

Below is the latest draft, filed Sept. 17, 2018, of my story about the deadly swatting incident that took place in Wichita, Kansas, on Dec. 28, 2017. I began reporting on the story for ESPN Esports in January 2018, finishing up just as I started my internship at Game Informer. Near the end of the summer, my ESPN Esports editor notified me that *ESPN the Magazine* was interested in the story, so I began more reporting work to expand and improve it.

In October, just as my editors were preparing to take the final steps to publish the story, Wired published a [similar story](#), so ESPN made the decision to pull my story from publication. Reporting for this story was without a doubt the most intense and instructive experience of my college career. I was able to practice interacting with police offices around the country, parsing through indictments and district attorney reports, speaking with sources about difficult subject matter and comparing various sources of information (police press releases, interviews, witness testimony, etc.) to clarify facts and timelines. I would not trade this experience for anything, regardless of the fact that it was ultimately not published.

Feel free to email me at [ccj1997@gmail.com](mailto:ccj1997@gmail.com) if you have any questions.

(This draft is posted here with permission of ESPN.)

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Just three days after Christmas, holiday decorations still hang at the Los Angeles Public Library in Exposition Park.

Even for a library, the large room is remarkably quiet. The librarians at Exposition Park don't like patrons making phone calls inside. So a mousey 20-something with short-cropped hair and light stubble looks for a place to talk on his cell, using the library's wireless network to send messages and lay out his plot. He passes by the robust children's section, the wooden chairs and tables at the public workstations -- and, most importantly, several security cameras -- and enters the bathroom.

The man can't afford a calling plan on his phone, so he uses public WiFi and the TextNow app to acquire a number with the 316 area code for Wichita, Kansas. He calls Wichita City Hall at approximately 6:10 p.m. Central Time. He reaches a security officer there and begins to tell him a horrific story. Seven minutes later, the man is transferred to a 911 dispatcher.

"911, what's the location of the emergency?"

"Um, I'm at 1033 West McCormick Street. I just shot my dad in the head 'cause he was arguing with my mom and it was getting way out of the control."

He talks slowly and casually, pausing often. His voice creeps along in a monotone. His name, he says, is Ryan. His mother and brother are in a nearby closet, Ryan says, and he's holding them at gunpoint. He's thinking of setting the house on fire and plans to commit suicide.

The dispatcher sometimes struggles to hear Ryan's hushed, mumbling voice. The call disconnects at 6:21 p.m. But 1,200 miles away, that four-minute call throws a community into disarray.

At 6:28 p.m. at 1033 West McCormick Street in Wichita, Kansas, Andy Finch opens his front door to police cars and blaring lights. There's shouting and a single gunshot.

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There's a pothole in the alleyway beside the house at 1033 West McCormick. The Finch family knows the noise of someone driving over the pothole well.

Sometime between 6:24 and 6:28 p.m. on that December day, Andy Finch hears that noise.

*Ba-dum.*

Usually, it means someone has come over to hang out with one of his nephews. But this time, Finch hears more than one car.

*Ba-dum.*

Too many cars.

*Ba-dum. Ba-dum.*

Then, seeing movement outside and flashing lights, Finch gets off the couch and goes to his front door.

The police are still setting up their perimeter and are as close as 20 feet from the front porch. There are no sirens -- only hushed voices. Then, Finch opens the door.

*"Front door!"*

*"Show me your hands!"*

*"Put your hands up!"*

*"Hands, hands, hands!"*

*"Walk this way!"*

To his right, a group of officers light up the dark porch with flashlights aimed in his direction -- flashlights with guns behind them.

To his left, on the other side of the building that used be the Breakfast Club Restaurant that forms the alley with the Finch's house, another group stands ready, silhouetted by the bright lights of the gas station behind them. A squad car is parked in the alleyway near Finch's porch.

And across the street, past the Finch's well-trimmed lawn and the pockmarked street, four policemen stand behind a red pickup and a dark sedan in a neighbor's driveway.

Finch raises his hands, then drops them to his side. According to police, he appears to "reach for his waistband, possibly to lift his pants, and reach behind his body with what appeared to be his right hand."

Inside, Lisa Finch, Andy's mother, hears the shouting, then a loud pop.

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WPD officer Justin Rapp hears the dispatch callout at 6:19 p.m. There is a hostage situation at 1033 West McCormick. Someone had shot his father and was holding his mother and brother at gunpoint.

