

# Man killed by police perpetrated 1979 Barstow High School shooting that wounded 3 students

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Barstow Police officers shot and killed Lance Powell, 60, March 31, 2021, after they said he opened fire on them with a handgun in the 700 block of Montara Road. *Courtesy Of The Barstow Police Department*

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department has identified the man who Barstow police officers shot and killed Wednesday after the man reportedly opened fire on them with a handgun.

The man was 60-year-old local resident Lance Montgomery Powell, sheriff's spokesperson Cindy Bachman said Friday.

The shooting occurred Wednesday afternoon in the 700 block of Montara Road after officers responded there after receiving a report of a “subject who threatened the reporting party and gestured to her as if he had a weapon.”

According to the Barstow Police Department, two officers saw Powell walking to a trailer and gave him verbal commands with which he did not comply.

“(Powell) then turned toward the officers and began shooting at them with a handgun,” authorities said. “The officers returned fire and struck the subject.”

Despite life-saving efforts, officials said Powell died at the scene.

Per department policy, the two officers were placed on administrative leave pending an investigation.

**'When he saw me, he aimed at me.'**



A sign in front of Barstow High School. *Daily Press File Photo.*

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Wednesday's shooting was not the first time Powell stood accused of using a gun against other people, according to court and public records and media reports.

More than 40 years ago, when he was 18, Powell faced attempted murder charges after three students were wounded at Barstow High School.

On the morning of Feb. 26, 1979, students walked on campus during a class change when shots rang out.

According to testimony reported by the San Bernardino Sun, one student, Steven Ramsey, had been walking toward the cafeteria when he saw Powell standing near a parked van holding a "black pistol."

"When he saw me, he aimed at me," Ramsey said at a court hearing in March 1979. "I was hit twice." Ramsey suffered gunshot wounds to his hip and right arm.

Two other students, Roger Woods and Rosalee Trowbridge, were also struck by bullets or bullet fragments, and they identified Powell as the shooter.

Trowbridge said she saw Ramsey "kinda screaming in pain" and Powell "running up toward a gate by the cafeteria" but did not see him pointing the gun.

All three students later recovered.

A friend of Powell's testified that Powell had brought a gun to the high school three days before the shooting and indicated that he "was going to get even" with Ramsey.

"He said Ramsey was giving him a lot of trouble or hassle or something," the friend, Paul Haefele, said.

Another friend of Powell's said he watched as the 18-year-old loaded rounds into the gun and fired toward Ramsey.

"Ramsey and Lance were about 10 to 15 feet apart when he pulled the trigger," Paul Osburn said.

News reports show that Powell later pleaded guilty to assault with intent to commit murder, as well as two counts of assault with a deadly weapon. A

judge sentenced him in August 1979 to no more than three years in the California Youth Authority.

Now known as the California Division of Juvenile Justice, the state-run facilities house inmates aged 12 to 25 who are considered to be the most serious youth offenders, according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

In 1994, an Orange County judge dropped charges filed against Powell that might have sent him to prison for life under the state's then-recently enacted Three Strikes sentencing law.

The Orange County District Attorney's Office had charged Powell with felony stalking and domestic violence, alleging that he "choked and kicked his girlfriend ... leaving her with bruises, and made threats he carried out," the Orange County Register reported at the time.

"I will snap your neck like a twig," Powell had reportedly told his girlfriend. The woman later backed away from her statements to police, court records show.

Judge Dan Dutcher dismissed the stalking charge and "also reduced two charges of domestic violence from felonies to misdemeanors, again ensuring Powell would not face a third-strike conviction," according to the Register.

When the law first went into effect in March 1994, anyone with two prior serious or violent felony convictions faced a mandatory prison term of at least 25 years to life if convicted of a third.

The Register reported that Dutcher's dismissal was the first instance in Orange County of a judge dropping a criminal charge that could have sent a defendant to prison for life under the then-new law.

In addition to the conviction from the Barstow High School shooting, the Register noted that Powell had been convicted of kidnapping in 1985 and was sent to prison in 1987 after being found in illegal possession of a firearm due to his felon status.

## Opinions differ on Powell



A photo of Lance Powell from the “Lance Powell for Mayor 2020” Facebook group. *Courtesy of Facebook*

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In a Barstow police Facebook post on the shooting, people’s perspectives on Powell were polarized on his past.

Donald Shirley said he had known Powell for years and that he was a “decent individual” who had “problems in school because of bullies ...” Shirley also suggested Powell had an abusive childhood.





**\*\*\*OFFICER INVOLVED SHOOTING\*\*\***

On March 31, 2021 at approximately 1522 hours, officers responded to the 700 block of Montara Road regarding a subject who threatened the reporting party and gestured to her as if he had a weapon.

Two Barstow Police Department Officers arrived on scene and observed the subject as he was walking to a trailer. The officers gave verbal commands to the subject, who did not comply with their orders. The subject then turned towards the officers and began shooting at them with a handgun. The officers returned fire and struck the subject. The subject fell to the ground and officers performed lifesaving measures on him until personnel from the Barstow Fire Protection District arrived on scene. Once on scene, Barstow Fire Protection Personnel pronounced the subject deceased.

Per department policy, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department's Homicide Team was contacted to conduct the criminal investigation. An administrative investigation was also initiated to determine if the officers performed their duties within policy.

Per department policy, both officers were placed on administrative leave pending the investigation. Anyone with any information regarding the incident can contact Sergeant Daniel Arthur at 760-256-2211 or 760-255-5170.

Another commenter, Victoria Becerra, identified herself as one of Powell's daughters.

"I am aware that he had a past, but I also know he tried to make up for any of his wrongdoings," she wrote. "He deserves to be represented fairly."

Becerra said her father had a good relationship with the American Cancer Society, ran for Barstow mayor and "loved his close family, friends and animals like nothing else."

Although Powell set up a campaign group on Facebook for mayor, he did not appear on the November 2020 ballot.

"He was proud to introduce me as his daughter and I never heard anything but good comments and praises for his kindness and good spirit from his friends and fellow charity members," Becerra said. "He was larger than life and that was intimidating to some, but he was gentle, kind and generous."

She also noted that Powell had been deaf in one ear due to cancer, adding that he would not have heard commands from police.

Others weren't as sympathetic about Powell.

"We all have a better world with him 6 feet under," Logan Ray — who said he was related to Powell — wrote.

Montana Powell said she was Powell's sister and that family members were "happy he is gone."

"You have no idea the terror he brought upon us all. Yes, we had a f\*\*\*\*\* up childhood but he chose to do the terrible things he has done over the years," she said. "He never received help for his mental problems and abuse we endured."

Anyone with any information regarding Wednesday's shooting is asked by the Barstow Police Department to contact Sergeant Daniel Arthur at 760-256-2211 or 760-255-5170.

Callers wishing to remain anonymous can call the We-Tip Hotline at 1-800-78CRIME (27463) or leave information on the We-Tip website at [www.wetip.com](http://www.wetip.com).

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