



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



2023-2008

Officer Involved Critical Incident – Terminal Road By Dayton
Airport, OH (L)

Investigative Activity: Interview with Officer

Involves: Ohio State Highway Patrol Special Response Team (O), Detective
Melanie Phelps (W)

Date of Activity: 08/17/2023

Activity Location: Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Patrol Headquarters – 555
Infirmary Road, Dayton, OH 45417, Montgomery County

Author: SA Steven Seitzman

Narrative:

On August 2, 2023, the Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) requested the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding an officer-involved critical incident (OICI) that occurred on the same date. The incident began in Madison County, Ohio, after the involved subjects, Rodney (Rodney) and Elaine (Elaine) Helman, fled from law enforcement officers and entered a parked tractor unit. The tractor unit was occupied by [REDACTED] whom the Helman's held against his will. At some point during the incident, Rodney shot [REDACTED] in the right hand. The Helman's continued to evade law enforcement officers using the tractor unit. The incident concluded on Dayton International Airport Access Road in Montgomery County, Ohio, where the Helman's were critically wounded from gunshots fired by OHSP SRT members. The Helman's later succumbed to their injuries at the Miami Valley Hospital.

BCI agents were advised that OSHP requested a negotiator from the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office in the early morning hours of August 2, 2023. Detective Melanie Phelps was assigned as the primary negotiator and responded to the scene. On August 17, 2023 at 1024 hours, BCI Special Agent Steven Seitzman conducted an interview with Det. Phelps. The interview was audio recorded.

The information provided below summarizes key points from the recorded interview and is not a verbatim account. Further, this report was placed in a chronology to aid the reader's overall understanding of the information elicited during the interview and may not be reflective of the actual sequencing of questions. It is suggested that the full audio recording be reviewed.

Det. Phelps advised that she has been a sworn deputy with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office for approximately 20 years. She said she has over 23 years of law enforcement

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experience. In 2008, she was assigned as a detective and has held that position since. In 2014, she became a crisis negotiator. She estimated that she has been involved in over 40 situations as a crisis negotiator.

Regarding her involvement in the OICI, Det. Phelps advised SA Seitzman of the following:

She received a phone call from Dispatcher Reeder on August 2, 2023 at approximately 0330 hours. She was informed that OSHP had a hostage situation near the Dayton International Airport and requested two negotiators. She advised that she quickly responded to the scene. Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Deputy Gallagher also responded. She observed a team of troopers walking up to the passenger side of the tractor unit. She learned that they provided cigarettes and Mountain Dew drinks to the Helmans. She was then directed into OSHP's armored BEAR, which was parked along the driver's side of the tractor unit. She said her location was unusual for a negotiator, as it was loud and not conducive to her task.

Det. Phelps advised that she was given preliminary information from OSHP troopers. She was told that the Helman's took the tractor unit from London, Ohio. She was told that Rodney shot at a London police officer, but the gun jammed. She initially thought there were two hostages, but she learned from Rodney that there was only one.

Det. Phelps said that an OSHP lieutenant handed her a phone. She was told that OSHP had conversed with the subjects inside the truck prior to her arrival, but she did not know the content of those conversations. She attempted contact with the subject, but they initially did not answer. After a couple of attempts and prompts from OSHP via the loudspeaker, Rodney answered the phone. She said that she could tell Rodney listened to the conversation through the phone speaker because Elaine would occasionally respond during the conversation. She further said that Elaine seemed even more assertive than Rodney.

Rodney told Det. Phelps that he and his wife had drug addictions and no one to help them. He told Det. Phelps that he had a workplace injury and thereafter became addicted to pain medication. Det. Phelps told him that drug treatment was available, at which point Elaine Helman spoke up and said drug treatment facilities would not take them because they were still using. Det. Phelps continued to talk to them about seeking treatment for addiction, and they both seemed receptive.

Det. Phelps advised that she could see a small amount of the inside of the tractor unit from her position. She could see through a partially opened curtain. She was able to see Elaine Helman sitting in the front passenger seat. She also observed Rodney. She saw him holding a gun near his lap with his finger on the trigger. She did not see Mr. ██████████ until the conclusion of the incident.

Det. Phelps recalled that at some point during the negotiations, the Helman's said they would come out of the truck and hung up. After 10 minutes, Det. Phelps called them back to see if they were going to exit the truck. Rodney said, "I just want to spend time with my wife."

Det. Phelps advised that she spoke with Rodney for over three hours through multiple phone calls. She described his demeanor as calm. She said he did not demand anything during any of the calls with her. She advised that she briefly spoke with Mr. ██████████ to ensure he was okay.

Mr. ██████ said he was fine and never mentioned having an injury.

Det. Phelps said that she saw Rodney point his gun in the direction of OSHP SRT members who were positioned in front of the armored BEAR. She remembered his arm extended out while pointing the gun at the SRT members. She said Rodney tracked the team's movements with the gun. She said this occurred at least three times during the incident. She relayed her observations to the OSHP SRT members.

Det. Phelps said that during her final phone call with Rodney, he said he wanted the incident to "end peacefully." She then remembered that the curtain inside the tractor unit was pulled, which blocked her view inside of it. She could then see the truck moving, as if the subjects were doing something inside of it.

Det. Phelps advised that the OSHP SRT team informed her of the emergency action plan. She was told the plan was to deploy flashbang devices in front of the tractor unit to distract the subjects. The team was then going to break the windows on the tractor unit. OSHP SRT was then going to order the subjects out of the truck.

Det. Phelps advised that five or ten minutes had elapsed since her last conversation with Rodney, and then the OSHP SRT team carried out an emergency action plan. She recalled the flashbang devices being deployed and the team breaking the tractor unit windows. Shortly after, she heard what she believed to be three muffled gunshots coming from inside the truck. She further believed the shots were possibly fired through the passenger side because she did not observe bullet holes on the driver's side. After she heard the shots fired from inside the tractor unit, the OSHP SRT members returned fire. She remembered hearing 12 or 13 shots. She recalled seeing an SRT member shooting through the tractor unit's windshield. She was uncertain how many SRT members fired their weapons.

After the shooting stopped, she heard yelling and observed a subject, later identified as Mr. ██████ walk around the back of the tractor unit. She saw OSHP troopers take him away from the scene. She then saw Rodney being taken out of the tractor unit. As the SRT members tried to handcuff him, she noticed he continued to keep his hand underneath his stomach. She recalled fearing that he still had the gun; however, he was subsequently handcuffed, and the gun was not found on him. He was then removed from the scene for medical treatment.

Det. Phelps next saw Elaine being placed on a medical stretcher. She believed Elaine was unconscious, but at some point, she regained consciousness, pulled an IV out of her arm, and threw the IV bag away from her. She was surprised that Elaine was combative with medical staff.

Det. Phelps advised that she was relieved by OSHP SRT command after the Helman's were removed from the scene.

The interview was concluded at 1119 hours. The audio recording is attached below.

Attachments:

Attachment # 01: 2023-08-17 Interview with Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Detective

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Melanie Phelps

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Exhibit 1

Included as a separate file.