

Unit 6 Activity 6.2

Two weeks ago, an incident described by the Liberty County Sheriff in his own words as a “botched SWAT operation,” an officer sustained a significant lower leg gunshot wound. While SWAT officers approached 1720 B Street, the individual being sought emerged from 1723 B Street and opened fire on officers. Following a brief exchange with officers, it was discovered that K-9 Sgt. Robert Luther, an 18-year veteran of the Liberty County Sheriff’s Department, had sustained a significant leg wound. While ballistics are still being examined, it would appear that Sgt. Luther’s wound were a result of “friendly fire.” An immediate request for EMS was made to 911. The shooter was “wasted” quickly according to the Sheriff.

Initially, in all of the confusing radio traffic, 911 dispatchers were of the belief that only the deceased was shot. So instead of EMS being dispatched, the Liberty County Medical Examiner was summoned, not EMS. Approximately 10 minutes later, as Sgt. Luther lay bleeding on the ground, officers made inquiry about the EMS they requested. It was then the mistake was discovered by 911 dispatchers and Central City EMS dispatched. After waiting another five minutes and while watching Sgt. Luther’s condition rapidly deteriorate, officers applied a makeshift tourniquet to his leg just below the knee. It took EMS another 13 minutes to arrive, as the original EMS unit dispatched could not be started while in the Fire Station #4. The EMS Unit from CC Fire Station #6 was able to respond from a greater distance away. Since this incident, the Sheriff has been incensed at Central City Fire and Central City EMS leadership regarding equipment condition and trustworthiness to respond. He blames CC Fire and CC EMS for the suffering by his officer. The Liberty County Law Enforcement Officers Association, and joined by the State Law Enforcement Officers Association blame the Sheriff for not including EMS in operational training and operational response. Association leadership has long requested EMS and medical treatment be available during these operations. The Sheriff has consistently declined to include EMS, claiming it “there is no reason to exposed untrained firefighters and EMS to dangerous situations.”

Because of delays and the improper tourniquet, Sgt. Luther still struggles in Central City Hospital with his recovery and resulting infections. Medical professionals, concerned about the potential for blood clots and possible pulmonary emboli, made the decision to amputate the officer’s leg at the knee. This will require long-term recovery. However, the community has taken a great interest in his recovery, seeing numerous photos in social media of the officer in the hospital being visited by “Candy” his 3-year-old partner German Shepard. Candy has been popular and frequent visitor to all county schools and loved by many children.

In addition, a 77-year-old man lost his life this past weekend outside a Central City Fire Station at approximately 1pm in the afternoon. Mr. David Couch, an African American resident and neighborhood activist, while taking in the Liberty County Celebration of Arts and Music activities, collapsed in a parking lot next to CC Fire Station #9. Couch’s family, seeing their father and grandfather collapse immediately ran to his aid. Several family members ran around to the front of Station 9 and rang the doorbell a number of times. After a short time, new recruit firefighter Bill Tobias answered the door and when told of the cardio vascular emergency replied.....”Sorry, but we cannot leave the station without a 911 call”.....and simply closed the door on the family.

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Several minutes later, a CC police officer on patrol rolled up on the parking lot commotion. Then seeing a passing ambulance, the officer stopped the paramedics who then administered aid to Mr. Couch, now pulseless. At some point a 911 call was placed and two of the four station personnel came to the parking lot without any equipment.

Although this event occurred just 3 days ago, here are the facts the media and public now know from the family and interviews.

Firefighter Tobias closed the door on the family after telling them to “call 911,” without offering a phone for such a call, or any other assistance.

Firefighter Tobias (fearing repercussions) did not report the emergency to his supervisor. His Fire Captain had retired to her bedroom after finishing a large lunch with the harsh instructions...she was “not to be disturbed unless this fire station was actually on fire.”

A third firefighter assigned to Engine 9 was also fast asleep in front of a television in the Station #9 day room. *Days of our Lives* was playing on the television at the time.

The fourth firefighter and the Engine Apparatus Operator was in the Station 9 library studying for an upcoming promotional exam and was unaware of the parking lot emergency, thinking the doorbell was most likely a visitor.

The fire department did not respond immediately and was no help to family. Family now believes, as does the community, this was a racially centered decision by Firefighter Tobias (white male) and the members (all white) of Station 9. An attorney has already been hired.

The Mayor has declined to comment.