

Rapid City Police Department Officer Involved Shooting Summary Detailing Events That Took Place on May 31, 2022

On May 31, 2022, the Rapid City Police Department (RCPD) requested the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) investigate an officer involved shooting that occurred on Terra Street in Rapid City, SD. Shania Watkins was shot multiple times by a RCPD Officer during a vehicle pursuit. The following is a synopsis of the events that occurred on May 31, and the subsequent investigation that was conducted by the DCI.

SYNOPSIS

On May 31, 2022, at about 4:04 AM, a RCPD Officer (Officer #1) attempted to conduct a traffic stop on a white Mitsubishi Galant near the intersection of North Lacrosse Street and East Waterloo Street in Rapid City. The reason for the stop was for an equipment violation (license plate illumination). Officer #1 activated their emergency lights and siren, but the Mitsubishi Galant failed to pull over.

The vehicle began to slow as it traveled on East Waterloo Street. An unidentified subject exited the front passenger seat of the Galant while the driver of the Galant continued traveling eastbound. The driver increased the vehicle's speed and committed multiple traffic violations in an apparent effort to elude the officer.

Officer #1 communicated to dispatch that they were in pursuit of the Galant and relayed pertinent information to responding officers. Officer #1 observed that the driver of the Galant threw a cup out of the vehicle as it traveled.

Other RCPD Units joined the pursuit as the vehicle traveled through Rapid City. Speeds during the pursuit reached approximately 65 mph. The suspect attempted to evade officers by turning into an oncoming lane of travel. A RCPD Officer (Officer #2) attempted a tactical vehicle intervention (TVI) on the Galant near East St. Patrick and Sedivy Lane. The TVI was unsuccessful and the Galant continued its course, turning onto South Valley Drive.

The suspect turned onto Terra Court and stopped in a position perpendicular in the roadway. (Officer #2) pulled the front of their patrol vehicle up to the passenger side of the Galant. Officer #2 exited their vehicle and began issuing commands to the driver to get out of the car. Simultaneously, the Galant began backing up, colliding with the front end of the officer's patrol vehicle. Officer #2 fired seven rounds through the passenger front door and window of the Galant.

Another RCPD Officer (Officer #3) pulled their patrol vehicle parallel to the Officer #2's vehicle at approximately the same time that the Galant started backing up. The rear end of the Galant came into contact with the front of this officer's patrol vehicle, causing the Galant to come to a complete stop.

Officer #1 arrived on scene after the shooting event and assisted the officers by issuing loud verbal commands for the occupant(s) of the Galant to surrender. Additional law enforcement arrived on scene, and the lone occupant of the vehicle was removed from the driver's seat.

The driver of the Galant was identified as Shania Watkins. Watkins sustained multiple gunshot wounds. RCPD Officers rendered medical aid to Watkins until medical personnel arrived.

DCI Agents determined that only one officer fired a weapon during the incident. The involved officer's Glock 9 mm duty firearm was secured by a RCPD Supervisor on scene.

The incident was captured by body worn and in-car cameras.

The Pennington County Sheriff's Office secured the scene until DCI Agents arrived.

Watkins was transported to Monument Hospital in Rapid City to be treated for her injuries.

DCI Agents and an Investigator from the Lawrence County Sheriff's Office contacted the two RCPD Officers involved in the incident.

Agents documented that Officer #2 was wearing their Rapid City Police Department issued uniform. Officer #2's duty firearm was documented and inventoried as follows:

- Glock 9mm handgun containing 11 unspent rounds of ammunition (7 rounds short of full capacity).
- Two spare magazines containing seventeen rounds each (full capacity).

DCI Agents also contacted Officer #3 present at the time of the shooting incident. They documented that this officer was wearing their Rapid City Police Department issued uniform. Officer #2's duty firearm was documented and inventoried as follows:

- Glock 9mm handgun containing 18 unspent rounds of ammunition, including one round in the chamber (full capacity).
- Two spare magazines containing seventeen unspent rounds each (full capacity).

SCENE INVESTIGATION

The shooting scene investigation conducted by the DCI produced items of evidence that confirmed statements given by RCPD Officers and video from body worn and in-car cameras.

Upon Agents arrival, the Galant was still running with the transmission placed in reverse and back-up lights still activated. DCI Agents observed tire tracks leading to and from the vehicles involved. Tire tracks directly in front of the Galant (marked with orange cones) appeared consistent with Watkins driving forward, stopping, and reversing. The Galant's tires were turned toward the left, causing the vehicle's front end to swing toward the right while reversing.

Along the passenger side of the Galant, there were black marks/dents, originating on the passenger side rear door and continuing toward the front of the vehicle. These marks/dents were consistent with the height and style of the bumper on Officer #2's patrol vehicle.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol mapped/scanned the incident scene. A copy of this map has been included with this report.

A total of seven (7) spent 9mm casings were found, consistent with the area where the Officer #2 fired their duty firearm.

DCI Agents conducted a neighborhood canvas of Terra Street. Approximately twenty residents were interviewed in an effort to identify an eyewitness account.

INTERVIEW: OFFICER #2

On June 1, DCI Agents interviewed the Officer #2 involved in the shooting incident. The officer described their involvement and thought process during the shooting incident.

Officer #2 responded to assist other RCPD Officers involved in the pursuit of the Galant. Officer #2 monitored radio traffic and attempted to position themselves ahead of the pursuit in an effort to deploy spike strips. Officer #2 heard radio traffic that a passenger had exited the vehicle on foot.

Officer #2 encountered the Galant and pursuing officers at the intersection of Cambell and Omaha Street. Officer #2 became the lead vehicle in the pursuit after the Galant made an illegal U-turn into an oncoming lane of travel. Officer #2 said the Galant was traveling at high speeds as it continued south on Cambell Street. A TVI was authorized and Officer #2 attempted to execute a TVI as the Galant traveled east on East St. Patrick Street. The TVI was ultimately unsuccessful as the driver regained control of the vehicle and continued to travel east on East St. Patrick Street.

As the Galant turned onto South Valley Drive, Officer #2 determined there was no safe location to attempt another TVI. The Galant made a sharp turn onto Terra Street before abruptly turning the vehicle perpendicular in the roadway. Officer #2 was able to stop their patrol vehicle before colliding with the passenger side of the Galant. Officer #2 exited their patrol vehicle with their duty pistol drawn and issued verbal commands to the driver. Officer #2 was standing between the open door and doorframe of their patrol vehicle. The Galant backed up while turning into the patrol vehicle. The passenger side of the Galant made contact with the front of Officer #2's patrol vehicle, breaking the side mirror of the Galant.

Officer #2 believed that the direction of the Galant's travel would collide with their open door, pinning Officer #2 between their patrol vehicle door and doorframe. Officer #2 recognized that they were in a perilous position and did not have time to retreat or move to safety. Officer #2 said that they made the decision to fire their duty pistol into the passenger side window of the Galant in an effort to stop the vehicle and driver. Officer #2 feared for their safety, the safety of other law enforcement, and the public.

Officer #2 stopped firing their pistol when the Galant came to a stop. Officer #2 believed there was only one person in the vehicle based upon their knowledge that the passenger had fled.

INTERVIEW: OFFICER #3

Officer #3 described their involvement and thought process during the shooting incident. Officer #3 said that they were on patrol when they heard radio traffic indicating that a RCPD Officer was in pursuit of a white Galant. Officer #3 responded and became involved in the pursuit as the secondary unit.

While pursuing the Galant, Officer #3 saw that the vehicle was traveling at high speeds through residential areas. Officer #3 witnessed the unsuccessful TVI attempt.

The pursuit continued onto Terra Street where the Galant turned perpendicular in the roadway. Officer #3 witnessed Officer #2 stop their patrol vehicle near the passenger side of the Galant. Officer #3 pulled parallel to Officer #2's patrol vehicle. Officer #3 intended to position their patrol vehicle toward the rear of the Galant to prevent further travel.

Officer #3 said that they anticipated that the occupant(s) of the Galant was going to flee on foot. Officer #3's attention was focused on the Galant's driver side doors. Officer #3 said they heard

several gunshots in rapid succession. Officer #3 was unsure if the shots were coming from the Galant or from Officer #2. Officer #3 looked over and observed Officer #2 standing outside Officer #2's patrol vehicle with their pistol drawn.

Officer #3 observed several bullet holes in the passenger window of the Galant. Officer #3 exited their patrol car and gave multiple commands to the occupant(s) of the Galant that went unanswered. Officer #3 later broke the glass on the driver side door to secure and remove Watkins from the vehicle.

