



**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: Involved Officer Interview
Involves: [REDACTED] (S)
Activity Date: 02/19/2025
Activity Location: Liberty Township Police Department - 1315 Churchill
Hubbard Road, Liberty Township, Ohio
Authoring Agent: SA Joseph Goudy

Narrative:

On Wednesday, February 19, 2025, at 1035 hours, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) Special Agent (SA) Joseph Goudy (SA Goudy) and SA Cory Momchilov (SA Momchilov) interviewed Liberty Township Police Department (LTPD) [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who was accompanied by his attorney, Adam Chaloupka and Dominic Vintantonio from the Ohio Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (OPBA). The interview took place at the Liberty Township Police Department. The interview was audio and video recorded.

[REDACTED] read, understood, and signed the BCI Criminal Investigation Notification form.

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.

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Preliminary and Demographic Information:

Name: [REDACTED]	Rank: [REDACTED]
Badge Number: [REDACTED]	Cruiser/Vehicle Number: [REDACTED]
Radio Call Sign: [REDACTED]	Immediate Supervisor: Captain Ray Buhalla
Radio Channel Utilized: Primary LE 2	Mobile Data Terminal: Present & Utilized
Cruiser Description: 2023 Chevy Tahoe - Standard police markings with emergency lights and siren	Occupants of Cruiser and Seating Positions: None
Assignment: [REDACTED]	Normal Shift: [REDACTED]
In-Car Camera: Operational & Utilized	Spotlight: Present; Not utilized
Emergency Lights: Present & Utilized	Siren: Present & Utilized
Shift Day of Incident: [REDACTED]	Duty Status: On-Duty
Days Off: [REDACTED]	Prior Overtime or Extra Details within Preceding 48 Hours: None
Hours of Sleep Prior to Incident: 6 to 7 hours	Consider Self Well Rested?: Yes
Total Length as Officer: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Length at Current Agency: [REDACTED]
Physical Disabilities (to include hearing aid): None	Corrective Lenses: No Corrective Lenses
Uniform Worn: Standard blue issued police uniform with LTPD patches on the shoulder, badge and duty belt with equipment	Equipment and Less-Lethal Options Carried on Person/Belt/Vest: Taser on right hip / 2 magazines on belt and 3 more on external carrier / handcuffs
Ballistic Vest: External Armor	Body Worn Camera: Present & Used
Other Recording Devices: None	Partner: None
Injuries: None	Equipment Damage: None
Training or Areas of Specialty: Defensive tactics instructor / SWAT training through OTOA / OPOTA Instructor	OPOTC Certification: Yes
Military Experience/Training: None	Use-of-Force Training: Previously had training in 2024
Prior Shooting Incidents: 7/2019 - OIS Bank Robbery	Prior Discipline / Use-of-Force Complaints: Stated he's sure he did, but nothing was substantiated. He mentioned a lawsuit that was dismissed

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Medications, Prescriptions, or Drugs that might Impair Your Duties at Time of Incident: None	
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Officer's Firearm(s):

Weapon #1

Make: Glock	Model: 45
Caliber/Gauge: 9 mm	Serial: Did not know
Type: Semi-Auto Handgun	Method of Carry: low ride on duty belt on left hip / Magazine fully loaded with one in the chamber
Magazine Capacity: 21 round magpole (extended magazine)	Total Rounds as Carried (including chamber): 22
Extra Magazines: 5	Number of Rounds in Extra Magazines: 17
Discharged During Incident? Yes	Primary or Backup Weapon: Primary
Rounds Remaining After Incident: 17	Number of Rounds Fired: 5 (After reviewing video)
Right/Left-Handed Carry: Left-Handed	Ownership: Personally Owned
Last Qualification Date: September or October of 2024	Type of Holster, if any: Safariland

Narrative:

On the day of the incident, [REDACTED] stated that while he was at the LTPD station at the start of his shift, he conducted roll call for the shift officers. It was during that time that they received the Flock alert to the stolen Jeep Cherokee at Belmont Avenue and Gypsy. [REDACTED] stated he was originally planning on staying at the LTPD to conduct administrative duties until the Flock alert came across. At that time, [REDACTED] stated that everyone ran out of the LTPD station to respond to the area of the Flock alert.

[REDACTED] stated that Officer Brandon Rice noticed the stolen Jeep, while working a side job at Premier bank, parked in the lot of the Harbor Freight. When they got into the area, he heard Captain Buhala mention boxing the vehicle in to avoid a pursuit. After [REDACTED] arrived in the area, additional units arrived in the area and got

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into position waiting for the go ahead to move in. Shortly thereafter, [REDACTED] stated he heard Captain Buhala say to move in and box in the vehicle.

At this point, [REDACTED] described the locations of where the responding units were in relation to the stolen Jeep. [REDACTED] stated that Officer Nick Ryan (Ryan) and Detective Robert Altier (Altier) were directly in front, facing the stolen Jeep, while Captain Buhala was directly behind it. [REDACTED] stated that he positioned his LTPD vehicle next to Captain Buhala's on the passenger side and Officer Christian Thoma's (Thoma) LTPD vehicle was on Captain Buhala's driver's side. He further stated that he eventually noticed Officer Rice's LTPD vehicle on his [REDACTED] passenger side.

