

For Immediate Release

Contact: Amy Brown
Abrown@pacga.org
(706) 638-2121



District Attorney Chris A. Arnt Completes Review of Officer Involved Shooting of Jack Lamar Harris

September 1, 2021, Catoosa County, GA – Lookout Mountain District Attorney Chris A. Arnt has released his finding in the Officer Involved Shooting of Jack Lamar Harris.

Facts:

On August 19, 2020, Jack Lamar Harris was shot and killed by law enforcement officers from the Lookout Mountain Judicial Circuit (LMJC) Drug Task Force (DTF) and the Walker County Sheriff's Department (WCSO). This shooting was investigated by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI). District Attorney Arnt has reviewed the case file and determined the shooting was a legitimate use of force by law enforcement officers under Georgia Law.

In this case, Walker County 911 received a call on the morning of August 19, 2020, regarding a violent domestic assault that was in progress. A female victim (CL) advised that Jack Lamar Harris had repeatedly beaten her, threatened to kill her and that he was armed with a gun. Deputies were dispatched to the area of Brotherton Lane in Chickamauga. Agents of the LMJC DTF were already in the same general area on an unrelated investigation and also decided to respond due to the nature of the call. WCSO Deputies and the DTF agents arrived at the female victim's residence at about the same time.

When officers arrived, they had already been advised that Harris was the suspect, he was likely armed with a handgun, and there was a violent physical assault in progress by Harris against CL. Officers approached the residence and announced their presence. Harris emerged from the house onto the porch and with one hand concealed from the officers' view. Officers commanded Harris to show his hands, whereupon he stated "f*ck this" and stepped back into the residence. Officers

were about to implement the protocol for a barricaded gunman with a possible hostage when Harris stepped back onto the porch with a handgun in his right hand.

WCSO deputies and the DTF agents immediately began telling Harris to drop the gun. Harris instead chose to level the gun directly towards the chest of the closest DTF agent. Subsequently, a WCSO deputy and two DTF agents fired at Harris, virtually simultaneously, with about 10 rounds striking Harris and killing him. Harris still had the firearm clutched in his right hand when he fell to the ground.

Officers searched the residence and located a badly beaten and partially nude CL inside the residence. CL's eyes and face were so badly beaten that her eyes were virtually swollen shut. CL was bloody and bruised all over her body. Harris had pulled large clumps of hair from CL's head. Harris arrived at the victim's residence the night before the incident. An argument ensued between the victim and Harris, who was drunk and smoking crack. Harris beat CL throughout the night and into the next morning, using his hands, fists, a bridle, a gun and knives to assault and choke CL. He also threatened to kill CL's cat. CL was able to get Harris' phone and call 911 on the morning of August 19, 2020. Once Harris learned that law enforcement was on the way, he told CL that he would kill her and himself when the police arrived. According to CL, Harris called a family member while waiting for the police to arrive and told them he was about to die. Once the police arrived, Harris went out to meet them and CL could see him with the pistol in his hand extended out like he was about to shoot someone. She then heard several gunshots, which sounded fast and in close proximity to each other. Officers then entered the residence and had CL taken to CHI Memorial for medical treatment.

The GBI investigation of the scene corroborated the statements of CL and the officers on the scene. An examination of Harris' gun by a GBI crime scene specialist, determined the gun to be a starter pistol, which is a blank gun designed to be used to start a race. This fact would have been unknown to the officers on the scene. A review of Harris' criminal record revealed a history of violence and specifically violent domestic assaults.

Applicable Law:

O.C.G.A. § 17-4-20 (b) provides that a law enforcement officer may use deadly force to apprehend a suspected felon only when the officer reasonably believes that the suspect possesses a deadly weapon or any object, device, or instrument which, when used offensively against a person, is likely to or actually does result in serious bodily injury; when the officer reasonably believes that the suspect poses an immediate threat of physical violence to the officer or others; or when there is probable cause to believe that the suspect has committed a crime involving the infliction or threatened infliction of serious physical harm.

O.C.G.A § 16-2-21 (a) provides that a person is justified in threatening or using force against another when and to the extent that he or she reasonably believes that such threat or force is necessary to defend himself or herself or a third person against such other's imminent use of unlawful force; however, except as provided in Code Section 16-3-23, a person is justified in using force which is intended or likely to cause death or great bodily harm only if he or she reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent death or great bodily injury to himself or herself or a third person or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony.

District Attorney Arnt's Conclusion:

It is clear beyond a reasonable doubt that Harris was engaged in a violent assault of CL during which he was armed with a gun and knives. Once law enforcement officers arrived, Harris elected not to comply with the officers' commands and instead chose to arm himself with a gun. When ordered to drop the gun, he instead made the choice to point it directly at the chest of a law enforcement officer. At this point officers had only one real choice and that was to fire on Harris to protect the safety of the victim and the officers. The officers were in legitimate fear of serious bodily injury or death and were justified under O.C.G.A § 16-2-21 (a) to use deadly force. In addition officers were justified in using force under O.C.G.A. § 17-4-20 (b) as they were faced with an armed violent criminal who was engaged in a violent assault that had already produced serious physical injury to Cl and who posed a current danger of causing physical harm to CL and to law enforcement officers.

District Attorney Arnt stated that “The loss of anyone’s life is tragic, and the decisions and actions that lead to Harris’s death were the direct result of his own choices. I hope and pray that the officers who were forced to take actions that resulted in the death of Mr. Harris, are able to cope with the trauma this has caused them. I also hope and pray that CL has a full recovery from her injuries.”

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