

Black airman's family wants body-cam video released

Fortson fatally shot at home by Florida deputy

Brendan O'Brien

REUTERS

A Florida sheriff's deputy who fatally shot a Black airman over the weekend may have entered the wrong apartment in response to a disturbance call, according to the family's attorney who is demanding the release of body-camera video showing the shooting.

The shooting occurred on the afternoon of May 3, when a deputy with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office went to the apartment complex, entered the unit and opened fire, according to a statement from Sheriff Eric Aden.

Six shots hit Roger Fortson, 23, a senior Air Force airman who was at home in his apartment, according to attorney Ben Crump, who is representing Fortson's family.

The sheriff said the deputy heard sounds of a disturbance and reacted in self-defense after he encountered an armed man. The sheriff did not name Fortson in his statement or give any more detail on the incident.

The sheriff's office did not return calls to comment on whether deputies had gone to Fortson's apartment by mistake, nor to corroborate details of what Crump said had taken place on the afternoon Fortson was killed.

During a news conference on Thursday, Crump said Fortson was on a Facetime call with his girlfriend after he just got home from playing video games with his friends. When he heard a knock on his door, he asked, "Who is it?" but didn't get a response, according to his girlfriend.

Fortson then retrieved a gun he owned legally and was walking back into his living room when the deputy burst through the door and opened fire, Crump said, citing the girlfriend. Fortson did not fire his weapon, the lawyer said.

"He was in his apartment minding his business and then ... this cascade of tragic events started to take place," he said, calling on the sheriff to release police body-camera footage.

The killing is reminiscent of an unannounced police raid in Louisville, Kentucky, in March 2020, when police burst into the apartment of Breonna Taylor, a Black 26-year-old emergency medical technician, killing her. Police had obtained a "no knock" warrant to raid the apartment, mistaking it for the home of a suspect.



Air Force Senior Airman Roger Fortson was shot and killed by a Florida sheriff's deputy last week.

U.S. AIR FORCE/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

Taylor's death, along with the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police weeks later, set off a worldwide wave of protests against racism in law enforcement in the summer of 2020.

After Fortson was shot, he was taken to a hospital where he died from his wounds.

The deputy must have gone to the wrong apartment as there was no disturbance at Fortson's residence and he was alone, Crump said.

"They had a duty to make sure they were at the right apartment before they busted in the door," he said, noting that the U.S. Constitution protects against unreasonable searches and seizures by police.

Crump said Fortson always dreamed of becoming a pilot, describing him as a patriot and a good young man who followed rules and respected authority.

"My baby was my everything," his mother said during the news conference, demanding full transparency from the sheriff's office as she held a photograph of her son. "Tell the truth about my son ... please clean his reputation."

The deputy, who has not been identified, was placed on paid administrative leave pending the investigation, the sheriff said. He did not specify who was conducting the investigation.