

Inquiry/referral IA No: INQ Piazza Received: Aug 24, 2016

Case #:

Officers involved:

Officer Benjamin P. Piazza [884/70792]

Officer current info:

Department: Uniform Operations
Division: Patrol
Sector: Sector 3

Snapshot - Officer information at time of incident:

Employee #: 70792
Department: Investigative Services
Division: Special Investigations
Sector:
Zone: Bravo
Unit: Organize Crime (CRT)
User defined 6:
Rank/title: Officer
Age: 31 Years of employment: 3 Years with unit:
Off duty: Unk Off duty employed: Unk

Officer complainants:

Sergeant Peter Turk [242/61226]

Officer current info:

Department: Investigative Services
Division: Major Investigations
Sector:

Officer witnesses:

Sergeant James Anthony Blanton [747/42761]

Officer current info:

Department: Uniform Operations
Division: Patrol
Sector: Sector 2

Officer Charles W Bramlett [360/66966]

Officer current info:

Department: Uniform Operations
Division: Patrol
Sector: Sector 2

Officer Steven R. Meador [855/66989]

Officer current info:

Department: Investigative Services
Division: Special Operations
Sector: RESIGNED 2/19/18

Officer Harry E. Horton [470/68401]

Officer current info:

Department: Uniform Operations
Division: Patrol
Sector: Baker Sector

Officer Lauren Haley Gregory [912/71964]

Officer current info:

Department: Uniform Operations
Division: Patrol
Sector: Sector 2

Officer Mark Edward Niethammer [979/71978]

Officer current info:

Department: Uniform Operations
Division: Patrol
Sector: Sector 2

Officer Desmond L. Logan [910/73507]

Officer current info:

Department: Uniform Operations
Division: Patrol
Sector: Baker Sector

Officer Joseph Caleb Sanchez [1046/73514]

Officer current info:

Department: Uniform Operations
Division: Patrol
Sector: Sector 2

Summary:

On Saturday August 20, 2016 Inv. Piazza was assigned to use an undercover vehicle and to be in plain clothes to help with violent crime enforcement throughout the city. On his way back to the SCRT office he was involved in an incident with several patrol officers that were dealing with a call at 2514 Amnicola Hwy. Sgt. Blanton called Sgt. Campbell to report the incident, but Sgt. Campbell informed him that Piazza worked for me. Sgt. Campbell informed me by text message at 0020 hours on August 21 that a complaint might be made against Inv. Piazza. I immediately called Inv. Piazza to ask him about the incident. I asked Inv. Piazza if he had been involved in anything that would cause a third shift supervisor to be calling for his supervisor in the middle of the night. He advised that he had, and I told him to tell me what had happened. Inv. Piazza told me that on his way back to the office he thought he would play a prank on the officers at 2514 Amnicola Hwy. He stated that he drove by and yelled out the window of the undercover vehicle "Fuck 12" at the officers on scene. He stated that some of the officers followed him to the SCRT office and confronted him about the incident. He stated that they felt disrespected by his actions and he felt that they had overreacted to what he said. Piazza stated that the officers supervisor had responded to the scene and had discussed

the incident with everyone involved. I asked Inv. Piazza if his actions had caused any of the officers to turn their lights on and to pursue him. He stated that they had not. At that point I contacted Car 19 which was Sgt. Jason Lewis (Acting LT for Organized Crime) and explained the incident to him as Inv. Piazza had relayed it to me.

I believed at the time that Inv. Piazza used poor judgment in his choice of actions, as well as misused his role in plain clothes and undercover vehicle department vehicle. Being that it was early in the morning and we were both off duty at that point I decided to address those issues at a later time.

On Sunday August 21, 2016 around 2330 hours Sgt. Blanton called me and advised that there was more to the incident than had been relayed to me by Inv. Piazza. Sgt. Blanton advised that Inv. Piazza drove by several times, each time doing something more aggressive to try and illicit a response from the officers on the call. Eventually Inv. Piazza drove by and threw some firecrackers out of the window of his undercover vehicle in an area that the officers would hear them.