[REDACTED] stated that after he got into position, he immediately exited his vehicle to get back and behind the pillars of his vehicle, "in case any bullets start flying" (21:30). [REDACTED] stated that he learned that tactic from CQB training. After [REDACTED] exited his vehicle, he stated he was giving the driver of the stolen Jeep commands. [REDACTED] also stated that at this point, he did not know where Captain Buhala was. [REDACTED] then stated that the driver, "put the car in reverse and just rammed into Buhala's SUV, it's a GMC Yukon" (22:16).

At this point, [REDACTED] stated:

"At this point, I knew Altier was in front over here by his truck and Nick Ryan was behind, he got out, behind his pillar of his, his vehicle. And at which point, he was ramming back towards us, and I was like {sigh} he's like, oh shit, this is not. Apparently, there was a gap enough for him to get enough motion to start ramming cars. And at that point, it was coming, the car was coming back towards us, it hit Buhala's SUV, severely, really hard. Cause I mean it shook everything, it was loud as hell. At which point, I didn't, I was thinking he was trying to come back towards us, to get through us, UNINTELLIGIBLE shit, this guy's gonna run me over, I fired once. In which point, the car started going forward and hit, I thought initially he hit both the cars in front. Apparently, from watching the video, he only hit Nick Ryan's car. I don't know how he missed Altier's car. But I seen Nick Ryan's car getting launched. Well, I had no clue where Nick Ryan was. Last I knew him to be was behind his vehicle. So, I'm thinking, shit, he's gonna kill this kid. I didn't know where Ray was, Captain Buhala was. Here, I hear he was still inside his vehicle, but I didn't know that because his tinted windows (22:28).

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██████████ continued by saying how all the officers were giving verbal commands to the driver of the stolen Jeep. ██████████ further stated that he believed they did not hear each other giving the commands. This was his understanding after reviewing the BWC video prior to the interview. ██████████ stated that he observed the stolen Jeep angled towards Officer Ryan's vehicle. At that point, ██████████ stated he moved forward because the stolen Jeep continued to ram the other LTPD vehicles around it. ██████████ stated, "I was like, I don't know where my fellow cops are, he's going to kill these guys." (24:09) ██████████ further described the scene as the parking lot being filled with people and it being 3:00 in the afternoon. ██████████ stated, "And then I step forward, and I fired again." (24:29). ██████████ described how the stolen Jeep was angled facing southeast.

██████████ then described hearing the engine revving by saying,

"All of a sudden you hear the gas rev, I mean, somebody, someone stomped the gas pedal, loud as hell and the car shot, like shot forward straightened out and went right into the building" (24:44).

██████████ then described the actions they took after the vehicle drove into the building. He stated that a ballistic shield was obtained, and the female was removed from the stolen Jeep and secured in an LTPD vehicle. Furthermore, ██████████ stated that emergency medical treatment was provided for the driver. ██████████ stated that when Detective Sergeant Schuster arrived on scene, Captain Buhala told him to get ██████████ away from the scene. Just before leaving the scene, ██████████ stated that he was having trouble holstering his duty weapon due to the light falling off and into the holster. This prevented the gun from initially being secured inside the holster.

SA Goudy asked ██████████ to describe how the Flock alerts were typically received. He stated that they would receive an alert on their phones via an application which would indicate license plates coming back with active warrants or as stolen. He further stated that this particular alert came from the area of Belmont Avenue and Gypsy Avenue in Liberty Township.

When ██████████ was asked to describe the LTPD's agency approach to Flock alerts involving stolen vehicles, he stated it depended on the situation. ██████████ stated that they would initially try to locate the vehicle first and establish the appropriate plan to safely conduct a felony stop. ██████████ was asked if the approach taken on the day of the incident aligned with the agency training regarding this matter. He stated that it did and briefly described the method again. ██████████

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████████ stated that due to how the LTPD vehicles were positioned, he was surprised that the stolen Jeep was able to maneuver around the way it did.

SA Goudy asked ██████████ when he fired his first gunshot. ██████████ replied:

"It wasn't until he started ramming the cars and he had hit Buhala's vehicle really hard and knocked it. I, and I, I, I honestly at that point, even when he was ramming, I'm like, shit, he's gonna come back, run us over, push us outta the way. And then, then I fired and then he decided to go forward and started ramming forward after I'd fired" (29:12).

████████ stated he was near the rear quarter panel of his LTPD vehicle when he fired the first gunshot.

████████ continued to describe his actions after firing his first gunshot. He stated:

"And then the vehicle started ramming forward and I seen it hit the marked cruiser, which would been Officer Nick Ryan's cruiser and launched that. And I had, last I knew Nick Ryan to be, was behind his vehicle, like, we're trained, this is how we do the vehicle stuff. I'm like, shit. Did he get out of the way? Is he, you know, I knew Altier was behind his truck, but I, I, at which point I seen Altier, I don't even know where Altier went. I seen people like running just to for cover" (30:17).

████████ stated that his sight picture during the first gunshot was the rear window of the stolen Jeep. Furthermore, he added that it was consistent with the CQB training he has had. ██████████ described more of the training, which consisted of shooting into vehicles and the effect it would have on the bullet trajectory.

████████ was asked when he fired the next four gunshots into the Jeep. He stated that it was after the stolen Jeep rammed into Officer Ryan's LTPD vehicle. At this point, ██████████ stated he began to move forward towards the stolen Jeep.

████████ stated:

"I was looking right at the vehicle, and I was trying to put my rounds right where the driver would be. The driver's seat area would be, trying to eliminate the threat before he ran one of the cops over or ran anybody over and killed anybody" (32:43).

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██████████ was asked if he was able to see into the vehicle, in which he stated that he was not able to due to the tint on the back window. He was then asked if he heard anyone yelling from inside the stolen Jeep, he stated that he did not hear anything coming from within the stolen Jeep. ██████████ was asked what he was able to hear during the incident, he replied:

"Cars getting rammed, smashed, loud and then after I fired, moved up and fired again, I heard the gas, somebody, I see somebody 'cause I mean him or I heard the gas pedal be, somebody stomped it to the ground and then the motor revved like super high and then the car just shot, but his wheels were cut so it sh, it was facing at an angle south, the wheel, so it, it shot, it turned to the left, straightened out, went right into the building" (33:22).

SA Goudy asked ██████████ if he was near any sort of cover while he was moving forward towards the stolen Jeep. He replied:

"I think I was moving. I moved up trying to just stop the threat before anybody got hurt by him. Which I probably shouldn't have stepped outta cover, but I was trying to, like, think if my coworkers were about to be killed by this guy" (34:10).

██████████ was asked if he knew where the other officers were at the time when he fired the last four gunshots. He replied:

"No. As last I knew, they were behind their vehicles from cover like we trained to do. And it wasn't until, you know, watching the video I seen that some people had done some stuff that not really what we trained to do" (35:30).

██████████ was asked if his actions were consistent with his training, he replied that they were. Furthermore, ██████████ added:

"...I was unaware that Nick Ryan came around his passenger side and ran, I guess out into the open right where the car could have either shot, UNINTELLIGIBLE shot, he ran all the way to Thoma's cruiser. I thought he was still there. We don't do that. If you run to cover, you stay behind cover. I mean, he put himself, I mean, I'm not trying to bash him, but he exposed himself and I never saw that. I, I, last I knew he was behind his vehicle. And when his vehicle got hit, I didn't know where the hell he was, if he got knocked, if he jumped out of the way or what he did" (35:49).

At this point, ██████████ stated that Officer Rice told him while on scene that if he ██████████ did not move forward, he (Officer Rice) would have fired also.

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████████ stated that at the time of the incident, he was not aware of Officer Rice's location. ██████████ stated that he did not know the locations of Captain Buhala, Officer Ryan, and Detective Altier. ██████████ mentioned again how he did not know Captain Buhala's location, as to whether or not he was still inside his vehicle. He stated he wasn't sure if Captain Buhala moved out of the way, got knocked down, or got hit.

████████ was asked if, based on his training, he thought that Officer Ryan and Detective Altier were in danger, he replied:

"Yes, based on my training. I thought these two are like, shit, he's gonna kill these two. And I don't know what happened. You know, when he backed up and ran into Buhala, I didn't know where the hell Buhala went to" (39:37).

████████ was asked if there was any other option available other than the use of deadly force. He stated, "At the point he was ramming cars, and I didn't know where my officers were, I felt no" (41:18).

The interview concluded at approximately 1120 hours.

The interview was audio and video recorded. Both recordings can be found under reference item G. The signed BCI Criminal Investigation Notification form is attached to this report. Please see the attachment and reference item for further details.

References:

Reference Item G – Involved Officer Interview – ██████████

Attachments:

1. 2025-02-19 BCI Criminal Investigation Notification Form - ██████████

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Criminal Investigation Notification

1. This investigation is being conducted in order to determine whether any criminal laws have been violated on the part of those involved in this incident. Specifically, to collect facts and information to be provided to the prosecutor and/or grand jury in order for them to determine whether the conduct involved is authorized or prohibited by criminal statutes.
2. Your participation in this interview is voluntary and you may decline to answer or cease the interview at any time. You are entitled to have an attorney present if you wish.
3. The criminal investigation is separate from any internal, administrative investigation which your employer may or may not be independently conducting. You are not being compelled to give any statement or answer any questions. This is not a "Garrity" interview (where you could be required to answer).

[REDACTED]
Printed Name of Interviewee

2-18-24 / 10:36 AM
Date / Time

[REDACTED]

SA Joseph Conroy
BCI Agent (Printed)

J. Conroy
BCI Agent (Signature)