

FINAL REPORT: IIU concludes investigation into man's death in police presence

On January 28, 2022, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) notified the Independent Investigation Unit (IIU) of an incident where a male died, from a self inflicted gunshot wound, in police presence at a residence located in Tadoule Lake.

The written notification disclosed the following information (edited for clarity):

“On January 27th 2022, at 5:49 a.m., the RCMP received a call from a male in Tadoule Lake who stated that another male, later identified as the affected person (AP), punched him in the face, tried to stab him with a large knife then threatened to shoot him. It was reported that AP had a firearm in his vehicle.

Following this incident there were several more complaints from the community members of people being bear sprayed and of possible shots fired. AP's whereabouts were unknown at this time.

RCMP members, Police Dog Services (PSD) and Emergency Response Team (ERT) Members were deployed to Tadoule Lake to assist with locating AP. After an extensive search of the community by ERT and PDS on Jan 27th and early January 28th, AP was not located. ERT and PDS departed Tadoule Lake on January 28th prior to AP being located.

On January 28th 2022, at 7:58 p.m., Members received information that AP was outside of a nearby residence. Members attended and located AP outside the residence with a firearm. Members advised AP that he was under arrest and to drop his firearm. AP immediately shot himself with his rifle. AP was transported to the nursing station by the RCMP. Shortly thereafter, AP was pronounced deceased...”

As this matter concerned the death of a person that may have resulted from the actions of a police officer(s), IIU assumed responsibility for this mandatory investigation in accordance with section 65(4) of The Police Services Act (PSA). IIU Investigators were assigned to this investigation.

Among the agency information obtained by IIU Investigators included:

- call history;
- RCMP members' notes and narratives;
- forensic identification service reports;
- photographs of scene and exhibits;
- civilian witness statements;
- occurrence report;
- autopsy and toxicology reports

Due to the dearth of information at the outset of this investigation as to the level of involvement by any RCMP member, the civilian director deferred a decision to designate any of them as a subject officer. The civilian director designated four RCMP members as witness officers (WO1 - 4). IIU Investigators met with and interviewed three civilian witnesses (CW1-3).

Facts and Circumstances

Civilian Witnesses (CW):

CW1 is a band constable in Tadoule Lake. On January 28, 2022, CW1 was on his way home after riding his skidoo on the lake. CW1 stated that he saw some police cars near the sewage plant. CW1 spoke to police and inquired whether AP had been located as of that date and was advised that they had not found him. CW1 stated that he advised police officers that AP may be at a nearby residence and would keep a lookout for him. CW1 stated that he left the scene on his skidoo to continue on his way home. CW1 stated that within minutes as he drove by a residence, he heard someone call out to him. CW1 stopped and saw a male sitting on some steps and then realized that it was AP. CW1 stated that AP was holding a gun to his stomach. AP threatened to shoot himself if CW1 came closer. CW1 stated that he fled this scene and returned to the area that he had previous contact with police officers. On arrival, CW1 advised the police officers what had just transpired (including AP's possession of a gun) and directed them to AP's location. CW1 stated that police officers immediately went to AP's location. CW1 stated that he stayed back, approximately 100 yards from AP's location. CW1 stated that he saw police approach AP, then AP shot himself (almost immediately as police officers started their approach) and fell down the stairs. CW1 stated that prior to the shooting, he heard police officers telling AP to put his gun down. CW1 stated that he heard the sound of a single gunshot. AP was immediately taken to the nursing station.

CW2 was house sitting for another couple that evening and was watching television. CW2 stated that a relative came over and advised her that AP was outside and in possession of a gun. CW2 stated that she sent a message requesting that police be called. Within five minutes, police officers attended to the residence and found AP, who was holding a gun. CW2 stated that police officers told AP to put his hands up. Then CW2 heard the sound of a single "pop". CW2 did not see the shooting.

