

Florida deputy kills airman after entering the wrong apartment

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A Florida deputy killed a US Air Force airman in his own home on May 3 after bursting into the wrong apartment, according to attorneys for the family.

Senior Airman Roger Fortson, 23, was in his off-base apartment when he was fatally shot by a deputy, who was responding to a disturbance call in a different apartment. People on bodycam footage talking to the deputy after he arrived at the apartment complex claimed a man and woman were involved in a domestic dispute. There was a notable lack of the latter in Fortson's apartment.

According to civil rights attorney Ben Crump, Fortson, who was black, was alone in his apartment on a Facetime call with a woman during the encounter. Crump says that, according to the woman, no one could hear the deputy announce himself nor was the deputy visible through the peephole of the apartment. Fortson attempted to ascertain who was knocking at the door, asking who was there but did not hear a response.

Bodycam footage was released shortly after news of the killing went viral online, unlike the multiple months or even years' delay typical when footage is incriminating of police.

The deputy could be seen on the footage knocking on the door, then awkwardly moving to the left then repeating the same exercise, except this time moving to the right of the door, in both cases potentially moving beyond the line of sight of the peephole each time—for unexplained reasons.

After this knocking, which from the perspective of someone inside the house could have been from anyone, including an attacker, the deputy shouts, "Sheriff's office! Open the door!" After the deputy shouted this again, Fortson opened the door with his legally owned pistol in hand aimed at the ground. The officer fired five shots in quick succession seconds after the door opened, fatally wounding Fortson, who was later declared dead at a hospital.

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office claimed the officer, who shot first after barging into Fortson's home, was acting in self-defense.

Fortson was based at the Special Operations Wing (SOW) at Hurlburt Field, Florida. He had just returned from serving in Kuwait and had recently celebrated his 23rd birthday.

According to Crump, "It is a harrowing tragedy that Roger dedicated his life to serving his country and defending our constitutional rights, and in the end, his constitutional rights were violated, leading to his death."

This statement deserves scrutiny. If it is the case that over 1,000 people are routinely summarily executed by police forces each year with almost complete impunity, how is it that constitutional rights are being defended by the government or its armed forces?

According to the Air Force, SOW "is one of five Air Force active-duty special operations wings and falls under the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)." As the Air Force notes, "The 1st SOW is a pivotal component of AFSOC's ability to provide airpower to conduct special operations missions worldwide. The primary mission of the 1st SOW is to rapidly plan and execute specialized and contingency operations in support of national priorities. The wing's core missions include close air support, precision aerospace firepower, specialized aerospace mobility, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) operations, and agile combat support."

Among the SOW arsenal are MQ-9 predator drones, AC-130J Commando IIs, which specialize in aerial refueling and transporting special operation death squads around the world, and AC-130J Ghost Rider gunships used in brutal neo-colonial "counter-insurgency" wars.

Opponents of US-backed regimes around the world, including political opponents and their supporters are assassinated by US special forces death squads, some of

which are transported by SOW, as well as missiles fired from MQ-9 predator drones.

US imperialism increasingly brings the same brutal methods home to use, overwhelmingly against the working class and poor people, who furnish the overwhelming majority of military recruits.

Reflecting this, recently the US Special Operations Command held its annual conference in Tampa, Florida, in which helicopters, military trucks, boats, all fitted with machine guns, and infantry fired blanks in a simulated urban warfare operation. The implication is that these same forces will be used in US cities.

Like in imperialist operations overseas, a certain amount of “collateral damage” is viewed as necessary by the ruling class as part of its brutal police state methods which it seeks to use, alongside more subtle methods, such as the political charlatantry of the Democratic Party, to head off a revolutionary movement of the working class.

Mapping Police Violence has tracked 384 deaths this year in the country, which is on track to meet or exceed the previous grim record reached in 2023 of 1,351 deaths by police. The past several years have seen total deaths of around 1,000 per year.

Just a couple days before Fortson was killed, police shot and killed a 14-year-old Wisconsin student outside of Mount Horeb Middle School after receiving a report of someone with a weapon. The student had a 0.177 caliber pellet rifle—something widely regarded as a toy gun in America which uses either pressurized air, carbon dioxide or nitrogen.

While capable of shooting one’s eye out, it is not regarded as a deadly weapon. Only two states, which does not include Wisconsin, treat BB or pellet guns as “firearms.”

Hundreds of terrified children ran after hearing the shots fired from police at the student. At the time, the authorities claimed an “active shooter” had been “neutralized” outside of the school. It is now apparent the only “active shooter” was in fact the police.



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