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Jose Guereña survived two tours in Iraq, but he couldn't survive his own government.

[Bob Owens](#)



Pima County Sheriff Clarence Dupnik infamously railed in January of this year that Arizona is a “Mecca for prejudice and bigotry.”

One must wonder if the “prejudice and bigotry” he considers endemic to Arizona is to blame for the death of U.S. Marine veteran Jose Guereña, killed when Dupnik’s deputies gunned him down in his home. They fired 71 shots. They hit him 60 times. And then, as if this wasn’t enough, Dupnik’s deputies blocked paramedics for an hour and 14 minutes from approaching the scene, denying Guereña treatment until he was assuredly dead.

Dupnik’s SWAT team initially claimed that Guereña fired at them while they were serving a warrant — as he slept. They claimed that his bullets hit the bulletproof shield that the entry team hid behind, and that the barrage of bullets they fired back was in self-defense.

Only, Guereña never fired his weapon. Awoken by his wife with screams that men with guns were invading his home and threatening his family, Jose Guereña armed himself with a AR-15 rifle and crouched in the hallway. The SWAT team unloaded upon Guereña on sight. He apparently recognized the home invaders as police. He took 60 rounds, but never — as the Pima County Sheriff’s Department was forced to

admit — took off his weapon's safety as he was being killed.

Prejudice and bigotry?

It was, you'll recall, a claim Dupnik made in the wake of Jared Loughner's bloody rampage at a "Congress in your Corner" event at a Safeway supermarket in Tucson, where six were killed and 14 others were injured — including, gravely, Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. Dupnik was attempting to blame the conservative Tea Party movement for the shooting when he made the comment. And even after it was revealed that Loughner's few known political views had been described as "quite liberal," and were in fact muddled at best, he refused to retract his slur.

So when Dupnik's teams attempted a complicated four-house raid of minority families looking for drugs, perhaps bigotry and prejudice really was in play.

Perhaps Dupnik's officers assumed every Hispanic accused of being a drug dealer really was one, and perhaps they assumed that the tenant of a home protecting his loved ones must be a bloodthirsty cartel member waiting in ambush. Is that why they gunned down a tired, hard-working father sleeping off a night shift at the local copper mine? A Marine veteran of Iraq that had the discipline not to fire — a discipline that a trigger-happy SWAT team which has now killed three men in less than a year cannot itself exercise?

Not only has the Pima Sheriff's Department tried to justify firing 71 shots at one man in a small hallway, hitting him (thankfully, just him) 60 times in a home where his wife and child were present. They've attempted to justify their refusal to let a team of paramedics treat Guereña, who was still miraculously alive after being sprayed mercilessly with bullets. It takes a competent SWAT team just a handful of minutes to "clear" a residential home during a raid. Dupnik's SWAT team refused to declare the scene "clear" for an agonizing one hour and 14 minutes, and not until Jose Guereña had already died.

A cynic might be tempted to suggest Dupnik's SWAT team was waiting for the only witness to their assault to die. Considering how the Sheriff's Department has acted since they stormed the home, a rational person might be tempted to agree.

Not content to blame the victim for his own death, they attempted to insinuate he was a drug dealer, even though they were forced to admit under direct questioning that no drugs were found in his home, and that a clumsy cop falling down may have triggered the bloodbath.

Vanessa Guereña claims that neither she nor her husband heard the officers announce themselves as police. As anyone who has ever seen an episode of any popular police reality show knows, no entry team waits 15 seconds after announcing themselves to batter down a door and rush the inhabitants — as Pima County Lt. Michael O'Connor claims his SWAT team did. Identical scenes of

immediate entry upon announcement (or after breaching), without giving those inside a chance to react, is a standard tactic captured again and again.

Why Lt. Michael O'Connor decided to tell a mistruth about a well-known, heavily documented, and highly standardized technique isn't immediately clear. Perhaps it is because of the inevitable wrongful death lawsuit to be filed against the Pima County Sheriff's Department on behalf of Vanessa Guereña and her two children. Or perhaps it is because of the possible DOJ civil rights investigation. Perhaps Dupnik's employees simply are unable to act any more professionally after a raid than they do during one.

No-knock warrants are typically used to surprise the target of raids and keep them from disposing of evidence, with possible violence from the offender cited as justification for the military-style use of heavy armor and machine guns.

Jose Guereña's death was entirely preventable. Over-armed, over-amped law enforcement is causing far more harm to the public than other tactics and techniques possibly could.

The over-militarization of law enforcement agencies and over-use of SWAT teams is an idea that needs to be revisited in a sane society. Too many good people have been traumatized, and too many killed, under the flimsiest of circumstances.

After surviving two tours of duty in Iraq, only to lose his life in an encounter with Clarence Dupnik's keystone cops, Jose Guereña was buried with full military honors.

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