On the evening of January 27, CW3 was a passenger in a truck with a couple of friends when they were stopped by AP, who was operating a skidoo. CW3 stated that AP was yelling, swearing and "acting crazy". It appeared that AP was also looking for something in the back of the skidoo. Suddenly, AP sprayed her and another truck passenger with bear spray. CW3 stated that she tried not to react, fearing AP would become more violent. AP was "freaking out" then became apologetic. CW3 stated that she was able to leave the area and went to the nursing station to get her eyes cleaned. CW3 stated that she went home and was advised that AP had attended there about three times ranting and calling out her name. She was advised that police had been called. The next day, now January 28, CW3 stated that she went to a relation's home. While there, AP attended and was outside yelling at CW3's relation. Eventually, AP left the area and CW3 contacted the police. CW3 stated that she provided the police officers with information on where AP may be located. CW3 stated that she agreed to accompany police to show them where AP may be found. They drove to the area of the sewage plant. On arrival, CW3 stated that someone drove up on a skidoo and spoke with police officers. The person on the skidoo then

drove away but within moments came “ripping” back and spoke with the police again. All of a sudden, police officers started to run off. CW3 stated that she told the police officers she was with,

“This wasn’t the plan, I don’t want to see anything, I don’t want to witness anything and can you just drop me off?”

CW3 stated that the police officers said they just got a call and cannot just drop her off. CW3, who was in the police cruiser’s back seat, stated,

“I seen that vehicle after the black vehicle turned around, I seen that police vehicle stop and seen all the police officers like running out.”

CW3 stated that a police officer then told her that she would be taken to the nursing station. As they drove off, CW3 stated that she saw lights flashing and somebody was standing on the stairs of a residence, looking at the police. CW3 stated,

“I heard a gunshot and don’t know if it was a spark or blood or whatever but I seen something, then I seen somebody fall onto the ground.”

CW3 further stated,

“When they all shone the light on him he was standing there and that’s when I heard the gunshot.”

Witness Officers (WO):

WO1 was deployed to Tadoule Lake in response to reports that AP was in the community and armed with weapons. WO1 was partnered with WO2. WO1 stated that they had contact with WO3 who provided information on a potential location for AP. At approximately 8:00 p.m., WO1 stated that further information was received from CW1, including that AP may be armed with a gun and was threatening to harm himself. WO1 stated that police made their way to the location where AP was sighted. On arrival, WO1 stated was approximately 45-50 feet from the residence when he saw AP sitting on the front steps. AP was holding a rifle and had it pointed at his own chest. WO1 stated that he armed himself with a service carbine rifle and began issuing commands to AP to drop his weapon. WO1 stated that AP was mumbling something and then suddenly, he heard the single sound of a pop, saw AP drop his gun and slump backwards on the steps. WO1 stated that police officers approached AP and began to provide first aid. AP was placed onto a police truck and rushed to the nursing station, where he was pronounced deceased. Police seized AP’s firearm, described as a 22 caliber, bolt action, Remington rifle.

WO2 was deployed to Tadoule Lake in response to reports that AP was in the community and armed with weapons. WO2 was partnered with WO1. WO2 stated that on arrival in the community, they met with CW3 who provided information on AP. WO2 stated that police officers attended CW3’s residence to ensure that AP was not present. Once this residence was cleared, police officers began a search for AP. WO2 stated that they were directed to the area of the sewage plant. At this location, WO2 stated that they met with CW1 who advised of a sighting of AP at a nearby residence and that he may be armed with a firearm. WO2 stated that police officers made their way to this residence and found AP sitting on the front steps and was holding what appeared to be a long gun, which he was pointing at himself. WO2 stated that he armed himself with a service carbine rifle and pointed it at AP. Police officers were giving verbal

commands to AP to drop his weapon and that he was under arrest. After 15 seconds, WO2 stated that AP discharged the gun a single time and then dropped it. WO2 stated that police approached AP and immediately provided first aid. AP was removed from the steps and taken to the nursing station where he was pronounced deceased. WO2 stated that AP was the only person to discharge a firearm a single time. AP's firearm was seized.

