

# SPRINGLE AVENUE STANDOFF

## 4 steps made difference between life and death

**ASSAULT**, from Page 1A  
Investigators and witnesses provided this account of the ensuing incidents:  
Police evacuated the neighborhood and set up a command post in the lobby and a first-floor apartment of a building directly south of 4130 Springle.

While scores of officers waited, fidgeting as they eyed Knowles' second-floor apartment, some officials tried to negotiate with him. He only yelled incoherently after being asked if he wanted to talk to a clergyman, relatives, friends or his mother.

Other police officials were contacting doctors who had treated Knowles, trying to learn if he might somehow be talked out of his apartment. The psychiatrists advised: You'll have to go in and get him.

Snipers, who caught only brief glimpses of Knowles through telescopes atop their rifles, periodically stretched to keep muscles from tightening up.

At 1 p.m., police decided they would end the waiting. Go, it was decided. Get him out of there. The danger was growing. The gasoline could ignite. Kids were leaving school nearby. And Knowles wasn't talking.

Some officers began questioning Knowles' relatives, friends and neighbors to find out exactly what was inside his apartment and where each item was located. They wanted no surprises.

They were told an air conditioner sat on top of a microwave oven about five feet to the left of the front door. A golf bag, dirty clothes, hubcaps and other car accessories were atop two mattresses crammed into a corner of the cluttered living room. The bathroom was tiny and just behind a wall about four feet to the right of the front door. The kitchen floor was covered with papers, plastic cups from fast food restaurants and a bowling trophy.

The building serving as a command post was an exact duplicate of Knowles', so police went to the corresponding second-floor apartment and walked through their plan.

Decisions were made about which weapons to use.

Given the close quarters, long guns were considered dangerous for the Special Response Team (SRT) that would make the arrest. The primary weapon would be the SRT's standard-

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issue 9-millimeter semi-automatic pistol, with assault rifles and shotguns for backup, along with the snub-nosed .38 caliber revolvers and commando knives carried by most SRT members.

Officials were concerned about using tear gas or anything else that might ignite the gasoline Knowles had splashed around the apartment. They opted for a vaporized droplet tear gas and stun grenades that make a huge noise and flash a bright, disorienting light. Neither device ignites a flammable substance.

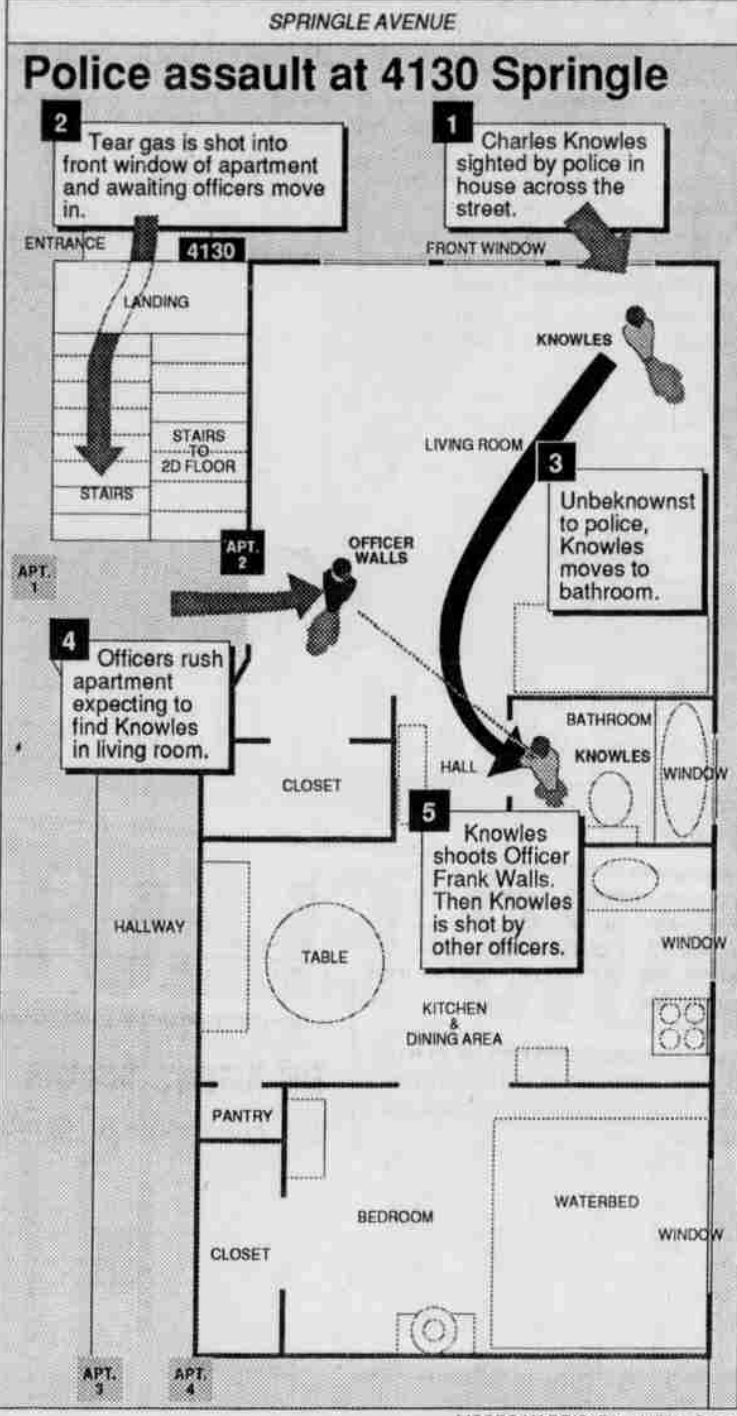
About 1:50 p.m., the arrest operation rumbled into motion as the new police armored personnel carrier moved onto the apartment's front lawn. It was done to see how Knowles would respond — and divert his attention as the SRT men climbed the stairs toward his apartment.

