

Body camera footage confirms border agents executed unarmed Native American man in hail of gunfire

Joshua Rodriguez
3 July 2023

On June 23, body camera footage depicting the May 18 firing squad execution of Raymond Mattia, a US citizen and member of the Tohono O'odham Nation in southern Arizona, by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents was publicly released.

The highly edited footage, which omits audio at key points and blurs the killers faces, unequivocally demonstrates that the 58-year-old Mattia was compliant and posed no threat to the multiple officers who shot him dead. Mattia was unarmed when he was killed in front of his house.

The autopsy report by the Pima County Medical Examiner ruled Mattia's death a homicide; however, the Tohono O'odham Nation authorities have been careful not to place any accountability on the CBP officers responsible for Mattia's death. According to a medical report Mattia suffered at least nine gunshot wounds.

Inconsistent police reports claim CBP officers were called to the village of Menagers Dam at approximately 9:04 p.m. In the edited audio released, a Tohono O'odham Police Department (TOPD) dispatcher says that they received a report of one or two shots fired west of the recreation center in Menagers Dam and that CBP agents should rendezvous with police at the center.

Several heavily armed CBP agents with military grade assault rifles were deployed to the recreation center where they met up with police.

For unknown reasons, once TOPD and CBP agents converge at the recreation center at approximately 9:27 p.m. they decide to convoy directly towards Mattia's house, passing several other houses. In the body camera audio, one of the police officers is heard saying, "I don't know exactly where that motherfucker's at."

By 9:35 p.m., both CBP agents and TOPD police, with guns

drawn, were descending upon Mattia's address. Roughly four minutes later body camera footage shows them confronting Mattia in front of his residence. The body cam footage shows multiple police officers with guns drawn and bright flashlights pointed at Mattia.

Mattia is shown standing outside the front door of his home conversing with a Tohono O'odham police officer, who tells him to "put his hands above his head," to which Mattia responds, "I am."

Within five seconds of Mattia responding, two different CBP agents give Mattia conflicting orders, one tells him to keep his hands up, while another orders him to "Put it down for me."

Mattia is observed gently tossing an object with his left hand, later revealed to be a sheathed knife in the direction of a TOPD officer. The sheathed knife landed several feet away from the police officer on the ground and well outside Mattia's reach.

After tossing the object as instructed, police and CBP agents immediately escalated the situation and began yelling several conflicting commands at Mattia. "Get on your f***ing face," one CBP agent yelled while another screamed, "Put your hands out of your f***ing pocket."

Attempting to comply, Mattia is observed raising his right hand, which was in his pocket holding his cell phone. As soon as Mattia pulls his hand from his jacket pocket at least three agents opened fire, shooting dozens of rounds at Mattia who immediately collapsed face first on the ground.

While Mattia was bleeding profusely on the ground, his killers continued to yell commands at him. "Put your hands out! Put your f***ing hands out!" As the agents moved towards Mattia they continued to yell at the dying man not to "f***ing move," and to "put his hands up so we can help

you.”

As of this writing, it is unclear if the TOPD officers on scene fired their weapons as well, but CBP has confirmed that at least 38 shots were fired. The video confirms police used pistols as well as military-style M-4 rifles to kill the unarmed man.

Due to allegedly inclement weather, CBP claimed that a medical helicopter was not able to be dispatched to the scene to assist with Mattia’s grievous wounds. Instead, according to a CBP statement, a doctor, “telephonically” declared Mattia dead at 10:06 p.m.

Family members of Mattia have confirmed that police refused to allow them near his body for several hours after he was shot which prevented them from carrying out sacred burial rituals. Instead of allowing the family to respectfully grieve, CBP and TOPD left Mattia’s body in the desert for nearly seven hours before transporting him.

The CBP Office of Professional Responsibility, the agency that provides “oversight” of the agency’s officers, is engaged in a massive cover-up of the police murder of Mattia. More than a month after Mattia’s death, none of the three Border Patrol agents who shot and killed him have been identified, much less charged. In fact, all three have been placed on paid administrative leave.

In an interview with the *Intercept* published on June 26, Mattia’s niece, Yvonne Nevarez revealed that the border police had yet to show the family the full unedited footage of the deadly encounter. “The way they put it together feels like a cheap attempt to justify what they did,” Nevarez told the *Intercept*, “and it feels like none of them are on our side. It feels like they’re just trying to defend themselves, instead of defending my uncle Ray.”

There are conflicting stories as to what precipitated the shooting of Mattia outside his home. Mattia’s residence, which did not have electricity, is located on the Arizona-Mexico border. According to family members, Mattia frequently called the local Border Patrol station in Ajo to report immigrants trespassing on his property. Officials with CBP have yet to confirm or deny if Mattia called them on May 18.

The killing of Mattia comes amidst a rise in far-right incitements against immigrants by both major political parties. Seeking to supplant Trump as the new Republican Führer, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has begun campaigning on a “shoot on sight” immigration policy,

while aspiring Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy has likewise called for “sealing the border” and finishing Trump’s border wall in a recent town hall.

According to the Southern Border Communities Coalition (SBCC), which has been tracking cases of abuse and fatal encounters involving the CBP since 2010, 275 people have been killed in encounters with CBP officers. According to SBCC, 2020, 2021 and 2022 have been the deadliest years, with 35, 58 and 51 people killed by CBP respectively. Including Mattia, 18 people have been killed this year while interacting with CBP agents.

Since 2010, the majority of those killed by CBP, at 32 percent, were killed in fatal car chases, 27 percent were killed in fatal shootings and 23 percent were killed due to medical issues, including possible medical neglect.

Arizona, the state where Mattia was murdered, is the second deadliest state with 52 killings attributed to the CBP since 2010. Texas is first with 144 killings, while California rounds out the top three, with 38 killings to date.

Although the majority of killings that have taken place since 2010 have been along the heavily militarized US-Mexico border, people have also been killed by CBP agents along the US-Canada border in states such as Washington, Michigan and Maine. While capitalist politicians claim that the border gestapo exists to keep citizens safe from criminal migrants, out of the 275 people killed by CBP since 2010, 45 were US citizens themselves.

The violence initiated by the CBP, and other police agencies, is the logical expression of a system that hunts down and imprisons millions of men, women and children in the US and elsewhere. The real “crisis” is not on the border, but the crisis of American capitalism, which for decades has produced extreme inequality and war while imposing dictatorships on workers around the world to the benefit of Wall Street. The Socialist Equality Party defends the democratic rights of workers and their families to live and work in the country of their choosing.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact