

'Your man shot my man': Dashboard videos show intense scene after Midlothian cop shot security guard Jemel Roberson

Koeske, Zak . Chicago Tribune (Online) , Chicago: Tribune Interactive, LLC. Feb 5, 2019.

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FULL TEXT

Huddled in the parking lot of Manny's Blue Room Lounge in Robbins, where moments earlier a white Midlothian police officer opened fire on a black security guard who had subdued a shooting suspect at gunpoint, several onlookers shouted angrily at a wall of police officers who stood between them and the security guard's lifeless body that lay uncovered on the cold pavement.

"Your man shot my man. The police shot security. That's what happened," a distraught Manny's security guard told an officer in an exchange captured by police body camera and obtained by the Daily Southtown. "We have a ...vest on and we getting shot. It's ...stupid."

A series of 15 dashboard camera, body camera and recovered cellphone videos that depict the torrent of raw emotions that deluged witnesses of the Jemel Roberson shooting were released by the Cook County sheriff's office in response to a Freedom of Information Act request.

The videos, which are the first images from the Nov. 11 incident to be released publicly, do not contain footage of Midlothian police Officer Ian Covey shooting Roberson or the events that immediately preceded it because the sheriff's office does not possess such footage, chief policy officer Cara Smith said.

The video release does, however, include two brief cell phone clips filmed inside the bar shortly before the interior shooting that prompted a large police response, as well as longer videos taken in the parking lot after Roberson was shot, primarily from the vantage of sheriff's police.

Smith said the agency released the videos now, more than two months after the shooting, because it had determined that "under state law, and in the interests of transparency," the videos could now be released to the public.

The sheriff's office, which is investigating the bar shooting that brought police officers from multiple departments rushing to the scene that night, said it had no comment on its ongoing criminal investigation, which has yet to yield any arrests.

The Illinois State Police, whose Public Integrity Task Force is investigating Roberson's shooting, did not immediately provide comment on the sheriff's release of the videos.

State police have thus far refused to release any videos of the incident in their possession or any other evidence collected from the scene, arguing in court that law enforcement investigative privilege entitled them to withhold the information until the conclusion of their investigation.

The video clips provided by the sheriff's office portray a frenzied and disordered scene where witnesses, infuriated by what they had seen, lash out at police as officers, many of whom arrived after Roberson was shot, attempt to preserve the crime scene and assuage distressed witnesses with varying degrees of tact.

In some frames, officers are seen performing chest compressions on Roberson, while other clips show the security guard's lifeless body lying uncovered on the ground with no one appearing to tend to him.

Some bystanders sobbed. Others called Covey "racist." Still others begged for answers.

"Somebody gotta make sense of this for me, bro," one man pleaded. "Somebody gotta make sense of this."

One security guard who was working alongside Roberson told police that a man entered the bar's side door and fired about five shots. He said security went outside and returned fire, striking the gunman.

"Everything was clear. Everything was down," the guard told police in one clip, explaining that Roberson had subdued the bar shooter and was getting things under control before police shot him.

The security guard said Covey came out the bar's side entrance and was pointing his assault rifle wildly when he spotted Roberson holding the offender on the ground at gunpoint and told him to drop his gun.

"I'm telling (Covey), he workin' with us, cool out. He's working with us," the security guard said. "(Covey) shot him. Four or five times. After we told him he's with us.

"Did he not see us with vests on, bro?" the guard continued, raising his voice. "Why would I have a vest on, bro? This . . . ain't for fun."

A few minutes later, as the standoff between police and anguished witnesses continued to intensify, one of the officers pulled the same security guard aside in an effort to calm him down.

"I don't need nobody else getting hurt, man," the officer said to him. "We just need to get the truth outta this...

"If this was bogus, we want the (officer) to be held accountable...You gotta make yourself a credible witness, not a hostile witness. You get what I'm saying? I need you to calm down."

The officer then explained that he and his colleagues showed up after Roberson was shot and didn't know what happened, but were trying to get to the bottom of it.

"I'm not out here to hurt you, you know that. I can't speak for everybody, but we ain't out here to hurt you," he said.

"I don't really have the words to give you, but man, just keep your mind right, man. Please."

"It was wrong, bro," the security guard replied. "It was wrong, bro. It was wrong."

The wrenching witness testimony captured on video is not reflected in the Illinois State Police statement about the shooting released a couple days after the incident.

The agency's statement, which contained an account that is attributed to "witness statements," said only that a Midlothian officer, since identified as Covey, gave Roberson "multiple verbal commands" to drop his gun and get on the ground before fatally shooting him.

It makes no mention of security guards advising Covey that Roberson was one of them or that witnesses shared significant distress over what they perceived to be a bad shooting.

"This is the (stuff) that I don't like," one witness told an officer afterward during a conversation recorded on police body camera. "The (people) that started this ..., they get away with it. And the (person) that's here to protect us, he gets shot! What?!"

A spokeswoman for the state police did not immediately respond to questions about the agency's failure to incorporate witness accounts critical of the officer's behavior in their initial news release and said that, for now, the agency was not planning to provide any further information about Roberson's shooting.

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DETAILS

Subject:	Theft; Cameras; Criminal investigations; Video recordings; Guards; Camcorders
Location:	Cook County Illinois Illinois
People:	Roberson, Jemel
Company / organization:	Name: State Police-Illinois; NAICS: 922120; Name: Twitter Inc; NAICS: 519130

Publication title:	Chicago Tribune (Online); Chicago
Publication year:	2019
Publication date:	Feb 5, 2019
Section:	Suburbs - Daily Southtown - News
Publisher:	Tribune Interactive, LLC
Place of publication:	Chicago
Country of publication:	United States, Chicago
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
Source type:	Blogs, Podcasts, & Websites
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2176270052
Document URL:	https://search.proquest.com/docview/2176270052?accountid=14026
Copyright:	Copyright Tribune Interactive, LLC Feb 5, 2019
Last updated:	2019-02-06
Database:	Global Newsstream

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