On January 15, 2011, the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation was contacted by the Fort Shawnee Police Department. Chief Benjamin Kehres requested BCI assistance in both the processing of a scene and the investigation of an officer-involved shooting, in the village of Fort Shawnee, Ohio. Special Agents David Hammond and Jeff Cook were assigned to process the scene, while Special Agents David Pauly and Thomas Brokamp were assigned to investigate the events surrounding the shooting incident. The incident itself involved three Fort Shawnee Police Officers; Justin Bentz, Justin Wireman, and Darrell Fields, as well as Mr. John Sowders.

Agents were advised that at approximately 3:00 a.m., Fort Shawnee Officers conducted a traffic stop near the 100 block of Olentangy Drive, in the Indian Village Mobile Home Park. A physical altercation ensued between the Fort Shawnee Officers and the subject, later identified as John Sowders. Mr. Sowders confronted the officers with a knife, cutting one of the officers on his hand. The knife was located at the scene and identified as a Cold Steel brand. Mr. Sowders was tased numerous times but seemed unaffected by the ampage. Mr. Sowders continued to fight with the officers, while still brandishing the knife. Mr. Sowders was shot at by two Fort Shawnee Officers (3 rounds), one round making contact with Mr. Sowders. He was transported to St. Rita Hospital, Lima, where he was pronounced dead.

Special Agents David Pauly and Thomas Brokamp interviewed the three Fort Shawnee Officers involved in the traffic stop and subsequent shooting. Officer Justin A. Bentz was interviewed first, followed by Corporal Darrell Mark Fields, and lastly, Officer Justin M. Wireman. It was determined through the interviews that Officer Bentz and Corporal Fields both fired their weapons, while Officer Wireman did not. Officer Bentz fired his weapon one time, while Corporal Fields fired his weapon twice. The weapons were collected for examination and GSR tests were completed on the officers. The interviews provided additional information regarding the traffic stop and subsequent physical confrontation with Mr. Sowders.
After speaking with the Fort Shawnee Officers, SA Pauly requested the Chief provide radio logs, cad screens, and radio traffic audio of the incident, training records, personnel files, officers' written statements, copies of the administrative leave, work schedules, and use of force policy, as well as several other documents, to provide assistance and clarification in the investigation. It should be noted that SA Pauly requested the in-car video system be collected, but learned that the system was not operational in either cruiser.

Agents then responded to the crime scene, near the 100 block of Olentangy Drive, in the Indian Valley Mobile Home Park, Allen County, Ohio. Upon arrival to the scene, BCI Crime Scene Agents David Hammond and Jeffery Cook were present processing the scene. Also present just outside the police taped area at the scene, in cruisers, were two Allen County Deputies to the west, and a Fort Shawnee Officer to the east, providing security. SA Pauly also observed Allen County Sergeant Fred DePalma assisting BCI Crime Scene Agents.

SA Pauly observed the scene which can be described as the following: two Fort Shawnee Police cruisers identified as Unit #312 and Unit #314, facing west (Unit #312 north of Unit #314, in near side-by-side formation). Fort Shawnee Unit #312 was positioned behind and slightly to the south of a light gray Nissan Sentra, with registration number EZC1509, with the overhead lights still activated. The gray Sentra had its driver's side door open and what appeared to be a black knife sheath on the snowy ground at the door's opening. A sketch of the scene is provided in the exhibits of this case file. Please see crime scene reports for a more thorough description of the crime scene.

SA Pauly walked the area and spoke with neighbors located at 109, 113, 121, 112, 116, 120 Olentangy Drive to determine if they heard or observed anything that would shed light on the incident. SA Pauly spoke with all the neighbors at these locations, except for the trailer at 113. The trailer appeared to be abandoned. SA Pauly and SA Brokamp also made contact with Christopher M. Poling, a resident of the Trailer Park, 201 Tuscarawas Drive, Fort Shawnee. Mr. Poling was identified as a person that may know the victim, John Sowders.

SA Pauly and SA Brokamp also met with Mr. Bruce Sowders, father of John Sowders. Mr. Bruce Sowders was called to the hospital to identify the victim. Mr. Sowders did positively identify the body of his son, John Sowders. An interview of Mr. Bruce Sowders was conducted at the Allen County Sheriff's Office. While at the Allen County Sheriff's Office, SA Pauly requested any reports, audio, cruiser video, photographs of the initial deputies that arrived at the scene. Further, SA Pauly requested a time and date to interview the three deputies, Deputy Sgt. Terry Sneary, Deputy John D. Chiles, and Deputy Todd Mohler. On January 19, 2011, SA Pauly interviewed all three deputies and retrieved reports, in-car video, and dispatch information.

