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Deputy Shoots Unarmed Man Repeatedly During 911 Call, Officials Say

Isaiah Brown was on a cordless phone with an emergency dispatcher when he was shot, his lawyer said. His family said he was in intensive care.



A Virginia deputy shot Isaiah Brown, 32, after Mr. Brown called 911 during a dispute with his brother. The Virginia State Police confirmed that Mr. Brown had been unarmed.

By Allyson Waller and Michael Levenson
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A Virginia sheriff's deputy shot and seriously wounded an unarmed man early on Wednesday morning, less than an hour after the deputy had given the man a ride after his car broke down, the authorities said.

The Spotsylvania County deputy had initially given the man, Isaiah L. Brown, 32, a lift to a house after responding to a 911 call for a driver whose car was not working at a gas station, the Virginia State Police said.

About 45 minutes later, the deputy responded to another 911 call for a “domestic incident” involving Mr. Brown and his brother, according to the State Police and a recording of the 911 call and body-camera footage.

After finding Mr. Brown walking in a road and talking to a 911 dispatcher, the deputy said, "He's got a gun to his head."

"Drop the gun now!" the deputy shouted. "Stop walking towards me! Stop walking towards me! Stop! Stop!"

At least seven gunshots can be heard on the body-camera footage.

"The officer mistook a cordless house phone for a gun," Mr. Brown's lawyer, David Haynes, said in a statement. "There is no indication that Isaiah did anything other than comply with dispatch's orders and raised his hands with the phone in his hand as instructed. The deputy in question made multiple, basic policing errors and violated established protocols."

Mr. Haynes said the family learned that Mr. Brown had been shot 10 times. Yolanda Brown, Mr. Brown's sister, said on Saturday that her brother was in an intensive-care unit and on a breathing machine.

"The exact doctor's words were, 'Your brother's not out of the woods yet, and it's touch and go,'" she said in an interview.

The Virginia State Police confirmed that Mr. Brown, who is Black, was unarmed. Mr. Haynes called the shooting "avoidable."

Roger L. Harris, the Spotsylvania County sheriff, released the 911 call and body-camera footage on Friday and said in a videotaped statement that the deputy who shot Mr. Brown had been placed on administrative leave. He did not give the deputy's name, and the sheriff's office did not return calls on Saturday.

The Virginia State Police, the agency that is leading the investigation, plans to turn over its findings to a special prosecutor for review, said Corinne Geller, a State Police spokeswoman.

Sheriff Harris said the State Police had been contacted at his request to ensure "an impartial and transparent investigation."

La Bravia J. Jenkins, the commonwealth's attorney for the city of Fredericksburg, Va., confirmed on Saturday that she had been appointed special prosecutor.

"Video of the incident has been released, but the investigation continues," she said in an email. "I have nothing further to report at this time."

The authorities described a fast-moving sequence of events that had begun at about 2:30 a.m. on Wednesday, when the deputy gave Mr. Brown a ride. Ms. Brown said her brother had been dropped off at his mother's house.

About 45 minutes later, the sheriff's office received a 911 call for a "domestic incident," the State Police said.

In the recording of the call, Mr. Brown can be heard arguing with his brother about getting keys to a car parked outside of the house.

While on the phone with a dispatcher, Mr. Brown asks his brother for a gun, which his brother refuses to give him, the 911 call indicates. Mr. Brown then asks the dispatcher to send someone to the house and says, "I'm about to kill my brother."

Mr. Brown tells the dispatcher that he did have a gun but does not have one on him, the recording indicates. As he continues talking with the dispatcher, sirens can be heard, and the dispatcher tells Mr. Brown to "hold your hands up."

In the body-camera footage, the responding deputy gets out of his car and begins shouting at Mr. Brown in the middle of a dark road illuminated by the flashing blue lights of his patrol car: "Show me your hands now! Show me your hands! Drop the gun!"

The footage mostly shows the ground and part of the deputy's car. It does not show Mr. Brown being shot.

After the shooting, the deputy gave medical aid to Mr. Brown, according to the sheriff. On the 911 call, the deputy can be heard telling Mr. Brown's brother to grab a medical kit in his patrol car.

"Stay with me," the deputy tells Mr. Brown. "Stay with me."

"Does he still have the house phone?" Mr. Brown's brother asks in the 911 recording.

The deputy asks: "Where is the gun at? Where is the gun?"

Moe Petway, the president of the Spotsylvania N.A.A.C.P., said he had watched the body-camera footage and listened to the 911 call on Friday with Mr. Brown's family. He said the call and the video had left him with questions about the deputy's response.

"If he believed it was a gun, the guy was not aiming the gun at him, so why didn't he take some evasive measures, retreat or get behind the car?" Mr. Petway said. "That's why de-escalation is so important, so officers take measures other than lethal."

Ms. Brown said she did not understand why the deputy had felt threatened by her brother.

"I would just assume that if the officer felt that he was aggressive or a harm to him or anybody else, that the procedure would have been to take him to jail or take him to a hospital or something to be evaluated," said Ms. Brown, who worked as a correctional officer for about 10 years at Fluvanna Women's Correctional Center in Virginia.