

Final hours of Deon Williams: What did happen in Room 241?

There were bullet holes in the walls. Bullet holes in the door frame. Bullet holes in the chair, the table, the curtains.

Deon Williams lay in the middle of Room 241, bleeding and dying. Shot three times — twice in the back and once in the side.

Police would call a rescue squad, but it would be too late: The 19-year-old would die in the hospital, killed by policemen's bullets.

That was Tuesday at the Toledo Budget Inn on Reynolds Road. Much has happened since:

► Police changed their story.

STORY BY
SAM ROE,
MICHAEL D. SALLAH,
AND **JENNIFER FEEHAN**
BLADE STAFF WRITERS

First they said Deon shot at them. Then they said he didn't.

► A preliminary coroner's report said Deon was shot twice in the chest. An autopsy later showed he had been shot in the side and back as he appeared to be turning away from the officers.

► The FBI was called in by

Deon's family, convinced his civil rights had been violated.

► And the Rev. Floyd Rose accused police of having a quick trigger. If the kid had been white, he charged, he would have been alive today.

For sure, many questions remain. At the top of the list:

What really happened in Room 241?

And how in the world does a 19-year-old kid, crying for his mother, holding a gun to his head, end up

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Deon Williams

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being shot to death by policemen in a motel room?

No one is saying Deon was a good kid. Just the opposite is true. He was a violent member of the Avondale Posse who couldn't stay away from guns and trouble.

More than once he shot at people. He easily could have killed somebody. Maybe one day he would have. If he hadn't been killed first.

But over the last week, a clearer picture of Deon — and of the shooting — has emerged.

He was born Dec. 14, 1972. His mother, Melinda Williams, was just 17 and not married. She already had a 21-month-old daughter.

Deon never knew his father. The last court officials heard he was somewhere in Louisiana.

Despite Deon's final message to his mother, he was not always close to her.

He spent a brief time in a foster home, then moved in with his grandmother. He lived with her 15 years before rejoining his mother.

"Somewhere, he got away from us," says Deon's uncle, the Rev. Harvey V. Savage, 70. "He sang in our youth choir when he was a boy, and I used to teach him at Sunday school in the basement of our church."

Deon's troubles with the law began slowly: throwing snowballs at cars, harassing girls on the phone. But he was to develop a quick temper. In the sixth grade, at Sherman Elementary, he was suspended for fighting — the first of several times Deon would be disciplined.

He was suspended so many times at Old West End Junior High School for fighting and truancy that officials eventually expelled him.

He enrolled at Bowsher High School, but didn't last long. He was expelled for allegedly having a gun.

Jail was more familiar to him than school.

Three times he was sent to state juvenile detention facilities. His crimes included robbery, assault, drug theft, drug abuse.

"When he got in trouble, he used to tell me and some of the younger dudes to stay out of trouble, not to mess up our lives," recalls his younger brother, Kareem, 17. "He was in jail, and he didn't like it. He said it was no place to be."

Interestingly, Deon was once arrested at the same Toledo Budget Inn where he was gunned down.

In December, 1989, just two days before his 17th birthday, he was arrested in a room with a 14-year-old girl, a 15-year-old girl, a 15-year-old boy, and a 27-year-old man.



Mourners comfort each other at a service for Deon Williams yesterday at Lo Salem Missionary Baptist Church

Police, who went to the motel at the request of the two girls' mothers, found the group "slightly less than completely clothed."

Court officials had seen Deon's kind before. A bright kid with a bad attitude and little discipline at home.

When he was 17, Deon told court officials he smoked marijuana daily and that his favorite activity was to take "ladies" to a friend's apartment and "get high, trip up."

He described himself as "moody," but he denied suicidal thoughts.

What about his friends? "Most are in the pen," he told officials in a boasting fashion, "or at the county [jail]."

Records further show he was a gang member who handled guns as often as most kids handle baseball gloves.

► He once loaded a chrome revolver on a school bus and waved it around.

► He once threatened three girls with a silver-plated, pearl-handled automatic.

► He once was accidentally shot in the shoulder while he and a friend played with an assault weapon.

► He once tried to hide a .38 caliber revolver that a friend had used to shoot a man in the leg.

► He once fired a .357 handgun

from his 1978 Buick at a 1971 Chevy.

► And just last July, he fired shots at a woman's car that had two children inside.

He spent six months in jail for that crime, walking free last month. "He said he would never go back to jail again," Kareem, his brother, recalled.

But Deon didn't change his ways. He went on a crime spree throughout the central city, robbing people at gunpoint of more than \$800 in cash, gold chains, and rings.

The night of his death, police were on the lookout for Deon. They had five warrants for his arrest.

Deon's girlfriend was 19-year-old Carla Woodson. On Monday, just before midnight, she checked into Room 241 of the Toledo Budget Inn, an aging motel with outdoor carpeting in the breezeways and signs advertising rooms for \$21.95.