SA Pauly went to the American Petroleum gas station, at 1250 W. Breese Rd., at the I-75 exit #120. During the brief interview with Sgt. Fields, SA Pauly learned that the victim's vehicle may have been parked at the gas station 30 minutes prior to the traffic stop. SA Pauly spoke with the clerk, and subsequently the manager, Joshua Singh. Mr. Singh provided an in-store video download and turned that over to SA Pauly. SA Pauly learned the name of the third shift clerk and subsequently interviewed her for any information. Nothing of any evidentiary value on the video.
During the course of this investigation, many documents, videos, and other pertinent materials were collected. The materials were received from various departments in the Allen County area. The purpose for collection was to assist in the documentation of the events that took place on January 15, 2011, at the Indian Village Mobile Home Park. Below are listed the documents collected, a description of the document or item, from whom they were collected, and the date the item was collected:

- **Fort Shawnee Police Department Personnel Roster** – reflects the personnel employed with the Fort Shawnee Police/Police Chief Benjamin Kehres/January 15, 2011
- **Fort Shawnee Police Department Work Assignment** – reflects officer assigned to duty for month of January 2001/Police Chief Benjamin Kehres/January 15, 2011
- **Copy of Administrative Leave** – reflects paid administrative leave for Officer Justin Bentz and Officer Darrell M. Fields/Police Chief Benjamin Kehres/January 15, 2011
- **Personnel Files** – reflects the personnel file of Justin Bentz, Justin Wireman, and Darrell Fields/Police Chief Benjamin Kehres/January 16, 2011
- **Cridersville Police Cruiser In-Car Video** – reflects video of Officer Huston’s response to the scene at Indian Village, post shooting/Cridersville Police Chief John Drake/January 16, 2011
- **CD of Audio of Radio Traffic and Phone Calls** – reflects audio and phone calls made to the Allen County Sheriff’s Office as well as police radio traffic, including Fort Shawnee Officers/Allen County Deputy Gerry Morris/January 16, 2011
- **Thumb Drive of In-Store Video at American Petroleum** – reflects the in-store patrons of the American Petroleum gas station located at 1250 W. Breese Road on January 15, 2011 from 1:00 a.m. until 4:00 a.m./Store Manager Gurminder “Josh” Singh/January 16, 2011
- **Calls For Service CAD Screens** – reflects the computer aided dispatch screens of calls for service, regarding the shots fired incident at Indian Village Mobile Home Park/Allen County Deputy Gerry Morris/January 18, 2011
- **CD of Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) Log** – reflects the activity of the occupants of Fort Shawnee Police Department Cruiser #314 on January 15, 2011 (Fields/Wireman)/Allen County Deputy Gerry Morris/January 18, 2011
- **CD of Allen County Deputy In-Car Video** – reflects video of Allen County Deputies response to the scene at Indian Village, post shooting/Allen County Deputy Gerry Morris/January 18, 2011
- **CD of Photographs of Scene** – reflects photographic documentation taken by Allen County Sgt. Fred DePalma, to include injuries to Officer Justin Wireman/Allen County Sgt. Fred DePalma/January 19, 2011
- **Copy of Allen County Sgt. Fred DePalma Crime Scene Report** – reflects the actions taken by Sgt. DePalma upon his arrival to the scene at Indian Village/Allen County Sgt. Fred DePalma/January 19, 2011
- **Allen County SO Report** – reflects the typewritten report of Allen County Deputy John Donald Chiles documenting he and fellow Allen County Deputies (Sneary, DePalma, and Mohler) arrival at the scene/Allen County Sgt. Terry Sneary/January 19, 2011
- **Fort Shawnee Use of Force Policy** – reflects the Fort Shawnee Police Department’s policy on use of force, to include deadly force/Fort Shawnee Chief Benjamin Kehres/January 24, 2001

- **Shawnee Township Fire Department Report** – reflects the handwritten and typewritten reports of the EMT personnel that arrived at the scene of the shooting at Indian Village Mobile Home Park. The reports also reflect the EMT who located a bullet in the clothing area of the victim. The expended bullet was turned over to Allen County Deputy Chiles, where it was bagged into evidence and turned over to BCI Crime Scene Agents/Shawnee Township Fire Department Chief/January 24, 2011

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**The following individuals were interviewed:**

- **Fort Shawnee Officer Justin Bentz** – Initial officer on traffic stop. Fired his taser during physical confrontation with Mr. Sowders, with no effect. Fired weapon (.40 Cal Glock) one time at Mr. Sowders, while being chased by a knife-wielding Mr. Sowders, while Mr. Sowders was yelling that he was going to kill the officer. The round and cartridge were recovered the scene. The round missed Mr. Sowders and impacted a vehicle parked on the north side of the roadway. Provided a typed written statement of the events, along with his verbal statement to agents.