That night I logged in to back end client to see if I could see any in car camera video of the incident. I found one video from Officer Bramlett that started at 2359 hours and was 4 minutes and 40 seconds long. The video showed the patrol car activate blue lights and travel at a speed of over 90 miles per hour heading from 2514 Amnicola Hwy back toward the police service center. The patrol car turns right on Wisdom St, right on Elmendorf, and ends up next to property division on Elmendorf. Audio picks up an officer stating that they thought they were being shot. An officer states that it was Inv. Piazza playing a prank, and several officers expressed displeasure at his actions. After watching the video and speaking with Sgt. Blanton I realized that there was more to the incident than Inv. Piazza had told me about.

After line up on Monday August 22, 2016 I asked Inv. Piazza to stay after to talk to him about the incident. At that point Inv. Piazza stated that he had driven by the officers on Amnicola several times. The first time he gunned the engine and then sped off. The next time he honked the horn and sped off. He called one of the officers on scene and asked them why he couldn't get a reaction from them. The next time he yelled out the window "Fuck 12" and sped off. All this time he did not get a reaction from the patrol officers. Finally he drove by and threw some small firecrackers out the window and sped off. He left the area and returned to the SCRT office. He received a phone call from one of the officers and they told him about the disturbance he had caused. He went to speak with them about the incident. Inv. Piazza felt that he was just playing a joke and that the patrol officers overreacted. The patrol officers felt that his version of a joke was in very poor taste. Inv. Piazza stated that he thought that the officers on scene knew that it was him in the vehicle and that he was playing a prank. I checked with dispatch to see if any of the officers had reported shots fired or had relayed on the radio that they had begun a pursuit of a shots fired suspect. Dispatch had no record of that type of incident, and the in car video that I had available did not show any radio traffic to that effect.

I asked why the version of the incident that he told me early Sunday morning was different from the version that he had just told me. He stated that he was embarrassed by his actions, and that he did not want me to find out what had happened. He stated that after speaking with the other officers and supervisors involved, that the incident was resolved. He stated that he did not tell me the truth because he felt that the incident was over and the details would not come out.

Inv. Piazza's actions reflect very poorly on the Street Crimes Unit. His actions were not reflective of that of an officer in an undercover role. He put other officers and citizens in danger due to the emergency response that his actions created. Inv. Piazza in the beginning, was not truthful when questioned by me about the incident.

After speaking with Inv. Piazza I informed my acting Lt, Sgt. Lewis, about the actual details of the incident.

Without calling other officers in to be interviewed, I have not been able to gather further information about the incident. There were other patrol cars involved that had their emergency equipment activated, but as of the time of this report there are no other video's available through back end client. When I spoke with Sgt. Blanton Sunday night, I asked him to relay to his officers involved to make sure that their videos had uploaded.

Inv. Piazza has had several incidents involving poor decision making that were handled at first informally, and then through documentation on his evaluation. This is a continued pattern of poor decision making.

I am forwarding this investigative narrative to my chain of command for documentation and for further instructions on how the investigation should proceed.

When/where:

Date/time occurred: Aug 20 2016 23:55

Incident location: N/A 2514 Amnicola Hwy Highway Chattanooga TN
County: City of Chattanooga

Linked files:

Summary and Findings - Piazza - Code of Conduct - 10072016 (pdf)
Section of policy pertaining to Piazza 10072016 (pdf)
Benjamin Piazza (doc)

DRH Recordings:

DRH Piazza, Benjamin 1st Recording 5-16-2017 102_0079 (MP3)
DRH Piazza, Benjamin 2nd Recording 5-16-2017 702_0080 (MP3)

Status/assignment information:

Status: Initial

Opened: Assigned: Due: Completed:

Disposition:

Unit assigned: Criminal Investigation
Handled at field/unit level: No
Investigator assign: Un-assigned
Supervisor assign: Un-assigned
Source of information:

Organizational component(s):

Department: Investigative Services
Division: Special Investigations
Unit: Organize Crime (CRT)
User defined 6: MIDNIGHT

BlueTeam chain routings

Aug 24, 2016 18:34: Sent from Sergeant Peter Turk [242/61226] to Lewis, Robert Jason Lieutenant [808/44558]

Instructions:

For your review and instructions.