Miss Woodson, a soft-spoken woman, says she knew the police were looking for her boyfriend. They had stopped at his mother's home on Dorr Street just a few weeks before.

"He was afraid of the police," she says.

While both were in the room, the

phone rang about 2:30 a.m. The caller said he was a front desk clerk and that the interior light in Miss Woodson's red Jeep was on and a door was ajar.

But she didn't believe him. "I had a funny feeling, because I've got an alarm in my truck. It would have gone off."

"I told Deon it was a lie, but he put on a jacket, grabbed my keys, and we went to the door."

Standing at the door were police officers. One of them told Deon he was wanted on several warrants.

Deon pulled out a gun, jumped back into the room with the door still open, and fell to the floor. Miss Woodson was a few feet away.

"Deon said he wasn't going to come out. He said he was going to kill himself," she recalls.

Officers ran down the halls, pounding on doors in the motel's south wing, ordering startled guests to leave their rooms.

"They just said there's a guy who's threatening to kill himself," recalls Darrel Marshall, 40, a self-employed timber salesman who was roused from sleep. "We got out."

Officers asked Deon to put down his weapon. "He said he didn't want to go back to jail, and he would rather kill himself than go back," Miss Woodson recalls.

At one point, she says, officers offered to make a deal with Deon: lead detectives to another man — wanted on a slew of felony warrants — and police would go easy on him. "But Deon's not a snitch," she says. "Besides, he didn't know where [the man] was. He didn't even like him."

After a few minutes, officers persuaded Deon to let Miss Woodson go. "He started crying and said he loved me. He asked the police if he could call his mother. He kept the gun to his head the whole time. I remember him telling the officers that he didn't know why they were pointing their guns at him, because he was going to shoot himself, not them."

Miss Woodson was cuffed in the hall and led outside. "That was the last time I saw him."

While a group of motel guests stood shivering in the parking lot, police cars from all over the city raced to the motel.

Two teams of sharpshooters gathered at both ends of the motel wing, and a patrol car parked directly under Deon's window.

The entire time, Deon "kept his pistol to his head," a report says.

Two trained negotiators, Sgt. Mike Stachura and Officer Robert Wood, talked to Deon from the hallway, while several officers pointed their guns at the entrance to Room 241.

Within an hour, a police car sped into the lot with Deon's mother inside. She had been awakened about 3 a.m. by a police officer who told her about the stand-off.

Deon's mother was rushed into the motel office. "I wanted to see him, but they said it could be dangerous."

The mother called Deon's room, but he didn't pick up the telephone. Over the next hour, "the situation continued to deteriorate," a report states.

"At 5:41 a.m., the suspect started to cry and asked that his mother be told he loved her."

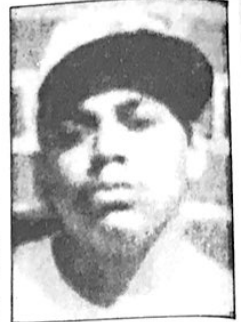
Over the radio — with a spotlight aimed at the second-story window of Room 241 — officers made their plans.

Officer 1: "OK. We are going to plan on introducing some chemical here as soon as we get the word from the commander... What's he doing?"

Officer 2: "He's up against the curtain right now. He's moving a little bit more. He should be to your extreme left."

Officer 1: "He's coming."

Officer 2: "OK. Hold on now. He's walking to your door, but now he's backed off toward the window again... He's walking toward your door a little. He's trying to look toward your door! Watch your-



Deon Williams: a short, troubled life

self... He's in the middle of the room, underneath the light."

Bob Seybold, a WSPD-AM reporter, was standing 100 yards away when he heard a loud "boom" ring out.

"Then, there were four or five other shots. While I could hear those shots, someone at the same time fired two blasts into the [outside] window of the room from behind the patrol car that was parked under the room."

In less than 40 seconds, it was over. The stand-off lasted just over three hours.

Through a haze of tear gas and gunfire, officers walked into the room and found Deon sprawled on the floor, lying in blood and shattered glass. Near his side was a Tech-9 semi-automatic.

Eleven shots had been fired. Below, in the motel office, Deon's mother was in a bathroom, crying.

"It was so hard for me to be out there in the office," she recalls. "The police came to the bathroom. They told me Deon had been wounded, and that he fired his gun at the police. An officer in a white shirt came over and showed me the gun Deon had."

Twenty-five minutes later, Deon was pronounced dead at Medical College Hospital.

On Tuesday, Sgt. Art Marx prepared a press release. It said tear gas was used and that "Deon fired at the three directed patrol officers stationed in the hall" and they "returned fire."

But the next day, officers said the release was in error. Deon's gun wasn't working properly and had not been fired.

They said they shot Deon because he pointed his gun at them.

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Deon Williams

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Two policemen fired the fatal shots — Officer Michael Gilmore and Sgt. Robert Condon.

Officer Gilmore, 36, has been on the force five years. Police sources say he is a competent officer with a good future.

