

Rock Falls officer won't be charged in driver's - Sauk Valley Newspapers (Dixon-Sterling, IL) - June 29, 2018

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MORRISON – The Rock Falls police officer who shot and killed a driver as he was backing toward him fired in self-defense and will not be charged with a crime, Whiteside County State's Attorney Terry Costello said Friday in a news release.

According to the release, and previous stories:

Nathaniel T. "Nate" Edwards, 43, of Sterling, was shot five times in the back and killed around 7:45 p.m. Jan. 26 in the driveway of 1304 Franklin St., where he had been attending a party, after a slow-speed police pursuit involving two Rock Falls and one Whiteside County Sheriff's squad car.

The incident began when officer Dustin Sugars spotted Edwards on Dixon Avenue weaving and speeding 41 mph in a 30-mph zone.

Edwards ignored police emergency lights and not only refused to stop his car, but also twice drove through a ditch and around squad cars attempting to block his path.

When he did pull into the driveway, he did not respond to commands, and ignored Sugars' warning, made with gun drawn and in an attempt to get him to exit the car, that "you're going to get shot."

Edwards replied "Kill me," followed by expletives, and laid his head against the window where the gun was pointing.

Then, after being told "do not back up," he revved the engine, put the white Cadillac in reverse and accelerated toward Rock Falls Sgt. Jonathan Cater, who had joined the chase, and was standing behind the car on the passenger side, gun drawn.

Officer Ethan Riley, whom Cater was training that night, also was behind the car, on the driver's side, gun drawn.

Cater moved out of the way and fired six shots into the back window, five of which hit Edwards – who still managed to put the car in park – and four of which were fatal. Edwards was pronounced dead at 8:48 p.m. at CGH Medical Center.

Riley, who also had to move out of the car's path, told investigators he considered shooting into the car, as well, but Sugars was in his way.

The pursuit was captured on two dashboard cameras; the shooting happened out of range of the cameras. Two other nearby squad cars were not equipped with dash-cams.

Toxicology results showed Edwards, who had a long history of drug- and alcohol-related traffic offenses, was drunk and high on marijuana at the time; his BAC was .189, more than double the legal limit to drive.

Cater "reasonably believed" that his life and Riley's life were in danger, Costello concluded after considering the results of the State Police investigation.

"Having reviewed the evidence submitted and the law, Officer Cater's actions in discharging his weapon, resulting in the death of **Nathaniel T. Edwards**, is valid as self-defense," Costello said in the 11-page release, sent around 12:30 Friday afternoon.

"Considering the totality of the circumstances Officer Cater faced, he reasonably believed that his and Officer Riley's lives were in danger. The Whiteside County State's Attorney's Office will not be pursuing any charges against Rock Falls Police officer Jonathan Cater as a result of this incident."

Edwards' mother, Alfredia Edwards of Chicago, is suing the city, the department and Cater in federal court, claiming the officer's "wrongful use of deadly force" violated her son's civil rights.

The suit claims the shooting was "intentional willful and wanton," "unprovoked," "unjustified," "excessive and unreasonable," and that the use of deadly force violated Edwards' Fourth and 14th Amendment rights.

The Fourth Amendment protects citizens against unreasonable search and seizure. The 14th provides equal protection under the law for all citizens; it has been interpreted to mean regardless of race, sex, religion, etc.

Cater, a 10-year veteran of the force, is white; Edwards was black.

Cater was put on administrative leave and returned to his job on March 26, the same day the ISP turned over its findings to Costello.

In addition to statements from neighborhood witnesses, and from Cater, Riley, Sugars and the two Whiteside County deputies on scene, the ISP report also included the autopsy report, including the toxicology test results and a laboratory analysis of Cater's service weapon.

Neither Cater nor any of the other officers involved – Riley, Sugars, and deputies Sean Coutts and Rollie Elder – were publicly identified until today's release.

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