

Police Close Call (from interview on p. 268)
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Police Officer Recounts Close Call with Murder Suspect
By Patrick Harwood

“I still smell the gunpowder this morning. I thought I was dead.”

Charleston police officer Carlos Vacanti is still coming to grips with the harrowing encounter he had late Sunday night with a man now identified as the key suspect in a Tennessee murder.

In an interview this morning, Vacanti talked about being shot at twice at close range—and living to tell about it.

Vacanti says he was on patrol around 11 p.m. Sunday when he spotted a man in a Meeting Street parking lot who matched the police description of the suspect in some recent car break-ins.

Vacanti said he pulled up in his car, got out and called to the man. He says as the man turned to face him, he saw a gun in his waistband, and then the man pulled out the gun.

Vacanti said in a flash his reflexes took over. He said as the man fired at him, he leaned to the right and dropped to one knee—a reflex that may have saved his life.

“I remember his eyes,” Vacanti said. “They were cold, the eyes of a killer. I smelled the gunpowder and waited for the pain. I thought I was dead. There’s no doubt in my mind he wanted to kill me last night just because I stopped him. I was

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an object in his way.”

Vacanti said as he started running behind some cars the man fired another shot, missing him again. He said his backup officer then arrived and the gunman fled.

Five minutes later, according to Vacanti, he and his partner found the suspect trying to break through the back door of a house. “I ordered him to stop, and he put his hands up and said, ‘You got me,’” Vacanti said.

The suspect’s name has yet to be released by police. Investigators said the man is wanted for the robbery and murder of a gas station attendant in Tennessee. He faces several additional charges in connection with last night’s incident downtown.

Vacanti said he still can’t believe all of this happened to him. A brief, violent encounter that lasted, in his estimation “maybe 60 seconds” will stay with him for a lifetime.

“I thought I was going to cash everything in,” he said. “I smelled the gunpowder and waited for the pain. I thought I was dead.”

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