Reviewed by Lieutenant Robert Jason Lewis [808/44558] on Aug 26, 2016 at 10:52

Decision: Approved

Reviewer comment:

I am in full agreement with Sgt. Turk and will forward this on to Captain Vaughn. On the night of, I observed the van pull in the narcotics lot and back out almost immediately from the office window. I wondered who was driving, but never saw any of the incident that took place or the driver for that matter. The van pulled back in the lot shortly after and no further activity took place. I recovered the keys days later and I suggested that Piazza be restricted in his duties until this incident has been looked into. Thanks
JL

Aug 26, 2016 10:52: Sent from Lieutenant Robert Jason Lewis [808/44558] to Vaughn, Nathan A. Captain [679/41354]

Instructions:

For your review

Reviewed by Captain Nathan A. Vaughn [679/41354] on Sep 07, 2016 at 11:39

Decision: Approved

Reviewer comment:

Chief McPherson,

This is the first incident where Piazza's supervisors have noted issues with integrity. Per our conversation this morning, I recommend that this and the 2nd be reviewed by IA as to what level of investigation they feel is warranted.

Respectfully,

Capt. N. Vaughn #679

Sep 07, 2016 11:39: Sent from Captain Nathan A. Vaughn [679/41354] to McPherson, Edwin D. Assistant Chief [752/42762]

Instructions:

Chief McPherson,

This is the first incident where Piazza's supervisors have noted issues with integrity. Per our conversation this morning, I recommend that this and the 2nd be reviewed by IA as to what level of investigation they feel is warranted.

Respectfully,

Capt. N. Vaughn #679

Reviewed by Assistant Chief Edwin D. McPherson [752/42762] on Sep 13, 2016 at 14:09

Decision: Approved

Reviewer comment:

I concur

Sep 13, 2016 14:09: Sent from Assistant Chief Edwin D. McPherson [752/42762] to Bacon, Pedro L. Captain [670/41309]

Instructions:

Lt. Bacon, I am forwarding this documentation to your office for an Inquiry and review of the facts surrounding this case.

Reviewed by Captain Pedro L. Bacon [670/41309] on Sep 21, 2016 at 11:12

Decision: Approved

Reviewer comment:

[Forward to IAPro by Lieutenant Pedro Bacon]

Sep 23, 2016 11:03: Sent from Captain Pedro L. Bacon [670/41309] to Vaughn, Nathan A. Captain [679/41354]

Instructions:

Hey Captain this is the Piazza incident that should be investigated by your chain

Reviewed by Captain Nathan A. Vaughn [679/41354] on Oct 07, 2016 at 12:33

Decision: Approved

Reviewer comment:

[Captain Nathan Vaughn has re-assigned the incident to Assistant Chief Edwin McPherson]

Oct 07, 2016 12:33: Sent from Captain Nathan A. Vaughn [679/41354] to McPherson, Edwin D. Assistant Chief [752/42762]

Instructions:

Chief,

For your review and recommendation.

Capt. N. Vaughn #679

Reviewed by Assistant Chief Edwin D. McPherson [752/42762] on Dec 12, 2017 at 13:22

Decision: N/A

Reviewer comment:

Orphan routing closed out in IAPro by IAPro user Lieutenant Toby Hewitt

Entered via BlueTeam by: Sergeant Peter Turk [242/61226] on Aug 24, 2016 at 15:05