



Ohio Attorney General's Office
Bureau of Criminal Investigation
Investigative Report



2024-2255

Officer Involved Critical Incident – 818 Cherryberry Dr.,
Columbus, OH 43228 (L)

Investigative Activity: Interview with Officer
Involves: [REDACTED] (W)
Date of Activity: 08/26/2024
Activity Location: – 2609 McKinley Ave., Columbus, OH 43204
Author: SA Aja Chung, #86

Narrative:

On Monday, August 26, 2024, at 1117 hours, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) Special Agents James Poole (SA Poole) and Aja Chung (SA Chung) interviewed [REDACTED] of the Columbus Division of Police (CPD) at 2609 McKinley Avenue, Columbus, Ohio. [REDACTED] was identified as a member of the CPD Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) [REDACTED] that responded to a barricade situation that occurred on Thursday, August 1st, 2024. The barricade situation stemmed from a domestic dispute involving Benjamin Wheeler (Wheeler), who is now deceased. Also present during the interview was [REDACTED]'s union attorney, Nicole Wannemacher. The purpose of the interview was to obtain all relevant information of the incident known or observed by [REDACTED].

Prior to the start of the interview, SA Poole advised [REDACTED] that BCI was conducting a criminal investigation separate from any internal investigation that CPD may be conducting. [REDACTED] was told that this interview was voluntary, and he could stop answering questions at any time. [REDACTED] verbally agreed to continue with the interview.

This interview was audio recorded, and a copy of the recording was saved electronically within the case file. Please refer to the recording for specific quotes. The following is a summation of the interview.

[REDACTED] confirmed that he was assigned to the [REDACTED] for CPD [REDACTED]. He works [REDACTED]. His badge number is [REDACTED] and his SWAT call sign is [REDACTED]. His body worn camera was worn and operating/recording and his helmet camera was worn but not powered on. [REDACTED] was not working special duty/overtime prior to the call out. He wears eyeglasses for reading and at twilight. His uniform he wore was his green SWAT uniform, heavy kit/body armor, helmet, duty belt, soft ballistic vest underneath his heavy kit. He was carrying his department issued Glock 17 and a taser.

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Approved By SAS James A. Mulford on
10/03/2024

█████ went on to explain his account of what occurred on August 1st, 2024. █████ said the Green Team received a call for a subject that had felony warrants and had barricaded himself inside a structure (house).

█████ indicated he is the █████ of the █████ team and once all members arrived, announcements began to Wheeler. █████ indicated they turned off the gas to the house because they received information that Wheeler had access to a firearm.

█████ stated the team decided to breach the door. At this time, Wheeler's position was known and CPD Officer Vass (driver's seat of the bearcat) could see Wheeler was holding a knife. █████ said the plan was to get up to the (front) door and use a less lethal to get Wheeler subdued. It was at that point that Wheeler started throwing knives and other objects at the SWAT team. █████ explained he was number two in the stack of SWAT officers and was positioned right beside █████.

█████ advised he heard █████ say, "I think he has a gun." █████ said, "It was at that point something came through the bunkers; but couldn't see what." █████ said he then heard, "█████ out." █████ said he waited for others to back up, so they could fall back to the bearcat. █████ indicated as he was waiting for others to fall back from the front door, he could feel objects hit his bunker. Later in the interview, █████ confirmed he deployed his taser during this encounter, but only one taser probe struck Wheeler and the other probe into the wall behind him. █████ indicated the taser was unsuccessful due to both probes not making contact with Wheeler.

█████ explained they began to fire gas canisters into the house to try and make Wheeler surrender. Unbeknownst to the Team, Wheeler had fans set up in the basement to blow the gas upstairs. █████ explained, he later learned, when they shot the gas into the house, Wheeler would retreat to the basement to get fresh air.

█████ advised as the night progressed, the team devised a plan to keep Wheeler in the kitchen so the team could make entry. At this point, Franklin County Sheriff Office deputies sent a drone into the residence, in which Wheeler knocked down. A second drone was deployed and able to keep flight. █████ said the team followed the second drone into the house. As █████ approached the house, he indicated he could feel objects hitting his bunker.

As the SWAT team made entry through the front door, █████ went on saying, "█████ tried to clear a path (into the house)." █████ said when the bookcase was knocked over, the contents (VHS movies and DVDs) fell into the pathway, "so it was like ice." █████ stated the plan was to stay "two-wide" but due to the obstructed path, he was pushed out to the right side (further into the living room). █████ said he saw other team members try to get a taser deployed towards Wheeler. █████ advised he holstered his gun and got his taser out as a back up for non-lethal. █████ then saw █████, who was directly in front of him, put his bunker down. █████ did not know █████ was stabbed at that time. █████ explained he could then see Wheeler swinging the knife and cut █████ on the arm. █████ said, "As he (Wheeler) was going for █████, that's when █████ who was to the right of █████ reached over (the bunker) and fired, I think, four times." █████ said he heard Wheeler yelp, turned and immediately ran away. █████

█████ explained that once that happened, he pushed █████ aside to get into the kitchen to get Wheeler contained into the basement.

█████ advised he knew Wheeler was hit (by gunfire) due to the blood on the floor and walls leading into the basement. █████ indicated he gave commands to Wheeler to come to the steps and to administer first aid. █████ said a pole camera was sent down the stairs and they could see Wheeler was laying on the floor. █████ described that he could see Wheeler was down and a knife to the right of him. █████ then indicated he put his bunker down as another team member covered him. █████ stated he grabbed Wheeler's left arm so another team member could apply handcuffs. It was at this time, █████ explained medics came into the basement to render first aid to Wheeler, but ultimately pronounce his time of death.

SA Poole asked █████ if he thought any of the actions by him (█████) or the other officers around him were criminal. █████ replied, he did not think the teams' actions were criminal because they (SWAT) did everything they could to end it peacefully. █████ confirmed the plan was to taser Wheeler and to get him the help he needed.

SA Poole asked how many different non-lethal uses of force were used? █████ said he wasn't positive on the total number, but he knows he deployed his taser on the first encounter with Wheeler at the doorway. Then while Wheeler was barricaded inside █████ stated he deployed 5 tri-chambers of gas throughout the incident.

Lastly, SA Poole asked if █████ or any of the other officers around him, at the time of the incident, violated any department policies set forth by CPD. █████ answered, "Absolutely not."

The interview concluded at approximately 1141 hours.

References:

No references.

Attachments:

Attachment # 01: 2024-08-26 Interview █████