Rapp and his partner arrive on the scene in minutes and park behind the former restaurant west of the McCormick house. Rapp grabs his department-issued rifle. People inside, according to dispatch, are being held at gunpoint, but he doesn't have much more information. Other officers have already begun setting a perimeter around the house.

An officer points Rapp to a window on the house's second story. They see the silhouette of someone "bending at the waist and moving up and down." From their perspective, it looks like someone performing CPR.

Rapp, on a sergeant's orders, positions himself behind a car across the street from the house. He monitors the door of the house through the non-magnifying scope of his rifle as Andy walks out. Through the chorus of yells, Finch moves his hand toward his waist.

Rapp never considers that the call could be faked. As far as he knows, a man in this house just shot and killed someone. And now, in the front door frame and in the crosshairs of Rapp's rifle, that man appears to reach for his waistband. The suspected caller raises his arm toward a group of officers to the east of the house.

Rapp would later say in a preliminary hearing that he didn't see a gun in Finch's hand. But in the chaos of that moment on Dec. 28, he makes a snap decision.

He fires. Andy Finch is pronounced dead at 7:03 p.m.

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Seventeen minutes after Andy Finch had been shot, 911 receives a call. It's Ryan again.

Dispatch notifies the officers that the caller says he's still in the house and has poured gasoline all over. The sergeant who had been positioned across the street with Rapp tells dispatch, "I don't smell gasoline."

The sergeant asks the dispatch operator to locate where the call is coming from.

"It's coming from a cell phone, and I'm getting some conflicting information. It may have been transferred through, and I don't have a cell phone number; I don't have any way to ping it."

Every detail of the call is wrong.

WPD contacts the FBI, and the departments collaborate on some leads they find on Twitter, including a tweet from half an hour after Finch's death: "That kids house that I swatted is on the news." Meanwhile, deputy police chief Troy Livingston prepares for a briefing the next day in Wichita.

"Due to the actions of a prankster," Livingston says, "we have an innocent victim."

Finch's house, he said, had been swatted.

Swatting, the practice of making a false report of an ongoing crime meant to result in a law enforcement response, has plagued all kinds of online circles and particularly gaming communities. It is typically used as a method of harassing streamers and gamers, and the interactions with law enforcement usually appear on those streams, too.

Swatters want people to see their work. They want victims to be on-stream when the police show up and for as many people as possible to see the fear and confusion. It's not enough to disrupt; that disruption must take center stage. Similarly, on Aug. 26, upset about an earlier loss, a Madden player opened fire on competitors and the crowd at an event he knew was livestreaming from a gaming bar in Jacksonville, Florida. The shooting played out to thousands of viewers on the livestreaming service Twitch.

In 2013, Matthew "Nadeshot" Haag, a Call of Duty player with OpTic Gaming at the time, was swatted. Haag now owns 100 Thieves, a consortium of esports teams.

"Yes, we were swatted during our livestream," he wrote on Twitter on Nov. 3, 2013. "Yes, they came in with assault rifles and pistols. Very dangerous situation. Thanks for asking."

In the gaming community, swatting is minimized as just a prank. Swatters laugh at streamers' reactions to police knocking down their doors. When Barstool Sports employee Devlin D'Zmura got the publication's Twitch channel banned by threatening to swat a Twitch user, Barstool President Dave Portnoy apologized for the incident by putting D'Zmura in a dunce cap and calling him stupid.

A number of high-profile streamers have all fallen victim to swattings in the past. But Andy Finch's swatting is the only known fatality, and Finch wasn't a streamer or a professional gamer. He hardly played video games at all.

Jordan "n0thing" Gilbert, a former member of Cloud9's Counter-Strike: Global Offensive team, was swatted in 2014 while livestreaming CS:GO from his bedroom. He was familiar with swatting trends in the gaming community, and he says knowing what to expect helped him be better prepared than most for the incident.

"Because I had seen it happen, I wasn't that scared," n0thing says. "I was able to see out the window that there was a bunch of people pointing weapons at me, and I was able to choose how my reaction was gonna be."

n0thing opened his front door, immediately put his hands up and walked out into the street as the police told him, "Walk this way." He followed their directions and then explained he was a streamer, and it all turned out fine.

n0thing says he doesn't know why someone would go out of their way to swat a person, but he has some ideas.

"In their minds, they think, 'Oh, we're gonna disrupt this person's life, and it's gonna be funny,'" n0thing says. "They're just silly about it."

