

Autopsy shows St. Louis teenager Vonderrit Myers was gunned down by police while fleeing

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25 October 2014

The results of a private autopsy indicate that St. Louis teenager Vonderrit D. Myers, who was gunned down earlier this month by an off-duty cop, was running away when he was shot, then subsequently killed execution-style with a bullet to the head, attorneys for his family said Friday.

Myers was killed on October 8, two months after the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, which sparked mass protests that were met by a militarized police crackdown.

Jerryl Christmas, an attorney for Myers's family, said the findings contradicted claims by police that Myers had engaged in a shootout with the officer. "The evidence shows that the story we've been given by the Police Department does not match up. There's no evidence that there was a gun battle going on," Christmas said.

Jermaine Wooten, another attorney for Myers's family, said that according to eyewitness testimony, Myers was "screaming on the ground...begging this officer to stop."

"The officer then runs up the hill, approaches Vonderrit, and then we hear one single shot. Vonderrit is not screaming anymore," the attorney concluded.

The officer, whose name has not been made public, remains on paid administrative leave.

The autopsy, conducted by renowned forensic pathologist Dr. Cyril Wecht at the request of Myers's family, showed that the 18-year-old, who family insists was unarmed, was shot six times in the back of his legs, once in the front of the leg, and once in the head.

"Six of the eight gunshot wounds were directed posteriorly. They struck Mister Myers on the rear part of his body," Wecht said. The numerous hits to Myers'

legs strongly suggested that the teenager was running away when the shots were fired, he added.

In addition to the six shots to Myer's back, the still-unnamed St Louis police officer fired a downward, execution-style shot to the head, which passed through the youth's left cheek, and was lodged in his body, Wecht found. "The head wound would have rendered Vonderrit immediately unconscious," Wecht said.

Myers' wounds indicated that the shots to his legs traveled a "significant upward direction," Wecht said, suggesting that they were fired at the youth's back as he ran uphill away from the officer.

"With Vonderrit running up the hill away from the officer and the officer shooting then from a lower down position, that would fit in perfectly and explain how you have bullets that appear to move upward in the body," Wecht noted.

Preliminary results from a separate autopsy conducted by St Louis Medical Examiner Dr. Michael Graham similarly found that Myers "was shot six to seven times in the lower extremities, with the fatal shot entering the right cheek." Dr. Graham is currently preparing a final report.

The St Louis police department has repeatedly altered its account of events that day, eventually settling on a convoluted narrative in which Myers initially fled from the officer, then entered into a "physical confrontation" with the officer, and finally fled again up a hill before firing three shots at the officer.

Seeking to square this account with the latest autopsy results, a lawyer representing the officer involved claimed that Myers was shot as he fell forward onto the ground, while pointing his weapon at the officer 180 degrees behind him.

“He was propped up on his left elbow, and his legs were facing out at the policeman as he went down, but he was still holding the gun and pointing it at the policeman,” the lawyer said.

To substantiate their version of events, the police are pointing to a forensic report by the Missouri State Highway Patrol asserting the presence of gunpowder residue on Myers’ body and clothing. The same report acknowledges, however, that such residue could stem from any number of causes, such as being shot at close range.

“The presence of gunshot residue on a person’s hands could mean the individual discharged a firearm, was near a firearm when it was discharged or touched an object with gunshot residue on it. Individuals shot at close range can have gunshot residue deposited onto their hands,” the report states.

The St. Louis police department claims to have possession of the weapon allegedly used by Myers, but has not made it available for public scrutiny. No DNA matching samples taken from Myers’s body have been found on Myers’ alleged weapon, according to comments made by St Louis Medical Examiner Dr. Michael Graham reported in the *St Louis American*. “If he had been carrying the gun, it would have had his DNA,” Wooten said.

The shooting of Myers follows the August 20 police killing of 25-year-old Kajieme Powell, a mentally disturbed man who died in a barrage of a dozen shots from two police officers, including several while he was motionless on the ground. A cell phone video subsequently showed that police misled the public about important circumstances of the killing.

Despite working as a private security contractor for Hi-Tek Security Services, the officer who killed Myers was reportedly wearing official police gear and wielding a police-issued weapon.

A local store manager, who saw Myers just before the incident, described Myers as “relaxed, regular, no worries or nothing” as he walked out onto the street carrying a sandwich. Myers’ aunt and guardian similarly said that the young man had a sandwich in his hands minutes before he was shot, a claim substantiated by surveillance videos.

Defending the use of an entire clip of ammunition against Myers, a lawyer for the St Louis Police Officers’ Association stated that whenever an officer

uses deadly force, “he uses deadly force until the threat is gone.”



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