INTERVIEW: SHANIA WATKINS

On June 14, 2022, DCI Agents conducted an interview with Shania Watkins. Watkins was asked to recount the events that took place in the early morning hours of 5/31/22. Watkins said that she was out driving her car in Rapid City. Watkins could not identify the passenger in her vehicle. Watkins said that she had just picked up an unknown female walking and was going to give her a ride. When the police attempted to pull Watkins over, Watkins told the unknown passenger that she could get out of the vehicle because Watkins had no intention of stopping for police. Watkins explained that she did not like the police based on previous life experience.

Watkins denied being under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time. Watkins admitted to having suicidal thoughts during this timeframe. Watkins denied being in possession of any illegal contraband or firearms. Watkins admitted that she may have thrown some trash out of her car during the pursuit. Watkins believed that the police were going to take her to jail. Watkins wanted to drive her vehicle home so that she would not incur a tow bill after her potential arrest. Watkins said that she was operating her car in a reasonable manner and not driving at high speeds.

Watkins said that she arrived near a family member's residence on Terra Street. Watkins stated she stopped the vehicle, placed it in park or neutral, and put the keys in her pocket. Watkins said that she complied with the officer's commands to show her hands. While complying, the officers opened fire and shot her multiple times. Watkins denied driving her vehicle toward the officers.

Watkins was unable to explain how her statements conflicted with the video evidence and medical reports showing that she was under the influence of methamphetamine and marijuana.

WITNESS INTERVIEWS

Multiple family members and associates of Shania Watkins were interviewed by DCI in an effort to establish her state of mind and events leading up to the shooting. Watkins had contacted a family member during the pursuit and indicated that she was not going to stop for law enforcement.

VIDEO EVIDENCE

Audio/video recordings from Officer #2's and Officer #3's body worn and in-car cameras captured the incident. The video was reviewed and found to be consistent with the statements provided by RCPD Officers.

The video depicts three RCPD Officers pursuing the Galant for several minutes.

Watkins' vehicle came to a stop in a position perpendicular to the road on Terra Street, blocking the eastbound lane of traffic. Almost immediately upon Watkins stopping, Officer #2 stopped near the passenger side of the Galant. Watkins remained stopped momentarily before she began to move in reverse. While backing up, the front passenger side of Watkins' vehicle was angled toward, and made contact with, the front driver side area of Officer #3's patrol vehicle.

Officer #2 exited their patrol vehicle and can be heard yelling, "Get out of the car!" as the Galant began reversing. As the Galant contacted Officer #2's patrol vehicle, Officer #2 fired their duty pistol multiple times.

As Watkin's vehicle was still moving in reverse, Officer #3's patrol vehicle pulled up parallel to Officer #2's patrol vehicle. The rear passenger area of Watkin's vehicle made contact with the front passenger side of Officer #3's patrol vehicle. Officer #2's shots began moments before Watkin's vehicle made contact with Officer #3's patrol vehicle.

Officer #2 stopped firing their weapon once Watkin's vehicle came to a complete stop. Officer #2 communicated to dispatch that shots had been fired.

Other officers arrived on scene, removed Watkin's from her vehicle, and provided medical attention until medical personnel arrived.

FORENSIC EXAMINATION

The South Dakota Forensic Laboratory (SDFL) tested the seven spent shell casings found on scene. The SDFL concluded that the spent casings matched Officer #2's duty weapon.

MEDICAL REPORTS AND CRIMINAL HISTORY

A drug screen and blood alcohol test were conducted on Officer #2. The results were negative.

According to medical records provided by Monument Health in Rapid City, Watkins' suffered multiple gunshot wounds.

A drug screen and blood alcohol test were conducted on Watkins. The drug screen results showed positive for Methamphetamine and Cannabinoid. There was a negative result on the blood alcohol test.

A criminal background check of Watkins showed a history of criminal offenses to include, theft, drug offenses, protection order violation, and false impersonation.

INVESTIGATION RESULTS

Based on the totality of the circumstances, a reasonable officer present at the scene utilized deadly force in a situation that was tense, uncertain, and building. Officer #2 responded to assist other RCPD Officers with a vehicle pursuit and became the primary officer through circumstances created by Watkins. Actions taken by Watkins placed the public and law enforcement in jeopardy. Watkins was a clear and present danger to the officers present at the scene. Officer #2 believed they were in a situation in which Watkins could inflict serious injury or death and responded with deadly force.

It is the conclusion of this report and the Minnehaha County State's Attorney that Officer #2 was justified in firing their duty weapon and using lethal force.