



South Carolina

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December 10, 2024

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

TO: File 2024-01466

FROM: Senior Special Agent Ryan Kelly

RE: Death Investigation

Dorchester County Sheriff's Office Canine (K-9) Orser, (Victim)

COUNTY: Dorchester

Introduction

On August 30, 2024, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) received a written request from Sheriff L.C. Knight of the Dorchester County Sheriff's Office (DCSO) to investigate the death of a DCSO K-9, where the K-9 was left unattended in a DCSO patrol vehicle by its handler, DCSO Deputy (Dep.) Brandon Edwards. SLED Captain (Capt.) Shaun Harley assigned Senior Special Agent (SS/A) Ryan Kelly to conduct the investigation.

Overview

According to the DCSO letter of request, DCSO Incident Report 24007561, and Dorchester Emergency 911 Call for Service Report 24058696 (**Attachment 1**), the following information was provided: On July 28, 2024, at approximately 9:10 p.m., DCSO responded to Dep. Edwards' residence located at [REDACTED], South Carolina (SC) in reference to the death of Dep. Edwards' DCSO K-9 Orser. DCSO Corporal (Cpl.) Shawn Buchanan located Orser deceased in the rear of Dep. Edwards' DCSO patrol vehicle. The K-9

was transported to Blue Pearl Emergency Animal Hospital where it was pronounced deceased. Cpl. Buchanan took photos of the scene (see Attachment 1).

Summary

Agent's Note: The interviews summarized in this report represent a synopsis of the interviews and are not verbatim transcripts unless otherwise indicated. Please refer to the corresponding attachments for the complete interviews.

On August 16, 2024, a necropsy and photographs (**Attachment 2**) determined a diagnosis of “generalized visceral congestion and pulmonary edema and cutaneous petechial to focal ecchymotic hemorrhage.” “...the possibility is not excluded that he may have had underlying and heretofore subclinical myocardial disease as could be observed with dilatory cardiomyopathy (DCM).” “Heat stroke is a diagnosis of excluded based in part of knowledge of the location and circumstances of the body at the time of death, the air temperature inside the vehicle and the core body temperature of the dog, as well as the absence of evidence of another organic condition that could explain sudden death.” If the K-9 had subclinical DCM, “he may have been more susceptible to complications of heat stress or heat stroke. A review of the K-9’s medical records found no pertinent information (see Attachment 2).

On October 8, 2024, SS/A Kelly conducted an audio/video recorded interview with Dep. Brandon Edwards (**Attachment 3**). The interview was summarized in a Memorandum of Interview (MOI) (see Attachment 3). Dep. Edwards was provided with a SLED Acknowledgement of Voluntary Statement (AVS) form (see Attachment 3) to which he indicated his understanding verbally and in writing. Dep. Edwards’ attorney, Donnie Gamache, was also present for the interview. Dep. Edwards provided a prepared statement (see Attachment 3) that contained the following information: Dep. Edwards has been employed by DCSO for approximately nine years. He had been paired with K-9 Osher since approximately February 2024. On July 28, 2024, he was at his residence [REDACTED] Dep. Barry Lowe came to his residence to switch DCSO patrol vehicles, a Chevrolet Tahoe and Chevrolet Suburban, between approximately 2:30 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. During the switch, Dep. Edwards

In addition to [REDACTED] switching patrol vehicles, the shattered windshield, and vehicle lock-out, Dep. Edwards advised he was under considerable stress that afternoon as he and [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

