

## 911 tapes fill in gaps in Princeton Panera Bread - Trentonian, The (Trenton, NJ) - April 5, 2018

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PRINCETON - Frantic 911 calls to police give a glimpse into the chaos that overtook Princeton when a gunman last month barricaded himself inside the Panera Bread on Nassau Street next to the famous Ivy League university.

A caller told a dispatcher he knew the gunman, **Scott Mielentz**, who was in a booth near where the drinks were located inside the chain eatery. The caller said Mielentz wanted to take his own life which confirmed information police received earlier that morning.

"I was just sitting with him. He doesn't want to hurt anybody," caller Richard Chrisman told the dispatcher, saying he knew Mielentz. "He just wants to hurt himself."

Chrisman fled to a building next to the eatery, abandoning his phone inside the restaurant. He used another phone to call 911, describing to the dispatcher Mielentz as being around 5 feet 7 inches tall with gray hair, clad in a dark-colored coat with "Michigan" on it.

The 56-year-old Mielentz was killed after a five-hour-long standoff with police March 20 inside the chain eatery. He was fatally shot by an unnamed officer or officers whom the Attorney General's Office still hasn't publicly identified.

Authorities identified Mielentz a day after the fatal police shooting.

The AG's Shooting Response Team is still investigating the circumstances of the police shooting, but documents and 911 tapes obtained by The Trentonian shed some light on the situation that overtook the normally placid university town.

Mielentz didn't take hostages when he barricaded himself inside the Panera bread around 10:30 a.m. while frightened patrons escaped out the back of the eatery.

According to a Princeton computer-aided dispatch report, Mielentz had a gun pointed toward his head and was threatening to kill himself. He sent a friend a text message that morning saying he wanted to end his life, according to the records.

The dispatcher told Chrisman, who The Trentonian was unable to reach, that police had also received information that morning saying Mielentz was missing.

Princeton Police officer Jennifer Gering was the first to encounter Mielentz when she arrived at the Panera Bread around 10:40 a.m., according to the documents, as a phalanx of local, state and federal authorities descended upon the restaurant.

On one of the three 911 calls obtained by The Trentonian someone is heard in the background shouting "drop the gun."

Mielentz, who lived in Newtown, Penn., before relocating to Lawrence, N.J., spent time in a psychiatric hospital in 2013, had crushing debt and admitted he didn't handle stress well, according to court documents.

He claimed to have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder from his time as an Army ranger involved in "covert operations" during the late 1970s in the Vietnam War and said he was plagued by "hallucinations, flashbacks and anxiety."

Sources said Mielentz, who wasn't old enough to serve by the time the Vietnam War ended in 1975, briefly served in the armed forces for a matter of months, and a doctor who treated him at Chelsea Community Hospital in August 2013 wrote in admission notes Mielentz didn't have any VA benefits.

Mielentz claimed he was honorably discharged, which The Trentonian hasn't independently verified, and suffered from chronic debilitating pain, depression, and overwhelming debt compounded by bouts of unemployment, according to court records.

The feds went after Mielentz for unemployment fraud, and he was forced to file for Chapter 7 bankruptcy claiming \$122,498 in debts and only \$6,670 in assets and owed about \$6,826 to the IRS.

Mielentz had mounting bills from credit card companies, doctors and owed \$42,911 in student loans, records showed.

He had driven his Ford Focus with Pennsylvania plates — impounded by cops — to the restaurant before entering the restaurant with a handgun, according to the records.

A Panera worker told a dispatcher employees and customers evacuated and were waiting outside in the back of the restaurant for cops to arrive.

The employee admitted he didn't see Mielentz but believed he was armed with a .22-caliber handgun. The AG's office hasn't said what kind of weapon Mielentz had or how he obtained it.