

“No-Knock Raid” is Just Another Term for “Violent Home Invasion”

On January 28, home invaders murdered 58-year-old Rhogena Nicholas and 59-year-old Dennis Tuttle of Houston, Texas. Nicholas and Tuttle wounded five of the (numerous) armed burglars before being slain.

That’s not how the news accounts put it, of course. Typical headline (from the Houston Chronicle): “4 HPD officers shot in southeast Houston narcotics operation, a fifth injured.”

A number of claims relating to the fateful “no-knock raid” remain in dispute, not least whether or not Nicholas and Tuttle were, as the search warrant leading to the raid alleged, selling heroin from their home (their neighbors characterized them as quiet people who didn’t have lots of company, and scoffed at the notion that they might be drug dealers).

Setting aside those disputes, let’s give the benefit of doubt to Houston police chief Art Acevedo on two things.

Acevedo says that his officers “announced themselves as Houston police officers while simultaneously breaching the front door.”

And Acevedo admits that immediately upon breaching the front door, one of the officers shot and killed the residents’ dog.

Ask yourself this: If armed men break down your front door and shoot your dog, are you going to notice (if you can even hear) the invaders saying “police, police?” Are you going to just automatically believe the claim even if you do hear and notice it? Or are you going to act to defend yourself?

It was only after the officers’ violent entry and after one officer killed their dog that Tuttle shot and wounded the dog-killer and Nicholas attempted to disarm him. Both paid with their lives for their forlorn resistance to a gang of armed invaders.

Naturally, Acevedo blames the victims — and the availability of guns with which mere civilians might conceivably defend their homes and their lives from violent intruders.

No, the cops didn’t find any heroin on the premises, although they did claim to have found marijuana and a white powder that Acevedo thought might be cocaine or fentanyl.

No, neither Nicholas nor Tuttle had criminal pasts which might have justified a John Dillinger style takedown. Tuttle had no criminal record at all. Nicholas had a single (dismissed) bad check charge on hers.

The Houston PD brought guns, battering rams, and overwhelming force to what they didn't even expect to be a knife fight. It was supposed to just be a quick episode of "law enforcement theater," a show of force to show the mere mundanes who's in charge.

That it went terribly wrong isn't on the victims. It's on Acevedo and company, and on Gordon G. Marcum II, the judge who signed a warrant specifying that police were "hereby authorized to dispense with the usual requirement that you knock and announce your purpose before entering" the residence.

Acevedo, Marcum, and the officers at the sharp end of the stick will never be charged with armed criminal action and conspiracy to commit same. But they should be. And we need a much higher bar for "no-knock" warrants, if they're to be allowed at all.