

# Nine Vermont Cops Execute Non-Threatening Addict Holding BB Gun

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*How many people did it take to waste this life, starting with himself?*

*Green Mountain homeboy **Nathan Giffin** was 32, white, and holding a BB pistol at his side when multiple police shot him multiple times outside the Montpelier High School he had once attended. Reportedly, Giffin had admitted addictions to cocaine and heroin, and maybe he even had an intent to die from suicide by cop. If so, he succeeded. Nine Vermont police officers pumped him full of bullets, dropping him on the spot as he stood passively at the far end of a football field after almost an hour standoff.*

How is this not an extrajudicial execution that never should have happened?

The [video of the shooting](#) is clear. Giffin appears distracted, uncertain, he takes three slow steps forward, one backwards, then four to his left. Then he drops. This is a full-on shooting of a wandering young man by a disorderly firing squad that continues shooting for about three seconds after Giffin is down, mortally wounded.

Police handcuff him on the ground, but the video does not show anyone administering medical attention. Giffin died in an ambulance on the way to the hospital, where he was declared dead.

Before releasing the victim's name, police released information about his criminal record dating back to 2002, when Giffin was 17. It is unclear whether he was known to any of the cops who killed him.

This was [Tuesday morning](#), January 16. According to reports, at about 9:30 Giffin used his realistic-looking BB pistol to hold up a [State Employees Credit Union](#). He fired no shots and no one was hurt. He fled the bank on foot, crossing the street onto the grounds of the high school, which was in session. Somehow (it's not clear how) [police cornered Giffin](#) on the bleachers of the fenced-in athletic field at the school. The school went on lockdown. Details of the standoff with the police are few. The "crisis negotiation team" was there, but there are no reports of any negotiation or other meaningful communication with Giffin. Police say that he made both [threatening and suicidal](#) statements, and that he ignored orders to surrender his gun. A witness quoted police taunting Giffin: "You going to run away now?" Somehow police were unable to avoid killing a defenseless drug addict who posed no serious threat, all of which they could have known in time. Students in the school reportedly took pictures of the killing as it unfolded.

Giffin's BB pistol, a Umarex 40XP, looked quite real, apparently. [Maj. Glenn Hall](#) of the

Vermont State Police rationalized the killing of a non-threatening man who hadn't fired a shot this way:

**I certainly can't rationalize why someone would do this, I don't know if there is an explanation, but certainly if you want people to believe that you have a real gun, this is as close as you can get... They look real. It would be literally impossible for anyone to tell it's not real, from a distance certainly, and even sometimes up close.**

Hall added that he didn't even know whether the BB pistol was loaded. Asked why the nine officers chose to shoot Giffin, Hall said he had no clue, although he put it this way:

"The reason that those officers choose to use deadly force are all part of the investigation. Investigators will want to hear from them, what led them to use deadly force."

Nine police officers with a single reflexive thought? Are they trained that way?

A nurse who knew Giffin when he was younger and hung out with her daughters recalled him as "a sweet kid with a rough life." She said that Giffin as a high schooler was a regular at her house and his [nickname was "Milhouse,"](#) after a character in the Simpsons.

**He was very kind and respectful to me, and grateful to be able to spend time at our house with our family.... The kids group was kind of like an extended family for themselves as well. It's a challenging time in a person's life to be in your teens, so it kind of reminded me of 'The Breakfast Club' a little bit.... We're all heartbroken. Obviously, a lot happened between high school and now, but the person that we knew was a lovely guy.... He was kind of like adorably goofy, and he had glasses, and in little ways he did look like Milhouse....I know that whatever was going on, he was struggling and suffering, and I will wait to see what the police investigation uncovers about him being shot by nine police officers.**

Although she hadn't seen him for more than ten years, the nurse said her daughter also remembered Giffin as "a very sweet soul who was very caring."



A [former 2003 classmate](#) remembered Giffin similarly:

"He was a great kid all the way through school. He was very friendly, very upbeat, very funny - funny to be around."

As reported by police, Giffin's criminal record includes convictions for cocaine possession, theft, burglary, and armed bank robbery (state and federal), but no violent crimes. He was sentenced to two years for the federal bank hold-up. He was most recently arrested for [Christmas day burglaries](#). In a police affidavit after his arrest, Giffin said he was "sick of living like this." He was to appear in court on those charges two days after he died. That court appearance had been delayed to allow Giffin to get drug treatment.

The nine police officers who shot or shot at Giffin are [on paid administrative leave](#) while the investigation continues.

Two of the nine officers have been through this before. **Sgt. Lyle Decker** and **Trooper Christopher Brown** were among [five officers who shot](#) and killed another 32-year-old man with a realistic-looking BB pistol in Poultney, Vermont, last summer. The crisis negotiation team was also there. Even though the perceived threat turned out not to be actual, the officers were cleared of wrongdoing in the case where the man, an accused wife-beater, was pointing the BB pistol down at them from a second story window. After an investigation, the state's attorney ruled that the killing was justifiable homicide under the law and the officers' decision to use deadly force was reasonable.

Giffin's life and death appears to be a years-long personal and social failure. The challenge to society is to figure out how to care for a damaged child before he drops out of high school, becomes a drug addict, a criminal, a convict, with less and less chance of recovery until he is publicly executed.

It's small consolation that no police officers or others were physically hurt in this cultural crime.

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