On September 17, 2024, SS/A Kelly conducted an audio/video recorded interview with DCSO Dep. Barry Lowe (**Attachment 4**). The interview was summarized in an MOI (see Attachment 4). Dep. Lowe was provided with a SLED AVS form (see Attachment 4) to which he indicated his understanding verbally and in writing. Dep. Lowe provided the following information: He is a K-9 handler with DCSO and has been employed with the agency for approximately one year and nine months. Dep. Lowe's assigned DCSO K-9 patrol vehicle was out of service, and he had been assigned a spare, unmarked, DCSO K-9 patrol vehicle to drive in the meantime. As a

result, Dep. Lowe and Dep. Edwards were sharing Dep. Edwards' marked, DCSO K-9 patrol vehicle and would meet to exchange vehicles prior to shift. On July 28, 2024, at approximately 3:00 p.m., Dep. Lowe responded to Dep. Edwards' residence to switch patrol vehicles. Dep. Lowe was in possession of the marked DCSO K-9 vehicle. Dep. Edwards had been off and was in possession of the unmarked spare vehicle. Upon arrival, Dep. Edwards advised he had locked the keys inside the unmarked vehicle. Dep. Lowe requested assistance, and Sgt. Gethers responded to unlock the vehicle. When Dep. Lowe arrived at Dep. Edwards' residence, Dep. Edwards' K-9 was inside the kennel, located inside Dep. Edwards' garage. The dog was barking as Dep. Lowe removed the K-9 from the kennel and put him in Dep. Edwards' fenced back yard. Sgt. Gethers then arrived on scene to unlock the vehicle as Dep. Lowe and Dep. Edwards began switching equipment between the vehicles. Sgt. Gethers left the scene and returned to service. The marked DCSO K-9 vehicle was turned on and the air conditioning activated as Dep. Edwards placed his K-9 inside the vehicle. Dep. Lowe asked Dep. Edwards why he put the K-9 in the vehicle, and Dep. Edwards responded that being inside the vehicle "calmed him (K-9) down." Dep. Edwards was [REDACTED] Dep. Edwards told Dep. Lowe he was leaving soon to pick up [REDACTED]

As they switched equipment, they noticed the driver's side rear tire on the marked DCSO K-9 vehicle appeared to be low. As Dep. Edwards and Dep. Lowe inspected the tire, a golf ball struck and damaged the windshield of the unmarked DCSO vehicle. *Agent's Note: Dep. Edwards' residence is located on a golf course.* Dep. Lowe notified his supervisor and then left Dep. Edwards' residence in the unmarked DCSO vehicle. Prior to leaving, Dep. Lowe observed Dep. Edwards move the marked DCSO K-9 vehicle to a parking space in his driveway. As he was leaving, Dep. Lowe observed Dep. Edwards exit the DCSO K-9 vehicle, and Dep. Lowe assumed Dep. Edwards turned the vehicle off.

At approximately 9:00 p.m., Dep. Lowe was notified by DCSO Sgt. Phillip Owens that Dep. Edwards' K-9 had died. Dep. Edwards called DCSO Lieutenant (Lt.) Shawn Napoli and Corporal (Cpl.) Shawn Buchanan and then met Cpl. Buchanan at the veterinarian. Dep. Lowe

observed the deceased K-9 to be “sweated,” and “covered in vomit.” Dep. Lowe did not observe any other signs of injury to the K-9. Cpl. Buchanan told him the K-9 had been left in a vehicle. Cpl. Buchanan and Dep. Lowe then responded to Dep. Edwards’ residence. Upon arrival, Dep. Edwards stated, “I messed up.” Dep. Edwards was crying and distraught. Dep. Edwards was also caring for [REDACTED]

Dep. Lowe did not observe or suspect Dep. Edwards to be under the influence of drugs or narcotics. Dep. Lowe advised as a K-9 handler, their training stressed the importance of not leaving their K-9 in a vehicle. Dep. Lowe was unaware of any stress Dep. Edwards may have been under and had no concerns about Dep. Edwards’ ability to care for a K-9.

