Border agent's service gun used in lover's death

SUSAN CARROLL
Citizen Staff Writer
Feb. 1, 2002

DOUGLAS - U.S. Border Patrol agent Matthew Scheffler still guards the international border, although not with his old .40-caliber Beretta.

The service weapon sits in an evidence locker, identified by authorities as the gun that killed Patricia Ramos, 36, his live-in girlfriend and a fellow agent.

On the September night that Ramos died of a gunshot wound to the head, Scheffler told police he didn't shoot her. "I wasn't in the room," he told detectives. "She was upset. I don't know why she did it, but she did it."

An independent analysis of the crime scene and autopsy requested by Douglas police determined physical evidence "does not support a suicide." The gun was found more than three feet from Ramos. Her body was halfway under a bed.

Detectives have named Scheffler, 34, as the prime suspect in the killing, now officially ruled a homicide, said police spokesman Mark Wilkinson.

"He was the last one in the room with her," Wilkinson said. "And he really didn't want to cooperate with the investigation. A lot of questions went unanswered."

Detectives are waiting for evidence, including gunpowder residue tests, before considering filing charges, Wilkinson said.

Scheffler declined to comment on the death or investigation, beyond saying, "I'm still not able to deal with it."

Ramos' sister, Lidia Galvan, is upset that the Border Patrol has allowed Scheffler to remain on active duty.

"The Border Patrol said it was an open-and-shut case of a self-inflicted gunshot wound because that's what Matt said," Galvan said. "That was the farthest thing from the truth."
At 1:11 a.m. Sept. 22, Cochise County emergency dispatchers handled two 911 calls from the Douglas home the couple shared. One was from Scheffler. The other was from Angie Cervantes, 15, Ramos' daughter.

"Please, get someone over here now," Scheffler said, according to police transcripts. He was crying. "My girlfriend just took my gun and shot herself."

On a phone in the living room, Cervantes talked to the dispatcher through tears, hysterical, saying her mother had been shot. At one point the dispatcher asks, "Did your mother do that to herself?"

"I don't know. I was in my bedroom, I didn't hear anything," she said. "Oh, my God, I saw her. Oh, my God."

About 8 that night, Ramos and Scheffler left for a party for another Border Patrol agent's house. A witness later told police the couple disagreed that night over Ramos talking to another man. The witness called it more of a spat than a fight. A witness told detectives it seemed as if the couple was always "butting heads," but he added that "Scheffler loved Ramos and would not hurt her," according to police reports.

Scheffler left early. Ramos stayed, talking to friends until about 12:30.

When Ramos came home, the couple started arguing in the living room and kitchen and then moved behind closed doors, the daughter told police. Her mother was yelling, "I hate you. I want you out of my life," the daughter told investigators. The daughter heard struggling behind the door, she told police, and pounded on the door: "If you don't stop yelling, I'm calling the cops."

There was no response.

Cervantes went into her room and cranked up the stereo. She didn't want to hear the struggling and screaming, she told police. The couple fought a lot, she said.

The music was so loud, it drowned out the gunshot.

When Cervantes couldn't sleep and turned down the stereo, she heard Scheffler's crying and screaming, "No. No," she told investigators.

After his initial statement, Scheffler declined to speak in detail with investigators, police said. He reportedly told detectives, "I work for the Border Patrol and I know my rights."

With FBI help, Douglas investigators were prepared to set up listening devices at Ramos' grave site, in case Scheffler came to the cemetery for her burial. They stopped after he did not go to the rosary for Ramos. Her family had asked that he not attend. Ramos was buried in El Paso, Texas, where Cervantes now lives.