## Summary of Neil Gardner's Interview with the Arvada, CO, Police Department, 26 April 1999

Pages 68 – 76, Jefferson County Sheriff's Office's Columbine Documents, Volume 9

Assembled by James Conner www.flatheadmemo.com

Ref # 99-12067

Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32 Status RTF

Type ASSTOA Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM INTERVIEW SUMMARY
OF JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPUTY Neil GARDNER, BADGE #3010

- \* Interview date and time: April 20, 1999 at 1735 hours
- \* Interview location: Leawood Elementary
  6155 W. Leawood Drive
  Littleton, Jefferson County, CO 80123
- \* Present at interview:

Det. R. Boatright, #8206, Arvada Police Department (Lead Interviewer)

Ofc. Brian Thompson, Arvada Police Department (Witness to interview)
Deputy Neil Gardner, Jefferson County Sheriff's Department (Interview Subject)

## PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

\* Name: Deputy Neil Gardner, #3010

\* Hire Date: November 1984

Previous Assignments:

Jefferson County Jail approximately five years Civil Division approximately two years Patrol approximately six years (Remainder of time spent in present assignment.)

\* Present Assignment:

School Resource Officer, in the process of completing his second school year at Columbine High School prior to the incident.

Assignment Duties:

Provides law enforcement functions in and around Columbine High School, also functions as liaison between the schools and surrounding community. Deputy Gardner also utilized the Bike Patrol as part of the service he provided to Columbine High School and the surrounding community (to include Clements Park).

Note: Deputy Gardner is called upon to respond to calls for service outside of the Columbine High School area, depending on manpower allocations. In addition, Deputy Gardner rotates back to a patrol function when school is

Arvada Police/Court System Arvada Police Department NARRATIVE

PIRNARR Arvada Police/Court Sys

Ref # 99-12067

Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32 Status RTF Page

04/26/1999

Type ASSTOA Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

not is session.

\* Present Assignment Training:

Completed 40 hours of School Resource Officer Training in addition to receiving certification related to Bike Patrol.

\* Shift Schedule:

Monday through Friday/0800 to 1500 hours.

\* Special Duty:

On April 17, 1999 between 2400 and 0500 hours, worked after prom party at Columbine High School. Deputy Gardner advised supervision of students was coordinated between himself and numerous parents (not identified by name).

## CIRCUMSTANCES PRIOR TO SHOOTING

\* Amount of Sleep: From 2100 hours on 04/19/99 to 0615 hours

on 04/20/99 (no reported sleep

disruption).

\* General Health: Good.

\* Glasses or contacts:

Deputy Gardner reports he wears prescription glasses, also prescription sunglasses, however was not wearing the prescription sunglasses this date.
(Note: Deputy Gardner was wearing

non-prescription sunglasses.)

\* Medication: For the past eight months Deputy Gardner

has been taking Lotincin (high blood pressure medication)/no reports of side

effects or impaired function.

\* Alcohol/Controlled Substances: None

\* Last Meal: Between 1035 and 1115 hours on 04/20/99

\* Family Issues: Deputy Gardner reports being separated from his wife for the past three months.

Note: Through questioning, Deputy

JC-001-008069

Arvada Police Department NARRATIVE

Ref # 99-12067 Type ASSTOA Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32 Status RTF

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

Gardner confirmed the aforementioned situation in no way affected his ability to assess and respond to the incident occurring on 04/20/99.

Uniform: Standard bicycle patrol uniform, which

consists of a bright yellow, polo style

shirt, with black BDU pants and department issued footwear.

Dark blue, unmarked Chevy Caprice, Vehicle: affixed with antennae and spotlights.

Type - .45 caliber Sig Sauer semi-Service Weapon: automatic pistol, Model P220, Serial

#G171138. The above described weapon holds seven rounds in the magazine with one in the chamber making the weapon capable of firing eight rounds prior to a reload. Deputy Gardner also carries two additional magazines (seven rounds

each/total rounds available - 22).

Weapon Familiarization:

Deputy Gardner owned the above weapon for eight years and per department policy, is required to qualify every three months: -Deputy Gardner believed his last qualification was possibly February of 1999, however could not be certain. Deputy Gardner reported at no time has he ever failed to qualify and normally qualifies with the rating of "expert."

Speer brand, .45 caliber, copper jacketed Ammunition: hollow point bullets.

Prior shooting incidents:

Between the years 1990 and 1992, Deputy Gardner was involved in two shootings. Both shootings involved suicidal males, however, neither incident resulted in Deputy Gardner discharging his weapon.

