

Cameras can help police cops

For better or worse, cameras are all around us. We use them to take photos of ourselves over and over again, and we use them to ruin concerts for everybody else. Sometimes, though, we use them to record dramatic, eye-opening events that change a nation. That certainly was the case last week when an eyewitness with a cellphone recorded the killing of an unarmed man in South Carolina who was shot in the back five times by police officer Michael Slager. The initial narrative about the incident was one we’ve heard nearly every time an unarmed person is killed by police: the officer was involved with a struggle for a weapon, was in mortal danger and pulled the trigger to save a life, either their own or someone else’s.

According to police reports, Officer Slager reported on his radio moments after the struggle: “Shots fired and the subject is down. He took my Taser.” But later, when the bystander video was released and the narrative proved false, it was chucked aside and Slager was immediately charged with murder. That’s the silver lining in this awful story, if there is one: An officer who so clearly erred in judgment and unnecessarily took the life of another person may face justice. That he will ever be convicted of the crime, however, remains unclear.

There are other parts of the video that are difficult to watch. The victim — 50-year-old Walter Scott — with five bullets inside him and his life draining away, lies handcuffed and face down for minutes before officers and medics attempt CPR. By then it was too late, though it is unclear if — shot in the heart — he died immediately. Still, handcuffing a dead man is its own kind of shameful act. The vast majority of police officers are remarkable human beings. They do a difficult job as best they can. We couldn’t do it ourselves and are forever grateful that others are willing to take on that responsibility. But that responsibility comes with great power, and in this case it is high-definition clear that the responsibility was used inappropriately.

The death of Walter Scott is a tragedy. That it was caught on film might help change police action forever. That’s partly because it is another in a string of high-profile uses of lethal force by police officers in Oklahoma, Cleveland, New York and Ferguson, Mo., — with two of those deaths captured on heart-wrenching video. And for all the work we do trying to choose just the right words to get people to think differently about an issue, there is nothing like graphic video to make people totally rethink everything. The death of Walter Scott did that again.

Body cameras are coming to police officers, but it’s not clear how much of that video will be available to the public. If police can choose what to release and what not to release, the usefulness of cameras diminishes greatly. At the same time, protecting victims is of utmost importance and there’s need for caution when releasing their identity to the public.

But the prevalence of recording devices will continue to increase. A large percentage of our day and our interactions are recorded, whether it’s during a traffic stop or going to the grocery for a gallon of milk. That’s unsettling, for sure, but it is a little resettling to know that an officer who makes a fatal mistake will be faced with evidence of his deed.

Correction

There was a typo in a website address included in last week’s story about the ongoing trail study for the WURA railroad line. The correct address for survey forms is www.eou.edu/rails-with-trails/. The Chieftain regrets the error.

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Our decline is self-inflicted



UP WITH FREEDOM


Rob Ruth

hashed-out among differing mindsets — framed within our nation’s founding documents. It has always been thus, and if the U.S. endures to the year 3000, no one at that time, either, should be surprised to hear political leaders and campaigners hold forth on their proposals’ solidarity with the 1,200-year-old Founding Fathers. Given our present circumstances, though, it’s difficult to imagine such a far-future America exerting the influence it could during the nation’s first quarter-millennium. Just last week, a New York Times report on a Washington, D.C., gathering of world economic movers and shakers (they were at the nation’s capital for meetings of both the World Bank and International Monetary Fund)

noted growing pessimism among these players concerning U.S. ability to continue in the economic leadership the country has held since the end of World War II. It seems the U.S. and its client institutions — including the World Bank and IMF — are being vastly outspent by China and its own emerging institutions. Those vast but strategically targeted expenditures are buying China more than mere influence. Surely but not slowly, China is purchasing control. Some of the worried observers who were interviewed by the Times complained the Obama administration hasn’t done all it can to effectively respond — failing, for example, to shepherd through Congress a long-proposed reform of the IMF — but repeatedly we hear the real core of the response problem is the now-too-familiar culprit that’s been crippling us on every front: a U.S. government too bitterly divided to properly function.

