

Trooper on tactical unit has been involved in four different shootings

Murray, Elizabeth . The Burlington Free Press ; Burlington, Vt. [Burlington, Vt]14 Feb 2018: A.5.

[ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

"Being assigned to the tactical unit elevates your exposure and potential involvement in situations where lethal force is necessary. That is what they are called to manage, the most critical situations we have."

Col. Matt Birmingham, commander of the Vermont State Police

The commander of the Vermont State Police says it's unclear how a trooper who has been with the agency for six years has become involved in four police shootings —three of them fatal.

Col. Matt Birmingham added that Trooper Chris Brown's assignment to the state police Tactical Services Unit increased Brown's chances to be involved in fatal incidents. Birmingham said the unit handles some of the most dangerous situations the police agency sees.

"When anybody ends up in a lethal-force situation, there's no rhyme or reason to it," Birmingham said. "It is certainly unusual for a law-enforcement officer to be involved in four force incidents that involved the use of lethal force, but there's anomalies in everything that we do. It doesn't necessarily mean that there's a problem. ... I don't know if there is an answer to that question, but we're looking at it."

Brown was one of two officers who shot and killed a man Sunday afternoon on Interstate 89 in Bolton. Benjamin Gregware, 42, of Sheldon was pronounced dead at a hospital after Brown and Richmond police Cpl. Rick Greenough opened fire at about 3:50 p.m. as motorists drove by on the highway. Investigators have said police were responding to reports that Gregware was potentially impaired, armed with a gun and intending to take his own life.

Including Sunday's incident, three of the four police shootings involving Brown, who was hired in 2012, have occurred in the past six months.

According to Capt. John Merrigan, the leader of the Vermont State Police Tactical Services Unit as of late January, Brown joined the team in October 2015. He was removed Jan. 30. Birmingham has declined to disclose the reason for the change.

Merrigan said the Tactical Services Unit deals with as few as 12 and as many as 30 incidents each year. According to the state police's website, those incidents can involve armed barricaded suspects, suicidal people, hostage situations, high-risk warrant service, manhunts, active shooters and other situations.

"Being assigned to the tactical unit elevates your exposure and potential involvement in situations where lethal force is necessary," Birmingham said. "That is what they are called to manage, the most critical situations we have."

Mental health counselor Sonny Provetto, who works with police agencies across Chittenden County including the state police, said Tuesday he knows of no evidence that shows officers who have fired at a person are more likely to do so in the future. He said officers' responses to situations are based on training, not emotional reactions. The first police shooting involving Brown occurred in September 2015 in Fayston. Brown shot and injured Robert Smallidge of Brattleboro after police said Smallidge displayed what Brown believed to be a rifle. During a search, investigators located a plastic gun that appeared to be an air gun with a pistol grip and the barrel and stock cut off, police said.

The Vermont attorney general and the Washington County state's attorney later concluded the shooting was justified.

Last September, Brown was involved in his second shooting. He was one of five members of the Tactical Services Unit to shoot and kill Michael Battles, 32, in Poultney. The attorney general and the Rutland County state's attorney concluded the shooting was justified.

Then in January, Brown was among nine officers involved in the fatal shooting of bank-robbery suspect Nathan Giffin on the athletic field of Montpelier High School. That shooting remains under review.

"If all four (incidents) are deemed justified use of force ... then Trooper Brown is doing what he's been trained to do, and he's doing his job," Birmingham said.

Brown will not return to full duty until the legal review of Sunday's shooting is complete, Birmingham said. The state police director said Monday he was worried about the effect the shootings are having on Brown.

"Let me be clear that this decision is not an indication of any wrongdoing by Trooper Brown, but merely a change in the way the state police will now manage our response to officer-involved shootings as it relates to the health and well-being of our members," Birmingham said Monday.

Contact Elizabeth Murray at 651-4835 or emurray@freepressmedia.com. Follow her on Twitter at @LizMurrayBFP.

"Being assigned to the tactical unit elevates your exposure and potential involvement in situations where lethal force is necessary. That is what they are called to manage, the most critical situations we have."

Col. Matt Birmingham, commander of the Vermont State Police

CAPTION:

Christopher Brown

DETAILS

Subject:	Shootings; Robbery; Tactical units
Location:	Vermont
Company / organization:	Name: State Police-Vermont; NAICS: 922120; Name: Twitter Inc; NAICS: 519130
Publication title:	The Burlington Free Press; Burlington, Vt.
First page:	A.5
Publication year:	2018
Publication date:	Feb 14, 2018
Section:	News
Publisher:	Gannett Co., Inc.
Place of publication:	Burlington, Vt.
Country of publication:	United States, Burlington, Vt.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States

ISSN:	08948844
Source type:	Newspapers
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuestdocument ID:	2001675193
Document URL:	https://search.proquest.com/docview/2001675193?accountid=14026
Copyright:	Copyright 2018 - BURLINGTON FREE PRESS - All Rights Reserved.
Last updated:	2018-02-14
Database:	Global Newsstream

LINKS

[Check SFX for Availability](#)

Database copyright © 2019 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)