- **Fort Shawnee Officer Justin Wireman** – Arrived on scene with Corporal Fields, after Officer Bentz initiated his traffic stop. Assisted Officer Bentz in attempts to talk Mr. Sowders out of the vehicle. Engaged in a physical confrontation with Mr. Sowders, where Mr. Sowders brandished a knife and cut Officer Wireman on his right hand between his thumb and forefinger. Officer Wireman fired his taser with no effect. Assisted Corporal Fields in chasing Mr. Sowders, who in turn was chasing Officer Bentz with a knife. Officer Wireman yelled for Corporal Fields to shoot Mr. Sowders. Provided a typewritten statement of the events, along with his verbal statement to agents. Justin Wireman also provided a Buccal swab for any DNA comparisons with the knife.

- **Fort Shawnee Corporal Darrell Fields** – Arrived on scene with Officer Wireman. Once a physical confrontation took place between Officer Wireman and Mr. Sowders, Corporal Fields fired his taser at Mr. Sowders with no effect. As Mr. Sowders chased Officer Bentz with a knife held high in the air, Corporal Fields gave pursuit on Mr. Sowders. Corporal Fields fired his weapon twice at Mr. Sowders, missing one time, but striking Mr. Sowders at his left shoulder area. The round exited Mr. Sowders’ chest as Mr. Sowders fell to the ground and was subsequently pronounced dead. Both cartridges were located at the scene. One 9mm Lugar round was located by EMS upon examination of Mr. Sowders at the scene. Corporal Fields provided a typewritten statement of the events, along with his verbal statement to agents.

- **Fort Shawnee Police Chief Benjamin Kehres** – Provided departmental documents requested by BCI.
Residents of the Indian Village Mobile Home Park - SA Pauly determined that the six mobile home trailers in the direct area. SA Pauly determined that mobile home #113 was abandoned.

Mobile Home #109 – Gerald C. Gay advised that he was in his trailer all night and did not hear any commotion or noise at all. Mr. Gay advised that he sleeps at the far (east) end of the trailer and didn’t know anything had occurred last night or early this morning until he woke up at 8:00 a.m. and observed police cruisers outside.

Mobile Home #112 – Sheila J. Hall advised that she was up at approximately 3:00 a.m. the morning of 1/15/2011, as she had just finished conducting a breathing treatment for a bronchial issue. Ms. Hall had just finished the treatment when she observed the flashing lights of a police car and observed "a cop car pulling over another car.” Ms. Hall stated that she thought it was "some idiot driving this time of night was going to get a ticket.” Ms. Hall sat back down on her couch. Approximately five to ten minutes later, Ms. Hall advised that she heard some yelling outside. Ms. Hall couldn’t make out what was being said, other than she heard someone yell “stop”. After the yelling, Ms. Hall stated that she heard “what sounded like three gunshots.” Ms. Hall got off the couch and looked out her window. Ms. Hall observed three officers with their firearms out and pointing toward another subject on the ground, across the street. The person on the ground was not moving. Ms. Hall advised that she watched one of the officers checked the person on the ground, stating “he checked his pulse or whatever. He looked dead to me.” After the officer checked the guy, all the officers started walking around, talking on their radios and looking around with their flashlights on the ground. Ms. Hall advised that she went and sat back down on the couch and heard the sounds of other police cars and an ambulance, but did not observe anything else.

Mobile Home #116 – Melissa A. Folk advised that she was sleeping on her couch, which is located near the front door of her mobile home. Ms. Folk advised that she was asleep and woke up to the sound of yelling and some gunshots from outside; sometime after 3:00 a.m. Ms. Folk stated she heard three gunshots. Ms. Folk advised that she could not determine what was being said during the yelling, but was able to hear men’s voices yelling prior to the three gunshots. Ms. Folk advised that she never observed any of the activity until after she heard the gunshots. Ms. Folk stated she then got up from the couch and looked outside. Ms. Folk observed a couple of police cars and another car with its door open. Ms. Folk advised that the lights of the police cruiser "kind of blinded” her and she couldn't see a lot of what was going on. Ms. Folk advised that she could see a couple of "shadows; of people across the street at the trailer at 113 Olentangy Drive.” Ms. Folk couldn’t make out if the shadows were of officers or other people. Ms. Folk did advise that the streetlight gave her enough like that she observed a person in Khaki pants, on the ground between the tree and that trailer, with one leg bent upward. The person did not look like he was moving. Ms. Folk advised that she walked away from the window for awhile, as she was startled by the gunshots and
didn’t want to see anything more. Ms. Folk did advise that she got back off
the couch later and observed the ambulance personnel “working” on the
person on the ground. Ms. Folk advised that she really didn’t see much else.

**Mobile Home #120 – LaDonna M. Roys** advised that she sleeps on her
couch all the time, falling asleep to the television. Ms. Roys advised that she
did not hear or see anything, but advised that she probably heard the noise, but
associated it with the television.

