



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



2023-2210

Officer Involved Critical Incident - [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Howland Township, OH 44484 Trumbull County

Investigative Activity: Interview with Trooper Michael Vitullo
Activity Date: September 5, 2023
Authoring Agent: Special Agent Cory Momchilov #64

On Tuesday, September 5, 2023 at approximately 1011 hours, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) Special Agents (SA) SA Momchilov (Momchilov) and SA Joseph Goudy (Goudy) interviewed Trooper Michael Vitullo (Trooper Vitullo).

Trooper Vitullo was identified as being a police officer who witnessed and/or had some level of involvement in the August 23, 2023, officer-involved shooting which occurred in the area of [REDACTED] Howland Township, Ohio. Reportedly, Trooper Vitullo 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.

Trooper Vitullo, an Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSP) Special Response Team operator was called to assist the Mahoning Valley Crisis Response Team (MVCRT) during a standoff situation. More specifically, Trooper Vitullo was requested to provide possible explosive breach capabilities.

Trooper Vitullo has been a Trooper with the Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSP) for over 17 years and has been a full-time member of the OSP Special Response Team (SRT) for approximately 7 years. Trooper Vitullo has been an explosive breach operator for approximately 5 years. Trooper Vitullo advised that he has received special training to become an explosive breach operator and trains regularly on the use of explosives.

SA Momchilov advised Trooper Vitullo that it was his understanding that he had responded to Howland Township regarding an incident. Trooper Vitullo stated that he did. SA Momchilov asked Trooper Vitullo if he could explain what had occurred.

Trooper Vitullo explained that he received a call from his lieutenant who advised that there was a "hostage barricade" in Trumbull County, near Warren. Trooper Vitullo further stated that he was advised that "they" (MVCRT) weren't turning the scene over but wanted the ability to have an explosive breach, if necessary. Trooper Vitullo and Sergeant Eric Lofland responded to the scene.

Trooper Vitullo stated, "I didn't know specifics about it, we usually don't get them but I feel like that changed a lot as far as it was a hostage situation but it wasn't typical because there were family and also, they, there was like, you know, opportunities that they were trying to get them to get out of the house but they wouldn't go, you know, for different reason and I felt like that all kind of developed."

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Trooper Vitullo advised when he arrived on scene they were at a "holding pattern" because they (MVCRT) was still trying to "figure out how can we, as safely as possible, you know, for officer safety and for, you know, not instigating the hostage taker to hurt anybody on the inside of the house as well."

SA Momchilov advised Trooper Vitullo, that it was understanding that at some point the decision was made to breach the residence. Trooper Vitullo responded, "Yes." Trooper Vitullo explained that he and Sergeant Lofland advised the MVCRT that if explosives were going to be placed on the door, they would prefer to place them while it was still dark. Trooper Vitullo stated, "It came down to, it's gonna be getting light and we want to have the capabilities of the explosive charge, so, we went ahead and they said we're going to put it on the door and then we'll go from there. So that's kind of how that went. At least it's there, we're capable of using it without having to wait until daylight and then put you guys out."

Trooper Vitullo explained, "There was a little bit of confusion at one, one faction felt that once we put the charge on the door, we had to go, like we we were going with it, you know get guys in position and then go. And the other faction was thinking we could just wait, you know, with it on the door, which we could but the geography of the porch and where, like there's a fence and the distance we had to be from the charge and we had to be responsible for the initiator, you just can't leave a live charge sitting out there. So, there was, we were kind of thinking, um Eric (Sergeant Lofland) and I, and this came down to the communications side of things, where we thought we just go around the corner of this house, we needed to be a certain distance from the charge for safety and the team commander thought that was, he didn't want guys that close to the house. He thought we were going to be able to pretty much get behind cover, you know, away from the house, maybe behind armor things like that and it was like, well, we don't have shock tube long enough to get that distance away. We're not using, you know, frequencies for, you know, electric detonation or anything like that. So, we need to be, we have 30 feet. That kind of made it seem like, okay, um, they were like, well nothings changing, we have no way of communicating with this guy and they had their, you know, risk assessment on what they felt like they needed to do and it rolled into let's put a plan together that when we put the charge up there, there's gonna be, whatever amount of time that is, then we're going to hit it and go. So, you guys are going to get to your safe spot, the stacks going to move around the corner and then once it's communicated, and we're all on the same page and guys are where they need to be, we're going to hit it and go in."

SA Momchilov stated, "So it was explosive breach, then entry." Trooper Vitullo responded, "Yeah."

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SA Momchilov then stated, "So, you got the charges up, you guys are off to the side, you blow the door. What happens next?"

Trooper Vitullo advised that the team moved to the porch and then got to the front door. Trooper Vitullo then stated, "Commands were given. I heard and at that point I assumed a position on the left rear of the house if you're looking at it from the front, there was nobody else there but me so I kind of looked at, there's a window there and I kind of assumed a containment roll, I guess, because I'm not interacting with them anymore, my job was done, but I heard, I was looking back and forth at the team and my window and just kind of seeing, you know, keeping my bearings and I heard shotgun, shotgun, shotgun. I remember him saying shotgun, shotgun. I don't really remember many other orders, maybe show me your hands or things like, I remember communicating to this guy, yelling at him and then they were saying like, he went down or he went around the corner or something, they were talking to each other and the stack is, you know, standing off the door, maybe 10 feet at the most, just on the porch there. And it was almost like, he must of went out of sight. Without me seeing it, it sounded like talking to him and then they couldn't see him and they saw him again, orders again and that's when the first shot was fired and a barrage of gunfire, like ah, there was a volley of gunfire at that point and that's where, and I'm looking back and forth like okay, teams firing into the house and I know that the shots are going here, I felt safe where I was at but I was thinking this window is my job, I'm going to keep eyes here. Then there was a lull, guys were injured, guys were saying I was hit, they were hoping off the porch, moving to the back of the stack and then there was another volley of gunfire. And at that point, I'm thinking, you know, are they able, they looked like they were able to maintain but I don't know how many guys were hurt at this point, I'm just seeing all this, I'm trying to figure it out but I'm thinking do I need to go help them, are we doing officer rescue stuff now, is the guy down inside."

Trooper Vitullo advised that the team "Ended up moving up to, into the structure."
Trooper Vitullo stated that he entered the structure just past the door to rely information.

Trooper Vitullo also advised that he physically placed and detonated the charge.
Trooper Vitullo advised that his body-worn camera was activated during the incident.
SA Momchilov later obtained a copy of that footage.

During this incident, Trooper Vitullo advised that he did not have radio communications with the MVCRT and that he and Sergeant Lofland were on their own channel. Trooper Vitullo was wearing an OSP SRT tactical uniform.

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The interview with Trooper Vitullo was audio recorded. The audio recording is attached to this investigative report.

Attachments

Audio interview of Trooper Vitullo

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