

Columbus, Ohio officer who killed Ma'Khia Bryant was trained in military marksmanship

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The Columbus, Ohio police officer who fatally shot 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant on Tuesday, Nicholas Reardon, is an active duty US Air National Guardsman trained as an expert marksman, it was revealed Thursday.

Police quickly released body cam footage of the incident earlier this week which shows Reardon approaching an altercation between a group of young people in a driveway. Bryant, facing away from the officer, can be seen pushing another female to the ground before Reardon drew his weapon and repeatedly shouted “get down.” After Bryant, armed with knife, turned to fight another woman, Reardon fired four times into Bryant. She died shortly after.

Social media users discovered that Reardon is a US Air National Guardsman and received an expert marksman badge with an M4 Carbine, the standard issue rifle for most US military units.

After police identified Reardon, Twitter users discovered he graduated from Bishop Watterson High School in Columbus in 2016. Reardon was a part of the school's wrestling team, which occasionally tweeted updates about his progress during basic training.

One tweet with an image of Reardon in military garb read, “Alumni Update: Nick Reardon '16 Rickenbacker AF Base Columbus, OH. While at Tech School earned expert marksman for M4A1...”

Air National Guard spokesperson Lt. Col. Devin T. Robinson confirmed to the Daily Beast that Reardon joined in the force in 2015 and has been assigned to the 121st Security Forces Squadron for the Ohio Air National Guard. In addition to domestic deployments, He spent six months in an overseas operation.

The fact that Reardon received military training and is an active duty guardsman raises questions about the militarization of police in America. Although military

veterans only make up about 6 percent of the population, almost 20 percent of police officers are veterans, according to The Marshall Project.

A combination of state laws, federal laws, and hiring practices are partially responsible for the strong military presence in police forces. States like New Jersey and Massachusetts have laws that require departments to select veterans over those without military backgrounds. Furthermore, disabled veterans, such as those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—a mental health condition many acquired during combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan—are favored over veterans without health concerns.

Interestingly, police departments and the state are fully conscious of the potential danger in hiring veterans. In 2009, the Justice Department and the International Association of Chiefs of Police issued a guide offering advice to departments seeking veterans. The guide stated: “Sustained operations under combat circumstances may cause returning officers to mistakenly blur the lines between military combat situations and civilian crime situations, resulting in inappropriate decisions and actions—particularly in the use of less lethal or lethal force.”

Data from police departments confirm this warning. In Boston, for every 100 officers with military service, officials received more than 28 complaints of excessive use of force from 2010 to 2015. The complaint rate for officers without military service was 17 complaints for every 100 cops. In 2017, a Pew Research Center poll discovered 32 percent of veterans admitted that they had fired their weapon while on duty as a police officer, compared to 24 percent of non-veterans.

The federal government is deeply involved in ensuring the youth they damaged in imperialist wars in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia can easily

transition into law enforcement at home. Because of the Americans With Disabilities Act, police departments cannot deny a job candidate for having a PTSD diagnosis. Additionally, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act prohibits police officers from being required to take a mental health evaluation after they return to work after a military deployment.

In 2012, the Obama administration provided tens of millions in funding to departments to incentivize the hiring of veterans. More than \$111 million was awarded to law enforcement agencies across the US. In exchange, approximately 800 jobs were created or reserved for veterans who served at least 180 days of active duty since September 11, 2001.

Over the last two decades an absurd amount of military-grade equipment has been gifted to police departments by the federal government. In 2014, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released a report exposing the federal government's role in transforming domestic law enforcement into a "paramilitary police." The report noted that the government actively facilitated the militarization of US law enforcement through federal military surplus programs.

The Department of Defense's 1033 Program is one such program. The program is operated by the Law Enforcement Support Office, whose motto is "from warfighter to crimefighter." This program has transferred more than \$5.1 billion in property from the military to local police departments since 1997. More than a third of the arms provided through the program are brand new, going from arms manufacturers directly to police departments.

The ACLU report found that the amount of equipment sent to local departments expanded rapidly over the years. The Defense Department transferred \$1 million of property in 1990, \$324 million in 1995, and nearly \$450 million in 2013. Police departments receive the military surplus for free but are required to use the equipment within a year. This all but ensures that officers use military equipment on citizens.

A 2020 CNN analysis discovered the Pentagon sent at least \$760 million worth of military equipment to local law enforcement agencies since August 2017. That included \$5.3 million of "crowd control" gear, such as riot shields, gas masks, tasers, and other materials.

Furthermore, 500 departments acquired Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles that cost up to \$1 million each. American police are touted as peacekeepers but are armed for war against the working class.

The militarization of police forces in the United States is intricately linked with the growth of authoritarianism in the US. Concerned with the growth of social opposition, the ruling class arms police to the teeth and gives them near-free rein to murder and terrorize workers.

Most recently, Charne Allen, Tennessee's Attorney General, announced that the officer who shot and killed a teenager in a high school bathroom would not face criminal charges. Anthony J. Thompson was shot by Knoxville police officer Jonathon Clabough as he was being arrested at Austin-East Magnet High School.

Police were responding to a domestic abuse call from the mother of Thompson's former girlfriend. Four officers entered a bathroom where Thompson was hiding. A handgun Thompson was carrying in his sweatshirt pocket, which police were not aware of, accidentally went off and struck a trash can. Clabough drew his weapon and shot Thompson in the shoulder. Thompson fell to the ground and officers surrounded him.

Officers said they did not know Thompson had been shot until two minutes after he was handcuffed. When officers turned over Thompson's body, they saw a large amount of blood. The school nurse was called to provide medical assistance, but a medical examiner later reported that Thompson could not have been saved.



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