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Teen fatally shot by officer

Nineteen-year-old allegedly reached for gun while in car

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Article Text:

A black teenager was shot and killed Sunday morning by a Knoxville police officer as authorities tried to break up a crowd that had gathered in the parking lot of a downtown convenience store. The shooting happened at 3:21 a.m. at the Weigel's at 411 East Summit Hill Drive when police were dispatched to check out a report that a "large crowd of people" was being loud and disorderly in the parking area, according to Knoxville Police Department spokesman Darrell DeBusk.

Sean Gillispie, 19, of Knoxville was shot once in the chest after allegedly "going for a gun" while in the back seat of a car that had been approached by Officers Jason Keck and David Ogle, DeBusk said. Both officers are white.

"The officers pleaded for the suspect to not go for the gun, but he continued through with his actions by raising his weapon toward the officers," DeBusk said. "Keck drew his weapon and shot the suspect in defense of his partner's life as well as his own life."

The president of the Knoxville chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, however, said the organization is conducting its own review of the shooting. NAACP President Dewey Roberts said Sunday that several witnesses had already contacted him, and he had taken statements from them.

"We've been asked to be involved and we will be involved," Roberts said.

He said that he had spoken to two witnesses and was in the process of getting the names of other witnesses to take their statements. He also said the witnesses gave a slightly different version of the story given by police.

Roberts declined to specify how the witnesses' accounts differed from those given by authorities.

"Our concern is that we make sure we get the true story," he said. "I assume that the police cameras should have been in place to record the whole incident."

DeBusk said that audio and video recordings made during the incident will be made public once an internal affairs investigation is completed.

Keck, who has been with the department since 1996, was placed on routine administrative leave with pay pending the investigation's outcome.

Because Ogle did not fire his weapon but was present when the incident occurred, he will only

be on leave for a week, DeBusk said.

According to police accounts, the E-911 center received a call shortly after 3:14 a.m. from a woman who "feared for her safety" because a crowd had gathered at the Weigel's.

"The caller ... indicated that a large crowd of people had gathered in the store's parking lot playing loud music and squealing their tires," DeBusk said.

"You had a large crowd of people, they were flooding the store, there were possible verbal arguments between some of the crowd members ... It was not what (the caller) felt was a safe environment."

DeBusk said the store is often the scene of impromptu gatherings after the bars in the Old City close their doors at 3 a.m.

"It's been kind of a standard practice when the clubs close down," he said. "A lot of people gather in the parking lot to continue their partying."

When Keck and Ogle arrived at the scene, "they were met by a large number of people in the parking lot in addition to numerous vehicles either parked or attempting to drive through the overflowing Weigel's store parking lot," according to DeBusk.

The officers approached a Chevrolet Caprice Classic that was parked in front of the store with the stereo blaring, DeBusk said. They asked the driver for his driver's license, registration, and proof of insurance.

The driver was complying with their request when one of the officers allegedly saw Gillispie "going for a gun," DeBusk said.

"He raised the gun and was pointing it at one of the officers, and it was loaded," DeBusk said.

"It's never an easy situation to deal with."

Keck then fired one shot from his .40-caliber handgun, striking Gillispie in the chest, according to DeBusk.

An ambulance arrived on the scene at 3:26 a.m., and Gillispie was taken to the University of Tennessee Medical Center where he later died, authorities said.

Gillispie had been arrested twice in the past year, but the outcomes of the cases against him weren't immediately available, DeBusk said. In one instance, he was charged with domestic assault while in another case he was charged with unlawful weapons possession.

Crime scene technicians allegedly found a loaded 9mm pistol in the back seat of the Caprice as well as other evidence, DeBusk said. It was unclear if the gun belonged to Gillispie.

"Substances found in the suspect's vehicle will be sent to a lab for analysis," DeBusk said.

Several witnesses to the shooting were interviewed by police and reportedly gave stories consistent with the officers' accounts, he said.

The driver, who wasn't identified by police, was taken into custody for questioning but was later released without being charged, DeBusk said.

Keck has been named KPD officer of the month twice and has been "cited numerous times for his work in the community," according to DeBusk.

"He (Keck) is emotionally shaken," DeBusk said. "You're never prepared for a situation like this. You revert back to your training, and that's exactly what he did in this case. He was given no option."

Knoxville Police Chief Phil Keith expressed regret for the shooting but insisted that Keck had no choice but to shoot Gillispie.

"The department regrets any incident where there is a loss of life and our condolences go out to the family," Keith said. "Anytime a person points a weapon at an officer, the officer has an absolute responsibility to protect his life, as well as the life of others."

Staff writer Lola Alapo contributed to this report. J.J. Stambaugh may be reached at 865-342-6307.

OFFICER-INVOLVED FATAL SHOOTINGS

April 29, 2003 - A Pigeon Forge Police Department officer fatally shot Butch Lee Cassidy, 27, of Marion, N.C., during a traffic stop. Authorities alleged Cassidy pointed a gun at officers. The agency has refused to identify the officer involved. The shooting remains under investigation.

March 8, 2003 - David Brian Keller, 27, of Maryville was shot to death in an altercation with Blount County Sheriff's Office deputies who went to arrest him for telephone harassment. Authorities said Keller began throwing kitchen knives at the deputies. Deputies Rusty Aycocke and Gary Perkins fired three shots in that incident, which is still being probed.

July 11, 2001 - Knoxville Police Department officers Norman Rickman and Jim Vichich shot Larry D. Lambert, 48, after he was pulled over on Papermill Drive and began firing at the officers. Although police wounded Lambert, authorities said he died from a self-inflicted gunshot. Rickman was also shot but survived. Officers cleared.

Feb. 16, 2001 - Lynford Ray Smith, 40, was killed by Knoxville Police Department officers who opened fire on Smith's van when he allegedly tried to run over them. Officers Jim Miller, John Kiely, Jason Sherrod and Jason Morrow had pursued the van into a muddy field at the dead end of Abercorn Road, where the shooting occurred. Officers cleared.

Feb. 4, 2001 - Knox County Sheriff's Office Deputy Randy Leeper fatally wounded Dannie Wade Taylor when he allegedly confronted Leeper and Deputy Ken Clabough with a shotgun and rifle at the door of his East Knox County home. Deputy cleared.

Jan. 9, 2001 - Robert "Bobby" Kinder Jr., 16, was shot twice when Knox County Sheriff's Office deputies tried to keep him from fleeing in an encounter on Andrew Johnson Highway. Kinder allegedly dragged Sgt. Mike Dalton several feet while trying to flee in a stolen vehicle, prompting Deputy Harold Hayes to open fire. Kinder died the next day. Deputies cleared.

Caption:

(Color) Keck; DIGITAL PHOTO - 0518KECK.CC (Color) Gillispie; DIGITAL PHOTO - 05182.JA.
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