WO3, a three year member of the RCMP, was dispatched with several other RCMP members to Tadoule Lake to assist with locating AP. On arrival, the team of police officers began patrolling in the community. WO3 stated that they had contact with CW3 who provided information to the police about AP. WO3 stated that police officers attended CW3's residence to ensure it was clear for her to return. Police received further information from her that AP may be at the sewage plant. Following their attendance there, police met with CW1 who advised that he had sighted AP moments earlier at a nearby residence. Police were also advised that AP was armed with a firearm. WO3 stated that police officers immediately attended to that residence. On arrival, WO3 stated that police armed themselves with service carbines. AP was sitting on the steps of the residence. CW3 was in the police vehicle. WO3 stated that the police officers were giving AP directions to put the gun down. WO3 stated that suddenly he heard the sound of a gunshot and saw AP fall down the stairs. WO3 stated that it was clear that AP had shot himself. WO3 stated that police went to AP and began providing first aid. WO3 left the scene to drop off CW3. On his return, WO3 stated that AP was still on the steps and police officers were "*working on him*". AP was then removed from the scene and taken to the nursing station.

WO4 had been a member of the RCMP for three and half years and on the day in question was dispatched with other police officers to Tadoule Lake to assist with locating AP. WO4 stated that police officers were directed to the sewage plant to attempt to locate AP. CW1 drove by on a snowmobile and advised police officers of a sighting of AP at a nearby residence. Police officers drove to this nearby residence. As police officers exited their vehicles, they armed themselves with service carbine rifles. There was a male, later identified as AP, sitting on the front steps. Within moments, WO4 stated that he heard the sound of a gunshot and saw AP drop his gun and fall over. WO4 stated that police ran to AP and started to provide first aid. AP was then removed and transported to the nursing station but was pronounced deceased.

Affected Person (AP):

IIU investigators received and reviewed an autopsy and toxicology report respecting AP. The cause of death was noted as a single gunshot (rifle) wound of the chest, with the following findings:

- 1. Contact high velocity rifle wound of the left anterior chest wall, with massive associated injuries to the sternum, heart, lungs, aorta, and airways; bullet fragmented into innumerable tiny pieces of lead and apparent jacket materials.*
- 2. Several bruises of varying age over the skin surface.*
- 3. No evidence of underlying natural disease process.*
- 4. Pale lividity and internal organs.*
- 5. Cocaine present in post-mortem blood.*

According to the toxicology report, three blood samples were taken from AP and analyzed. The results indicated that AP had the following substances that in or detected in his system:

Cocaine
Benzoyllecgonine (Inactive cocaine metabolite)
Coca-ethylene
Ethyl-ecgonine
Coca-ethylene and Ethyl-ecgonine (formed upon the ingestion of cocaine and ethanol)
Gabapentin
Diphenhydramine
Diazepam metabolite (nordiazepam)
Temazepam
Oxazepam Clonazepam metabolite

AP had no history of suicidal ideations. AP's death resulted from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Conclusion

The RCMP responded to a call for service concerning assaultive behaviour by AP in Tadoule Lake. Police were advised that AP may be armed with a firearm and other weapons. AP's present whereabouts were unknown at that time. Police attended and conducted a search of the area in an attempt to locate and apprehend AP. On the evening of January 28, police officers received information that AP was outside a residence, sitting on the front steps and was in possession of a firearm which he had pointed at his own chest. Police officers attended and verbally commanded AP to surrender his firearm. Suddenly and without warning, AP shot himself with his own firearm. AP was transported to the nursing station by the RCMP members and shortly after arrival was pronounced deceased. The cause of death was found to be a self inflicted gun shot wound to the chest.

Based on all of the circumstances and in consideration of the medical findings and eye witness accounts, there is nothing to support any conclusion that there is any level of contribution by any police officer to the cause of AP's death, either by action or inaction. There are no grounds in this matter that would justify the designation of any of police officer as a subject officer.

As a result, there is no further need for IIU to continue with this investigation into this tragic matter and, accordingly, this matter is now closed.

Final report prepared by:

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Independent Investigation Unit
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