

# Deputies tortured a restrained teenager by using a stun gun on him, lawyers say

By Alex Horton

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Fifty seconds.

That's how long Cheatham County Deputy Sheriff Mark Bryant held a stun gun to Jordan Norris over the course of four bursts, at times inches from his heart, in an incident captured on video in a Tennessee jail.

Straps held Norris's arms and legs while a deputy appeared to hold his mouth shut with a rag.

The stun gun's low hum drowned out Norris's deep heaves.

"I'll keep on doing that until I run out of batteries," Bryant warned in between jolts.

The Nov. 5 incident in a county jail outside Nashville led to a recent lawsuit from Norris, 18, who filed a complaint last month against the three deputies involved. Their actions were caught on surveillance video and cameras attached to the stun gun.

Another jolt from the stun gun went on for 10 seconds. Burns covering Norris's body indicate there were likely more, according to court documents filed in a district court in Tennessee.

The teen's lawsuit alleges that the three Cheatham County deputies — Bryant, Josh Marriott and Jeff Key — used excessive force "without legitimate law enforcement purpose" in deploying a

stun gun on Norris while he was restrained in a chair. The suit, which seeks punitive damages, additionally alleges that officers and others in the area failed to protect the inmate's rights.

"The repeated and prolonged use of a Taser against a fully restrained person amounts to torture; the videos speak for themselves," Benjamin Raybin, one of Norris's two lawyers, told The Washington Post.

Raybin said he advised Norris to decline all interview requests.

The sheriff's office referred questions to the county's criminal investigation division, which did not return calls for comment. But the three deputies have been placed on administrative leave pending the investigation.

Norris had been arrested Nov. 3 on drug and weapons possession charges, the Tennessean reported.

Two days after his arrest, on Nov. 5, Norris began to suffer a "mental health episode" and banged his head against the door. He was placed on suicide watch while a nurse was called to attend to him. His arms, chest, waist and legs were restrained, according to his lawsuit.

Marriott was on hand to apply pressure to his face and neck to cause pain, the filing said.

"Are you ready?" Bryant asked Norris, who seemingly braced for the inevitable surge of voltage. He appeared to ask for water.

"Would you like to comply?" Bryant asked. Norris's response was inaudible.

"No you won't," Bryant said as his stun gun surged into Norris, who grimaced and groaned.

“Stop resisting!” one of the deputies yelled at Norris, who was strapped into restraints.

“You don’t like it, do you?” a deputy asked.

Norris was strapped to the chair for three hours, with authorities reporting him as “very combative” and yelling he wanted to be shot, according to jail logs obtained by the Tennessean.

The lawsuit alleges two instances of unnecessary stun gun use, but Norris’s stepfather, William Chapman, told CBS affiliate WTVF that he counted more than 40 burns all over the teen’s body.

“I was actually giving the police benefit of the doubt over my own child because I was thinking he must have been fighting back, he must have been resisting,” Chapman said.

He said he now doubts the version of events offered by Cheatham County Sheriff Mike Breedlove, who told the station that his deputies acted accordingly and that Norris was combative.

“When I found that he was actually strapped to a restraint chair, it was even more mind-boggling; it didn’t make any sense,” Chapman said.

He told the station the situation should have been avoided.

“I think he had some sort of breakdown,” he said. “They said he was feeling suicidal.”

Breedlove declined to give an on-camera interview to a local news station, and he could not be reached for comment by The Washington Post on Tuesday.

But in a July 28 statement, the sheriff sought to distance himself from earlier comments suggesting the deputies were in compliance with the law.

“I was briefed about the situation and shown video evidence, however, not all video footage was presented at the time of the briefing,” Breedlove said. He added that he directed supervisors to evaluate the office’s use-of-force policy and asked for an independent investigation.

“As sheriff, I want our citizens to know that any inappropriate behavior that may have violated an individual’s rights will not be tolerated,” he said in the statement. “We will work closely and cooperatively with the TBI [Tennessee Bureau of Investigation] and district attorney’s office to ensure all facts are provided and all angles of this incident are thoroughly investigated.”

His statement was a departure from his previous writings.

Breedlove documented arrests his officers made with lengthy and at times bizarre messages posted to the official Cheatham County Sheriff’s Facebook page.

In a Nov. 3 post about Norris following his arrest, Breedlove wrote: “Let it be known he was going to kill any Deputy who tried to arrest him. He was armed with stolen weapons. A drug dealer by trade and on the fast track to live the Thug life.”

“The team, armed with a search warrant, invited themselves into the ‘House of Norris’ on Little Pond Creek with such dynamic quickness, he became shocked with awe and peed a little bit. Great job Cheatham SWAT!” the sheriff added.

The Facebook page has either been deleted or hidden. The text of those comments was obtained by The Post.

Breedlove told Nashville’s CBS affiliate that the weekly arrest updates were intended to be humorous.

Taser International, a manufacturer of the devices, did not respond to a request for information on potential hazards for using a stun gun near a suspect's chest.

But a 2009 advisory from the company said potential lawsuits could assert that a stun gun caused arrhythmia, or a disruption of the heart's rhythmic beating. Officers should focus on the back, pelvic muscles or thigh, the advisory said.

In photos attached to the lawsuit, stun gun burns, in raw red pairs as if they were bites from a viper, dot Norris's body — including on his chest.

A 2015 Post investigation found that about one person per week died that year in incidents in which stun guns were used. While a link between stun guns and those deaths was not clear, the devices were mentioned in at least a dozen cases as one factor on the autopsy reports or cause-of-death listings.

Research has shown that when used correctly, these devices are generally safe, but policing experts and company product advisories have warned about the increasing risk of death or injury if used excessively or in a way that breaks from the company's guidelines or police department policy.

Tasers "may not be effective on emotionally disturbed persons or others who may not respond to pain due to a mind-body disconnect," the company warned in 2013. "Avoid using repeated drive-stuns on such individuals if compliance is not achieved."