

BODY CAM FOOTAGE PLAYED IN HEARING ON POLICE SHOOTING DEATH

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FULL TEXT

MARTINEZ >>Body cam footage reveals a man sitting in his car at a Pittsburg restaurant was shot by police within 30 seconds of the officers approaching, one of many details released at a coroner's inquest hearing Tuesday regarding the shooting death.

Among the evidence in the death of Terry Amons Jr., 43, were two brief clips from officer body camera footage that depicted the shooting. The clips showed both officers yelling commands at Amons as he sat in the driver's side of the car. One officer, Dillon Tindall, is seen opening the door.

Amons is seen sticking one foot out of the car, gripping the steering wheel. Then he briefly lowers his hand to his right leg. As he raises his hand back up, holding a white glove, Tindall fired shots. The video shows several muzzle flashes. As it was played, there were audible gasps from a group of Amons' loved ones who attended the hearing. Both officers present testified that they saw a handgun in the middle section of Amons' parked car, near the emergency brake, as they approached him at a Nation's Giant Hamburgers restaurant in Pittsburg. Jurors were shown a photograph of a handgun police testified was recovered from the car.

"There was no doubt in my mind he was reaching at the firearm at that point," Tindall testified, saying he believed Amons was "gearing up for something." He said he feared for his and the other officer's safety.

The other officer present, Jesus Arellano, testified that he noticed the gun before Tindall, and that both officers drew their weapon and pointed it at Amons. He described Amons as "fidgety" during the encounter.

Both officers testified they were called to the scene by an anonymous party who reported "suspicious circumstances" of what looked to be a drug deal. No narcotics were found in Amons' car.

A forensic pathologist testified that Amons was shot three times in the back and once in the chest, and that three of the four gunshot wounds were fatal. One pierced his heart and several other organs.

Jurors took about 15 minutes Tuesday to unanimously rule that Amons had died "at the hands of another, not by accident," one of four categories they are given. An attorney representing Pittsburg sent this newspaper an email asking that city officials not be contacted about the ruling.

Prominent civil rights attorney John Burris attended the hearing and said afterward he is filing a legal claim on their behalf. He called the officers' testimony "very well-orchestrated." He said Tuesday was the first time he and Amons' family saw the video and that they came to court looking for answers.

"The most critical piece of evidence was the video, and we'll have to look at that more closely," Burris said, later adding, "I didn't see anything today that's going to stop me from filing my tort claim."

Both Tindall and Arellano testified Tuesday that they handcuffed Amons after he was shot and fell from the car, and that they "continued with our police investigation" rather than giving medical aid, because they thought someone else could have been in the car. Tindall testified he was also concerned at the time Amons could have been robbing the Nations and had an accomplice in the restaurant.

"Stranger things have happened," Tindall said on the stand.

He added that they called for medical aid after the shooting and another officer arrived to provide it "within one to three minutes."

Amons was taken to John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek and died shortly after being admitted, according to

testimony.

The two officer body camera clips, each a little more than a minute long, were not retained by the coroner's office as a court record. A public records act request for the footage was filed with the city of Pittsburg on Tuesday afternoon.

Coroner's inquest juries are held whenever someone dies at the hands of police or in police custody. They are overseen by a presiding officer and carry a similar format to court proceedings, although hearsay evidence can be admitted, police are allowed to review their reports at-will, and witnesses, including the involved officers, are allowed to observe each other's testimony.

The hearings are conducted by the coroner a branch of the Contra Costa Sheriff to give the public a look at the facts of in-custody or officer-involved deaths, and the jury's decision carries no criminal or civil liability. Jurors are asked to decide whether the person died by accident, natural causes, suicide, or at the hands of another.

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