

## SWAT Officers Cleared Of Criminal Charges In Fatal Shooting Of Man Suffering Mental Breakdown

By Bay City News

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Two SWAT officers will not face criminal charges for shooting and killing a man suffering a mental breakdown who barricaded himself in his Pacifica home and stabbed one of the officers when he came inside, San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said Friday. Officers Mario Busalacchi and Stephen Woelkers "undoubtedly saved the life" of Busalacchi by shooting and killing 34-year-old Errol Chang in the home he shared with his mother at 384 San Pedro Ave. on March 18, Wagstaffe wrote in a letter to Daly City police Chief Manuel Martinez dated Tuesday.

Chang was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and for weeks prior to the shooting had been experiencing huge mood swings and delusions, such as believing that President Obama was trying to assassinate him, according to Wagstaffe's letter.

He had been arming himself with kitchen knives and had not slept for three days prior to his family calling police on the day of his death.

His father, Thomas Chang, had been barricading himself in his bedroom for fear his son would kill him as he slept, Thomas Chang told investigators. Thomas Chang said that the morning of March 18 his son had become so aggressive he had no choice but to call police to try and force his son into psychiatric treatment, but he feared that his son had a death wish and was seeking "suicide by cop," according to Wagstaffe's letter.

Prior to police arrival Errol Chang hugged his family and said that he loved them and thanked them for all they had done for him, Wagstaffe said.

Officers responded just before noon and found Errol Chang in the home's

backyard on a four- or five-foot retaining wall with his father and brother. His mother, Christine Goias, told police that he was armed with a hatchet.

The officers told Errol Chang's father and brother to leave the backyard and tried to talk to him, but he was irrational, telling police that the president was trying to kill him and threatened to chop their heads off, Wagstaffe said.

But despite the officers' assurances that they were there to help him, Errol Chang took the axe from his pocket and raised it above his head. The officers pointed guns at him and demanded he stop, but he swung the axe in their direction.

"The Pacifica officers showed enormous restraint in not shooting Mr. Chang at that time," Wagstaffe wrote.

The officers called for backup and tried to Taser him, but he removed the prongs, ran into the house and barricaded himself inside.

The Daly City SWAT team arrived at the residence and police tried to talk to Errol Chang by calling the home's phone, his cellphone, through a loudspeaker, and by throwing a phone through the window. Chang refused to talk to the officers, according to Wagstaffe.

He moved furniture around to block the entrances to the home and police feared that he might find a gun and ammunition that his father said he had hidden inside the house. The officers started throwing flash-bang grenades through the home's windows in an effort to get him to come outside.

At one point, he broke one of the home's front windows and stuck his head and upper body outside, yelling things like "go ahead and shoot me in the head", "give me five more minutes" and "I'm dead already," according to Wagstaffe. The officers thought about pulling him through the window but decided it was too dangerous.

Eventually the officers came up with a plan to enter through the back door while Chang was at the front window and throw a flash bang into the living room to disorient him long enough for the officers to take him into custody.

But getting inside proved more challenging than they thought because of Chang's makeshift barricades, including a mattress and other furniture blocking the entrance to the living room where he was hiding.

The SWAT team, including Officers Busalacchi and Woelkers, threw a flash-bang beyond the barricade and then tried to move it, but couldn't and Busalacchi scaled the barricade and got into the other room.

Chang came out of the smoke and darkness and ran toward Busalacchi, hitting him in the legs. Busalacchi managed to kick Chang off him, and then noticed he was holding a large knife with a brass-knuckle spiked handle.

Chang swung the knife at Busalacchi's face, but the officer blocked the attack with his arm and was stabbed there. Woelkers pointed his rifle over the barricade and as Chang raised his arm to stab Busalacchi again, both officers fired their guns.

Chang collapsed and was pronounced dead a short time later. Busalacchi was taken to San Francisco General Hospital and required surgery for the stab wound. Wagstaffe said that after his review of the evidence he reached "the inevitable conclusion that the homicide of Errol Chang, while tragic, was legally justifiable homicide."

He even commended both officers for how they conducted themselves in the confrontation, and said their actions saved Busalacchi's life.

"It is our belief that both officers conducted themselves in a professional, reasonable and proper manner and to the last moment sought to avoid the very result demanded by the conduct of Errol Chang," Wagstaffe wrote.