



**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: Captain Ray Buhala (W)
Activity Date: 12/16/2024
Activity Location: Liberty Township Police Department, 1315 Churchill
Hubbard Road B, Youngstown, OH 44505
Authoring Agent: SA Nicholas Valente

Narrative:

On Monday, December 16, 2024, at 1857 hours, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) Special Agent (SA) Nick Valente (SA Valente) and SA Matt Armstrong (SA Armstrong) interviewed Captain Ray Buhala (Captain Buhala). The interview took place at Liberty Township Police Department (LTPD), 1315 Churchill Hubbard Road B, Youngstown, Ohio. The interview was audio and video recorded.

Captain Buhala 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. Reportedly, Captain Buhala 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 Captain Buhala

Captain Buhala stated that his radio call sign on December 16, 2024, was 902. He has been employed by LTPD for about 19 years. He has been a police officer for a total of approximately 21 years. During the incident, Captain Buhala was not wearing a patrol duty uniform. He was, however, wearing a long-sleeved shirt with a small LTPD patch on the left center of the garment that was covered by an exterior police vest with a police patch and badge visibly displayed on the front of the vest. Captain Buhala was also wearing 5.11 branded cargo pants and had his duty pistol in an outside-the-waistband holster. Captain Buhala did not exit his vehicle prior to the shooting and only his upper body would have been visible to the subject during the incident.

Captain Buhala drove an unmarked police GMC Yukon that was equipped with lights and a siren. Captain Buhala utilized both the lights and sirens in responding to the incident and while on scene. Captain Buhala considered himself to be well-represented as a police officer during the incident. He stated that he was not under the influence of

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any substance that would impair his memory or judgment during the incident or during the interview with BCI. Captain Buhala did not have a body-worn camera (BWC) or any other recording devices with him at the time. Captain Buhala had watched the BWC video created by Officer Christian Thoma (Officer Thoma) and the dash camera video from [REDACTED] patrol vehicle during the incident. Captain Buhala stated his recollection of the incident was similar to what he saw when he viewed the above-noted videos.

Captain Buhala recalled that in the days preceding the officer-involved shooting he received a BOLO for the subject regarding an allegation that the subject had stolen firearms owned by his father. Captain Buhala also noted that earlier on the day of the officer-involved shooting he received another BOLO pertaining to this subject. This second BOLO put out by Hermitage Police included information about the male subject having stolen license plates from a Walmart to place on the stolen vehicle he was driving.

Leading up to the officer-involved shooting, Captain Buhala was notified of a Flock surveillance camera hit indicating the Flock camera located at Gypsy Road and Belmont Road had picked up the stolen vehicle operated by the subject. The vehicle in question was traveling from south to north into Liberty Township. This Flock camera is located approximately four city blocks from the Harbor Freight parking lot. When the Flock hit notification was sent out, a Hermitage Police Officer who disseminated the most recent BOLO relayed over the police radio to [REDACTED] that the Flock hit was for the BOLO sent out earlier that day. Captain Buhala heard this radio traffic as well.

Based on the Flock hit and the related radio traffic that followed, Captain Buhala left the police station to join the patrol officers in attempting to locate the stolen vehicle.

Captain Buhala drove directly from the police station to the scene using his police lights and sirens. Captain Buhala estimated he arrived at the Harbor Freight parking lot at approximately 1431 or 1432 hours.

As Captain Buhala arrived, he observed Officer Robert Altier (Officer Altier), who was also driving an unmarked vehicle, drive past the subject vehicle and confirmed it was the vehicle in question officers were looking for. Captain Buhala believed Officer Altier's unmarked vehicle was a black Dodge Ram. In addition to Officer Altier, other officers present in the area at the time were [REDACTED], Officer Thoma, Officer Nick Ryan (Officer Ryan), Officer Brandon Rice (Officer Rice), and Captain Buhala himself. In total, there were two unmarked police vehicles and four marked police vehicles.

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The subject vehicle was parked in a parking space towards the front of the store and occupied by two people. The subject vehicle had pulled through a parking space and parked in the space directly past and adjacent to the first space in a manner that would indicate the easiest route to exit the parking space would be for the subject to drive forward and immediately into the lane of traffic in the parking lot.

Captain Buhala used his police radio to tell the other officers in the area that they would try and "take down" the subject vehicle while it was still in the parking lot to avoid a possible pursuit if the subject did not cooperate. Captain Buhala and the other officers formulated a plan of how to approach the subject vehicle. The plan was for Captain Buhala to first approach the subject vehicle and block its ability to back out of the parking space using his unmarked police vehicle. Officer Altier would then quickly approach the subject vehicle from the front with his unmarked vehicle so that the subject could not escape driving forward. The other officers in marked police cars would then converge on the subject's vehicle as well. The group of officers approached the subject's vehicle as planned, arriving within moments of each other.

