

Driver agreed to get help, tape shows

A tape of police radio calls documents a pursuit that ended with a Richfield man's death.

By Howie Padilla
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Moments before Gerilyn Mornson locked the doors of her husband's sport-utility vehicle and drove away, a Minneapolis police officer thought he had a deal to get her help at a mental-health crisis center.

During the low-speed pursuit that followed, officer Lance DuPaul told other officers that rather than allowing him to take her to the crisis center at Abbott Northwestern Hospital, Mornson had agreed to be driven there by her husband, with DuPaul following.

The 35-minute pursuit on city streets and Interstate Hwys. 94 and 35W on March 28 ended in Richfield, when Mornson's vehicle hit Duane Mumm, 58, of Richfield, who was nearing the end of 5-mile afternoon run.

"She's very adamant about not

going with me," DuPaul said while following her on I-94, according to a tape recording of police radio calls.

"Be advised," he warned officers as the pursuit continued down I-35W. "When I was with her earlier she was very psychotic and did not want any dealings with police. She pushed away from me several times."

Her mental state was why a police lieutenant overruled a sergeant's order to call off the chase, Second Precinct Inspector Rich Stanek said Thursday.

"I think we'd better call our chase off," Fourth Precinct Sgt. Mike Kjos told officers who were following Mornson with their lights and sirens activated.

"For what he knew, it was the right call," Stanek said. "But he didn't have all the facts."

Officers have the power to call off a pursuit at any point, he said,



Police were called to check on the welfare of Gerilyn Mornson.



Duane Mumm of Richfield was struck by Mornson's SUV and killed.

and to take into consideration such factors as the time of day, traffic flow and the identity of the driver. What Kjos didn't know, Stanek said, were the events leading up to that point.

"Is this person supposed to be suicidal?" came the call from Second Precinct Lt. Larry Doyle.

"Affirmative," the police dispatcher replied.

"Continue to monitor without lights and continue to monitor its location," Doyle directed.

"They both made the right call with the information they had," Stanek said.

As Mornson drove on, officers asked for stop sticks — spike-filled devices that are thrown across the roadway designed to blow out tires — but Mornson turned off the freeway before they could be deployed.

Officers were directed to get in front of Mornson and slow her, but that method failed, too.

"We tried to get in front of her," an officer is heard saying. "She blew right by us."

Just before Mornson left the freeway and entered W. 60th St., Doyle told officers that if stop sticks wouldn't work, they had permission to "take her out safely. Try to get in front of her and slow her down."

The pursuit reached W. 63rd St.

and Nicollet Av. S., where Mornson's vehicle hit Mumm. Mornson's vehicle and one police car crashed into trees. Witnesses gave conflicting reports about whether Mornson tried to sideswipe the squad car or officers hit her.

"We don't have all of the forensic evidence or the investigation results," Stanek said.

The idea, Stanek said, was for officers to get in front of Mornson's vehicle and box her in, but they never made it far enough. A mark from the collision on the rear driver's-side door of Mornson's SUV clearly indicated contact with the squad car, he said.

"I have no doubts based upon what I saw at the scene, the officers' statements and the statements from an outside witness, what happened," Stanek said. "It wasn't that the officers turned into her."

The State Patrol is investigating. The Anoka County attorney's office will review the case.

Mornson, 38, of Chaska, who was injured in the crash, had not been charged with any crimes as of Thursday afternoon.

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