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Masters lives up to its hype



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

wife and daughters, as Ben exchanged hugs and acknowledged the appreciation of his family, friends, and admirers. At the end of that love fest, Ben said he felt like he had won the tournament all over again. Much of the pre-Masters hype had centered on how Tiger Woods would fare after a two-month hiatus from competitive golf, and whether or not World #1 Rory McIlroy would be able to complete a career Grand Slam at the ripe old age of 25. Tiger, who had been plagued by the chipping “yips” when he was last on tour, greatly exceeded expectations by displaying a much-improved short game, making the cut, and even working his way up to the third last grouping on Sunday morning. As fate would have it, he was even paired with Rory in that final round. Although neither of these

ultra-competitors could have felt thoroughly satisfied with anything short of a victory, nevertheless both could take solace in their own personal rebounds and strong performances. I was glad to see Phil Mickelson in the hunt on Sunday. As golfing great Colin Montgomerie remarked later that day, “Phil is box office!” His nickname, “Phil the Thrill,” has been earned by shots like Sunday’s 40-foot birdie putt, that side-winded its way over a hump and down a bank into the hole, and his sand shot that sunk for an eagle on the final par-5. Phil is always fun to watch. But the star of this Masters, from start to finish, was Jordan Spieth. This 21-year-old Texan, who finished in second place in last year’s tournament, jumped out to 8-under-par on the first day, and stretched that margin to 14-under by the end of two rounds. While his weekend scoring was not eye-popping, his play was still rock-solid under the type of pressure that typically causes most early leaders to wither on the vine.

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Valley has beauty in community

To the Editor: With a great sadness in my heart I traveled to the Wallowa Valley on Easter weekend. As many of you know, Lee Phelps took his life as a way of dealing with his loss of life capacities that was robbing him of his sense of worth and his ability to interact with the world. I traveled with Lee’s Uncle Mark and several cousins who came to be with Kit and Kim, Taylor and Chris. Kit’s parents came, as did her brothers and wives. Kim’s brothers and sister were here and additional cousins, traveled to be with family. Lee’s sailing mates, both male and female, came from afar to say farewell to their friend and kindred spirit. While talking to Kim by the bonfire on Saturday evening, I mentioned the support he and Kit were receiving from their friends and the entire Wallowa Valley community. He turned to me and said that that was the reason he and Kit had chosen to live here. The sense of friendship, concern and caring was evident from their first days they drove down into the valley. I was quite moved as I saw the outpouring of love and the afore mentioned qualities come forth on Saturday eve-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ning as hundreds of folks from Lostine, Joseph, Enterprise and Wallowa came to the river to be with the dear friends and say goodbye to Lee, a boy that they had helped raise. This sense of community is often lost in the modern day rush of life. It is not lost in the Valley of the Wallowa. People drive through his lovely valley, and look with wonderment at the beauty of the magnificent snow draped mountains. But what they do not see is the true beauty of this place. The glorious sense of community nurtured by the people here in the shadow of the mountains.

Rob Phelps (cousin) Sisters

This hospital outstanding
To the Editor: I recently left a full-time position at Wallowa Memorial Hospital for personal reasons. My 2 1/2 years tenure there

were the best years of my professional career. I was fortunate to work under the direction of Larry Davy and his administrative team, Jenni Word and Joe Wanner. During my 26 years working in the healthcare industry I have worked in many hospitals both small and large. WMH is by far the best hospital I’ve ever worked at. There was never a day I didn’t enjoy beginning my shift or coming in after hours to provide care to the citizens of Wallowa County. I’ve never felt more appreciated by my direct supervisor and by the administration. WMH is truly focused on providing high-quality care. This is evident by the dedication and commitment of the entire organization. We were always reminded by Larry no matter how tough times were “remember who we are here for — the citizens of the community and the many visitors.” Everyone from the housekeeping staff, nursing, ancillary staff to the physician staff, live by this philosophy. I also had at the pleasure to interact with the hospital board.

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