INCIDENT SYNOPSIS

During the interview of Deputy Gardner, the forenamed

Ref # 99-12067 Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32
Type ASSTOA Status RTF
Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

described his activities beginning at the point he went on duty on 04/20/99. Deputy Gardner did not report any unusual activity occurring prior to the incident. In respect to the incident itself, Deputy Gardner stated he, along with Andy Martin (Columbine High School Campus Supervisor), left the SRO Office at approximately 1025 hours and drove to the south student parking lot. Deputy Gardner indicated he was driving the unmarked Chevy Caprice at the time. Deputy Gardner, along with Andy Martin, then went to the cafeteria area, where they discovered the lunch meal being served was "teriyaki." Deputy Gardner stated both he, along with Andy Martin, decided not to eat lunch in the cafeteria that date, after which it was determined they would purchase their lunch meal at "Subway."

Deputy Gardner indicated he, along with Andy Martin, then drove to a nearby "Subway" where they purchased their meal. Deputy Gardner explained after receiving their meal, they drove back to an area in Clements Park, where they could observe the "smoking pit." According to Deputy Gardner, the "smoking pit" was an area where Columbine High students were permitted to smoke. Deputy Gardner stated, while observing the "smoking pit," he and Andy Martin ate their meal.

Deputy Gardner stated after finishing their meal at approximately 1115 hours, he received a radio call from the school janitor, identified as "Jay." The aforementioned communication was transmitted on a school radio. According to Deputy Gardner, the transmission received from "Jay" was "Neil, I need you in the lunch room." Deputy Gardner described the janitor's request as urgent and even detected panic in his voice. Deputy Gardner confirmed the radio transmission clearly indicated a serious tone.

After receiving the communication, Deputy Gardner stated he immediately drove from Clements Park to Pierce St. and proceeded south where he was stopped for a red light at Fair Drive. While at that location, Deputy Gardner heard a Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Dispatch call. Deputy Gardner stated the call was requesting Unit 147 to respond to Columbine High School on a report of a female down in the parking lot. After hearing that transmission, Deputy Gardner stated he activated his lights and siren (Code 3) and proceeded through the intersection at Fair Drive. Deputy Gardner explained, based on the communications he received at this point, he was considering the possibility a student had been run over in the parking lot.

Deputy Gardner explained he then turned into the entrance for the south student parking lot at Columbine High School and proceeded westbound in a Code 3 response. While still traveling westbound, Deputy Gardner stated he observed approximately three to four students running from the school, after which he advised Jefferson County Dispatch he was on scene. Deputy Gardner reported at the time he was specifically looking for a female who was in the

Page 5 04/26/1999

Ref # 99-12067 Type ASSTOA Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32 Status RTF

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

parking lot, possibly injured.

When reaching the parking area, Deputy Gardner received a radio transmission from Peter Horvath (Dean of students at Columbine High School). The radio transmission is as follows, "Neil, I need you in the school. There's been a shooting." Again, Deputy Gardner stated he detected a clear sense of urgency in Peter Horvath's request.

Deputy Gardner stated as he continued into the area and assessed the situation, he observed a white puff of smoke coming from the west end of the south student parking lot. Deputy Gardner stated he then began to drive in a westerly direction towards the smoke and traveled as far west as possible in the parking lot and then turned northbound, at which time he begins to hear what he believes is a loud noise (possible explosion). Deputy Gardner clarified the windows to his vehicle were rolled down at the time.

Deputy Gardner next explained he heard what he believed was one loud explosion, after which he looked up towards the library windows which faced to the southwest. Deputy Gardner stated he then observed window to the library had been broken out. Deputy Gardner stated he subsequently heard eight to ten rapid fire quashots which he believed were coming from the library area.

According to Deputy Gardner, he then directed Andy Martin to get down on the floorboard of his vehicle, advising that he now believed there was an armed suspect in the school. Deputy Gardner then described stopping his vehicle (facing a northeasterly direction) behind a row of cars parked on the north row of the south student parking area. From the aforementioned position, Deputy Gardner was able to see the library/commons area, as well as the southwest exit/entrance to the building.

Once Deputy Gardner had positioned his vehicle, he observed the windows on the southwest entrance/exit doors had been broken out. According to Deputy Gardner, he then gave a "Code 33" to his dispatch, indicating an officer was in trouble. Deputy Gardner pointed out at the time he made the above radio transmission, he heard another explosion coming from inside the school. Deputy Gardner stated he believed the explosion was coming from a "deeper" location inside the school.

