

New Hampshire man killed in 'armed confrontation' with Old Town police

Pendharkar, Eesha . TCA Regional News ; Chicago [Chicago]29 Nov 2018.

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FULL TEXT

Nov. 29--By Eesha Pendharkar, BDN Staff --November 29, 2018 7:49 am

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A New Hampshire man was killed early Thursday morning following an armed confrontation on Stillwater Avenue with the Old Town police officer who pulled over his vehicle, according to Chief of Police Scott Wilcox.

Officer Joseph Decoteau ordered Adrian Bunker, 37, of Merrimack, New Hampshire, to pull over his gray Silverado pickup truck around 3:20 a.m. According to the police department, the "armed confrontation" that ensued resulted in Bunker's death.

Decoteau is on paid administrative leave pending a review by the department, according to the police chief, and the Maine attorney general's office is investigating the shooting as it does in all cases involving the use of deadly force by law enforcement.

Decoteau has been with the Old Town Police Department since Dec. 11, 2017, according to the department. He graduated from the Maine Criminal Justice Academy in May 2018, according to a Facebook post from the police department.

During a news conference Thursday afternoon at the Old Town Police Department, Wilcox did not say why Decoteau initially pulled over Bunker's vehicle, and he did not offer further details about the incident.

A number of residents in the area described hearing a commotion early in the morning.

Hannah Berrios, a 21-year-old University of Maine student who lives at 840 Stillwater Ave., said she woke up to a police officer yelling outside her home around 3:30 a.m.

"I woke up to them just yelling, 'Drop your weapon, drop your weapon,'" she said.

When she looked out the window, she saw the officer yelling at a pickup truck stopped on the side of the road. She said she didn't want to spend much time looking out the window, but she heard the officer yelling for about 15 minutes.

"I was a little nervous," she said.

She said she never saw the driver leave his vehicle.

"Fifteen minutes later, I heard, like, a pop," she said. "I didn't really know what it was. I've never heard a gunshot before in my life."

An ambulance arrived at the scene shortly afterward, and a detective came by later in the morning, around 6:30 a.m., to ask Berrios about what she had witnessed.

Doug Beckerleg, who lives at 822 Stillwater Ave., said police were on the road throughout the morning.

Around 9 a.m., he said he saw a hearse pull up, and authorities wheel a body from the ambulance to the hearse.

"He was in a red body bag," Beckerleg said. "They took him out of the ambulance, they put him on a gurney, and they pulled him right down the middle of the road and put him in the hearse and took him away."

Bill Cooley, who lives in an apartment at 812 Stillwater Ave., said he heard a shot at some point between 3 and 4 a.m.

"I heard a pistol shot, then I heard some sirens," Cooley, 62, said.

The sirens did not last long, he said, which made him think they were from ambulances passing through. Cooley

said he left his house shortly before 5 a.m. to find the street blocked off.

"It's a terrible thing, obviously," he said. "I'm from big cities, and I can't honestly describe myself as shocked."

Police closed off a 0.7-mile stretch of Stillwater Avenue for the entire morning, and investigators from the Maine attorney general's office were on the scene as well as officers from multiple area law enforcement agencies. A major artery through Old Town, the stretch includes Governor's Restaurant, McDonald's, a cemetery, a Maine Savings Federal Credit Union, a number of other businesses and residences.

Police reopened the road around 12:15 p.m.

With the road closed, the school day got off to a disjointed start for students from the Pine Haven mobile home park, located off the closed portion of Stillwater Avenue.

Some students from the mobile home park waited for their school bus near Pembroke Drive, where police barricades closed off the road, said Cpl. Ryan Fitch of the Penobscot County Sheriff's Office. The bus picked up those students, but did not pick up students waiting at the mobile home park. Fitch said police alerted Cyr Bus Line, the school bus contractor for Regional School Unit 34, about those students, and a bus returned to the area to pick them up.

Bangor-area Community Connector service in the area was also interrupted for several hours, the bus service said. A spokeswoman for the Maine attorney general's office confirmed that two investigators were on the scene.

BDN writer Christopher Burns contributed to this report.

Correction: An earlier version of this report misidentified the law enforcement agency for which Cpl. Ryan Fitch works.

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