

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

NAVY REGION MID-ATLANTIC PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

1510 GILBERT ST., STE. 207
NORFOLK, VA 23511
TEL: (757) 322-2853
FAX: (757) 445-1953



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Stabbing victim in good condition, suspect in Navy custody, additional sailor being questioned

Norfolk, Va. (CNRMA) – Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) agents confirmed today that Petty Officer 3rd Class Wilbur G. Harwell, the sailor suspected in the stabbing assault of another service member Friday at the Naval Support Activity Hampton Roads Portsmouth Annex, had departed the installation before perimeter gates were closed at 8:35 a.m. Agents are questioning another service member they say aided in Harwell's escape.

The victim of the assault, Petty Officer 2nd Class Justin D. Powell, remains in good condition at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth recovering from multiple stab wounds.

Harwell appeared at a custody hearing today in Federal Court in Norfolk where he was turned over to the Navy. Harwell has been placed in pretrial confinement at the Naval Consolidated Brig in Chesapeake pending court-martial charges under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). NCIS has not completed its investigation of the incident and Harwell has not yet been charged.

An initial review hearing for Harwell will be held tomorrow where Navy officials will determine whether to continue Harwell's confinement. If Harwell is ordered to remain in confinement, the UCMJ generally requires he be arraigned within 120 days. The military justice system, similar to the civilian justice system, is based on the principle of innocent until proven guilty.

The service member being questioned by NCIS agents has not been charged.

Agents say Powell was stabbed during an altercation with Harwell in a barracks room. After Harwell fled the scene, agents say Powell exited the barracks and made his way to the Navy Exchange area for help.

Emergency services received the report of the stabbing at 8:33. Two minutes later, at 8:35 a.m., the gates to the installation were closed and personnel ordered to shelter in place while Navy, local, state and federal law enforcement agencies conducted a room-by-room search for the suspect.

NCIS agents today said they believe another service member assisted Harwell in leaving the installation before the gates were closed and drove the suspect to Virginia Beach. Harwell was apprehended at an oceanfront hotel about 5 p.m. Friday by Navy, local and federal officials in Virginia Beach.

The identity of the service member being questioned, and further details of the NCIS investigation, have not been released.

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