

## Police



Article published Monday, August 4, 2008

# Lima police sergeant acquitted in drug-bust shooting death

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LIMA, Ohio — A veteran Lima police sergeant was acquitted Monday on charges he was negligent when he shot an unarmed woman to death and wounded her 1-year-old son.

Joseph Chavalia, 52, was found innocent of negligent homicide and negligent assault, both misdemeanors, stemming from a Jan. 4 drug raid at Wilson's Third Street home in which Tarika Wilson, 26, and her son, Sincere, were shot.

The jury deliberated for about three hours.

The verdicts followed 3½ days of testimony in Allen County Common Pleas Court, including an account of the raid by Sergeant Chavalia.

He told the jury that as he climbed the staircase of the house with another SWAT team member directly behind him, he saw a shadowy figure duck in and out of a doorway at the end of the dark hallway at the same time he heard gunfire.

Sergeant Chavalia said he was "absolutely, positively" certain he was being fired at, and he returned fire even though he could not see the person he was shooting at.

As it turned out, two SWAT officers downstairs had shot two pit-bull dogs let loose on officers by Wilson's boyfriend, Anthony Terry, the target of the raid.

The incident focused national attention on Lima, where some residents accused police of unfairly targeting African-Americans.

About a month later, the Rev. Jesse Jackson met with community leaders in Lima and declared the shooting of the biracial woman by a white police officer "unnecessary



Lima police Sgt. Joe Chavalia was found not guilty Monday in the shooting death of a woman and the wounding of her 1-year-old son.  
( LIMA NEWS/Kelli Cardinal )

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force, excessive, and illegal."

Earlier Monday, a longtime member of the Columbus Police Department's SWAT team testified that he would have fired at Ms. Wilson during a drug raid at her home, although he would've fired sooner.

James Scanlon, who has been with Columbus Police for 30 years and co-owns a SWAT training business, said as police officers in high-threat situations frequently do, Sergeant Chavalia waited too long to fire after he heard gunfire and believed he was the target.

"You're always waiting for the next bit of information hoping that next bit of information causes you not to fire," Mr. Scanlon said.

Following Mr. Scanlon's testimony the defense rested.