

Missouri: Cop Website Contained Apparent Death Threat Against Video Vigilante

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Unofficial website popular with Saint Louis, Missouri police contained a death threat against Brett Darrow three months before his recent encounter.

When stopped by an out-of-control St. George, Missouri police officer last Friday, motorist Brett Darrow feared for his life (view story and video). It turns out, he had legitimate reason for concern. Three months ago, participants in an online forum frequented by Saint Louis law enforcement personnel threatened to harass -- and even physically harm -- Darrow.

The messages appeared on St. Louis CopTalk, a site that describes itself as a site "for the use of law enforcement officers employed by the St. Louis Police Department and their supporters in the St. Louis Metropolitan area." While it has no official ties to the city, it does allow officers to log into official police email accounts from the front page. In June of this year, Darrow had sparked outrage among the forum's members after he videotaped a disputed traffic stop involving what Darrow argued was a perfectly legal turn and what a Saint Louis police officer said was not.

In the course of researching the incident, TheNewspaper learned from an inside source about a CopTalk posting dated June 29, 2007. A user calling himself "STL_FINEST" wrote the following item, presented unedited and in full:

in reply to "Who is this terd?"

I hope this little POS punk bastard tries his little video stunt with me when I pull him over alone- and I WILL pull him over - because I will see "his gun" and place a hunk of hot lead right where it belongs.

We verified the existence of the post which, until some time around July, was publicly available here. It has been deleted. Because the CopTalk forum allows anonymous posting, only the site's administrator has the ability to confirm the identity of a poster or his status as a law enforcement official. When contacted by TheNewspaper this week, the forum owner had no comment beyond, "Sorry, the posting log I have access to only contains the most recent 300 messages, and that particular message cycled off some time ago."

Still, participants did not disavow the posting. Instead, another added, "I'm going to his house to check for parking violations." We informed Darrow of the existence of the messages, but withheld publication not wishing to interfere with an expected investigation into officers' behavior at the well-publicized traffic stops. To our knowledge, no such investigation was ever made.

CopTalk now bans discussion of Darrow's videos. A message dated September 10 reads: "We are already very much aware of Mr. Darrow and his antics. There is no

need to post any of his award-winning videography here." Still, discussions of last Friday's St. George traffic stop made their way onto the site for a few hours before being removed by the administrator. One poster expressed contempt for Darrow:

"Other than CYA and a heads up why do we give this [expletive] any thought? He lives for this type of [expletive]."

Another CopTalk user referred to a discussion on the online forum AR15.com by saying:

"I have a discussion going on another board where someone is basicly [sic] calling me a liar. The retards have even invited Brett to join to tell his side of what he does."

The firearms enthusiast forum began discussing Darrow's video on September 10. At least one other message from a self-identified Saint Louis area police officer appears to condone official harassment of the twenty-year-old motorist.

"Take the kid to jail... today... tommorrow... the next day... everytime you see him out and he commits a traffic violation... tow his car and take him to jail... period. No arguing, no yelling.....nothing but the sound of cash leaving his wallet from impound fees and fines." (view thread, view saved image of full post)

Unlike the CopTalk forum, however, neither this user nor any others in a sampling we made of the nearly 2000 messages posted on the AR15.com message thread supported the actions of St. George Police Sergeant James Kuehnlein. A number immediately condemned the self-identified officer's remarks.

The evidence shows that law enforcement problems extend far beyond the tiny geographic boundaries of 1300 resident city and that Darrow's video may have wide-reaching effects. The young driver's encounters with Saint Louis area police began in March 2005 when an intoxicated, off-duty police officer threatened to kill him. Darrow escaped only to find himself arrested hours later. The city agreed to drop all charges against him on the condition that he waive his right to sue over the incident. The following year, a Saint Louis officer at a DUI roadblock said he would, "find a reason to lock you up tonight" (view video and story). This is in addition to Sergeant Kuehnlein's videotaped threat that, "we will ruin your career and life and everything else you have coming before you."

The videotape from Kuehnlein's police cruiser is currently missing and the sergeant is currently on unpaid leave. St. George Police Chief Scott Uhrig is also being investigated by city officials who say he may have failed to inform them that the State of Missouri Administrative Hearing Commission concluded that, "Uhrig's unwelcome sexual advances to a teenager, while on duty and under the guise of enforcing the laws, indicate an especially egregious mental state, show that he cannot enforce the law, and are cause for discipline."

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