Knowles fired a shot at the tank. A police sniper, acting as a spotter for the SRT team, radioed Knowles was positioned at a window in the northwest corner of his living room.

At 2 p.m., officers inside the tank-like carrier fired three rounds of tear gas into Knowles' apartment. Hope was held out that he might surrender. Instead, he fired another shot.

At 2:05 p.m., they began kicking through the front door of the apartment.

Knowles, meanwhile, had moved those four steps and flopped onto the bathroom floor.



MOSES HARRIS/Detroit Free Press

The door came crashing down, a stun grenade was lobbed inside with Walls and the others close behind. As Walls spun toward the northwest corner of the apartment, Knowles opened fire. His shot ripped through Walls' armored vest in the lower right back.

The next seconds were a flurry of fire. Knowles was hit seven times — once in the right shoulder, twice in the left upper arm, once in the chest, twice in the stomach and once in the left hip.

Other officers, including Executive Deputy Police Chief James Bannon,

who were waiting on the stairway landing, rushed up to help drag Walls out of the apartment. After getting him to the landing, officers pulled off Walls' gas mask and began trying to remove his vest as an EMS technician yelled: "I've got to get to the wound!"

When the vest was torn away, it was as if a tourniquet had been removed. Blood poured. Walls was dead on arrival at St. John Hospital at 2:34 p.m.

Schmit died from his wound at 3:52 p.m. at Samaritan.

Knowles was pronounced dead at the scene.

Staff Writer Jack Kresnak contributed to this report.

## Young lauds police for bravery in raid

**BY DEBORAH KAPLAN AND JACK KRESNAK**  
Free Press Staff Writers

Mayor Coleman Young on Tuesday praised police courage in storming the east side apartment of a mentally ill man who shot two officers to death before he was killed by police gunfire.

"I'm not prepared, before I see the full report, to second-guess those officers on the field," Young said. "... That was comparable to a combat situation — there are split-second decisions."

Young said he has asked the Police Department to expedite a board of inquiry review of the shootings.

"Until there's a close examination, I'm not going to condemn. In fact I can only say that I extend my condolences to the family for the two fallen officers and my congratulations to the police department for another courageous action."

Top police officials said the preferred tactic is to secure the area around a barricaded gunman and wait for sleep or surrender.

