

NATIONAL

Gunmen Fire at Black History Month Fest Wounding Onlookers

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. (AP) — The gathering of families at a picnic started out as a day of celebration marking Black History Month. It ended when an apparent dispute between at least two gunmen erupted into a hail of gunfire.

More than 500 people dove for cover just after 3 p.m. Saturday when rapid blasts of automatic weapons fire sprayed across the Desert Highland Unity Center. A man and a 3-year-old boy were wounded.

"It was like we were in the middle of a war," said Bernetta Clayton, 35, of Palm Springs, who was at the picnic with two of her three children. "Thank God more people didn't get hurt."

Both injuries were minor, and police and witnesses said they were amazed more people were not hurt.

"We lucked out a whole bunch," said Officer Don Fallon.

Christopher Bernard "Terry" Spears, 30, of Cathedral City was arrested for investigation of attempted murder, assault with a deadly weapon, threatening a police officer and reckless driving, Fallon said.

Police were looking for at least one other suspect, said Sgt. Joe Zingg.

"It sounds like it might just be two people that didn't like each other and had weapons available

and started shooting," Fallon said. Black leaders from throughout the Coachella Valley said they would organize a community meeting in response to the shooting, said Tahlib McMichaux, a member of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"It's so senseless. Here are young blacks killing blacks. I cannot help but feel that the problem of education, drugs, lack of jobs, the surrogate parent, TV and Hollywood are accountable for this type of behavior," said Joseph Beaver, 71, executive director of the Black Historical and Cultural Society of the Coachella Valley.

Some witnesses said the shooting erupted when a man who appeared drunk shot at a small parade of cars arriving at the celebration. Passengers in those vehicles returned fire, they said.

The day-long celebration included a parade, barbecue and car show. Many participants were singing when the shooting broke out.

"People just dropped to the ground. The music stopped. People were screaming. Everybody was trying to make it to the auditorium. It was just chaos," said Dionne Skinner, 28, of Cathedral City.

A number of people were injured in a "mad dash" to flee the gunfire, but none of the injuries

were serious, Fallon said. When the shooting ended, police found the park littered with bullet casings, said Sgt. Mike McCracken. Three people were taken to area hospitals for treatment and released later in the day.

Lionel Henderson, 3, of Cathedral City was grazed in the chest by a ricocheting bullet. He was treated at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage, officials said.

His aunt, Zella Robinson, 38, of Palm Springs, injured her right shoulder as she dived onto her granddaughter to protect her from the bullets.

Bruce Allen, 26, of Fontana suffered a bullet wound in the jaw and was treated at Desert Hospital in Palm Springs.

Palm Springs police summoned officers from three additional departments — the California Highway Patrol, the Cathedral City police department and the Riverside County Sheriff's department — after a group of men prevented police cars from reaching the center.

"They blocked the car, yelling at me and cursing," said Officer Ruth Alvarez, the first to arrive. "When I saw my backup arrive behind me, I put the car into reverse and backed out. We were waiting for more people to get there so nobody would get hurt."



Minnie Lee Langley, 80 holds a family member's hand during emotional testimony on events she witnessed at age 9 of the Rosewood massacre given by her cousin before a hearing Friday in Tallahassee recently. The state is conducting a hearing into the racial violence that wiped out the black settlement of Rosewood, Fla., as legislators try to unravel the 1923 massacre.

Under Fire: No Minority Representation On University of Va.'s Governing Board

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Gov. George Allen has come under fire for his decision to leave the University of Virginia's governing board without minority representation for the first time in 16 years.

"This kind of turns back the clock," said Rick Turner, the school's dean of African-American affairs. "You don't make that kind of mistake in 1994. It's not even a mistake. It's an act of insensitivity."

Allen, a Republican, on Friday replaced three members of the school's board of trustees, all of them Democratic supporters. They include Freddie W. Nicholas Sr., the board's only black.

The first black member of the Charlottesville school's board was appointed by Republican Gov. John N. Dalton in 1978. Every governor since has ensured that a black person held at least one of the 16 seats — until Allen's move.

The university has struggled in its relationships with black students, who make up 9.3 percent of the school's 18,073 students. Turner said the university retains 97 percent of its black students into their second year and graduates 75 percent.

"People are not going to believe me when I tell them about our retention and graduation rates when they find out our decision-makers are predominantly white males," he said.

Rafiq Jeffries, 20, a member of the Black Student Alliance, said his group "thinks this is a slap in the face to all black students at the university and parents who send them here because we are not represented in the governing structure of the university."

"I'm furious," said Kimberly Warden, a junior. "Though I can't say I'm completely surprised, Allen is not your most multicultural kind of person."

Warden said the school's race relations are under an "accepted tension" and that the lack of black representation on the board won't help.

"Unintentionally or intentionally, he sent a tremendous message," Warden said. "The board of visitors should reflect the interests of the students. It seems like we're never going to get out of this good-old-boy tradition."

Allen's press secretary, Ken


Stroupe, said the criticism is unfair.

"We're in the first month of his administration," Stroupe said, "and these are the first appointments that we have made to this board."

We have four more years in this administration."

Stroupe said Allen has named a black and the first Latino to his Cabinet and picked minorities for panels that oversee everything from transportation to technology.

"You have to look beyond the one board and look at the efforts of the administration thus far, and I think they're unprecedented," he said.



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