At almost the same time, Deputy Gardner stated he then observed a suspect come to the double doors located at the southwest entrance/exit of the high school. According to Deputy Gardner, the suspect then stepped outside the doors approximately two feet. Deputy Gardner described the suspect as a white male, in his late teens, early twenties, approximately 5'10" to 6'0" tall, with a "skinny" build. According to Deputy Gardner, the suspect had light colored hair which would be approximately collar length and was wearing a white t-shirt with a dark blue "flack jacket."

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ref # 99-12067 Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32 Type ASSTOA Status RTF Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

Deputy Gardner also recalled the suspect wearing a possibly dark colored ball cap which was on backwards.

Deputy Gardner related as the suspect had exited the southwest entrance/exit of the building, he was in the process of positioning himself behind the rear area of a white Chevy Blazer, which was parked (facing north) adjacent from his vehicle. Deputy Gardner stated he was able to look through the windows of the white Blazer, during which time he was able to make the observations related to the suspect. While in that position, Deputy Gardner confirmed the suspect was holding a dark colored long rifle and what was described as a port of arms position. Deputy Gardner estimated he was approximately 60 to 70 yards from the suspect at this point.

Deputy Gardner stated as he observed the suspect, the aforementioned appeared to be "fidgeting" with the weapon and, subsequently pointed it in his direction. Deputy Gardner stated the suspect then fired two shots, one of which he believed struck the windshield of the white Blazer. Deputy Gardner stated he subsequently ducked down to take cover and then made a quick peek in order to maintain a visual of the suspect. At that point, Deputy Gardner described the suspect bent over the weapon "fiddling" with it. Deputy Gardner did not know specifically what the suspect was doing with the weapon, but recalled the barrel of the rifle pointing in a downward direction.

At that point, Deputy Gardner moved to the front of the white Blazer, positioning himself behind the engine block. Deputy Gardner subsequently leveled his weapon over the hood of the white Blazer, at which time the suspect again brought the weapon across his body and pointed it in the direction of the deputy. Deputy Gardner stated at that time, he discharged his weapon, describing that action as four rapid shots. Deputy Gardner indicated he believed it was possible he struck the suspect with his first round, however, could not confirm that point. Deputy Gardner explained what led him to believe he possibly struck the suspect was the fact as he began firing his weapon, the suspect spun to his (the suspect's) right in a crotched position completing a full 360 degree motion. Deputy Gardner stated based on the suspect's actions, he believed it was possible he had struck the aforementioned somewhere in the right shoulder area.

Deputy Gardner stated after discharging his weapon in the manner indicated, he then ducked back down, at which time the suspect again fired in his direction, which was described as a "volley" of approximately 7 to 8 rounds. Deputy Gardner stated he believed many of the rounds passed over his head and was uncertain if anything was struck by the bullets.

After the suspect discharged the weapon in the manner indicated, Deputy Gardner again peeked up over the white Blazer and was unable to observe the suspect. Based on questioning, Deputy

Ref # 99-12067 Type ASSTOA Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32 Status RTF

Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

Gardner believed the suspect had returned inside the building.

Deputy Gardner next recalled cover cars arriving on scene. Deputy Gardner specifically recalled seeing Unit 144 accompanied with one of the motorcycle officers approaching from the north in a tactical manner. Deputy Gardner stated at that point, additional units began to arrive, which he identified as Units 149, 147 and 140. Deputy Gardner stated over approximately a three to five minute time span, he along with the previously identified units, began to set up the perimeter.

As the perimeter was being established, Deputy Gardner recalled seeing a "fireball" (explosion) in the "lower commons area" As the incident continued, Deputy Gardner was notified by Unit 144 (accompanied by the MC unit) there were two victims down in an area to the west of where the southwest doors were located. Deputy Gardner stated he was advised one of the victims was not moving, while the other one periodically would raise up an arm. Deputy Gardner stated at one point, he was able to see the victim who periodically moved his arm, which he described as being approximately 20 feet southwest from the southwest entrance/exit of the school.

For purposes of clarification, Deputy Gardner did prepare a diagram which identified the locations of all responding Jefferson County Units. In respect to Unit 144, Deputy Gardner positioned that unit directly north of his location to the west of the school (southwest entrance/exit), Unit 149 was positioned to the south of the school (south student parking lot), Unit 147 was positioned on Pierce, while Unit 140 was positioned to the north. It should be noted Units 147 and 140 were not identified on the diagram.

