Fired Manchester cop sent racist messages

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By TODD FEATHERS
New Hampshire Union Leader

Text messages sent by a former Manchester police officer from his department-issued phone shed light on a dark aspect of his time in the Special Enforcement Division. Aaron Brown was one of two officers fired last year following an internal investigation into accusations that they used their positions as police officers to coerce women into sex. The Strafford County Attorney’s office opened a subsequent criminal investigation into Brown and former detective Darren Murphy. In addition to the sexual assault allegations, investigators looked into messages Brown sent to his wife in which he used violent and racist language and bragged about destroying people’s property while executing search warrants.

Strafford County Attorney Tom Velardi eventually concluded that there was insufficient evidence to charge Brown or Murphy with a crime.

In one exchange on May 10, 2017, Brown’s wife wrote that it made her nervous that he might travel to Boston to work a case with the FBI.

“It’s all good,” Brown wrote. “Besides I got this new fancy gun. Take out parking tickets no problem. FYI ‘parking tickets’ = black fella.”

Brown worked for the Manchester Police Department from July 2007 until his firing in April 2018.

Nov. 13, 2017:
Wife: How’s your day going?
Brown: So far so good Kicked this fellas [genitals] in and ransacked him (sic) place. Overall a success lol

UNION LEADER ILLUSTRATION
AARON BROWN

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His lawyer, Mark Morrissette, criticized the Strafford County attorney for releasing the text messages and thousands of pages of investigative files, which the Union Leader obtained through a Right-to-Know request.

“The information should not be issue within the department. “Those passages … are obviously something of concern,” he said. “I don’t necessarily see that as reflective of a culture at Manchester police. I see that as a sad example of an individual and what they’re willing to say.”

Search warrant destruction

Other messages Brown sent his wife suggest violent misconduct intentional damage to the dresser and dishes as he claimed in the text messages, according to their notes.

‘A success lol’

It does not appear, based on the Strafford County attorney’s files, that investigators looked as thoroughly into another incident Brown mentioned to his wife.

On Nov. 13, 2017, she asked him how his day was going.
redistributed, even if it was provided to you or your newspaper. … I would suggest strongly to the prosecutor that that was a wrongful disclosure,” he said, adding that Brown has contested his firing with the state Public Employee Labor Relations Board.

Brown also maintains that “there’s not one ounce of truth to those allegations” of sexual assault, Morrissette said.

‘Taking over’

In July 2017, Brown sent his wife an internet video of a “crackbunny” fight and wrote, “I am certainly not a racist. I have my proclivities about people … but those folks are straight up n’s … no two ways about it.”

“Serve no place in life or society,” he added. “And yet they are completely taking over all parts of daily life.”

In other messages, Brown said his superiors were treating him like a “field (expletive)” and repeatedly used the term “parking tickets” to refer to African-Americans.

Manchester Police Chief Carlo Capano, who took over the department after Brown and Murphy had already been fired, said he could not discuss the details of the Brown case because it was a personnel matter.

“The comments are offensive and hate has no place in our community,” Mayor Joyce Craig said in an interview. “I, and I know on the job.

The couple joked repeatedly about whether he had a chance to “smash (expletive)” while working. On one occasion in January 2018, Brown bragged that he had sneaked past a supervisor while executing a search warrant and “completely wrecked a huge dresser and mirror.”

“Pushed it right over. On purpose,” he wrote.

The state trooper and Manchester officer working the case for the Strafford County attorney investigated that incident and another in which Brown claimed to have smashed a drying rack full of dishes during a search.

When they spoke to Brown in September 2018, after he had been fired, he told them he had embellished the accounts.

But in the same interview, he suggested it was common practice to destroy personal property while executing search warrants.

“So you know myself and my partners would, would always not like think it was funny — but we would get you know — it was, it was amusing to us kinda like to go in and, and do a good job you know and, and just make a, a huge mess while trying to find this stuff … and then you know kinda like watch the bosses kinda walk around and be like ‘oh my God look what happened here,’ you know,” Brown said, according to a transcript of the interview.

“Kicked this fellas (genitals) in and ransacked him (sic) place. Overall a success lol.”

Strafford County Attorney Tom Velardi said the investigators could not confirm that assault happened.

“We learned that no such report was ever made by a citizen,” Velardi said. “We also learned that none of these instances was corroborated by the alleged victims when we interviewed them. … There is nothing to support the proposition that on one of the occasions when Brown was in a private home he, Brown, assaulted someone. If we had gotten that information we would have followed it to its conclusion.”

Woullard Lett, a former police commissioner and president of the Manchester NAACP, said the racism Brown displayed is a societal disease, not something that can be attributed to any one police department or organization, and it will take institution-wide efforts to address it.

“‘We were able to discover this other stuff (Brown wrote) tangential to the main investigation, it wasn’t that other stuff — this behavior — that brought him to our attention,” Lett said. “There may be folks on the police force now who feel the exact same way, but they know ‘don’t write it down.’”

“I think that part of the challenge that we’re facing is not only the individual attitudes, but also the institutional practices and policies that end up perpetuating this sort of illusionary
I can speak for Chief Capano, have zero tolerance for this type of misconduct.”

Scott Spradling, chairman of the city’s police commission, said he believes Brown’s messages are indicative of one bad officer and not a cultural and jaundiced view of the world,” he added.

The investigators interviewed other officers who were present for the searches in question; spoke with tenants of the apartments; and reviewed photographs taken before officers searched the homes. They concluded that there was insufficient evidence to prove that Brown caused