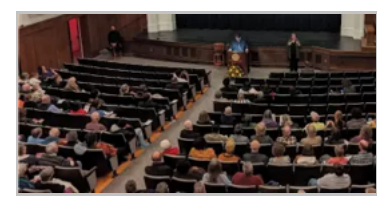


FEBRUARY 1, 2022

UPDATED: Two Bridgewater College officers killed in campus shooting

By **Bridget Manley, Publisher**
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Editor's note: This article was updated at 8:56 p.m. after the police briefing.

By **Bridget Manley, publisher**

Police arrested a 27-year-old Ashland, Va., man suspected of killing two Bridgewater College police officers Tuesday in an on-campus shooting, which added the private liberal arts college to the list of American schools whose campuses have been marred by gun violence.

Campus Police Officer John Painter and Safety Officer J.J. Jefferson died, according to a Bridgewater College email.

"These officers were close friends, known to many of us as the 'dynamic duo,'" said the email from Bridgewater College President David W. Bushman to students, faculty and staff. "John was J.J.'s best man in his wedding this year. They were beloved by students, faculty and staff. I hurt for their families and loved ones, as I know we all do."

The college cancelled classes and events for Tuesday and Wednesday and will close its offices Wednesday.

Painter and Jefferson were responding to a call about a suspicious person who "was in a location where he shouldn't have been" at Memorial Hall at about 1:20 p.m., said Corinne Geller, spokeswoman for the Virginia State Police during an evening press conference.

"After a brief interaction with the man, the subject opened fire and shot both officers," Geller said. "The man then fled on foot."

Police later arrested Alexander Wyatt Campbell after a brief pursuit that led officers through the North River and onto a small island that is also part of the town of Bridgewater. Campbell had a gunshot wound but was treated and released at Sentara RMH. He is being held without bond at the Rockingham/Harrisonburg Regional Jail and is being held on four felony charges, including two counts of capital murder, Geller said.

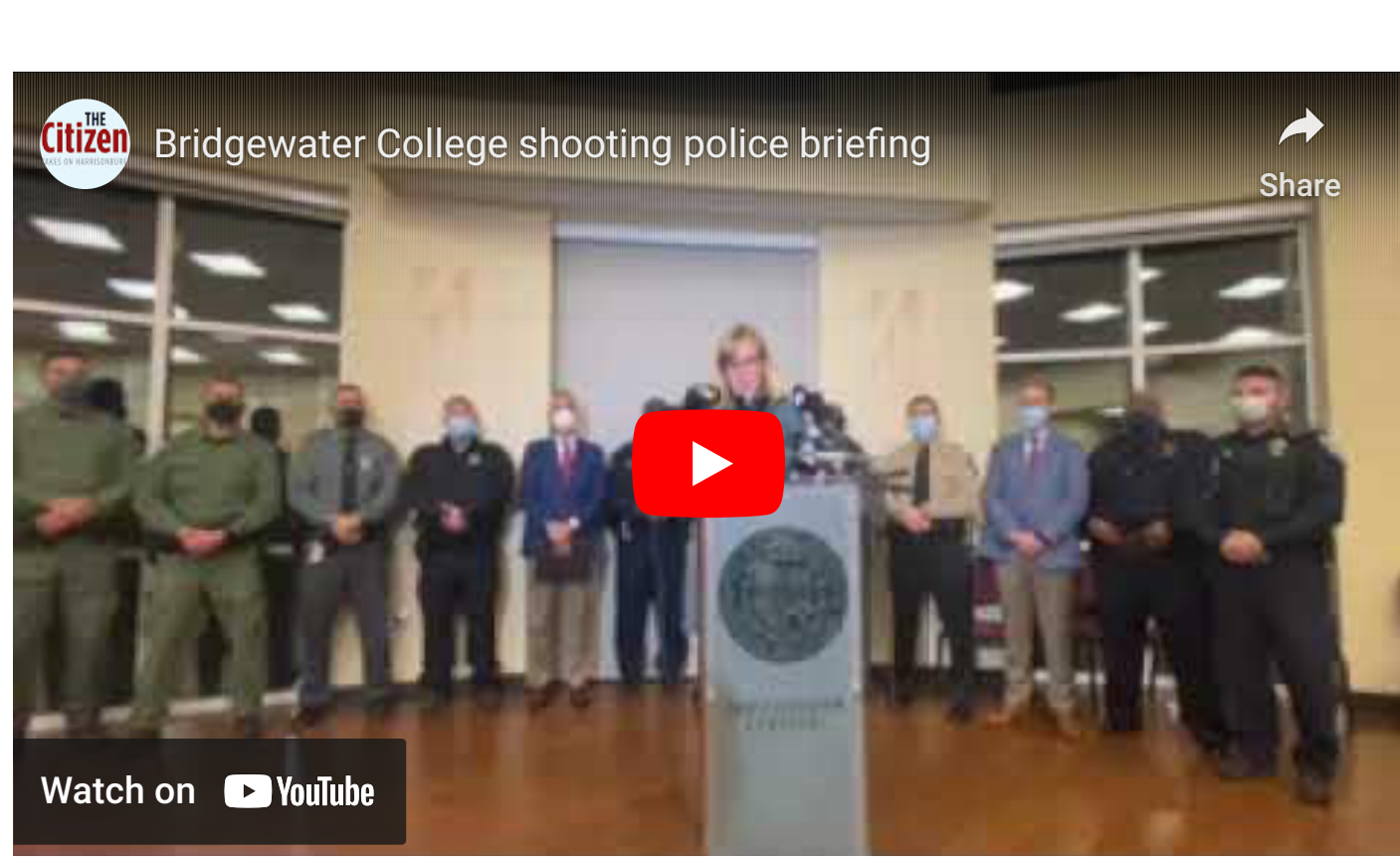
State police investigators are still trying to determine whether the wound was self-inflicted or if he was shot by one of the Bridgewater College officers.