**Mobile Home #121 – Billie Fugatt** advised that it was sometime between
3:00-3:30 a.m.; she and her husband, Bill Fugatt, were in their bedroom,
asleep in bed. Ms. Fugatt advised that she had just turned over in bed when
she heard “two pops...it went pop-pop,” outside somewhere. Ms. Fugatt
advised that her window faces the area where the subject on the ground was
lying. Ms. Fugatt advised that “it sounded like it was just outside our bedroom
window.” Ms. Fugatt advised that she looked out her window and observed
what appeared to be three to four officers and someone on the ground. Mr.
Fugatt advised that he heard the sound of one gunshot and the voices of a
couple of officers, but that was all. Mr. Fugatt advised that he couldn’t make
d & if % of the conversations, and didn’t hear any yelling, only the low sound
of voices talking.

- **Bruce Sowders** – Father of the deceased John Sowders. Positively identified son as the
decedent. Advised that he knew John drank alcohol a little bit, and characterized son as a
loner type and outdoorsman. Did not know of any medical issues or mental health issues,
but advised that as a child John spent some time in a facility in Troy, Ohio for behavioral
issues. Provided a verbal statement to agents.

- **Christopher Poling** – Good friend and occasional roommate of John Sowders. Helped to
identify the vehicle at the scene as being owned by John Sowders. *Please see additional
criminal intelligence report submitted to the Allen County Sheriff’s Office.*

- **American Petroleum Manager Gurminder Singh** – Provided in-store video of January
15, 2011.

- **American Petroleum 3rd Shift Clerk Susan Hartman** – Could not provide any
information regarding Mr. Sowders or his vehicle being present during her shift.

- **Allen County Sheriff Deputy Sgt Terry Sneary** – Third deputy to the scene upon
hearing the “shots fired” radio traffic. Assisted with crime scene tape and protected the
two shell casings with rolls of tape. Went to John Sowders’ residence to ask about owner
of vehicle. Spoke with John Sowders’ mother. Provided a report on activities along with
his verbal statement.

- **Allen County Sheriff Deputy John Donald Chiles** – Second deputy to the scene.
Collected a fired 9mm round from the EMT’s they located in Mr. Sowders clothing at the
scene. Turned evidence over to BCI. Provided a report of activities along with a verbal
statement.
• **Allen County Sheriff Deputy Todd Mohler** – First deputy to the scene, approximately 7 minutes after the “shot fired” radio traffic was broadcast. Deputy Mohler spoke briefly with Officer Bentz while at scene. Followed the squad with Mr. Sowders aboard, to the emergency room. Could smell a strong odor of an alcoholic beverage from inside the room where Mr. Sowders’ body lay. Provided a report of activities along with a verbal statement.

• **Vince Downing** – General Manager at Tom Ahl Dealership. Sowders was hired in February of 2010; took two weeks off to go live in the woods in southern Ohio in July of 2010; and took a voluntary layoff in September of 2010. Advised he was a solid worker that kept to himself. No disciplinary issues.

• **Robert Linehan** – Supervisor of John Sowders at Ahl Dealership. Advised he was a solid worker that kept to himself. No disciplinary issues. Provided name of Mr. Sowders’ ex-girlfriend to agent.

• **Kara Fulford** – Ex-girlfriend of John Sowders. Began dating Mr. Sowders in September of 2006. She broke it off with Mr. Sowders in November of 2010. Advised that Mr. Sowders did drink, but had only seen him get drunk on one occasion (just after the break up). She knew of no medical or mental health issues with Mr. Sowders.

• **Several Family Members** – Met with Timothy Graham, Kurt Kuncel, and Matthew Frank. The family had information they wished to pass on as well as many questions regarding the incident. SA Pauly took their information for follow up, but could only answer a small minority of their questions due to the open investigation.

On 1/31/2011, SA David Hammond advised that he had received the toxicology report on Mr. Sowders’ blood alcohol content at the time of the traffic stop and shooting incident. The report indicates that Mr. Sowders BAC was **24** (three times the legal limit for driving a vehicle). A copy of that report will be included with SA Hammond’s reports. SA Pauly further received lab results regarding taser information, and shooting distances. It was determined that the taser information was consistent with the time frame the officers advised they activated each of their tasers. It was further determined that BCI lab results of the estimated shot distances were not less than four feet away from Mr. Sowders. It should be noted that the distances are only an estimate and could be much further from four feet, but not less than four feet. SA Pauly provided the investigation results to the Allen County Prosecutor’s Office for review, and additional information will be forwarded to both the Prosecutor’s Office and Grand Jury upon its receipt. Detailed reports are included in the investigative file, along with various other attachments including, photographs, videos, and audio files.