But Police Chief William Hart and Executive Deputy Chief James Bannon said the decision was made to rush the apartment of Charles Knowles because Knowles had fired on police and hit Lt. James Schmit, who died, and poured gasoline throughout his apartment and threatened to ignite it; children were getting out of a nearby school, and dozens of people had been displaced by an evacuation during the seven-hour siege.

The apartment was hit with tear gas and a stun grenade before police moved in. Knowles, however, was not where police expected to find him and he fired a shot that hit Officer Frank Walls through the side of Walls' bullet-resistant vest before Knowles was killed.

"They did basically what they should have done," said Robert Trojanowicz, a professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University. "They waited. They tried to establish communication and they evaluated the surrounding circumstances. ... And then you're dealing obviously with an unbalanced person who is unpredictable and difficult to communicate with."

"In the final analysis, all these variables and circumstances will never present themselves exactly the same again. They can learn from this operation, but no matter what happens, it'll never re-create itself so that you can prevent these kinds of tragedies."

Walls was a member of the special response team, a volunteer group of officers who undergo extensive physical, tactical and weapons training to handle such situations. Retired commander Gerald Solai, now public safety director in Center Line, headed the unit at its inception in September 1987 when it was placed on standby during Pope John Paul II's visit to Detroit.

Solai was not present during Monday's standoff and shootout, but defended the use of the team to rush the apartment.

"You've got to consider that that team is very highly motivated, superbly conditioned, very highly trained and highly skilled," Solai said. "They're the best and the brightest. If you're going to win the game, you put your best team on the field."

Robert Scully, vice-president of the Detroit Police Officers Association, seized on the shootings to criticize the city for spending more than \$100,000 for an armored vehicle that was called to the scene, but not to equip all officers with protective vests.

"There's a possibility that Lt. Schmit could have survived had he been wearing a vest," the union leader said. "We'll never know. But we do know that police work in Detroit is very dangerous and that our officers deserve all the protection that can be provided."

"The money is on hand to equip street officers. ... The elected officials don't give a damn about us when we're alive, don't pretend to care when we're dead."

Young said it was "a damn shame that the DPOA would take advantage of a tragedy like this" to pursue its campaign for vests.

He noted that Schmit had a vest available but apparently chose not to wear it when he made the initial police attempt to force open Knowles' door. "I can't explain to you why a lieutenant would go up and try to kick in a damn door," Young said. "But he did. There were vests out there."

"The DPOA is doing what I'm refusing to do, second-guess."

"We have enough vests for the narcotics division and for all others involved in the type of tasks that need them. Police officers who want vests can get them; most of them wouldn't wear a vest unless we ordered them to."

## Slain officers had passion for running

**BY JIM FINKELSTEIN**  
Free Press Staff Writer

One view of Officer Frank Walls and Lt. James Schmit may put them in perspective best:

The view of them running fast into the distance, the soles of their jogging shoes flashing as they disappear.

Both of the officers, slain Monday by a barricaded gunman, had a passion for running, according to neighbors and friends who were able to grab a few words with them along the way.

Walls, 39, "was wearing his Free Press International Marathon T-shirt when he died," said his longtime friend, Officer Richard Kelley of Detroit's 11th Precinct. "He'd worn it so long his girlfriend had been trying to turn it into a dust rag."

And Schmit, 41, "was a true runner" who ran 10 to 12 miles a day and also was in marathon-level shape, according to Marci Brelinski, a neighbor on Schmit's block of Lanno, a half-block from the woods of Balduck Park on the city's east side.

Friends and relatives remembered the officers Tuesday as examples of Detroit's finest, both in and out of uniform.

Walls was born Aug. 1, 1949, and was a graduate of Southeastern High School.

He entered the Marine Corps after graduation and served in Vietnam, according to Kelley. "But his time in

the marines was something he would never talk about," Kelley said.

Walls was a 13-year veteran of the Detroit Police Department.

Walls, who was divorced twice, was engaged to Debra Campbell when he died.

Walls was an avid runner, who often trailed his basset hound, Buford, said his friend Robert Cantlon. Walls had run in the Free Press International Marathon in the early 1980s, Cantlon said.

"His participation in the special response team, that was something he was incredibly proud of," said Cantlon, a former Detroit officer now with the Troy Police Department.