On September 17, 2024, SS/A Kelly conducted an audio/video recorded interview with DCSO Cpl. Shawn Buchanan (**Attachment 5**). The interview was summarized in an MOI (see Attachment 5). Cpl. Buchanan was provided with a SLED AVS form (see Attachment 5) to which he indicated his understanding verbally and in writing. Cpl. Buchanan provided the following information: He is a K-9 handler with DCSO and has been employed with the agency for approximately nine years. Cpl. Buchanan has approximately seven years of experience as a K-9 handler. He received a call from Dep. Edwards’ personal cell phone at approximately 9:15 p.m. on the evening of July 28, 2024. Dep. Edwards was upset and stated, “He’s gone. He’s gone. He’s dead.” Cpl. Buchanan initially believed Dep. Edwards’ K-9 had escaped his enclosure until Dep. Edwards told him the K-9 was deceased. Cpl. Buchanan immediately responded to Dep. Edwards’ residence. When Cpl. Buchanan arrived on scene, he was met by Dep. Edwards, who told Cpl. Buchanan the K-9 was inside the DCSO vehicle. Dep. Edwards was crying and appeared very distraught. Cpl. Buchanan did not observe nor suspect Dep. Edwards to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Cpl. Buchanan opened the vehicle and located the K-9 deceased in the back. Cpl. Buchanan observed vomit and that the K-9 had been sweating but did not observe any other signs of injury. Cpl. Buchanan advised Dep. Edwards to sit down as he (Cpl. Buchanan) notified their supervisors. Dep. Edwards stated several times, “I fucked up.” Cpl. Buchanan then took photographs of the scene.

Cpl. Buchanan had known Dep. Edwards for approximately seven to eight years. Cpl. Buchanan observed the patrol vehicle's "Hot Pop" to be functional, but the vehicle had been turned off, rendering the "Hot Pop" inactive. *Agent's Note: Per Cpl. Buchanan, K-9 vehicles are outfitted with "Hot Pop" systems that monitor ambient temperatures inside vehicles. When the ambient temperature exceeded 84 degrees, the system would lower the vehicle's windows and sound an alarm.* Cpl. Buchanan advised K-9 officers are routinely trained on the dangers of leaving their K-9's in vehicles. Cpl. Buchanan had concerns about Dep. Edwards' commitment to training, as Dep. Edwards was experiencing stress at home.

On Tuesday, September 24, 2024, SS/A Kelly conducted a telephone interview with DCSO Sgt. Maxwell Gethers in reference to the death investigation of a DCSO K-9 that occurred on July 28, 2024. The interview was summarized in an MOI (**Attachment 6**). The interview took place over the telephone and was not recorded. The interview began at 11:38 a.m. Sgt. Gethers provided the following information: He is a patrol supervisor and responded to Dep. Edwards' residence at approximately 3:00 p.m. to assist with a DCSO patrol vehicle with the keys locked inside. Upon arrival, Sgt. Gathers met briefly with Dep. Lowe and Dep. Edwards. Sgt. Gethers unlocked the vehicle and left the residence. Sgt. Gethers estimated he was at Dep. Edwards' residence for approximately five to seven minutes. While present, Sgt. Gethers did not observe any K-9 present and could not recall if [REDACTED]

A review of Dep. Edwards' DCSO personnel file, DCSO training file, and South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy (SCCJA) training file (**Attachment 7**) found Dep. Edwards' Class 1 Law Enforcement Officer certification was active and in good standing. Dep. Edwards' Patrol Canine Team Certification was also active and in good standing. Dep. Edwards was disciplined on June 26, 2018 for violation of Rules and Regulations of DCSO Section 4 General Conduct subsection A and issued a one-day suspension. Dep. Edwards was disciplined on August 14, 2019 for lack of communication with his supervisors and issued a three-day suspension. Dep. Edwards was disciplined on December 4, 2019 for failing to complete documentation related to the apprehension of a juvenile and placed on desk duty. On September 12, 2024, Dep. Edwards

was demoted (see Attachment 7), received a reduction in pay, and was transferred from the DCSO K-9 Unit for violations of DCSO Policies and Procedures related to this incident.