Captain Buhala used police-style emergency lights while he approached and parked behind the subject. Captain Buhala parked approximately two to three feet behind the subject's vehicle. Captain Buhala's emergency lights included a pull-down visor light, red and blue flashing lights in the grill of the vehicle and flashing of the vehicle's regular lights. Captain Buhala remained inside his vehicle and briefly activated his vehicle's siren as a way of further signaling to the subject that he was law enforcement and was parked behind the subject and blocking his exit path. After pulling up behind the subject's vehicle and blocking the subject's path to back out of the parking space, Captain Buhala stayed seated in his vehicle. The other officers quickly pulled up and further blocked the subject's vehicle in, limiting its ability to potentially flee the scene. Captain Buhala was able to see from his position inside his vehicle that Officer Altier also used emergency flashing lights coming from his dashboard when he approached the subject vehicle.

Officer Ryan parked his marked police vehicle to the southeast of the subject in the main driveway in front of the store near the subject vehicle. Officer Thoma parked his marked police vehicle nearby to the left/east of the subject vehicle. [REDACTED] parked his marked police vehicle facing the subject vehicle to the right of Captain Buhala. Officer Rice's vehicle was somewhere to the southwest of the subject's vehicle. These other officers quickly exited their vehicles and began to approach the subject vehicle on foot.

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As the group of officers approached the subject vehicle, Captain Buhala observed the subject put his hands up to comply with their orders. Captain Buhala believed at that moment the subject was compliant, and the incident would end quickly with further compliance from the subject. However, the subject did not continue to listen to the officers' orders. Rather, Captain Buhala next heard the subject's engine begin to rev up, and the subject backed his vehicle into Captain Buhala's vehicle, a GMC Yukon. The subject struck Captain Buhala's vehicle with enough force to move Captain Buhala's vehicle a short distance. It was clear to Captain Buhala that the subject backed into his vehicle with significantly more force than someone normally backing out of a parking space would use.

When asked how much time transpired from the moment officers exited their vehicles, approached the subject, and began giving commands to the time the subject began to back out and struck his vehicle, Captain Buhala estimated 15 to 20 seconds transpired and recalled it being a significant amount of time for the situation.

Captain Buhala stated it was daylight out at the time of this incident. Captain Buhala felt it was readily apparent to the subject that he knew he was interacting with the police at the time, as there were numerous uniformed police officers and marked police cars present at the time. Captain Buhala did not hear the subject or the passenger in the vehicle ever make any verbal statements.

After the subject had backed in and struck Captain Buhala's vehicle at a high rate of speed, the subject put his vehicle in drive and began to drive towards Officer Ryan's marked police vehicle, which was parked in front of the store. As the subject began to drive forward, Captain Buhala observed [REDACTED] out the corner of his eye to his right. Captain Buhala began to hear shots being fired at that time. Captain Buhala believed he heard around four shots fired. All the gunshots were fired in quick succession in one grouping. As the shots were being fired, the subject's vehicle traveled at a high rate of speed directly towards Officer Ryan's vehicle near the front of the store. The subject vehicle struck Officer Ryan's vehicle, continued forward, and then struck the storefront and crashed partially into the store. After crashing into the store, officers yelled commands at the subject to show his hands and exit the vehicle.

The subject did not exit the vehicle. However, the female who was seated in the front passenger seat did exit the vehicle. Captain Buhala escorted the female (known to be Hanna Tillery) away from the crashed vehicle and to the marked police vehicles.

Officer Altier then retrieved a shield from his vehicle. A group of officers approached the subject vehicle, while using the shield as cover. Captain Buhala believed, upon

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approaching the subject's vehicle, these officers found the subject with a gunshot wound to his head. As the officers approached the subject, Captain Buhala was entering the store. Upon entering the store Captain Buhala confirmed that no one was injured inside the store.

Captain Buhala and the other officers immediately called for EMS to provide additional assistance to the subject after reaching him and learning he had an apparent gunshot injury to his head.

When asked, Captain Buhala stated that he believed [REDACTED] firing his weapon was appropriate for the circumstances at the time [REDACTED] did so. When asked, Captain Buhala stated that he did not believe [REDACTED] would have known the location of the other officers at the time he fired. Captain Buhala added that [REDACTED] [REDACTED] yelled out questioning where Officer Ryan was immediately after firing his weapon.

The interview concluded at approximately 1929 hours.

The audio recording of the interview was attached to this report. The video recording of the interview was saved as part of Reference Item B. Please see the attachment and video recording for further details.

References:

B – Officer Interviews

Attachments:

1. 2024-12-16 Audio Interview of Captain Ray Buhala

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