

SLCPD identifies officer involved in dog shooting, calls for civility

By Celeste Tholen Rosenlof | Posted - Jun 27th, 2014 @ 10:43pm

SALT LAKE CITY — Salt Lake City police identified the officer who shot a dog during [the June 18 search for a missing toddler](#).

At a press conference Friday, Chief Chris Burbank identified Brett Olsen as the officer who entered Sean Kendall's unlocked backyard gate after knocking on the front door of the home during the search. Kendall's dog, Geist, a 110-pound Weimaraner, was reportedly acting in an "aggressive" manner. He was shot in the head and killed after the officer felt threatened by the dog.

The dog was originally believed to have been in a kennel, but new evidence shows the animal was "extremely close" and "within feet" of the officer, the chief said.

"It would be irresponsible of me to go into tremendous detail there because we still have an investigative process to take place," Burbank said.

Burbank called the shooting unfortunate and asked people to imagine the outcry if officers had failed to search everywhere for the missing boy.

"This is an unfortunate circumstance where a family pet — where Geist — was killed," Burbank said. "It's not the intention of any police officer to go out and conduct business in this manner. They are put in a situation that they have to face some tremendous circumstances. And if you think for just a minute, imagine what the outcry would be if we said we didn't go into any yards looking for this child, if something tragic happened to this child."

"I haven't seen this type of public outcry when certain human beings have lost their lives. I'm not here to minimize any particular incident, especially not this one. But perspective has been lost."

—Chief Chris Burbank

Burbank said the department sent numerous officers to the area, some of which conducted a search of the home, though he admitted it was not an extensive search.

"We follow protocols outlined by the National Center for Exploited and Missing Children. We've worked with them extensively in the past," Burbank said.

The 3-year-old was found asleep under a box, nestled in blankets about an hour and a half after the search began.

Burbank noted Olsen's role as one of the "heroes of Trolley Square" during the Trolley Square shooting in February 2007. He said Olsen was "not prone to panic."

The police chief continued the press conference, saying Olsen had been receiving threats and hate mail daily since the shooting.

"I haven't seen this type of public outcry when certain human beings have lost their lives," Burbank said. "I'm not here to minimize any particular incident, especially not this one. But perspective has been lost."

He read excerpts from some of the communique directed toward Olsen, saying there were "much worse" than what he had read.

"That officer would lay dead next to my dog," he read. "If a cop were just to shoot my dog, I would find a way to shoot that cop. No joke, I would kill the cop that killed my dog.' That pig that shot that dog needs to be executed, too."

He said the responses were "extremely disappointing" based on the department's history of working with the community. Burbank called for the community to treat officers with respect and engage in civil dialogue, as he demands officers treat the community with respect.

"I ask only one thing: that this community continues to approach interactions with this police department in a respectful manner," he said. "I absolutely demand that every single one of my officers treats the public with the respect and dignity that they deserve. My officer and officers deserve no less."

Olsen's actions are under review, Burbank said, and individuals will be held accountable to their actions, not "this ridiculousness."

"It is a process that takes place, and it is a good and thorough process that takes place," he said.

The department has contacted the Humane Society of the United States, the

Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and the U.S. Department of Justice. Burbank said a review of the department's training and protocol for certain circumstances will take place.

Kendall, the dog's owner, said he wants to see justice for the actions of the officer. He said he expects to see the same disciplinary action that anybody else would receive.

"I absolutely do not condone death threats, any violence toward police officers, I have no hard feelings toward them," Kendall said. "All I want is justice."

Kendall said he found it sad that people would use this situation to promote violence. But, in speaking with his lawyer, he said, he found that a missing person search does not give police the right to trespass on his property.

"It angers me so much," Kendall said. "If it was you or anybody else, we'd be sitting in a cell. Something is wrong with this situation."

Contributing: Andrew Adams
