

California police caught on video beating man after chase

By Zaida Green
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Police officers in Apple Valley, California were captured on video beating a man Thursday for more than two minutes following a chase. The beating was recorded from a news helicopter and broadcasted live by local news station KNBC-TV.

The video shows 30-year-old Francis Pusok surrendering after falling off his stolen horse, lying facedown on the ground with his limbs spread apart. Showing no attempt to resist arrest, he is then shocked with a Taser by an officer. Pusok places his hands behind his back to reaffirm his submission. Another officer jumps out of a police helicopter, runs up to Pusok, and kicks him in the face, initiating the rain of blows.

Within two minutes, Pusok is swarmed by eleven officers. Unarmed and posing no threat to anyone, Pusok is shocked with a Taser twice, punched 37 times, kicked 17 times, and struck with a baton 4 times. 13 of those blows were to his head.

After the beating, Pusok lay motionless on the desert sand for over 45 minutes. None of the eleven officers who stood around him attempted to administer medical treatment during that time. Ten of the officers have been put on paid administrative leave.

Jim Terrell, Pusok's family attorney, condemned attempts to paint the savage two-minute beating as justifiable. "What I saw on the television was thugs beating up my client... And these questions about what was [Pusok] doing? What did they do? This is far worse than [the 1991 police beating of] Rodney King."

"These are bad cops whether it's Ferguson, Missouri, or right here in Apple Valley," recalling the police killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson. "This stuff's got to stop."

Pusok was later taken to a hospital to be treated for

undisclosed injuries. Pusok's family and friends were informed of neither Pusok's condition, nor which hospital he was being treated at. Three officers were treated at the same hospital, one for a kick by the horse, and two for dehydration.

Pusok was picked up from jail by his attorneys yesterday. Speaking to KNBC-TV, they reported that he was still in pain, with a badly swollen eye and marks all over his face and body. Pusok told his attorneys that after the beating, an officer whispered into his ear, "This isn't over."

"And what's why he's scared to death for himself and his family right now," Terrell said.

According to the local police department, Pusok was the prime suspect in an identity theft investigation. He fled by car from police serving a search warrant at his home. After a three-hour pursuit through the cities of Apple Valley and Hesperia, he abandoned his car and stole a horse, fleeing into the surrounding shrubland.

Jolene Binder, Pusok's girlfriend of more than thirteen years and mother of his three children, said that the allegation of identity theft "is not true... I feel like they're trying to paint a picture of him as a bad guy and deserving of [the beating]." She described him as a devoted father despite having a criminal record.

Pusok's mother, Anne Clemenson, likened the beating to "a joyride for the cops" and demanded that all the officers involved be fired. "He didn't deserve something like that. To tase him, the beatings that I see them doing to him—it's uncalled for. You see him laying [sic] down, and they continue to kick him, hitting him and punching him. Why?"

The Sheriff's Office claimed that the Taser "was ineffective due to [Pusok's] loose clothing", thus "a use of force" occurred. In other words, kicks to the face and groin, punches, and strikes with the Taser device

itself were necessary to subdue an unarmed man lying facedown in the sand.

“They beat the crap out of him, and now they’re trying to do everything that they can do to avoid them being in any trouble,” Binder retorted.

San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahon announced an internal police investigation into the circumstances of Pusok’s arrest. He attempted to allay public distrust of the investigation, saying that the audio recorders worn by all the officers would be analyzed.

Though admitting that the video was “disturbing,” McMahon was careful not to in any way denounce the violence against Pusok or draw connections to the wider campaign of state repression in the United States. “If our deputy sheriffs did something wrong, they’ll be put off work and they’ll be dealt with appropriately, all in accordance with the law as well as our department policy,” McMahon declared.

Beating Pusok in broad daylight while a news helicopter hovered overhead, all eleven police officers were confident that they, along with the hundreds of other police officers who have killed thousands of people over the last twelve months, would not be held accountable for their actions. On the contrary, expressions of opposition to police violence have been met with censorship, surveillance, and the deployment of the National Guard.

Pusok’s beating is just the latest instance in the long reign of police violence in the United States. The website killedbypolice.net counts at least 28 people killed by the police in the US since the start of April, and 320 people since the start of this year, at a rate of more than three killings a day.

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