

## **'I Just Want to Know Why He's Dead'; Family Disputes Police Account of Collapse in Prince George's Holding Cell**

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At precisely 2:18 a.m. on Sept. 22, Elmer Clayton Newman Jr. picked up a phone inside his Suitland apartment and called 911. Someone was inside the home, he told the operator. Send the police.

Two Prince George's County patrol officers sped to the apartment. For reasons that still aren't clear, they arrested Newman and took him to a police station in Oxon Hill, where they confined him in a holding cell.

About 90 minutes later, Newman, 29, collapsed on the cell floor, still bound in handcuffs. Paramedics could not revive him as they rushed to Fort Washington Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Five months later, exactly what led to Newman's death is still a mystery.

The state medical examiner has ruled Newman's death a homicide, authorities disclosed this week for the first time. The official cause was a complicated one, but boiled down to this: death brought on by a cocaine overdose but also neck and chest injuries that he sustained while in police custody.

The FBI and Prince George's prosecutors are still investigating and will decide whether police officers acted properly or if criminal charges should be filed.

The police describe Newman as a psychotic deluded by cocaine who assaulted several officers for no apparent reason. Any injuries he may have suffered were his own fault, they said, because he fought with officers and later slammed his head in a drug-induced rage against the wall of his cell.

But one witness gave a much different account, saying that Newman offered no physical resistance when he was arrested. Moreover, an attorney for his family said that police kicked Newman in the stomach and beat him with batons and that they were slow to summon medical help.

Newman's relatives said in interviews yesterday that they don't understand how a man they portrayed as a gentle soul wound up as a homicide victim because he called 911.

"I would like to know what happened to my brother," said Tanya Jenkins, one of Newman's two older sisters. "From the beginning, we knew something was wrong. But [the police] won't tell us anything. We just want some answers, and we're tired of waiting."

Seven officers who had contact with Newman were placed on leave after his death, as is routine in such cases. They are scheduled to assume administrative duties today, said Royce D. Holloway, a police spokesman.

The officers' actions are still under investigation, and Holloway said he didn't know why they were being allowed to return to work. He identified them as Sgt. Randall S. Mathews, Cpl. Fred Brockington, Cpl. Stacy Hampton, Cpl. Andre Hancock and Officers Carl Copeland, Edward Finn and Jason Johnson.

Police said that when they arrived at Newman's apartment, which he shared with his girlfriend in the 4400 block of Rena Road in Suitland, there was no intruder and no break-in, contrary to what they said Newman had told the 911 operator.

Instead, they said, Newman rushed two officers and attacked them with his fists. Police said that after subduing him with pepper spray, they handcuffed Newman and charged him with assaulting an officer.

"There was a very violent struggle and force was applied," said Police Chief John S. Farrell. "This man was huge--I mean huge as in the 300-pound range. You're talking about tremendous strength."

But a neighbor who witnessed Newman's encounter with the police said he did not put up a struggle at all.

Dorothy McKinney, 65, whose apartment is directly across a stairwell from Newman's, said she was awakened by a loud knocking on Newman's door. She said she looked out the peephole of her front door and saw Newman sprawled on his stomach on the floor, with his hands cuffed behind his back and an officer's foot on his neck.

"He was screaming, 'What did I do? What did I do?' He must have said it 50 times," McKinney said. "But from what I witnessed with my eyes, that young man was not offering any resistance. He wasn't fighting them at all. In fact, he was being very submissive."

McKinney said that she did not see the police mistreat Newman and that he did not appear to be injured or hurt.

At some point while he was in police custody, however, Newman suffered neck and chest injuries severe enough that they contributed to his death, according to the autopsy.

Police declined to release the autopsy report itself, saying the case was still under review. They also refused to disclose the tape recording of the 911 call.

Christopher A. Griffiths, an attorney for Newman's family, said other unnamed witnesses saw police beat Newman with their fists and batons after he was arrested. He said police left Newman in the holding cell in an twisted position on his stomach, cuffed by his wrists and ankles, and were slow to get medical help even though he was gasping for air.

"He was hogtied," Griffiths said. "The police refused to provide him with medical care. They let him suffocate in that jail cell."

Police at the Oxon Hill District station called 911 at 3:25 a.m. and requested an ambulance for "a prisoner on PCP," according to dispatch records obtained by The Washington Post under the Maryland Public Information Act. An ambulance crew was on the scene within four minutes, the records show.

At 4:11 a.m.--46 minutes after the police called 911--the ambulance crew radioed the dispatcher to report that it was on the way to Fort Washington Hospital with a patient in cardiac arrest.

More than 500 people attended Newman's funeral two weeks later at First Baptist Church of Highland Park in Landover. Mourners wore yellow ribbons with a snapshot of Newman and a tag that read: "No weapon formed against me shall prosper."

"I just want to know why he's dead," said his mother, Clarcy Newman, 57, of Capitol Heights. "What did he do? I still have no clue- -no clue--after five months. And that hurts."

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