

**Rapid City Police Department Officer Involved Shooting Summary
Detailing Events That Took Place February 3, 2023**

On February 3, 2023, the Rapid City Police Department (RCPD) requested the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) investigate an officer involved shooting that occurred at 1601 Haines Avenue (Loaf 'N Jug convenience store). A RCPD Police Officer discharged their duty pistol during a confrontation with Eric James Wright. Wright was later pronounced deceased as a result of gunshot wounds. The following is a synopsis of the events that occurred on February 3, 2023, and the subsequent investigation which was conducted by the DCI.

SYNOPSIS

On February 3, 2023, at 12:20 PM, Eric Wright entered the Loaf 'N Jug convenience store located at the northwest intersection of Haines Avenue and Lindbergh Avenue in Rapid City. Wright walked behind the counter and confronted employees with a knife in his hand. Store employees and customers attempted to intervene with Wright as he threatened to take a clerk hostage. Wright seized a clerk by physical force and escorted them outside the store. Wright wielded the knife in a threatening manner toward the clerk and bystanders who attempted to intervene.

Multiple people in and around the store called 911 to report what they believed to be an armed robbery in progress. RCPD Officer #1 received notification of the call at 12:23 PM and responded from the RCPD North Substation. Officer #1 arrived in the parking lot of the Loaf 'N Jug at 12:24 PM and observed Wright outside the store holding the clerk at knife point. Wright separated himself from the clerk as Officer #1 approached on foot from their patrol vehicle. Wright did not comply with commands from Officer #1 to drop the knife and portrayed an aggressive posture.

Wright ran toward Officer #1 with two knives in his possession. Officer #1 retreated while firing three rounds from their issued duty pistol. Wright fell to the ground after being shot multiple times. A bystander ran up to Wright directly after the shooting and removed one of the knives before being directed to get back by Officer #1. Wright maintained possession of one of the knives while on the ground and refused commands to discard it.

Additional RCPD Officers arrived at the Loaf 'N Jug and continued to issue commands for Wright to drop the knife. A secondary RCPD Officer deployed a Taser on Wright, at which time the knife was secured, and Wright was placed into handcuffs. RCPD Officers on scene then rendered medical aid to Wright while awaiting an ambulance, which arrived on scene at 12:29 PM. Wright was transported to the hospital where he was later pronounced deceased.

The incident was captured by Officer #1's body worn camera as well as surveillance cameras inside and outside of the convenience store.

The scene was secured by the Pennington County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) and the South Dakota Highway Patrol (SDHP).

DCI Agents contacted Officer #1 and documented that they were wearing their Rapid City Police Department issued uniform. Officer #1's duty firearm was documented and found to be three cartridges short of full capacity. Officer #1's spare magazines were inventoried and found to be at full capacity.

DCI Agents contacted and interviewed the secondary RCPD Officer who deployed their Taser on Wright. The Officer's magazines and duty pistol were found to be at full capacity. The Taser that was utilized by the Officer was analyzed and the data regarding the deployment was reviewed by DCI.

Investigators from the Custer County Sheriff's Office and Pennington County Sheriff's Office assisted DCI with conducting witness interviews and managing a scene investigation. DCI Agents reviewed and analyzed radio transmissions, 911 calls, medical records, and background information regarding Eric Wright. DCI Agents also reviewed the RCPD body worn camera, patrol car camera, and surveillance video.

SCENE INVESTIGATION

The shooting scene investigation conducted by DCI produced several items of evidence that corroborated RCPD Officer #1's statements and video obtained from the incident.

DCI Agents documented and collected one deployed taser cartridge and one taser cartridge that had not been deployed. There were three (3) fired 9mm cartridge casings consistent with ammunition used by the Rapid City Police Department. The location of the casings was consistent with the area where Officer #1 was positioned during the shooting.

DCI Agents documented and collected two fixed blade knives on the ground in the parking lot.

DCI Agents observed two (2) bullet defects on the east side of the Loaf N' Jug building. These defects were consistent with the location and direction Officer #1 fired their weapon.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol recorded and measured the scene of the incident with a laser scanning device.

OFFICER INTERVIEW

On February 6, 2023, DCI Agents interviewed RCPD Officer #1. Officer #1 described their involvement and thought process during the shooting incident.

Officer #1 responded to a "robbery in progress" call for service at the Loaf N' Jug gas station. The call for service advised a male subject (Eric Wright) was holding a knife to a clerk's neck. Due to the nature of the call, Officer #1 activated their marked patrol vehicle's emergency lights and siren and quickly responded.

Upon arrival at the gas station, Officer #1 parked their patrol vehicle away from the building, near the gas pumps. They observed several people standing outside the store near the front door. Officer #1 exited their patrol vehicle and walked a short distance toward the front of the store before seeing Wright, who was standing outside the front door. Wright was positioned behind a hostage and had them in a "headlock" with his left arm. Wright was holding a large wooden handled knife to the subject's neck with his right hand. Officer #1 believed Wright was holding the subject hostage. Officer #1 unholstered their duty pistol and attempted to verbally address Wright.

