

You decide: Full dash-cam video of MWC police shooting

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By Tres Savage

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Charles Pettit Jr. died after being shot by a Midwest City Police officer in October. Pettit's father questions the legitimacy of evidence showing his son pointed this gun at the officer. (Photo provided)

After three TV news reports showing edited versions of Midwest City Police dash-cam footage from a fatal police shooting, NonDoc has decided to publish the entire footage for the sake of public transparency.

This decision is not one made lightly, as NonDoc has held the footage and photographs for five weeks after filing an open records request in early December regarding the death of Charles Pettit Jr.

The request was made after social media postings by the dead man's father, Charles Pettit Sr., claimed his son was "murdered" by police. He questioned the legitimacy of police statements that Pettit Jr. had a gun when he was shot.

'It's quick'

NonDoc met with Oklahoma County District Attorney David Prater on Feb. 25, spending more than an hour with the former police officer-turned-prosecutor. Our meeting occurred more than two months after Prater said he met with and showed the video to attorneys representing Pettit Sr.

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In our meeting, we watched the video multiple times and used the Midwest City Police Department’s special dash-cam program to view it frame by frame. We also reviewed dozens of photos from the scene.

Although the moving car’s video is not crystal clear, the images available support the description provided by Prater: Following a pursuit, MWC officer James Hill and Pettit Jr. confront each other beside a Rose State College dumpster. Pettit has his arms raised — one hand attempting to block the glare of Hill’s flashlights, and the other extended at the officer. Hill shoots Pettit Jr., and the latter drops a pistol.

“It’s quick, but it’s all captured on video,” Prater told NonDoc in February. “You see (Pettit’s) arm cocked and his (other) arm straight out, and he’s pointing directly at officer Hill, and as soon as Hill identifies he’s got his arm out and it appears to be a weapon, he starts to fire.”

Pettit Jr. died in the hospital nearly three weeks after the shooting.

Sitting on the story

Despite obtaining this video five weeks ago, we initially made the editorial decision not to publish a story about the October incident because, as far as we observed, Pettit Sr. had refrained from posting further inflammatory images or statements on social media.

We considered that Mr. Pettit was surely experiencing tremendous grief about the death of his son, known as CJay. The tragedy is compounded by the December 2014 death of Pettit Sr.'s other son, Lincoln Price, who was killed by Oklahoma City police after shooting two officers during a traffic stop.

As a result, we sought not to run a story that boiled down to, "Grieving father making false claims about son's deadly encounter with police."

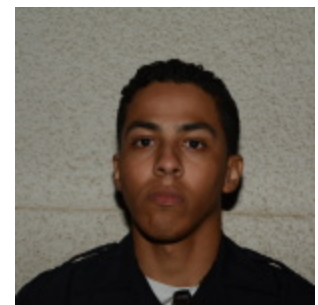
Clips appear on local TV news

But Tuesday night, KFOR Channel 4 broke the seal on Pettit Sr.'s social media claims by airing edited portions of the dash-cam video, interviewing MWC Police Chief Brandon Clabes and noting that Prater had declined to file charges against officer Hill. Interestingly, the KFOR story centered around Pettit Sr.'s claims but ended by noting Pettit Sr. and his attorney had declined comment to the station.

The next day, News 9 and Fox 25 ran their own pieces using other clips from the dash-cam footage. News 9's Adrianna Iwasinski did a stand up from the dumpster where Pettit Jr. died, and Fox 25's Jennifer Falsetti actually interviewed Pettit Sr., who said he still doesn't know whether his son had a gun or not.

"I want to be able to see that weapon clear in his hand, and I want to be able to see him pointing the weapon clear, as they say," Pettit Sr. told Fox 25. "I didn't see that."

As a result, we have published this video unedited on our YouTube page and embedded it below so that members of the public can view it for themselves.



Midwest City Police officer James Hill stands for a post-incident photo. (Provided)

Warning: This video contains footage of a police shooting that may be unsettling for some viewers

Some details and time stamps to keep in mind while watching:

According to Prater and police reports, officers were chasing Pettit Jr. and another suspect in relation to the burglary attempt. The other suspect continued fleeing and was never apprehended, but that detail — unreported by the TV stations — explains why the officers continued to survey the area with their guns drawn after Pettit Jr. was shot.

Video timeline

0:50: MWC Sgt. Scott Primo begins responding to the burglary call

3:00: Primo arrives at the reported location on Peppertree Lane

3:20: MWC officer James Hill flashes his flashlight (left side of frame) to alert Primo to his location as he approaches the house

4:10: Primo's pursuit of the fleeing suspects begins in his car

5:00: Primo pulls into a parking lot at Rose State College

5:15: Primo's dash cam captures footage of Hill and Pettit Jr. coming face-to-face beside a dumpster. Both men have guns drawn, and Hill fires multiple rounds, hitting Pettit Jr. several times

5:30: Hill kicks Pettit Jr.'s gun away from the fallen suspect, and Hill and Primo survey the area for the other suspect

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