

“Major Inconsistencies” in Police Accounts of Fatal Shooting

On 18th November 2009, 36-year-old mentally ill man Adam Salter was [shot in the back by NSW Police Sergeant Sheree Bissett](#) at his Lakemba home, dying as a result.

Four police officers had responded a short time earlier to a triple-zero call by Adam’s father, Adrian Salter, who reported that his son had been threatening to stab himself with a knife.

The four officers – Sergeant Bissett, Sergeant Emily Metcalfe, Senior Constable Leah Wilson, and Constable Aaron Abela – are currently on trial before a Judge-alone in [Downing Centre District Court](#) for allegedly giving false evidence to the 2012 Police Integrity Commission (PIC) inquiry into Adam’s death.

The District Court has heard evidence from Adrian Salter that at the time of the incident, his son was being treated by ambulance officer on the floor of the kitchen when he got to his feet and moved towards the sink where there was a knife.

“When Adam got to his feet, nobody stopped him. I didn’t understand why there was a room full of trained people and nobody stopped him,” Mr Salter said.

The concerned father rushed into the kitchen in order to stop his son from grabbing the knife.

“I did try to put my arms around him but he fended me off. I couldn’t grab hold of him.”

The father became tangled in cords and fell to the kitchen floor, before police shot his son in the back.

“I heard ‘taser, taser’ – I heard the words twice – and then I heard the bang”, he testified.

That evidence was consistent with his initial statement to police and the statements of the treating paramedics – but police gave different versions of the events.

Immediately after the shooting, officers Bissett and Metcalfe were seen talking to one another and smoking on the footpath opposite the Salters’ home, while officers Abela and Wilson were also talking to each other on the front porch.

Police Integrity Commission

During the PIC inquiry, the officers gave versions of events that were significantly different to the consistent accounts given by the ambulance officers and Mr Salter’s father.

Sergeant Bissett claimed Constable Abela was “struggling” with Adam who had lunged towards him.

Constable Abela’s version was different – that there was some contact with Adam, but it was “just an instantaneous reaction where my arm just came out to stop him”. He then proceeded to state that he grabbed the Adam’s left arm in two places – just above the elbow with his right hand and just below the elbow with his left.

Officer Wilson’s testimony was different again – that officer Abela placed his right hand on Adam’s shoulder before Bissett fired the fatal shot.

Officer Metcalfe’s evidence was different once again – that Abela was holding Adam around his upper torso when the shot was fired.

Due to these and other inconsistencies, the officers were charged with lying to the PIC.

Police Cover-Up

The PIC was highly critical of the police investigation which followed, finding that the evidence of the ambulance officers was excluded or ignored in an attempt to prevent embarrassment to the police force and conceal Sergeant Bissett's conduct.

The PIC recommended that veteran Homicide Detective Inspector Russell Oxford face disciplinary action over the way he handled the investigation, and that Inspector Matthew Hanlon and Detective Inspector Stephen Tedder also face action for their involvement in preparing misleading reports and documentation.

The Coroner described the police response as [an 'utter failure'](#), finding that "Police killed the person they were supposed to be helping,"

At Trial

In Court, Crown Prosecutor Nannette Williams highlighted the fact that the officers' versions were both inconsistent with one another, and with the evidence of the other eye-witnesses at the scene.

She pointed out that the accused are all experienced police officers, that "[i]t is their job, their profession, to get evidence right," that they were all in close proximity to the incident and yet "in this important matter their accounts do not align."

She said it was obvious the officers "got their heads together" immediately after the incident and agreed to lie by saying the fatal shot was fired because Adam was a threat to officer Abela – although they did not get a chance to sort out the finer details of their lie.

She described Metcalfe's "deliberately vague" testimony as an attempt to avoid locking herself "into a version which may

quickly be exposed as a lie”.

“For a trained and experienced police officer, those words don’t ring true,” she told the Court.

Ms Williams also highlighted the “consistency of omi[tting]” any reference to Adam’s father’s presence inside the kitchen.

“Not one police officer put Mr Adrian Salter in the room because to do so would expose the lie within their evidence to the Police Integrity Commission that it was Constable Abela who had attempted to restrain Adam,” she said.

She stressed the fact that the father’s account was consistent with the ambulance officers who were present and witnessed the incident.

“The combination of that evidence clearly gives the lie to the police accounts,” she submitted.

Who You Gonna Call?

The accused are each represented by experienced criminal defence barristers, including [Raymond Hood](#) who attempted to counter the prosecution case by saying the incident was very quick, and that the officers cannot be expected to observe every detail.

The barristers [cross-examined Adrian Salter at length](#), attempting to elicit inconsistencies in his evidence – but the best they could get was that Mr Salter was unsure of how many times the word “taser” was used or whether his son had been shot or tasered.

The trial continues before Justice Greg Woods