



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



2024-1658

Officer Involved Critical Incident - 2212 Tryon Rd.,
Ashtabula, Ohio 44004

Investigative Activity: Interview with Lieutenant Larry Harpster
Involves: Lieutenant Larry Harpster (W)
Activity Date: 06/20/2024
Activity Location: Lake County Sheriff's Office-104 East Erie Street,
Painesville, Ohio
Authoring Agent: SA Cory Momchilov #64

Narrative:

On June 20, 2024, at 0952 hours, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) Special Agent (SA) Cory Momchilov (Momchilov) and SA Jesse Bynum (Bynum) interviewed Lake County Sheriff's Lieutenant Larry Harpster (Lieutenant Harpster). The interview took place at the Lake County Sheriff's Office located at 104 E. Erie Street, Painesville, Ohio. The interview was audio recorded.

Lieutenant Harpster was identified as being a police officer who witnessed and/or had some level of involvement in the June 1, 2024 officer-involved shooting which occurred in the area of 2212 Tryon Road, Ashtabula, Ohio. Reportedly, Lieutenant Harpster did not discharge a firearm during the course of the incident. The purpose of the interview was to obtain all relevant information of the incident known or observed by this officer.

Lieutenant Harpster stated his radio call sign on June 1, 2024, was "Harpster," "43" or "Command." He has been employed by the Lake County Sheriff's Office for 27 years. Lieutenant Harpster is the Commander of the Lake County Regional SWAT Team. Lieutenant Harpster has been a member of the SWAT team for 24 years and has been commander for 4 to 5 years. During the incident Lieutenant Harpster was wearing a green polo with khaki pants. Lieutenant Harpster was equipped with a holster and a firearm. During the incident, Lieutenant Harpster stated he was in the command vehicle that was station approximately a quarter mile away from the scene. He stated was not under the influence of any substance that would impair his memory or judgment during the incident or during the interview with BCI. He does wear corrective lenses (glasses).

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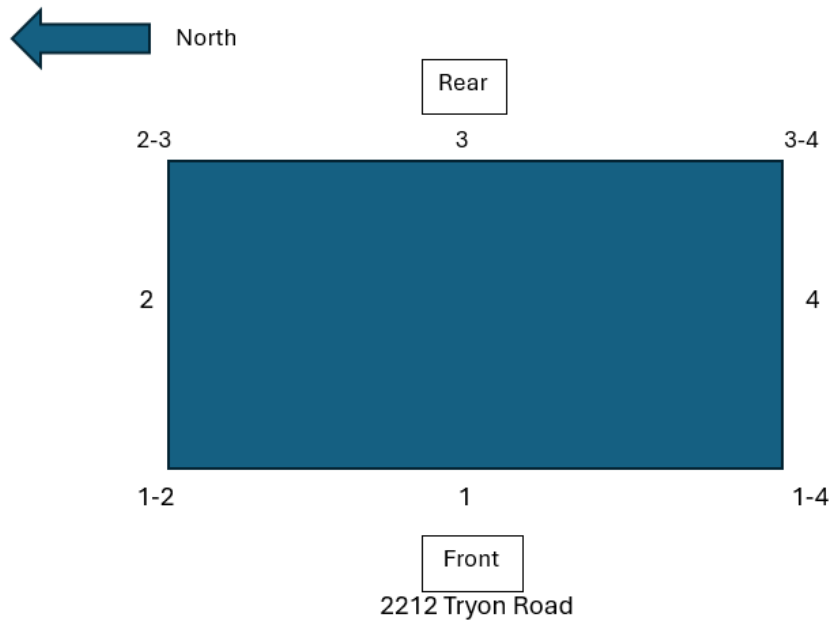
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Precursor Information

During tactical situations, a tactical numbering system is often utilized to quickly identify positions around a residence. The main entrance of the residence is usually referred to as the "1 side", counting clockwise around the house, the sides are then sequentially numbered. The corners are then designated by indicating which sides meet at that corner, e.g. corner 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, and 1-4. This number system was utilized by the Lake County Reginal SWAT Team during this incident (See diagram below).



The Lake County Reginal SWAT Team had two armored vehicles on scene. A smaller armored vehicle, which team members refer to as "David" and a larger armored vehicle which is referred to as "Goliath."

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On June 1, 2024, at approximately 2040 hours, Lieutenant Harpster advised that he received a call from Ashtabula County Sheriff's Detective Evan Wolff (Detective Wolff). According to Lieutenant Harpster, Detective Wolff informed him that Ashtabula County Sheriff road deputies were called to a complaint regarding an individual pointing a long gun at a neighbor's house. When deputies and a family member of the individual arrived on scene, the individual pointed the firearm at them. The individual then retreated into his residence. A perimeter was established around the house using the Ashtabula County Warrant Team and the Regional SWAT team was paged.

