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Officers risked lives to rescue woman in siege

POLICE officers risked their lives to save a woman who set fire to her flat moments after threatening to kill them, a court heard.

Gail Wright had barricaded herself into her North-East home after telling neighbours she had been raped.

Police arrived shortly after midnight to find Wright at the window of her upstairs flat, but she smashed the glass and started throwing things at them.

Teesside Crown Court heard yesterday that 28-year-old Wright told them: "Don't come any closer or I'll kill myself."

Richard Bennett, prosecuting, said Wright sparked an hour-long stand-off when she armed herself with a knife and began stabbing the window frame.

Wright threatened to kill the officers and turn the knife on herself if they tried to enter the flat, so a negotiator was called in.

Neighbours watched as a police helicopter beamed light onto the siege scene, but an agitated Wright retreated into the flat and set fire to a vacuum cleaner bag.

Mr Bennett said: "A number of police officers risked their own lives to enter the building, having entered the building full of smoke.

"Breathing and seeing was difficult and the officers were starting to fear for their own safety.

"They repeatedly shouted for Miss Wright to show herself so they could remove her from the flames and the inferno."

One officer found Wright unconscious and she was carried to safety from the property in Norton Road, Stockton.

Judge Anthony Briggs made Wright the subject of a hospital order after hearing from defence barrister Ian West that she had shown a marked improvement since receiving mental health treatment.

Wright had told police she had been drinking and the rape claim was false. She admitted arson.

http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/935935.Officers_risked_lives_to_rescue_woman_in_siege/