Deputy Gardner stated while he maintained his position, he then observed a female lying on the sidewalk area to the east of his location near the commons area. After making that observation, Deputy Gardner next observed the same suspect return to the southwest entrance/exit. According to Deputy Gardner, the suspect then positioned himself behind the right door (Deputy Gardner's right), after which both he along with Unit 144 yelled to each other the suspect had returned. Deputy Gardner next observed the suspect prop the rifle on the metal portion of the door where the window had been located. According to Deputy Gardner, the suspect was using the metal portion of the door as cover. Deputy Gardner related the suspect then began firing at Unit 144. Deputy Gardner could not estimate the number of rounds fired, but indicated they were numerous (more rounds then were fired at him during the earlier volley). At that point, Deputy Gardner stated he again fired four rounds in the direction of the suspect, who at the time was still positioned behind the metal portion of the door. Gardner was then required to reload utilizing the far left magazine. Deputy Gardner stated it was also possible Unit 144 was returning gunfire.

Ref # 99-12067 Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32
Type ASSTOA Status RTF
Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

Deputy Gardner stated after the above exchange, he then recalled Denver Police Units arriving and were armed with a short rifle style weapon. Deputy Gardner was unable to estimate the number of Denver Units that had arrived on the scene.

Deputy Gardner reported a few minutes after the Denver Units arrived, the suspect previously described was seen through the windows in the library. According to Deputy Gardner, approximately three or four Denver Units began firing in the direction of the suspect. Deputy Gardner recalled seeing the library glass windows breaking and believed there was continuous rounds fired by the Denver officers for approximately 15 seconds. Deputy Gardner reported he believed the suspect was attempting to return fire in, what he described as "short bursts." Deputy Gardner stated, based on the amount of gunfire, he thought it was possible the suspect had been hit.

Deputy Gardner reported approximately five minutes after the last exchange of gunfire, he heard what he believed was approximately six muffled gunshots coming from somewhere inside the school. Around that same time frame, Deputy Gardner observed a juvenile male (not wearing a shirt) run out from the lower commons door in a southwesterly direction. Deputy Gardner remembered hearing the juvenile shout, "don't shoot, don't shoot." Deputy Gardner stated he believed the juvenile male was limping.

Deputy Gardner next directed Andy Martin to exit his vehicle and respond to the west end of the parking lot in order to take a safer position. According to Deputy Gardner, Andy Martin was positioned behind vehicles to the west (north row) of the south student parking area.

Deputy Gardner reported he subsequently yelled to the juvenile male that exited the commons area of the building and taken up cover behind a parked car in the south student parking area (west center row). Deputy Gardner stated he had asked the juvenile if he had seen the suspect. According to Deputy Gardner, the juvenile male responded in the affirmative and described the suspect as a "big guy in all dark clothing." Deputy Gardner stated, after receiving that information, he now believed there were at least two armed suspects in the school.

Deputy Gardner stated he next confirmed with the juvenile male that he had been shot in what was believed the upper hip area. Deputy Gardner stated he subsequently returned to his vehicle and drove to the juvenile male's location and had the victim enter his unit. Deputy Gardner then drove back to an empty parking space which faced north in the south student parking area. Deputy Gardner made efforts to confirm the victim's condition appeared stable and did not require immediate evacuation for lifesaving measures. Deputy Gardner confirmed he remained with the victim

Ref # 99-12067

Reported Date 04/20/1999 Time 12:39:32 Status RTF

Type ASSTOA Location 6201 S PIERCE ST

CASE 04/24/1999 042299/BOATRIGHT/SH

until they were evacuated by SWAT officers who had arrived on scene.

For purposes of clarification, Deputy Gardner stated after placing the victim in the vehicle and repositioning his unit in the parking lot, he did not hear any additional gunfire for approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Deputy Gardner stated it was at that point that SWAT officers began arriving on scene and he observed students fleeing the school for approximately twenty minutes. Deputy Gardner estimated he remained with the victim for approximately one hour, during which time he did not hear additional gunfire and was subsequently evacuated by SWAT Units.

After being evacuated, Deputy Gardner stated he was taken back to the command post where he provided information to those present as it pertained to his knowledge of the incident and the layout of the school.

At the conclusion of the interview, Deputy Gardner's weapon, along with his extra magazines, were examined. It was determined Deputy Gardner's weapon had six rounds in the magazine, along with one round in the chamber. In the left front pant pocket, Deputy Gardner had one empty magazine. In respect to the third magazine, that item was located in the far right magazine pouch and that magazine contained six rounds. According to Deputy Gardner, that magazine had not been removed from the pouch during the incident. Deputy Gardner further confirmed no one, including himself, had handled his weapon since the incident. Deputy Gardner's weapon was subsequently recovered by Jefferson County Deputies R. D. Butts and J. Warren.