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Taser Abuse Garners International Attention

by Tony Eubank

Why would people in Castres, Paris, and Bordeaux, France have any interest in Cleveland, TN, let alone have any reason to write a slew of letters to the Bradley County Sheriff's Office and the Bradley News? The answer to this question begins with allegations levied against the BCSO earlier this year concerning its use of tasers. These begin with the case of Christopher McCargo, who was arrested for public intoxication in February. A lawsuit filed against the BCSO claims that, while in custody at the Bradley county jail, McCargo was stunned in the neck with a taser while he was restrained in a chair and then left unsupervised for three hours. When officers returned and released McCargo from his restraints he fell to the floor unconscious and bleeding from the mouth. From there he was taken to the hospital where he fell into a coma. McCargo currently remains in a coma in an Ohio facility.

Another case involving the BCSO and tasers is that of Brian Woodby. Woodby claims that while he was in the custody of BCSO deputies, after being stopped for a DUI offense, that he was stunned with a taser several times in the stomach and genital area. After this he was released from custody, without being charged with any crime, and treated at a hospital for taser-related injuries. Both of these incidents received large local news coverage and some national notoriety. As a result the human rights organization, Amnesty International caught wind of the stories. Amnesty International is a worldwide organization that campaigns for globally recognized human rights. Amnesty is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. It does not support or oppose any government or political system. The organization's only concern is the impartial protection of human rights. Amnesty works towards this goal through several means, including petitioning governments, protests, vigils, and other awareness raising tactics. The main way that Amnesty raises awareness about various issues is through its thorough research and letter-writing campaigns. Earlier this year Amnesty called for the end of the use of tasers by U.S. law enforcement agencies. Reasons for this, as outlined in an Amnesty issued press release, include the significant year-on-year increase in taser-related deaths, a lack of any independent and rigorous study into the health effects of the electro-shock devices, and the fact that despite these safety concerns, tasers continue to be used in the U.S. as a routine force tool rather than as a weapon of last resort. The same press release also stated concern over the continued reports of excessive use of tasers, which in some cases amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. As a result of Amnesty's campaign against excessive and sometimes abusive taser use in the U.S., the BCSO has been swamped with letters from Amnesty International members, not from the U.S., but France. Khaled Benelhadj, a coordinator for Amnesty in Paris France spoke with the Bradley News concerning the letters that are being sent in care of Sheriff Tim Gobble. "We found out about the things happening in Cleveland through our London research office. So, when we were notified, we began the letter-writing campaign," said Benelhadj. "We are writing the letters simply as a means of raising awareness and to cause your law enforcement officials to take some action in order to change the way things are being done," continued Benelhadj. Benelhadj expressed his special concern over what he sees as serious

