

Police shooting of New Mexico homeless man caught on video

D. Lencho, Stuart Winter
27 March 2014

Barely a year after the Albuquerque Police Department's chief resigned in the face of escalating police violence, a video depicting the fatal shooting of a mentally ill, homeless man while being evicted from his "illegal" camping spot has sparked outrage in New Mexico's largest city. The APD has shot 36 people, 22 of whom died, since 2010.

The video, which now has nearly a million views on YouTube, prompted nationwide outrage. On the afternoon of March 16, heavily armed APD officers with an attack dog approached James Boyd, who was camping in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains near an upscale neighborhood on the city's eastern edge. The officers claim to have been involved in a tense, hours-long standoff with Boyd, and then shot him six times after he picked up a knife.

On March 25, several hundred protesters, bearing a coffin symbolic of other victims of police violence, shouted, "We are all James Boyd!" during a rally in front of the police station. Within hours of that demonstration, Albuquerque police fatally shot another man outside an apartment complex, after he allegedly shot at police. He died Wednesday morning at a nearby hospital.

In a press conference the day after the shooting, Chief of Police Gorden Eden, Jr., claimed that a helmet-cam video worn by the shooter exonerated the officers by showing that Boyd posed a "direct threat" to the officers and that lethal force was justified.

The video, however, shows that the shooting was nothing short of cold-blooded murder. It begins with Boyd announcing to the officers "I am not a murderer," and picking up his belongings, apparently preparing to leave his campsite.

For no reason apparent on the video one officer fired a flash-bang grenade, which exploded near Boyd's feet

while another sicced the dog on him.

Boyd dropped his belongings and seemed to be trying to defend himself against the dog with a knife while officers shouted commands for him to get down on the ground. As he turned away from the officers, with arms outstretched, appearing to comply, six shots rang out from the assault rifle being held by the officer wearing the helmet-cam. The dog was put back on the leash.

Although Boyd was mortally wounded, an officer commanded him to drop the knife and repeatedly fired "less-lethal" beanbag rounds into his posterior. The dog was then sicced on Boyd again, mauling his lifeless leg.

Chief Eden's comments came a little more than a year after former police chief Ray Schultz announced his resignation following complaints about the upsurge in police violence (see: "Albuquerque police chief resigns amid surge of police violence"). In fact, the Department of Justice has been engaged in an investigation of the APD since December 2012, to determine if the spike in police killings since 2010 involved the use of "unreasonable deadly force against civilians."

Once the video became public—and viral—Albuquerque Mayor Richard Berry was forced to say that Chief Eden spoke too soon in defending the officers: "The chief got asked an honest question and he gave an honest answer," claimed the mayor. "Unfortunately, it was premature and a mistake, and that will not happen again." The officers have been placed on paid administrative leave.

The escalation of police violence is an everyday occurrence—in fact, a growing de facto policy for dealing with the impoverished and mentally ill—in cities from coast to coast.

New Mexico has suffered greatly from the deepening

attacks on the working class—and of the domestic militarization that goes hand-in-glove with imperialist aggression. At 22.2 percent, New Mexico has the highest poverty rate of any state, according to the US Census Bureau.

In addition, New Mexico presents a textbook case of the relationships between military-related research and spending, mammoth war budgets, and the widespread poverty of the working class and Native American population. New Mexico hosts three air force bases (Kirtland Air Force Base, Holloman Air Force Base, and Cannon Air Force Base); a testing range (White Sands Missile Range); and an army proving ground and maneuver range (McGregor Range).

Other war-related federal installations include Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL)—which maintains a large portion of the nation’s nuclear weapons stockpile—and Sandia National Laboratories (SNL), which conducts electronic and industrial research on Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact