

U.S.

# Emergency Declared in Ferguson After Shooting

By JOHN ELIGON and MITCH SMITH AUG. 10, 2015

FERGUSON, Mo. — The St. Louis County executive declared a state of emergency here on Monday as officials and activists sought to regain control of the volatile streets after plainclothes police officers shot and critically wounded an 18-year-old black man who they said was firing on them late the night before.

The police said the man, Tyrone Harris Jr., was among two groups of young people who exchanged gunfire near peaceful protests late Sunday on the first anniversary of the death of Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager who was killed by a white police officer in Ferguson. Prosecutors on Monday charged Mr. Harris, of the St. Louis suburb Northwoods, with 10 counts, including four of felony assault on a law enforcement officer.

The declaration of a state of emergency by the county executive, Steve Stenger, empowered the county police force and its top commander, Chief Jon Belmar, to oversee police operations in and around Ferguson, where police units from surrounding towns arrived on Monday to bolster efforts to maintain calm. Gunfire on the fringes of demonstrations commemorating Mr. Brown's death — which set off looting, arson and confrontations with the police last year — unnerved residents and demonstrators over the weekend.

“The recent acts of violence will not be tolerated in a community that has worked so tirelessly over the last year to rebuild and become stronger,” Mr. Stenger said in a statement. “Chief Belmar shall exercise all powers and duties necessary to preserve order, prevent crimes, and protect the life and property of our citizens.”

On Monday, protesters who had commemorated Mr. Brown throughout the weekend

staged acts of civil disobedience across the region. They protested incarceration rates and prison contractors in Clayton, the county seat, and held a rally outside the federal courthouse in St. Louis, where nearly five dozen people were arrested. Another 60 or so were arrested after blocking traffic for about 30 minutes during the evening rush on Interstate 70 in the St. Louis suburbs.

Around 10 p.m., police officers and state troopers began to make arrests after some demonstrators did not clear West Florissant Avenue, which was scarred by vandalism and looting a year ago. There were isolated scuffles, and some frozen water bottles were hurled toward officers.

Some protesters were not so quick to embrace the police version of the shooting of Mr. Harris, whose family has questioned whether he fired on the police or was even carrying a weapon. The authorities said they had recovered a 9-millimeter Sig Sauer next to Mr. Harris that was reported stolen last year.

Still, there seemed to be agreement among some protest leaders — many of whom were from the region, but others who had come into town to commemorate Mr. Brown — that much of the trouble has been caused by young people with no connection to the demonstrations and who were hanging out along the street.

“We continually talk and engage folks and try to help them understand what it is to actually be in confrontation, what resistance looks like, what organized resistance looks like versus like some of what happened last night,” Montague Simmons, the executive director of the Organization for Black Struggle, said Monday. “Some of those folks were not there to protest, obviously. They were just there for their own reasons. I guess the point for us is making sure we’ve got enough people on hand that when that happens, we’re able to help keep folks safe.”

Still, Mr. Simmons faulted the county’s decision to declare a state of emergency, warning that an overly aggressive police stance might provoke new unrest. Protest leaders had also criticized the police for showing up in riot gear late Sunday.

“The state of emergency is the result of county government’s unwillingness to control the police and authorities, who used excessive force on a crowd that was retreating as instructed,” he said in a statement.

The executive order will allow for certain staffing changes to bolster the police presence, a spokeswoman for Mr. Stenger said. It also could allow for a curfew to be put in place, though that step has not been taken.

Thousands of peaceful demonstrators commemorated Mr. Brown’s death with rallies,

concerts, demonstrations and church services through the weekend. Though both a local grand jury and federal prosecutors cleared the white police officer who killed him, Darren Wilson, of criminal wrongdoing, Mr. Brown's death led to protests against police violence across the country and helped start a national debate on law enforcement policies in minority communities.

On Sunday, the mood of the demonstrations started to become tense after a couple of people broke into a beauty supply store along West Florissant Avenue and several police cars responded, with officers lining up along the storefront. Dozens of protesters blocked traffic and started moving off the roadway to yell at the police officers. But when several squad cars raced to an intersection nearby and dozens of officers in riot gear formed a skirmish line, the demonstrators surged back into the street.

After an hourlong standoff, gunfire broke out about 300 yards away in a strip mall where dozens of people who were not part of the protest were milling about.

Shots were being exchanged between two groups, according to the police. Mr. Harris fired a handgun as he ran across West Florissant, the police said in court documents. Four plainclothes officers in an unmarked sport-utility vehicle drove toward Mr. Harris with the S.U.V.'s red and blue lights flashing, the police said, and he fired upon them. They got out and chased him, and after an exchange of gunfire, Mr. Harris was hit, the police said.

But Mr. Harris's grandmother said that his girlfriend, who was with him, told her that Mr. Harris was running across West Florissant to her car to escape gunfire.

The grandmother, Gwen Drisdell, said she did not know whether Mr. Harris was armed. It would not be unreasonable that he might carry a firearm because of how violent the streets are, she said, but added, "I don't believe that he would disrespect police like that."

Mr. Harris was a friend of Mr. Brown's, Ms. Drisdell said, and he graduated from the same high school, Normandy, this year. Mr. Harris was searching for a job, she said, and was interested in truck driving.

No family members have been allowed to visit Mr. Harris in the hospital, she said. But she did learn that doctors were concerned about a bullet near his spine that they might not be able to remove, she said. Mr. Harris was being held on a \$250,000 cash bond.

Hours after Mr. Harris was wounded, two other teenagers were shot and wounded by an unknown assailant on Canfield Drive, where Mr. Brown was killed, according to the police. The authorities were still investigating whether there was a connection between the shootings. The Police Department also said it deployed smoke canisters to disperse crowds on Canfield, though

demonstrators said the substance was tear gas.

Some political leaders who have denounced the police in the past were not so critical in the wake of the recent violence.

“I didn’t see anything related to the shooting that I personally saw police handle improperly,” said Antonio French, a St. Louis alderman who was in the strip mall near where the gunfire originated Sunday night. “Based upon being out there and what I saw and heard and even felt go whizzing by my head, it was not initiated by police. It was a violent encounter that then apparently spread across the street.”

State Senator Maria Chappelle-Nadal, a Democrat whose district includes Ferguson, said Monday that she was working to understand what led to the officer-involved shooting. The shootings reinforced the need for protesters to police themselves and ensure that demonstrations remain peaceful, she said.

“I want people who are interested in protesting to continue doing that in a very peaceful way,” she said. “We also have to learn a lot of lessons and teach.”

Alan Blinder contributed reporting from Ferguson, and Timothy Williams from New York.

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