"He felt he was always meant to do it. ... It was as big a part of his life as anything."

"He had the ability to make the people around him feel special — even the people he knew casually."

"The people he was close to, they were his family," he said.

On Schmit's block of two-story brick-and-siding homes on the far southeast side Tuesday, several neighbors were tearful as they told of the lieutenant's dedication to friends and family.

Most often, they noticed him jogging, sometimes twice a day. "He'd run down to Jefferson a ways and back," said Carol Myers, a friend and neighbor for 20 years. "He was very

regular about it."

Schmit also spent time boating on Lake St. Clair.

Myers said Schmit was a neighbor who could always be counted on. "If his wife (Janet, a Unisys employe) was away on business, he'd clip coupons and go to the grocery store," she said. "He was a fine father and husband."

Brelinski said Schmit was a quiet man who enjoyed boating and fishing.

Schmit was born Nov. 27, 1946, in Monroe. No information was available Tuesday about his education. He joined the Detroit Police in 1968.

In addition to his wife, Schmit is survived by his son, Michael; daughters Marie and Jean, and his mother, Esther Schmit.

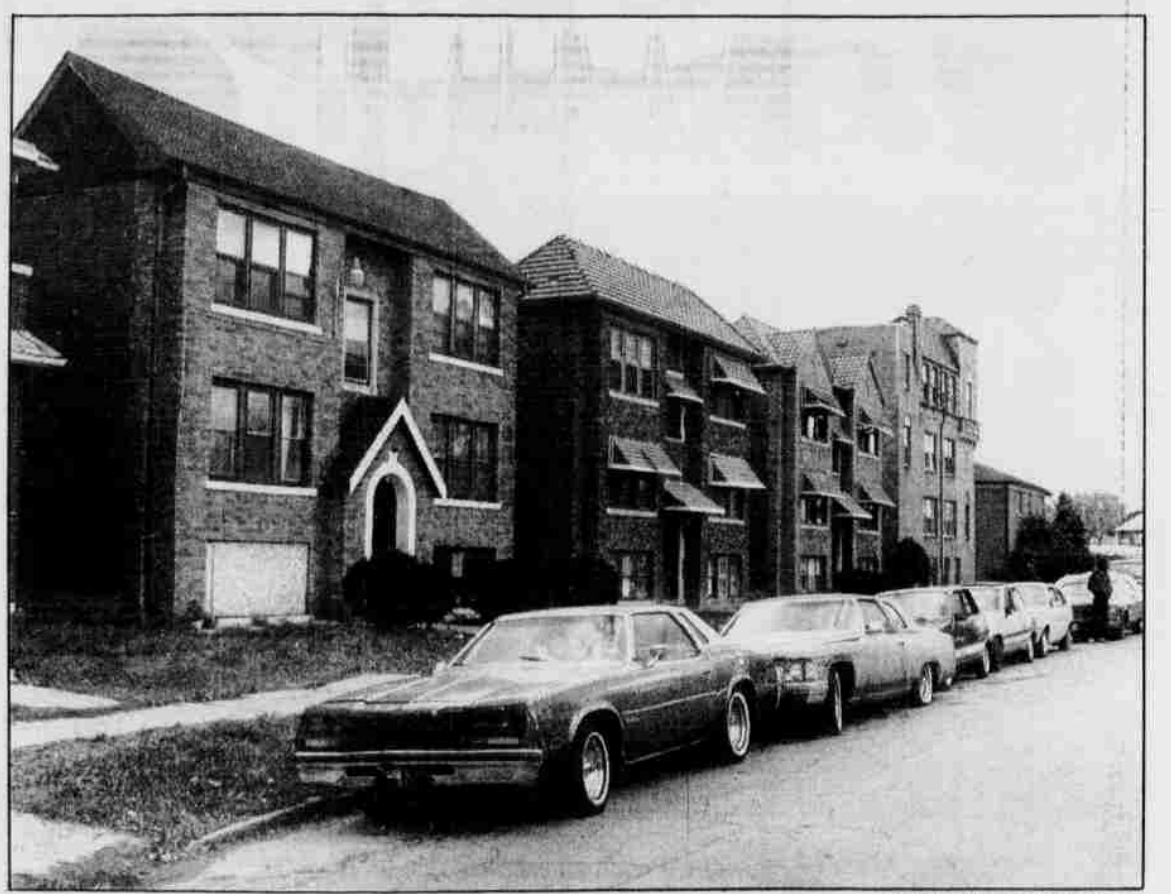
Schmit's funeral will be at 11 a.m. Friday at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, 20955 Bournemouthe Road, Harper Woods. Burial will be in St. Charles Cemetery, Newport.