A bystander exited the store and attempted to intervene by confronting Wright. Officer #1 gave a verbal command for the intervening bystander to stay back. While confronting the bystander, Wright and the hostage separated. The hostage ran south out of sight and Wright moved north along the building. Believing Wright was going to flee on foot, Officer #1 began moving parallel to Wright in the parking lot.

Wright positioned himself near an occupied vehicle stopped in front of the store. Officer #1 stopped near the rear of the vehicle while continuing to issue commands for Wright to drop the knife. Officer #1 feared Wright was going to either get in the vehicle and flee or take the occupant of the vehicle hostage.

Officer #1 continued commands for Wright to drop the knife. Wright moved toward the driver side of the vehicle and Officer #1 responded by moving to the rear driver side of the vehicle. The bystander, who previously intervened, threw an object in Wright's direction. Officer #1 again told the bystander to move back.

Wright did not comply with Officer #1's commands to drop the knife. Wright jumped up and down and then sprinted toward Officer #1. Officer #1 described Wright's behavior as, "trying to hype himself up". Officer #1 fired their duty pistol as Wright ran toward them with the knife in hand. Officer #1 believed they fired three (3) rounds from their pistol before Wright fell to the ground directly in front of them.

Immediately after the shooting, Wright dropped a knife. Officer #1 observed a second knife underneath Wright. Additional Officer's arrived to assist and approached Wright as he laid on the ground. Prior to officers approaching, Wright picked the knife up off the ground and held it "in a stabbing motion". Officers yelled for Wright to drop the knife. Wright did not comply and was Tased by another Officer, at which time Wright threw the knife near Officer #1's feet. Following the Taser deployment, Wright was taken into custody.

WITNESS INTERVIEWS

DCI Agents and Investigators from the Pennington County Sheriff's Office conducted witness interviews to include family members of Eric Wright. The witness statements were consistent with Wright brandishing a knife and forcing a clerk outside. Wright made statements to witnesses that he did not intend to hurt anyone, and that he "needed this". Wright told store employees to call 911 to summon law enforcement to the store.

VIDEO EVIDENCE

Security camera video from the Loaf N' Jug showed Wright inside the store at 12:20 PM. Wright walked behind the counter holding a knife and confronted store employees. Employees and bystanders attempted to intervene with Wright as he seized a clerk at knifepoint. Wright forced the clerk out the front entrance of the store into the parking lot. Wright stood outside the front doors holding a knife to the clerk's neck until Officer #1 arrived. The store video was consistent with witness statements of the incident.

Audio/video recordings from Officer #1's body worn camera captured the shooting. The video was reviewed and found to be consistent with statements provided by Officer #1. The video depicted Officer #1 responding to the store and parking near the fuel pumps. Wright was observed holding the clerk hostage in front of the store. Wright separated from the hostage and moved to a position in front of a vehicle in the parking lot. Officer #1 issued multiple commands for Wright to drop the knife. The video depicted Wright holding a knife in each hand and failing to comply with Officer #1's commands. Wright charged toward Officer #1 and three audible gunshots could be heard as Officer #1 retreated backward.

After Wright fell to the ground, a bystander was observed running in and kicking Wright near the head. The bystander grabbed one of the knives and tossed it away. Wright grabbed the second knife while on the ground and refused commands from Officer #1 to drop it. Responding officers

arrived and gave additional commands for Wright to drop the knife. A Taser was deployed on Wright at which time he was placed into handcuffs.

FORENSIC EXAMINATION

The South Dakota Forensic Laboratory (SDFL) conducted firearm testing on Officer #1's Glock model 17 9mm pistol. The three recovered 9mm cartridge cases recovered at the scene were consistent with being fired from Officer #1's duty weapon.

MEDICAL REPORTS AND CRIMINAL HISTORY

A drug screen and blood alcohol test were conducted on Officer #1 with negative results.

Wright's blood alcohol content was recorded as .146. A drug screen showed inconclusive results for the presence of drugs in Wright's system.

An autopsy performed on Wright showed that he sustained multiple gunshot wounds and died as a result of those injuries.

A criminal history review showed that Wright had a history of arrests including alcohol, drug, theft, and firearm related offenses. Wright was currently on parole after being released from prison in January of 2023.

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. Eric Wright was a clear and present danger to the public and the officer present at the scene. Officer #1 fired their pistol after Wright ran at them armed with two knives. Officer #1 believed they were in a situation in which Wright attempted to inflict serious injury or death. The officer responded with deadly force.

It is the conclusion of this report and the Attorney General that the Officer was justified in firing their duty weapon and using lethal force.



Suspect Eric James Wright, with a knife in each hand, approaches Rapid City Police Officer No. 1 during the Officer Involved Shooting Feb. 3, 2023 in Rapid City. **(Image from the body-worn camera footage of Rapid City Police Officer No. 1).**

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The two knives that were in the possession of Eric James Wright. (DCI Investigation Photos)