Sergeant Condon is also described as a good cop. He is a 43-year-old competitive marksman and a former military adviser in Vietnam.

In 1987, he was named "Officer of the Year," in part, for helping devise the entry-team concept — the same method used in Tuesday's standoff with Deon Williams.

In fact, such standoffs are not new to Sergeant Condon.

In December, 1981, in a South Toledo parking lot, he snatched a gun from a distressed man who was threatening suicide, according to records.

In May, 1985, a gunman barricaded himself inside a Lewis Avenue apartment with his girlfriend and two children. After four hours of fruitless negotiations, Sergeant Condon and two other officers stormed the apartment and rescued the woman and children.

The gunman was arrested without injury.

Still, Sergeant Condon has had his problems with guns.

In 1982, he was issued a written reprimand and ordered to receive additional training after he shot a

fleeing suspect in the arm.

Investigators concluded the man did not have a gun, Sergeant Condon's life was not threatened, and that he should not have fired.

Then, in 1988, records show, Sergeant Condon was suspended two days for carrying two loaded guns while being drunk off-duty.

Officer Gilmore declined to comment until the police firearms review board completes its investigation. Sergeant Condon could not be reached.

Police officers said they did everything they could to get Deon Williams to lay down his gun.

They pleaded with him and tried to console him. But because he was armed, they couldn't risk their own lives.

Deon's survivors say they have their doubts and have asked the FBI to investigate.

Deon's mother says police should have let her see Deon before they went in after him. "He loved me and was asking for me. If he could have seen me, or heard my voice."

Deputy Chief Ron Jackson isn't so convinced.

"You could be jeopardizing that person," he says. "You don't know the feelings the barricaded person has for that other person."

The family also says police lied to them. They claim police initially said Deon opened fire on them.

Police say it doesn't matter that they were mistaken at first, because Deon did turn his gun on them.

"What are officers supposed to do

when a gun is pointed at them?" said a police supervisor. "They didn't know the gun didn't work."

Yesterday morning, more than 200 people crowded into Lo Salem Missionary Baptist Church on Vance Street in the central city.

There, in the same church where Deon was blessed as a baby, he was laid out in an open casket.

"Young black men are becoming an endangered species," Pastor Lewis Savage, son of the Rev. Harvey V. Savage, told the congregation. "Live to be 21 and that's a miracle for some."

Also during the service the Rev. Floyd Rose spoke of a different statistic.

"One more black man — a young black man — has fallen victim to police bullets," he said. "And now there will be every attempt to justify the killing."

He accused the FBI and U.S. Justice Department of failing to prosecute local police officers for violating the rights of black men. He also vowed to launch an independent investigation and to ask that the police civilian review board do the same.

"It cannot bring Deon back, but if we do nothing, one of our sons will be the next victim," he said.

"Amen! Amen!" the crowd shouted.

Mr. Rose's voice reached its highest pitch as he contrasted Deon's standoff with one last fall.

"On Oct. 23, a white man stood off police for more than 10 hours. He

fired more than 100 rounds at them and the police never fired back — not even once," he said. "They waited and waited, and I say they could have waited a little longer [for Deon]."

But the standoff Mr. Rose apparently referred to involved Henry Lee Brewton — a black man.

That standoff lasted 11 hours. Police fired once at Mr. Brewton, missing him. He eventually ran out of his Peck Street house and was captured unharmed.

In his comments, Lewis Savage did not place blame for Deon's death, but urged young people at the church to put down their guns, get out of the drug scene, and get away from gangs.

"Don't stay in this mess," he told them. "This is a sad, sad occasion."

As she descended the steps of the church after the service, Deon's mother also made a desperate plea to the young men gathered outside. "Get out of these streets now," she said.

She wished she could tell Deon the same.

Budget motel standoff

1 2 a.m. Police searching for Deon Williams, 19, who is wanted on five robbery warrants, say they spot a red 1988 Jeep Cherokee in Toledo Budget Inn parking lot, Heatherdowns and Reynolds, belonging to his girlfriend.

2 2:30 a.m. Stand-off begins in room 241, between Williams and police. he has gun and refuses to come out, saying he will kill himself before he goes to prison.

5 5:41 a.m. After repeated police attempts to persuade Williams to give up his gun, Williams begins to cry and asks officers to tell his mother he loves her. Officers suspect Williams is going to shoot himself.

6 5:42 a.m. Officers lob tear gas into the room, and police say Williams appears in doorway and turns gun on them; officers fire at least 11 rounds into the room, with three shots striking Williams as he turned away from the officers, according to autopsy.

3 2:35 a.m. Girlfriend is allowed to leave room, and is taken into custody by police.

4 3:30 a.m. Deon Williams' mother is escorted to motel in police car to talk to son on motel phone, but police say he refuses to answer phone.

7 6:25 a.m. Williams is pronounced dead at Medical College Hospital.