Walls is survived by his parents, Frank and June Walls, a brother and four sisters.

His funeral will be at 9 a.m. Friday at Verheyden Funeral Home, 16300 Mack, Grosse Pointe Park.

Visitation for both officers will be at Verheyden, 4-9 p.m. today and 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursday.

Prayers for Schmit will be at 7:30 p.m. Thursday.



JOHN COLLIER/Detroit Free Press

Charles Knowles' five cars are chained together in front of his apartment on Springle Avenue, where two police officers and Knowles were killed Monday in a seven-hour standoff.

## Neighbor recalls victim as a peaceful man

**BY MARGARET TRIMER**  
Free Press Staff Writer

Charles Knowles puzzled many of his neighbors but they also found his odd behavior a welcome diversion from the violence and drug traffic they faced daily.

"He really was one of the best neighbors around here. You knew he'd never hurt you. He didn't even raise his voice," said Jean Morris, 50, who has lived in the apartment building next to Knowles' for four years. "We all knew he had a mental illness, but that man really didn't bother a soul. We're really going to miss seeing Charles around. He belonged here."

Other neighbors said they are making plans to move from the 4100 block of Springle, where on Monday a seven-hour siege of Knowles' apartment left him and two police officers dead. With the sting of tear gas still wafting through the faded amber brick apartment building, some people still seemed disoriented after being evacuated from their homes for most of Monday.

**"Look, he was a mystery to me, too," said his son, Charles Jr., 20.**

And nobody could explain Knowles' outburst.

"Look, he was a mystery to me too," said his son, Charles Jr., 20. "I don't know why this all happened. I may never know."

"But I loved him. You know, he was my father and I just loved him."

Knowles' son and 21-year-old daughter, Lisa, came to clean out their father's belongings and remove the five cars he kept chained together in front of the apartment building.

"I wish that everybody would have just left him alone," the son said. "He'd never tell me who was hassling him. I just wanted to know though, so I could ask them why."

Workers who counseled Charles Knowles at the Northeast Guidance Center, a community mental health facility on the east side, said he reported to them bimonthly as scheduled

and was taking anti-psychotic drugs.

"There was no history of this type of thing in any of the contacts we had with him," said David Walker, director of the clinic.

Knowles had been hospitalized at least six times for mental illness since 1969 and was diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. According to court records, Knowles had a history of not taking medication to control the disorder.

Walker said each of the center's "aftercare" workers, who follow up on people released from hospitals — have between 95 and 120 patients.

Jesse Kyles, 22, who lives down the hall from Knowles' unit, said he spent most of Monday night with friends because he couldn't tolerate the fumes in his apartment.

"My eyes are still watering and I

had a burning sensation through my whole face," Kyles said. "All I want is to get back to normal, to get some sleep and get on with my life."

Morris, who remained in her apartment during the standoff, said she would never forget watching the Police Department's tank-like vehicle lumber down Springle and park in front of Knowles' apartment building.

"A tank like that for a man like Charlie?" she said. "I was so scared; I was like a leaf shaking on a tree; I thought they might mistake my apartment for his. I could just picture Charlie in there. In fact, I haven't been able to get him out of my mind."

Morris said police used her apartment throughout the siege and practiced maneuvers there because the layout is identical to Knowles' apartment.

"Maybe I shouldn't have let them do that," she said. "Maybe I should have talked to Charlie. But maybe everybody should have just left Charlie to Charlie. He always seemed to snap out of things."



JOHN COLLIER/Detroit Free Press

Jean Morris, left, and her boyfriend, Unray Grayson, in the living room of their apartment Tuesday on Springle, next to where Charles Knowles lived.