



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



2024-3954

Officer Involved Critical Incident - 3487 Belmont Avenue,
Youngstown, Ohio, 44505

Investigative Activity: Witness Officer Interview

Involves: Christian Thoma (W)

Activity Date: 12/16/2024

Activity Location: Liberty Township Police Department

Authoring Agent: SA Matthew Armstrong

Narrative:

On Monday, December 16, 2024, at 1949 hours, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) Special Agent (SA) Matthew Armstrong (SA Armstrong) and SA Nick Valente (SA Valente) interviewed Liberty Township Police Department (LTPD) Officer Christian Thoma (Thoma). The interview took place in a conference room at the LTPD. The interview was audio and video recorded. The video recording has been stored in evidence.com as reference item B. The audio recording has been attached to this report.

Officer Thoma was identified as being a police officer who witnessed and/or had some level of involvement in the December 16, 2024 officer-involved shooting which occurred in the area of 3487 Belmont Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio, 44505, Ohio. Officer Thoma did not discharge a firearm during the incident. The purpose of the interview was to obtain all relevant information of the incident known or observed by officer Thoma.

This report only summarizes the information deemed by the author to be of the most relevance to the investigation and does not purport to contain all questions and answers from the interview. 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 recording be reviewed to clarify any content or contextual questions regarding the information from the interview.

At the time of the interview, Officer Thoma had not reviewed any video recordings of the incident

Officer Thoma's radio call sign on December 16, 2024, was 930. He has been employed by the LTPD for approximately 2 years. He had been a law enforcement officer for a total of 17.5 years. During the incident, Officer Thoma wore his standard

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police uniform which he also wore during the interview. It included an external ballistic vest carrier and a duty belt. He drove marked police cruiser #20 and had the emergency lights activated during the incident. He believed he was well-represented as a police officer. He stated he was not under the influence of any substance that would impair his memory or judgment during the incident or during the interview with BCI.

At the time of the incident, Officer Thoma wore a body camera mounted to the left side of his chest. It along with his cruiser dash camera were recording during the incident. He did not know the involved subject and had no previous encounters with the subject.

Earlier that morning, he had received a flyer for a stolen license plate that had been placed on a stolen vehicle. Then, that afternoon, they received an alert from the Flock system for a white Jeep with stolen license plates which was traveling north on Belmont Ave. Upon viewing the photograph from the Flock alert, he realized the alert was related to the information he had received earlier in the day.

Officer Brandon Rice was working a side job in the area and informed the officers that the involved vehicle was parked in front of Harbor Freight.

Captain Buhala and Detective Altier were in unmarked vehicles. Det. Altier confirmed the plate on the involved vehicle was correct. Since the vehicle had two occupants, Captain Buhala directed officers to "take down" the vehicle in the parking lot to prevent it from going out on the roadway. He explained the "take down" involved surrounding the stationary vehicle to prevent it and the occupants from escaping.

Captain Buhala approached the vehicle and parked less than 5 feet from its rear bumper. Det. Altier approached it from the front. Officer Thoma pulled up and parked along the driver's side of Captain Buhala's vehicle and at the rear of the involved vehicle. There he could see the driver's side of the involved vehicle. Officer Ryan parked on the right side of Det. Altier's vehicle and at the front of the involved vehicle. [REDACTED] parked on the passenger side of Captain Buhala's vehicle and behind the involved vehicle.

Officer Thoma exited his cruiser and pointed his firearm at the driver's side door of the involved vehicle. He could see the driver was a white male. He ordered the driver to show his hands several times. The subject looked at him and put his hands up. The subject then reached down, and the Jeep started moving backward until it struck Captain Buhala's vehicle. He ordered the driver to stop again. He then got back into his cruiser to pin the vehicle in, but he heard a gunshot and saw the Jeep starting to move forward. The Jeep then struck another cruiser, and he heard several more gunshots. Officer Thoma jumped back out of his cruiser thinking the subject was returning fire or

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firing at him and ran to the rear driver's side portion of his cruiser. The Jeep then made a sharp left turn and drove straight into the front of Harbor Freight. Officer Thoma then ordered the driver to show his hands, but the driver did not comply.

A female passenger exited the Jeep screaming and crying. She was apprehended by another officer. He saw Detective Altier, along with Officer Brandon Rice and [REDACTED] [REDACTED], utilizing a shield to approach the vehicle. They indicated the driver had a gunshot wound. Officer Thoma then assisted in rendering medical aid.

When Officer Thoma first heard the gunshots, he did not know who was firing. He reiterated that he thought the subject was firing at him because the subject had his hands up before reaching down.

He estimated 20 seconds elapsed from the time they converged on the vehicle until it began moving in reverse. He did not hear the occupants of the vehicle say anything during that time.

During the incident, other officers also gave commands, but he was not sure which officers. He did not remember if sirens were used during the accident.

Before the incident occurred, other officers mentioned the subject involved with the stolen vehicle might be armed.

The interview concluded at approximately 2007 hours.

References:

Reference Item B – Officer Interviews

Attachments:

1. 2024-12-16 Audio Interview of Officer Christian Thoma

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