Finch had none of n0thing's advantages. He didn't play online games. He had no reason to expect that the police might show up at his house with weapons drawn. Swatting wasn't part of his world until he opened his door on that day in late December.

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Andy Finch didn't play video games aside from an occasional NBA 2K match with his cousin, Jaidyn Irving. He was a 28-year-old father of two – an tattoo artist who was teaching his 7-year-old son, Aiden, to play chess. His famous potato salad was a must at family parties, and he was the master of the grill for the Finch family.

Before Finch died, he and Irving used to sit together on Lisa's porch. The last time they talked, Irving says, was just two days before Finch's death. He and Irving were sitting on that porch, smoking a Black & Mild cigar and "just talking about life."

"That's what he loved to do," Irving says. "He loved to sit out on the porch and just watch the cars pass by."

As a kid, Finch was a Boy Scout who loved the outdoors and wore shorts with cowboy boots; that's where his mom got his nickname, calling him "Andy Pandy Cowboy Finch" until he was old enough to object.

Finch was one of the only white kids growing up in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. His large nose earned him the nickname “Snowman.”

Lisa Finch, Andy, his brother Jerome and his sisters Nikki and Adrienne lived in Virginia until the mid-1990s, when Lisa moved to Wichita with her children and separated from Andy’s father, Thomas Finch. There, Andy met Emanuel Silva, a close friend.

It didn’t take much for Finch to connect to his new home, and soon, his reserved, easygoing attitude made Snowman a trusted friend.

“He really showed me what loyalty was -- where somebody's gonna be there unconditionally,” Silva says. “No matter if I talked to you six months ago, it's the same connection we have since the time we split.”

Their ability to get right back to things came in handy: Silva says the crowd Finch and Silva hung out with was in and out of prison, so friends would often disappear for a while. Finch, too, had some trouble with the law.

But Lisa Finch says her oldest son had been trying to turn things around in recent years. He had taken on low-paying jobs to pay child support after he and the mother of his children separated.

“He was a family man,” Lisa Finch says.

The Finch family, including his cousin Irving, describe Andy as a protector. In February 2016, Irving was shot -- by who, he doesn’t know. Finch was one of the first to call him.

“He was the only one that actually cared about it and actually asked me about it every day, man,” Irving says. “Like, 'What are they doing about that?' Stuff like that. ... Even ‘til he was dead, he was still out there: ‘I’ll find out who shot you.’”

Finch looked out for his friends in the same way.

Two years ago, Silva felt threatened by some people driving around the neighborhood.

“I called up a bunch of friends,” Silva says. “He was the only one that showed up. He had to be at work at 5 in the morning, and he posted up with me at my house all night.”

The people drove by Silva’s home. “Guns were waved,” Silva says.

“My man was outside smoking a cigarette,” Silva says. “But he didn't run. He stood right next to me. You don't know what it's like to have somebody by your side like that -- somebody solid.”

Silva hadn't talked to Andy for some time, he says, because Andy was busy working to support his children. But if he could see his friend now, Silva says it would be like they had just seen each other yesterday.

"It's just hard for me to accept that I can't just hit him up and be like, 'Dude, how you doing?'" Silva says. "I'd take any day back with Andy. Just to have him there. Just to say hi."

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On the night of the shooting, six more out-of-state calls come in to Wichita 911. Only this time, they're not coming from Ryan. They're from people who want to help catch him.

Roderick Miller, a WPD sergeant in the investigations division, hears about these calls and contacts each person to see what they know. They share screenshots with him -- information on a Twitter user called SWAuTistic.

Miller has never heard of swatting, but as he searches social media sites, he sees more and more evidence that SWAuTistic might be the person behind the Wichita calls. Miller passes his information off to WPD detectives, including Jeffrey McVay, who had been called in around 7 p.m. to interview witnesses from the McCormick scene.

McVay conducts those interviews until 4:58 a.m. the next day and keeps track of the other investigators' progress as he goes. He sticks around after all the interviews are over and gets information linking SWAuTistic to a 2015 bomb threat in Glendale, California. The perpetrator's name is also familiar to the Panama City Beach Police Department: the PCBPD was looking into him as a suspect in a November 2017 bomb threat called in to a high school.

The rest of the pieces come together quickly.

WPD Detective Addie Perkins reaches out to the Los Angeles Police Department to find the detectives responsible for the Glendale case. She makes contact with LAPD detectives Edward Dorroh and Mike Rosello, and they exchange audio files. Perkins sends the swatting call recordings, and the LAPD officers send the bomb threat calls.

Dorroh is already on his way to the swatter's suspected location -- the Exposition Park library -- when he receives the recording, so he listens as he drives. The detective recognizes that mousey voice. He and Perkins come to the same conclusion.

"Same guy," Perkins would later say at a hearing.

Perkins contacts the Sedgwick County district attorney's office in Kansas and suggests securing a warrant for the man's arrest.

By the time Dorroh arrives at the library, the warrant has come through, and a police surveillance team has already detained the suspect. Dorroh finds Ryan – whose real name is Tyler Barriss – handcuffed and leaning against a car with officers around him.

Barriss has put on some weight since the last time Dorroh saw him, but his voice sounds the same.

Later that day, Barriss confesses. He tells the detectives how he was contacted by two *Call of Duty: World War II* players, that he was asked to swat 1033 West McCormick by one of those players, that he tried to connect to a virtual private network to make the call but failed, that he “got sloppy” and jumped on the public WiFi.

Barriss says he knew it was only a matter of time before someone died in a swatting.

“I guess that time was last night,” he says.

“It’s just so unfortunate.”

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Barriss posed as Ryan to help settle a score between a Call of Duty player who had engaged in a heated argument with another player during an online match.

On Dec. 27, Barriss had allegedly received a message from Casey Viner, an 18-year-old from North College Hill, Ohio, who was mad at a teammate from a recent money game. As reported by Dexetero, the players allegedly lost \$1.50 on the match. Viner and the teammate, 19-year-old Shane Gaskill from Wichita, argued over private messages. Gaskill gave Viner a false address and goaded him to “pull up” to 1033 West McCormick.

“I said ‘I won’t be the one pulling up,’ ” Viner later wrote in a message to an unnamed person, according to a federal indictment, “‘You’re getting swatted.’”

And Viner knew just the person to ask.

Barriss, who goes by SWAuTistic on Twitter, has a reputation for swatting. He has been connected to falsified police calls in multiple states in a federal indictment, including the one in Wichita. Viner gave him the address, and Barriss followed Gaskill on Twitter. Gaskill noticed and taunted Barriss via direct messages, saying “Please try some shit [...] I’ll be waiting.” He sent Barriss the same false address he’d given Viner.

Barriss made the calls believing that he was swatting Gaskill. Around 7:58 p.m., Gaskill told Barriss that the McCormick address was an old house of his. He lived elsewhere in Wichita and was trolling them. And they fell for it.

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By 9:51 p.m., local television reporters had begun reporting about deadly police action at 1033 West McCormick. Gaskill messaged Barriss again, but not to taunt him.

*"This is a murder case now  
Casey deleted everything  
You need 2 as well  
This isn't a joke K troll anymore  
If you don't you're literally retarded I'm trying to help you both out  
They know it was a swat call"*

Barriss has been charged with involuntary manslaughter, giving a false alarm and interference with law enforcement, according to the Office of the District Attorney of Sedgwick County.

He is also facing a federal indictment on two counts of threatening and conveying false information concerning use of an explosive in two separate false bomb threats on government buildings in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 14 and Dec. 22, 2017.

Barriss pled not guilty on June 29 and is incarcerated at the Sedgwick County Jail while awaiting trial. The two most severe counts against him carry maximum penalties of life sentences.

In what could be another landmark case for criminal filings for swatting, the players who allegedly provided the information that led to Finch's death -- Viner and Gaskill -- also face charges. Viner has been charged with multiple counts of conspiracy, conspiracy to obstruct justice, obstruction of justice and wire fraud. Gaskill is charged with several counts of conspiracy to obstruct justice, obstruction of justice and wire fraud. They posted bail on June 13 and both pled not guilty. Viner and Gaskill face up to 20 years in maximum penalties on their most severe counts.

In an [interview from jail with ABC7](#), Barriss said he has been paid to make false calls in the past but would not say if there was any discussion of payment in this instance. In an [interview with DramaAlert](#), however, Barriss offered some explanation as to why he agreed to swat Gaskill for Viner.

"I was minding my own business at the library," Barriss said. "Someone contacted me and said, 'Hey, dude, this fucking retard just gave me his address, and he thinks nothing's gonna happen. Uh, you wanna, you know, prove him wrong?' And I said, 'Sure. I love swatting kids who think that nothing's gonna happen.'"

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After Andy's death, Lisa Finch filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the City of Wichita and the officers involved in the shooting. The goal of the lawsuit is twofold.

"There needs to be a policy and procedures in place when these types of calls come in," says Andrew M. Stroth, the Finch family's lawyer and a civil rights attorney with the Action Injury Law Group. "But we also think that the officer and the Wichita Police Department ... are responsible for the death of Andy Finch."

From the Wichita Police Department's perspective, however, the blame lies with those involved in the swatting call itself, not the officers who responded to it.

Sedgwick County District Attorney Marc Bennett announced in a 42-page report on his office's investigation into the event that Rapp, "Officer #1" in the report, will not be criminally charged because officers entered the scene thinking that someone had a gun and an intent to kill others in the house.

"To charge Officer #1 would require evidence—not 20/20 hindsight—that it was unreasonable for him to believe ... [Andy] posed a risk to the officers near the house," Bennett wrote in the report. "Given the evidence provided to the officers by dispatch and Mr. Finch's physical movements after opening the door, there is insufficient evidence to establish that Officer 1 acted in an unreasonable manner."

Livingston told reporters at the December press conference that this was the first swatting call to WPD that he was aware of. Miller, the WPD sergeant who first began investigating the swatting, said at a preliminary hearing for Barriss that he would guess the department has received "20 to 30" fake calls per year in his 18-year career, but this was the first swatting the department had to deal with. Ramsay said at the January conference that a review of the swatting would be conducted after the conclusion of the criminal investigation in order to try to prevent future incidents.

One of the factors that makes swatting calls so difficult for law enforcement to deal with is that 911 operators have to take calls at face value, says Chris Carver, a spokesperson for the National Emergency Number Association. Since swatters intend to incite a significant police response, these false reports almost always depict disastrous scenarios.

"Put yourself in the mind of a 911 telecommunicator who is receiving a call reporting an event that could be potentially one of the most horrific of their career," Carver says. "It's an incredibly challenging position."

At a press conference on Jan. 5, WPD Chief Gordon Ramsay said he wanted to stress the department's sympathy for those affected by the swatting.

“We are so sorry that this ended in a senseless death,” Ramsay said. “This is a terrible tragedy, not only for the -- obviously -- for the family, that will forever impact them, but also the community as well as police staff that will carry this burden for the rest of their lives.”

In the aftermath of the shot that killed Andy, a police officer must live with killing an innocent man, three people are awaiting trial and a family has lost its rock. There are ongoing civil suits and conversations about what went wrong and what can be done differently.

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Lawmakers are scrambling to catch up to a trend that is difficult to police and prosecute, with only a handful of states -- including New Jersey, Colorado, Louisiana and California -- enacting anti-swatting laws. Politicians who have attempted to address the trend have themselves been swatted. Sen Ted Lieu of California was targeted after he proposed an anti-swatting bill in 2013 in California’s state legislature.

“It's not like they're reporting, you know, 'Someone stole a loaf of bread,’” Lieu says. “That's what causes police to not just show up but show up on edge.”

Rep. Katherine Clark sponsored an anti-swatting bill in Massachusetts in 2015. She learned of swatting when one of her constituents became the target of severe online harassment related to “GamerGate.”

“Swatting was one of the attacks on people's safety and homes that had sort of jumped out of the gaming world,” says Clark, who was swatted in 2016 after her sponsorship of the bill.

Clark is now sponsoring a national bill in Congress. The legislation aims to modernize criminal statutes to deal with internet-based attacks, allocate funds to the FBI for data collection and train local law enforcement to deal with attacks like swatting and doxxing, the practice of publicly sharing information about a person and those close to them like their home address, phone numbers and other private details.

And in Kansas, state legislators took less than 7 months to respond. On April 12, Kansas Governor Jeff Colyer signed an act which makes swatting calls that result in someone’s death punishable by more than 12 years in prison on a first conviction. The Andrew T. Finch Act became law on July 1.

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In the time since Finch’s death, Lisa Finch and the rest of her family have moved to a different house, about seven miles west of 1033 West McCormick. The memory of her son’s body in the doorway was too painful.

Lisa Finch scrolls through her phone looking for people who knew Finch, who can tell his story. She talks slowly, deliberately, as she searches for the right words.

“I’m trying to withhold emotion until this is all over with,” she says. “And then I’m going to let myself grieve.”

Silva sits in a chair beside the couch where Lisa sits. A table holding an urn of Finch’s ashes and a large, framed portrait of him rests between them.

“Do you think that’s healthy for you, though?” Silva asks.

Lisa pauses.

“Uh ... I mean ...”

She doesn’t have any answers.