The following documents were obtained pursuant to this investigation:

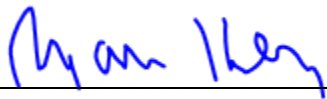
- DCSO Canine Operations policy (**Attachment 8**)
- DCSO Dep. Edwards’ patrol vehicle service record (**Attachment 9**)
- Dep. Edwards, criminal history, SCDMV 3-year driver history (**Attachment 10**)

Conclusion

- According to the DCSO Incident Report 24007561 and Dorchester Emergency 911 Call for Service report 24058696, the following information was provided: On September 28, 2024, at approximately 9:10 p.m., DCSO responded to Deputy (Dep.) Brandon Edwards’ residence located at [REDACTED], SC in reference to the death of Dep. Edwards’ DCSO K-9 Orser. DCSO Corporal (Cpl.) Shawn Buchanan located Orser deceased in the rear of Dep. Edwards’ DCSO patrol vehicle (Attachment 1).
- On August 16, 2024, a necropsy was conducted at Central Veterinary Hospital. A diagnosis of “generalized visceral congestion and pulmonary edema and cutaneous petechial to focal ecchymotic hemorrhage” was determined. “...the possibility is not excluded that he may have had underlying and heretofore subclinical myocardial disease as could be observed with dilatory cardiomyopathy (DCM).” “Heat stroke is a diagnosis of excluded based in part of knowledge of the location and circumstances of the body at the time of death, the air temperature inside the vehicle and the core body temperature of the dog, as well as the absence of evidence of another organic condition that could explain sudden death.” If the K-9 had subclinical DCM, “he may have been more susceptible to complications of heat stress or heat stroke (Attachment 2).
- On October 8, 2024, SS/A Kelly conducted an audio/video recorded interview with Dep. Brandon Edwards where Dep. Edwards acknowledged leaving the K-9 unattended in his DCSO patrol vehicle. In addition, Dep. Edwards was under immense stress [REDACTED] (Attachment 3).

- On October 8, 2024, SS/A Kelly conducted an audio/video recorded interview with DCSO Dep. Barry Lowe. Dep. Lowe confirmed switching vehicles with Dep. Edwards, the shattered windshield, and the flat tire. Dep. Lowe also returned to Dep. Edwards' residence and observed the K-9 deceased in the rear of the DCSO patrol vehicle (Attachment 4).
- On October 8, 2024, SS/A Kelly conducted an audio/video recorded interview with DCSO Corporal (Cpl.) Shawn Buchanan. Cpl. Buchanan responded to Dep. Edwards' residence and found Dep. Edwards crying and appearing very distraught. Cpl. Buchanan did not observe nor suspect Dep. Edwards to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Cpl. Buchanan observed the K-9 deceased in the back. Cpl. Buchanan observed vomit and that the K-9 had been sweating but did not observe any other signs of injury. Dep. Edwards stated several times, "I fucked up." Cpl. Buchanan then took photographs of the scene (Attachment 5).

The report will be submitted to the appropriate prosecutorial authority for review.



SS/A Ryan Kelly

Attachments

1. DCSO Letter of Request, DCSO Incident Report 24007561, Dorchester Emergency 911 Call for Service report 24058696 and DCSO photographs
2. Central Veterinary Hospital necropsy report and photographs
3. SLED recorded interview, SLED MOI, SLED AVS form, Dep. Brandon Edwards
4. SLED recorded interview, SLED MOI, SLED AVS form, Dep. Barry Lowe
5. SLED recorded interview, SLED MOI, SLED AVS form, Cpl. Shawn Buchanan
6. SLED MOI, Sgt. Maxwell Gethers
7. DCSO personnel file, DCSO training file and SCCJA training records, Dep. Edwards'
8. DCSO Canine Operation Policy
9. DCSO Dep. Edwards' patrol vehicle service record
10. criminal history and SCDMV 3-year driver history, Dep. Edwards

*Agent's Case Management History is maintained in the case file.