

Confidential Internal Draft—Do Not Distribute

Date: September 10, 2020

To: File

Re: Interview of DPD Sergeant Erik Knutson on September 10, 2020

From: Nicholas E. Mitchell, Independent Monitor

On September 10, 2020, Office of the Independent Monitor (“OIM”) Independent Monitor Nicholas E. Mitchell interviewed Denver Police Department (“DPD”) Sergeant Erik Knutson. It was a telephonic interview. The interview was not recorded, and this memo summarizes the interviewer’s thoughts and mental impressions of that interview. This memo was prepared by Nick Mitchell.

Sgt. Knutson explained that he was on vacation but willing to have a discussion regarding the OIM’s current review of the recent George Floyd Protests (“GFP”). He is the DPD’s primary crowd control trainer and is currently assigned to the DPD’s Training Academy (“Academy”). He has been the DPD’s primary crowd control trainer since 2013. He received a considerable amount of crowd control training leading up to the Democratic National Convention (“DNC”), which he has shared with other officers in the years since. For the DNC, they did a lot of training on field force tactics, including use of batons, shield, and formations.

TERMINOLOGY

Sgt. Knutson explained that it is important to use the right terminology to discuss crowd control. He generally tries to encourage people to think about “Crowd Control” rather than “Field Force” approaches. He noted that field force training generally focuses on the choreography on the line, the formations that officers take, and signals to communicate movement, etc. Whereas “Crowd Control” is broader and includes other techniques for controlling crowds that have nothing to do with skirmish lines and formations. If a crowd is well-managed, field force techniques may not be necessary to keep everyone safe. “Crowd Management” is getting a cooperative crowd to go where it needs to go, like moving people after a sporting event. “Crowd Control,” on the other hand, refers to dealing with a more volatile crowd and moving it into a particular direction. Sgt. Knutson has also encouraged the department to refer to its gear as “turtle suits” rather than riot gear, since wearing protective equipment is about officer safety, and need not wait for riot conditions.

CROWD CONTROL/FIELD FORCE TRAINING

The DPD has an established partnership with FEMA to utilize a FEMA-developed field force training module. Pursuant to the agreement between the DPD and FEMA, if the DPD wants to use the FEMA training, it needs to offer the full three-day course, and cannot “bastardize” it.

In 2015, Sgt. Knutson worked to develop a three-day field force operations class. That effort was well-received by the DPD at that time. He put officers through that course approximately once a month in 2015, into the beginning of 2016. In mid-2016, several DPD commanders said that they would no longer send officers to that training. It was too time intensive and was causing manpower issues in the districts. So that was the end of the three-day course.

In 2019, to reduce the drain on manpower, Sgt. Knutson came up with a one-day course (while FEMA does provide a one-day Field Force Operations (“FFO”) refresher, it is only allowed for officers who went through their three-day class, so he was unable to use FEMA materials). [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] So in 2019, he focused on developing a field force leadership course. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So he put on the first field force leadership course in December 2019. It was a review of formations, how to get them formed, and how to run them. There were 7 supervisors in that course. From the feedback he received, participants thought it was a good refresher but they didn't get a chance to actually run through the formations with officers, which was a negative. This was the only Field Force leadership training they were able to do.

Around that same time in 2019, the DPD also offered a one-hour online field force refresher training for officers. It was one hour only and was online. He believes that all officers in the patrol division took that one-hour online class. Sgt. Knutson does not know how effective that training was, but felt that if officers were paying attention, they could have gotten a useful refresher about formations and movements.

Unit Types and Sizes

[REDACTED]

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION WITH CROWDS

[REDACTED]

PROPER TACTICS/TECHNIQUES

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

WHAT SGT. KNUTSON SAW WHILE WATCHING THE GFP

Sgt. Knutson was on vacation during the beginning of the GFP. But he watched a lot of video of the GFP. He offered to come in to help during the protests but was told that he wasn't needed. After watching video, he said, "in my opinion, some of the formations that were being used were nothing that I have ever trained on." More specifically, Sgt. Knutson noted the absence of riot batons on the line. He saw officers moving a crowd with pepperball only. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

He noted that during the GFP, crowds of 100 or 200 would splinter off into groups of 20 or 40. So platoons were too big for this. He noted that from the video he has seen, there was an absence of "command and control," and too much reliance on pepperball. Leaders should have required officers to use batons and encouraged proper formations and half steps.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

RECENT CROWD CONTROL/FIELD FORCE TRAINING

Recently, Sgt. Knutson has implemented a train-the-trainer class for district trainers regarding field force operations. Under this new approach, district trainers are responsible for training the officers in their districts. It is a four-hour curriculum for both officers and command officers. The trainer have already been trained, but he is not sure if they have trained officers back in the districts. He notes that he wanted this to be an eight-hour class, but that idea was "squashed" because it would be too time

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intensive. He also wanted to bring officers to the Academy for the training, but that too was squashed. Hence the train-the-trainer model, which is less resource intensive. The course consists of 11 20-minute modules about crowd control and field force operations.

He also noted that Jason Burton and Jason Moore are two other potential experts on crowd control in the DPD. Further, Matt Lunn (in the Chief's office) recently sent around an 80-page report about recent protest events and best practices for crowd control. After the interview, I texted him to ask for a copy, and he said that he would provide it.

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