Once on scene, Lieutenant Harpster advised that he spoke with Assistant Commander Don Ticel (Deputy Ticel) and "we set up command." It was decided that a small group of team members would quickly respond to the scene in case the individual came out of the house while the rest of the team waited on the arrival of armored vehicles.

Lieutenant Harpster advised that family members of the individual were also on scene. Those family members were directed to command to speak with negotiators, so intelligence could be gathered on the individual.

Once the remainder of the team arrive on scene, they were deployed to the perimeter. Lieutenant Harpster advised that the Ashtabula County Warrant Team remained on the 1-2 and 2-3 corner of the residence. Lieutenant Harpster explained that both armored vehicle, David and Goliath were stationed near the front of the residence and audible announcements were given ever 2 minutes. Lieutenant Harpster stated that they were told that the individual did not have a cellular phone or landline.

SA Momchilov asked Lieutenant Harpster if they observed the individual at any point, early on. Lieutenant Harpster stated it was relayed to him that the individual came to the front window with a knife in his hand and tapped on the glass.

At some point, it was decided that the front window of the residence would be breached (using the ram located on David). During that breach, Lieutenant Harpster explained that the window had vertical blinds that completely blocked the view, so the arm of the ram held the blinds open, so a drone could be used to fly inside the residence (Figure 1) (See Investigative Report titled, "Drone Footage Review" for further detail.) A throw phone was also deployed the same time as the drone.

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Figure 1

Lieutenant Harpster stated, "I saw the throw phone. It's usually in a plastic case. Those had separated. I could see that from the footage, from the drone, and I could see that the phone was right inside the window in front of a chair (Figure 2). So, I had the drone guy park the drone behind because I was afraid, people are afraid of those drones. They, they don't know what to make of 'em. So, I wanted it behind the throw phone because we started announcements over the throw phone saying here, come and grab this phone. It's, it's a cell phone, and so we can talk. Um, just as the drone got behind the cell phone and landed, um, kind of, an eagle eye camera now, he came to the hallway, and I was watching this on monitor. He came to the hallway, uh, with a long gun in his hand, pointed it at the drone for probably 20 seconds (Figure 3), just stood there, and then he lowered his, his gun. He did not fire, and he started yelling out (Figure 4), looked out the window where the, the ram was through and holding the blinds, and he was yelling out the window is what it looked like. I couldn't hear him but that's what it looked like. He was gesturing and yelling out there."



Figure 2

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Figure 3



Figure 4

SA Momchilov stated, "So at some point it's my understanding that he shoots out of the house."

Lieutenant Harpster that at some point someone yelled, "Shots fired from the house" while Lieutenant Harpster was still inside the command post. Lieutenant Harpster advised that shot struck the windshield of the armored vehicle.

Lieutenant Harpster advised at some point gas munitions were deployed inside the house to limit access to certain rooms. Lieutenant Harpster stated, "We believe him to be in the bedroom at the 1-4 corner. Um, this was later on, so we deploy, started to deploy. We had already put gas across the number 3 side of the house to limit that, limit the garage and limit the basement, and as we were putting gas into the bedroom window on the 1-4 corner, they reported shot came out of that bedroom window and they heard it zip over their head."

SA Momchilov asked Lieutenant Harpster what occurred after the second shot was fired.

Lieutenant Harpster stated, "We were continuing gas munitions. One of the teams, gas 40-millimeter gas guns went down. So, we had backed the truck with the ram (David) on it, out into the street, so it was parallel to the front of the house, um, and it had gone over, it had headed north towards the driveway of the house where Goliath was, the other armor. They were transferring a 40 mic to that truck, and as they were backing that, the older truck with the ram on it (David) back to the south, uh, directly in front of the house, there was a, we had one of our guys on the, by the hood of the truck and one by the back bumper, and ju, just as then what I was told what came over the radio was, shots fired from the truck and suspect down [11:05]."

SA Momchilov asked, "So you've been a commander and on the SWAT team for so long. Like what was the purpose of all this? Was it the communications for him to surrender, or?"

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Lieutenant Harpster replied, "Yeah. The big thing is communications. We, we have the throw phone for that. We port, our big thing is we'll port windows a little earlier so that if we do have to make entry, we can cover those windows and see what's inside before we put bodies inside. Um, that's our big, our main purpose of it. Um, we go at the speed that the suspect dictates. If he'll sit and talk to us, we'll sit and talk all night. Um, there was no communication with him. Um, he was agitated. One of the teams saw him at a back window. Uh, when we pulled the electricity from the house, he came out to a back window and gave him, put his finger up to the glass, um, then retreated back into the house. So, there was never really any dialogue between us and him.

SA Momchilov asked Lieutenant Harpster what was the purpose of cutting off the gas and electricity?

Lieutenant Harpster stated, "It was reported to me that there was blaring music coming from inside of the house so he was trying, I think, trying to drowned out the announcements, and we took his electricity so he cannot do that. Take away some of the comforts of home. Um, our whole purpose is to get him to come to the front door and give up."

SA Momchilov asked, "So you being the commander, is there anything you would've done differently or anything that you didn't like how it transpired, or you think you went through the proper steps?"

Lieutenant Harpster stated, "Yeah. We, we go through techniques and then tactics. Um, and again, that speed is dictated by the suspect, and, uh, I wouldn't do anything different."

SA Momchilov then stated, "Maybe we could start at the beginning, tell me, like, the steps you took."

Lieutenant Harpster replied, "Obviously, first is our presence. Um, we put two big, armored trucks in front of the house that are loud, um, announcements. We keep those on, usually on a 2-minute cycle, and we don't stop those really for anything unless he is talking to us already and knows it us out there, and we can confirm that through co, communication with him. Um, our presence. Um, he's obviously looking outside and seeing everything goin' on, uh, so I have no doubt that he knew who was out there. I don't know what his state of mind was because we could never communicate with him."

Lieutenant Harpster continued, "Um, that, kind of, that will help when there's no communications, you have to get to the next step. Um, the porting the windows, uh, the front bay window is a tactic that we use often, um, on a barricade because it gives
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us points of ingress and egress and also gives him points of egress. Uh, we want him to come out so, so this can end peacefully. and that was especially when we started deploying gas, which is later on, um, we give him a route to get out. We give him rooms that are not, don't have that irritant gas in them so that he can come out. This, on this one we left the whole hallway and the front room and front door. Um, yeah, the, he's drowning out the announcements with the loud music that was goin' on so we take the power for that. Um, we'll take the power and the gas to take away comforts of being at home. Um, we want, we want him to come out. Um, that everything we do is towards that purpose. Um, our first step is trying to get communication. We've talked, we talk to family. There wa, in this situation, there was no communication so that's why we deployed the throw phone. Um, that throw phone can act as a loudspeaker so our CNT was making announcements through that phone. He certainly should've be, been hearing that. Um, we, we have numerous negotiators on site so we'll work with them and if he'll communicate, we'll, we'll take as much time one they're talkin' as long as he needs. Um, yeah, that's about, that, that's it. And, you know, obviously, he shoots a round out the window. Um, at that point guys are behind or in the armored truck so it's that's what that trucks really for, um, to keep them safe but when we're moving trucks and guys are outside of the truck, that's, it's a little different."

SA Momchilov stated, "Does that change the whole scenario too if somebody fires from the house?"

Lieutenant Harpster replied, "No. Not, not really. I mean, we still go through our steps. We know they have the capability because in this instance family had taken his guns from him sometime before and when he insisted on getting the guns back, they did return a shotgun and a handgun but they did not give him ammo, and I don't report that to the team because I don't want them to put their guard down that he has no ammo, he can't do anything. On, once he fires a round out and it hits the truck, then we know, okay, he does have capability. That doesn't change what we do. We assume everybody has the capability to do that, to fire, so [17:54]."

SA Momchilov stated, "So, kind of, like the steps and the you guys took was, you know, the presence was first, the announcements, throw phone, you cut the electricity, you started to gas the house. You cut the gas and then started gassing the house."

Lieutenant Harpster replied, "Correct."

SA Momchilov stated, "Do, do you think you had any other available options after that?"

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Lieutenant Harpster replied, "No, once that gas starts to cook, um, in most cases, there, it's, it's uncomfortable enough for them that they either start communicating to get out of that or to come out and surrender."

SA Momchilov stated, "Would you guys have waited him out? Let's say he didn't, let's say he didn't fire or present, would you guys have stayed there for as long as you needed to, for days even?"

Lieutenant Harpster replied, "Yeah. The last thing I wanna do is put my guys in that house 'cause he knows that house, we don't. That's why we try to give every advantage to us to see in the house, sometimes porting and holding windows, um, sometimes removing parts of the home with the ram."

The interview with Lieutenant Harpster was recorded via audio. The audio recording is attached to this investigative report.

References:

None

Attachments:

1. Audio interview of Lieutenant Harpster

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