

No charges in Colorado deputy's killing of college student Samuel Yeager

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The April 3 police killing of 23-year-old Samuel Yeager by a Douglas County, Colorado sheriff's deputy has been ruled justified after an investigation by the 18th Judicial District Critical Incident Response Team.

Chief Deputy District Attorney Gary S. Dawson informed Sheriff Tony G. Spurlock in a letter dated June 4 that after reviewing the available evidence he had determined that the shooting by Deputy Christopher Lippolis was legal and justifiable.

Yeager, who was carrying an AK-47 rifle in a soft case, had been initially confronted by Deputy Brent Butler on an off-ramp just outside the city of Castle Pines after a driver had called 911 to notify them that he had dropped off on the side of the freeway an armed man who was acting erratically.

Yeager and the driver were classmates at the University of Colorado Boulder and had been on a hike together in the mountains. Douglas County is immediately to the south of the Denver metropolitan area. Yeager had brought the gun in order to go shooting afterwards.

However, after the two smoked some marijuana during the hike, Yeager began to act erratically, apparently suffering from paranoia and delusions. According to the investigation, Yeager had also been trying to overcome an opiate addiction by taking kratom, a supplement which can trigger hallucinations and delusions.

Deputy Butler confronted Yeager with his service weapon drawn and repeatedly demanded that he drop the gun, which was still in its case. Yeager refused to put it down, insisting that he had the right to carry the weapon. He moved away from the deputy and got down on the ground and apparently took the rifle out of its case.

Deputy Lippolis arrived as backup and used a scoped Colt M4 carbine to get a sight on Yeager and fired three times, hitting him in once in the left hip and twice in the head, killing him on the spot. Law enforcement weapons retailer Arms Unlimited boasts that the gun is "combat proven." The M4 was initially designed for use by the US Army and has been used in every American military intervention since 1999.

According to Lippolis, he believed that Yeager was preparing to shoot at Butler, making it necessary to open fire. While three bullets were fired from Yeager's gun simultaneously with Lippolis opening fire, none of the deputies present were shot or injured. Butler never opened fire during the encounter, telling investigators that he was concerned for the safety of motorists driving past on the nearby freeway and overpass.

With the conclusion of the investigation, the deputies involved in the killing will now return to the beat after having been on administrative leave since the shooting.

Lippolis was previously involved in a 2017 incident in which another deputy broke a woman's arm during a welfare check. According to a March 6, 2020 lawsuit filed by Cristi Lundquist, Deputy Leory Nichols forced his way into her home, grabbed her arm and pulled it down, "causing an audible snapping sound."

Lippolis helped Nichols restrain her even as she repeatedly complained that they were hurting her. The deputies had refused to heed Lundquist's demands that they leave her home even though she was under no suspicion of criminal activity.

According to the *Denver Post*, there have been 16 people killed and 6 wounded by law enforcement so far this year across the state. Since 2015 there have been 228 police killings in Colorado, making it one of the deadliest states for police violence over the last six years both in total number and per capita. While having

roughly half the population of the state of Georgia, Colorado has had more police killings in this time frame.

In the two months following Yeager's death there have been at least nine police killings in Colorado, including five fatal shootings in Denver since May 14. Among the victims are:

- Paige Pierce Schmidt, 26, shot and killed by a Delta County Sheriff's deputy on April 9 during a brief traffic pursuit just outside the city Hotchkiss. Her family and friends received few answers from the police and are demanding a thorough investigation. A Facebook group, Justice for Paige!, has more than 1,500 members.

- Smoky Lynn Crockett, 60, killed April 17 by police during an armed encounter at a home outside of Fort Lupton.

- Richard Quintana, 37, killed outside a gas station in Colorado Springs after he failed to follow an officer's orders to drop the gun he was holding.

- Dalton Lee Buckholz, 28, died on May 1 after being shot by Cañon City police during a traffic stop. According to family, Buckholz was unarmed and sitting in his car with his hands on the steering wheel when he was killed.

- Caleb Jereme Grisenti, 22, was fatally shot in Englewood, a suburb of Denver on May 18. Police identified the car Grisenti was driving as stolen and sought to stop him. According to the police, Grisenti hit and dragged three officers with the car before they opened fire, killing him. The police have yet to release body cam footage of the shooting.

- Raul Rosas-Zarose, 52, killed on May 19 after being shot five times as he moved towards officers while armed with a knife. Police claim that he was attempting to cut his own throat with a utility knife. He was shot with ten pepper balls and a taser within 33 seconds of being encountered by Denver police officers.

- Shannon Wright, 29, confronted by police as a suspect in the robbery a Denver liquor store on May 30.

Police claim he was armed with a shotgun which he raised at them, forcing them to open fire. Wright was pronounced dead at a hospital.

- Eugene Matthews, 24, shot and killed by police on June 2 after allegedly carrying out an armed robbery and carjacking in Arvada.

Nationally, police violence continues unabated with approximately three people killed on average every day. Police are on track to kill approximately 1,000 people this year, as in previous years. As a social phenomenon, police violence impacts people of every race, ethnicity and gender, not just African Americans. The overwhelming share of victims are working class and poor, many suffering a mental health emergency at the time of their fatal encounter with the police.



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