Police from across multiple departments — including Harrisonburg, Bridgewater College, the towns of Dayton and Bridgewater, the Rockingham and Augusta counties sheriffs' offices, the Virginia State Police and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources Conservation Police — joined in the search.

The FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives also are assisting in the ongoing investigation, Geller said.

Geller declined to comment on whether Campbell had any connection to Bridgewater College.

As part of the investigation, police also recovered multiple firearms "associated with Campbell" from the campus, Geller said.



Bridgewater College, which prominently **displayed its ranking as being among the safest schools** in the U.S., issued a campus-wide alert about an active shooter at 1:24 p.m. after shots were fired outside of Flory Hall. The college was on lock-down for nearly three hours.

Joshua Gilliam, a senior at the college, was in class in Flory Hall when he said he heard five or six gunshots. He said he closed the classroom door and sat up against it as many of the other 18 students in the class ducked for cover.

He called it "traumatizing."

"It's sad of course," he said. "I hate to see this happen. You hear about it on the news but you never thing it would happen to you or at your school. It's devastating."

Kai Bowman, like many Bridgewater students, said he reached out to friends to make sure they were safe.

"I honestly didn't even feel like leaving my room until a few minutes after I got that all-clear," said Bowman, a senior theater major from Waynesboro.

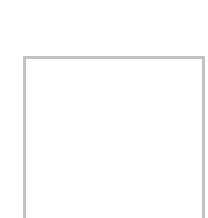
After emerging from Flory Hall after police had cleared the scene around 4 p.m., a group of students from a history class told reporters that they heard some noise but didn't realize it was the sound of gunfire until other students began texting.

Several said after closing the door, they texted or called family members to tell them "I love you."

Speaking at the evening press conference, Bushman, the college's president, said the Bridgewater College community is grieving with the families of Painter and Jefferson.

"What happened here today is senseless and tragic," he said. "It's heartbreaking."

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Bridget Manley, Publisher

Bridget spent most of her adult life working as a morning show producer and reporter for radio stations in Cumberland, Md., and Annapolis, Md., before moving to Harrisonburg eight years ago. When she's not reporting the news and helping run The Citizen, she's the manager of operations for Rivercrest Farm and Event Center in Shenandoah, she is a freelance reporter for WMRA, and also hosts a podcast that shares parenting stories called "Birds In A Tree."

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