

## State Police issues update on I-40 shooting

Written by gallupsun  
Tuesday, 10 November 2020 16:48

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CIBOLA COUNTY - The New Mexico State Police Investigations Bureau was called to investigate an officer involved shooting on Interstate 40, near milepost 114 by Laguna, N.M. on Oct. 17.

At approximately 10:50 am, New Mexico State Police responded to assist the Valencia County Sheriff's Office (VCSO) with a vehicle pursuit on State Road 6, west of Los Lunas, N.M. Agents learned VCSO deputies were pursuing a male subject who was involved in a shooting incident earlier in the day in Valencia County. VCSO Deputies pursued the vehicle west on State Road 6 to Interstate 40. The vehicle merged onto Interstate 40 and proceeded to travel westbound.

A New Mexico State Police officer located the vehicle matching the description of the vehicle that was pursued by VCSO near the off ramp at milepost 108 near Interstate 40. The New Mexico State Police Officer attempted to initiate a high-risk felony traffic stop. The male driver of the vehicle, later identified as Richard James Romero, 49, of Los Lunas, sped off and a pursuit was initiated.

The vehicle merged onto Interstate 40 eastbound and proceeded to travel east. Pursuing Officers observed Romero drive his vehicle in a reckless manner endangering other motorists on the roadway. A Pursuit Intervention Technique (PIT) maneuver was utilized by a New Mexico State Police Sergeant in an attempt to bring the vehicle to a safe stop. The vehicle continued to flee east on Interstate 40 towards exit 126. The vehicle exited onto the off ramp, turned around and merged back onto Interstate 40 westbound.

A State Police officer assisting in the pursuit deployed stop sticks at milepost 120 on Interstate 40. The vehicle continued to travel westbound and another State Police officer deployed stop sticks at milepost 116. This time Romero drove his vehicle over the stop sticks and continued to flee west on Interstate 40.

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The pursuit ended when a PIT maneuver was utilized on Romero's vehicle by New Mexico State Police Officer Gene Gonzales. The vehicle came to a stop after the vehicle crashed into a cable barrier in the median near milepost 114 on Interstate 40. Officer Gonzales and other New Mexico State Police Officers with the assistance of Laguna Tribal Police officers positioned their patrol vehicles near Romero's Vehicle. Officers gave numerous verbal commands to Romero to exit the vehicle and surrender peacefully.

Romero ignored commands and refused to exit the vehicle. A Laguna Tribal Police Officer deployed a less-lethal bean bag round into the left driver's side rear window of the vehicle after officers visually observed Romero continue to move around inside the vehicle. Gonzales observed Romero produce a rifle and point the barrel of the rifle towards other officers who were on scene. Romero fired a round from the rifle towards the officers through the front windshield of the vehicle.

Gonzales returned fire and fired his department issued firearm towards Romero, striking him. Officers observed Romero continue to hold the rifle in his lap. Officers continued to give verbal commands to Romero to exit the vehicle. Romero continued to ignore commands given. A Laguna Tribal Police Officer deployed another less-lethal bean bag round towards Romero after there was no response. Officers approached the vehicle in attempt to make contact with Romero and noticed he was unresponsive.

A Laguna Tribal Officer grabbed and secured the rifle, as other officers on scene rendered aid to Romero. Emergency Medical Personnel were directed to the scene to render additional aid. Romero succumbed to his injuries and died on scene.

All officers involved were okay, and there were no injuries reported.

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Gonzales was placed on standard administrative leave. Gonzales has been with the New Mexico State Police for approximately 12 years and 5 months. Upon completion of the investigation this case will be forwarded to an assigned district attorney's office for review.

***For additional details on the shooting incident that occurred in Valencia County, please contact VCSO.***

