

Sheriff's office faces scrutiny over training



ABOVE: Knox County Sheriff's Office Capt. Eric Edlin, operating a traffic radar gun in 2020, is not a state-certified police officer, yet participates in enforcement that requires it. FILE

LEFT: Edlin wears a body camera in this screenshot taken from the recording by another deputy's body camera during an armed raid on a South Knox County business in September 2021. FROM POLICE VIDEO

Captain not certified to enforce law

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A Knox County Sheriff's Office captain who joined in a raid on a suspected catalytic converter theft ring lacked the certification to participate, and is the second person identified by Knox News who burst into the building armed with a handgun despite a Tennessee law that prohibits officers to enforce the law without meeting state standards.

Capt. Eric Edlin was the fifth man through the door during the September 2021 raid, on the heels of sheriff's office fire investigator Jerry Glenn, who also carried a sidearm and was not certified to participate in the raid. Both men were appointed to their positions by Sheriff Tom Spangler.

Edlin's issues don't stop there.

He has twice been the target of orders of protection filed by women who allege he threatened to kill them, the second of which could have prevented him from serving as a law enforcement officer without Spangler's intercession.

Knox News discovered Edlin and Glenn's participation by examining video from the raid.



Spangler

Edlin came to the position of captain overseeing the sheriff's office reserves unit by a circuitous route.

In the years before he began overseeing the reserves, he held several jobs outside of police work, at one point working for a crane operating company and a heavy hauling company, according to his LinkedIn profile. He eventually started and sold his own lawn care business.

Before that he worked for the sheriff's office at the county jail. But only briefly.

Edlin lasted less than a year in the job,

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leaving in April 2003, two months after his wife filed a restraining order against him alleging he threatened to kill her.

He joined the sheriff's office reserves in 2012 as a volunteer under Sheriff Jimmy "J.J." Jones. Reserves officers can do almost anything a regular officer does, but are limited to only 20 hours a week and are typically assigned low-level tasks like directing traffic, guarding hospitalized arrestees or driving people to jail after they've been arrested.

On a 2016 employee application from Edlin obtained from the sheriff's office by Knox News, he lists briefly working at the jail in 2002-03, but the "reason for separation" is redacted and the sheriff's office will not say whether there was an investigation into the allegations that he threatened to kill his wife or if that's the reason he left.

If he quit while the incident was being investigated, he is ineligible for re-hire, according to sheriff's office rules regulated by the Knox County Merit System.

But in the end, those rules doesn't matter.

The regulations, which "set forth and enforce a structured set of rules and guidelines to favorably influence the professionalism of law enforcement," don't apply to sheriff's appointees. Spangler, like any Knox County sheriff, can appoint anyone he chooses.

So after Edlin completed the agency's reserves officer academy in 2012 and served several years as a volunteer reserves deputy, Spangler moved him to an appointed full-time position overseeing the reserves in 2019, according to his personnel file, though Hillary Martin, the sheriff's office records coordinator, told Knox News the personnel file is wrong and Edlin wasn't moved to full-time until February 2021.

Regardless of when he started working full time, he has never been certified by the state to do police work. But this hasn't stopped him.

There are obvious ties between Spangler and Glenn and his wife, Kimberly, the sheriff's office spokesperson. The couple donated nearly \$5,000 to Spangler's 2018 campaign while Kimberly ran the campaign, and Spangler gave both sheriff's office jobs after he



Eric Edlin, right, is the captain over the Knox County Sheriff's Office Reserves Unit. He has twice been the target of orders of protection filed by women who allege he threatened to kill them.
THE KNOX COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

was first elected.

Edlin has less obvious ties with Spangler. He donated \$100 to Spangler's 2018 campaign. However, both Edlin and Spangler love to fish and both have participated in at least 12 amateur bass fishing tournaments since 2022 with the Tennessee Team Trail Fishing Tournament. The two don't fish on the same team, though Edlin's partner is another sheriff's office employee, Deputy Thomas Sawyer.

A history of domestic problems

In 1998, when Edlin was 19, a former girlfriend filed a restraining order in Knox County court against him alleging he threatened to kill her, according to court records.

"On Saturday, Feb. 7, Eric stood in the road at my house and was yelling at me," the woman wrote in her order of protection petition. "He began calling me names (dick sucker, whore, bitch) and he said, 'Go in before I whoop your ass.' He said, 'Don't forget what I said I'd do to you before.'

"In December, Eric hit me in the stomach almost causing me to fall down the stairs," she continued. "I was bruised from this. He has threatened to kill me on more than one occasion. Eric follows me around when I am with friends, he has also paged me and called me nonstop."

Knox News is not naming the woman because she alleges she was a victim of domestic abuse.

The judge granted the order of protection, which lasted one year.

Edlin was hired by the sheriff's office under Sheriff Tim Hutchinson to work in the jail four years later. The sheriff's office would not comment on why he was hired or why the order of protection and threatening to kill a woman didn't disqualify him from joining the sheriff's office in 2002.

In 2003, Edlin's wife filed an order of protection in Knox County court against him alleging similar behavior.

"Last week of December, threatened to shoot & kill, because I found a phone number of another female," his wife wrote in the petition. "It happened at his apartment, Jan. 17. Threatened to frame by planting drugs in my home or car, to take away my baby."

Knox News is not naming the woman, who has since separated from Edlin, because she alleges she was a victim of domestic abuse.

She dropped her request for the order of protection a month later after Edlin agreed to attend counseling and take prescribed medications, according to court records.

A month after the petition for a domestic order was dropped, Edlin left the sheriff's office.

Is Edlin permitted to carry a weapon?

Tennessee law comes down hard on people with orders of protections filed against them, including an order for removal of firearms in some cases.

Edlin's ability to carry a firearm, however, wouldn't be affected by either case. The statute removing firearms only applies in cases where the parties are spouses, former spouses, have a child together or have ever lived together. None of those criteria apply in the 1998 order of protection sought by the girlfriend. The 2003 order of protection is moot because it was dismissed.

Edlin's wife filed for divorce in 2005, and in 2006 he filed for an order of protection against her, alleging she hit him in the chest and head and threw his car keys. He dropped it three weeks later.

The two remarried in 2011. In April 2023, Edlin filed for divorce. It has not been finalized.

Sheriff can hire almost anyone to be a deputy

The Knox County Sheriff's Office Merit System exists to protect employees from political retribution from the elected sheriff. Merit system policy lays out rules for hiring, firing and most ev-

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