

Video released of 2013 incident

Border agents urged 16-year-old boy to drink liquid meth, resulting in his death

Genevieve Leigh
1 August 2017

Newly released surveillance video shows two US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents encouraging a Mexican teenager to drink liquid methamphetamine at the US-Mexico border crossing in San Diego, California. After taking a total of four sips of the liquid at the behest of giggling border agents, the sophomore high school student died of a massive overdose. The video was only recently obtained by the media, despite the fact that the incident took place more than three years ago, on November 18, 2013.

Sixteen-year-old Cruz Marcelino Velázquez Acevedo was crossing the US-Mexico border at the San Ysidro port of entry when he was stopped and questioned by border agents. The agents found two bottled containers of an amber colored liquid which they suspected to be some form of liquid drug. The substance was later determined to be highly concentrated methamphetamine dissolved in liquid, with the contents of each bottle being 100 times stronger than a typical dose of methamphetamine.

The newly released video does not contain sound, but the interaction caught on camera between the two agents, Valerie Baird and Adrian Perallon, and Cruz, combined with court records, paints a very clear picture of the events.

In the opening scenes of the video, Baird pulls out two bottles from the boy's bag. The officers later report that one was labeled as black tea and the other as lemonade. Velázquez, sweating and agitated from nerves, insisted to the officers that they contained "just apple juice."

After exchanging words with her fellow agent, Baird places the larger bottle in front of the boy. She says something to Cruz during which she makes the

universal gesture indicating he should drink the liquid, presumably to prove that it is not drugs. The boy obliges and takes his first sip at 7:04 pm. The other agent, Perallon, then motions for him to take another sip. Cruz then takes his second sip of the powerful drug. The footage shows the officers repeatedly exchanging smiles and laughing as the events unfold.

This routine takes place twice more but this time with the other officer, Adrian Perallon, placing the bottle in front of Cruz and gesturing for him to drink. Cruz took a total of four swallows of the liquid meth. A few moments after the fourth swig, a drug-sniffing K-9 approaches the teenager and detects the drug.

At 7:38 p.m. Cruz is placed in handcuffs and escorted to the security office. Soon after ingesting the drug, Cruz's body temperature soared to 105 degrees Fahrenheit and his pulse reached a rate of 220 beats per minutes. Baird notices him sweating and motions for him to wipe his forehead. Surveillance video in the security office shows Cruz in visible distress, rocking and shaking while handcuffed. No medical help has been called for at this point.

Cruz continued sweating profusely. Clenching his fists and he begins to shout repeatedly "Mi corazón! Mi corazón!", which translates to "My heart! My heart!" Cruz was experiencing all the typical signs of Methamphetamine overdose: increased heart rate, extreme rise in body temperature, and possibly a stroke.

By the time paramedics arrived, Cruz could no longer stand on his own. Officers reported that his eyes were rolling and that he was thrashing so violently that they handcuffed the teenager to the guardrails. Cruz lost consciousness in the ambulance.

He was pronounced dead when they arrived at the

hospital.

Thirty minutes elapsed between the time that Cruz took his first sip and when the officers decided to call for paramedics. The testimony from the two officers is contradictory, with Baird claiming that Pellaron had suggested that Cruz drink the liquid, saying that he “does it all the time” in other roles as CBP officer. Yet Pellaron stated under sworn testimony, “I never asked him to [drink the liquid], he volunteered to, and I believe I gestured for him to go ahead”.

Border agents have access to drug kits which allow them to safely test any substance they suspect to be illicit drugs. Neither officer bothered to retrieve any such field test kits. Instead they had the teenager test the substance on himself.

In March, more than three years after his death, the Velasquez family was awarded \$1 million after settling a wrongful death lawsuit against the US government and the two border officers. To this day no apology or any admission of wrongdoing has been issued. No punitive measure was ever brought against the officers and both remain employed by CBP in San Diego.

The family’s lawyer, Eugene Iredale, told ABC News that the family believes Cruz was recruited as a drug mule, likely by members or associates of a drug cartel. Cases of people being paid to carry drugs across the border are quite common.

An immigrant recently deported by the US government told the WSWs that the cartels will target deportees who are dropped at bus stations just over the border. In these cases, the victims are beaten, tortured, and held for ransom before being turned into mules.

It is believed that this incident was Cruz’s first experience carrying out such an operation, and that he was being paid a small sum of cash in return. Cruz clearly did not understand the potency or danger of the drugs he was carrying, or he presumably would not have agreed to drink the liquid. In all likelihood, the boy was convinced by drug smugglers that he would not be stopped, and was persuaded by the idea of earning money of his own. It is also very possible that he or his family’s wellbeing was threatened if he did not agree to participate.

Cruz attended high school in Tijuana, Mexico, just over the US border. He worked, helping his grandmother run a small business that supported his family. Most days he looked after his younger sister,

Reyna, who relied on him after their parents separated. “He was kind of my dad,” Reyna told reporters, “because since I was little he always helped me with homework, teach me sports, and everything he could.”

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) obtained, through the Freedom of Information Act, files of 149 cases from 2011 to 2015 in which unaccompanied minors reported threats of, or actual physical abuse, including sexual abuse, by border officers. These cases, including the case of Cruz, took place under the Obama administration.

The vast immigration apparatus which has been built up over decades by both Republican and Democratic administrations has produced an army of border agents and Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers who, like the regular local police officers throughout the United States, torment and often kill poor and working class individuals with impunity on a regular basis.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact