

‘Sheer brutality’: Police detail Baton Rouge shooting scene

By MELINDA DESLATTÉ
Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — The horrific scene unfolded in a matter of minutes, a black-clad man with military training stalking law enforcement officers and ignoring horrified onlookers as he shot anyone he could find wearing a badge.

Police say Gavin Long, 29, of Kansas City, Missouri, brazenly prowled a crime scene of hundreds of yards around a cluster of nondescript buildings along a busy highway, rifle pointed straight ahead as he sought targets.

And they say he shot to kill. “It is chilling in the sheer brutality,” Louisiana State Police Col. Mike Edmonson said Monday, describing surveillance videos that recorded Long as he gunned down three law enforcement officers Sunday and wounded three more before he was shot and killed. “These officers were intentionally targeted and assassinated. It was a calculated act.”

Two of the slain officers were from the Baton Rouge Police Department: 32-year-old Montrell Jackson and 41-year-old Matthew Gerald. The third was a deputy with the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff’s Office, 45-year-old Brad Garafola.

Officials provided the first detailed accounts of the shooting scene Monday, using a map to describe the chaotic shootout with Long. Baton Rouge Police Chief Carl Dabadie wouldn’t say who was shot at which location, and he hasn’t named his wounded officer.

Carrying two rifles and a pistol, Long parked his car near a beauty supply store mid-morning. Gun raised and faced partially covered with a ski mask, he approached a parked police car at the gas station and convenience store next door — only to find the unit empty. Authorities believe the first 911 call came in, reporting a “dude with a rifle,” as he returned to his car.

Undeterred, Long located another possible target at a nearby car wash. But again he was thwarted. Edmonson said by the time the former Marine parked his car, the officer there had driven away.

He wasn’t interested in anyone without a badge, officials said.

“Other people, he totally ignored them. He acted like they weren’t even there,” East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff Sid Gautreaux said.



AP Photo/Gerald Herbert
Decia Gerald, wife of slain Baton Rouge police officer Matthew Gerald, cries while holding their children Fynleigh, left, and Dawclyn, right, during a candlelight vigil at the Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge, La., Monday. At left is Decia’s mother, Denna Badeaux.

Long stalked the area, searching, as more 911 calls poured in and officers arrived.

Turning the front corner of the beauty supply store, the gunman spotted his first marks: two Baton Rouge police officers. Without hesitation, Long shot both, Gautreaux said, leaving one dead and the second crawling toward the back of store.

Garafola, taking cover behind a dumpster at the store with his gun drawn, tried to rescue his wounded fellow officer — only to run face-to-face into Long. The shooter took aim at Garafola, killing him in a hail of gunfire. Video shows bullets hitting the concrete around him, Gautreaux said.

“My deputy went down fighting. He returned fire until the very end,” the sheriff said.

Long then noticed the wounded city police officer on the ground and took two close-range shots, Gautreaux said.

With three officers dead, another city police officer caught Long’s attention as he rounded his way back behind the beauty supply store. Long stopped, turned and shot, wounding the officer before heading around back, jumping a wall and running past the convenience store and the car wash.

There, sheriff’s Deputy Nicholas Tullier, 41, had returned to his police

car after getting the license plate from Long’s rental vehicle.

Long fired directly into the car, shooting Tullier in the head and stomach, walking ever closer as he pulled the trigger, Gautreaux said, before exchanging gunfire with Deputy Bruce Simmons, 57.

Simmons went down with a shot to the shoulder that required a titanium rod to replace an arm bone shattered by the gunman’s bullet. Tullier’s injuries were even worse. He’s in critical condition, a machine helping him to breathe, “fighting for his life,” Gautreaux said.

Before Long could get any nearer, a shot rang out from over a hundred years away, as an officer with the city police SWAT unit took down the gunman with the sort of textbook maneuver officers learn in their tactical training. Dabadie called it “a helluva shot.”

Authorities say without that shot, they believe Long would have continued the killing spree, possibly driving a short distance down the highway to the Baton Rouge police headquarters.

“This guy was going to another location. He was not going to stop here,” Dabadie said pointing to a map laying out the scene of the carnage. “After he was finished here, I have no doubt he was heading to our headquarters and he was going to take more lives.”



AP Photo/John Locher
Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump walks off the stage with his wife Melania during the Republican National Convention, Monday in Cleveland.

Melania Trump ignites GOP convention after gloom, turmoil

By JULIE PACE
and ALAN FRAM
Associated Press

Obama and Clinton, who spent four years in the administration.

CLEVELAND — After a harsh primary, Republicans kicked off Donald Trump’s general election campaign with a warm and personal validation from his wife, Melania Trump, who emotionally assured GOP convention delegates and voters across the country that the brash candidate has the character and determination to unite a divided nation.

“If you want someone to fight for you and your country, I can assure you, he is the guy,” Mrs. Trump told delegates in her highest profile appearance of the presidential campaign.

Her husband made a brief, but showy entrance, into the convention hall to introduce her, emerging from shadows and declaring, “We’re going to win, we’re going to win so big.” He returned to the stage after his wife’s remarks, greeting her warmly with a kiss and cheering her on along with the crowd.

Mrs. Trump’s hopeful remarks were a sharp contrast to the night’s other speakers, who painted a bleak picture of a nation gripped by insecurity. The speeches were also filled with harsh criticism of Democrat Hillary Clinton, with delegates chanting “lock her up.”

The evening’s “Make America Safe Again” theme took on new resonance given the nation’s unsettlingly violent summer. A parade of speakers told detailed stories about deadly combat missions and loved ones killed at the hands of people in the United States illegally. And they cast the turbulent times as a direct result of weak leadership by President Barack

Obama and Clinton, who spent four years in the administration. “Who would trust Hillary Clinton to protect them? I wouldn’t,” Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani said in one of the night’s most fiery addresses.

Many of the party’s past and future stars were glaringly missing from the lineup, underscoring the concerns some GOP leaders have with closely aligning themselves with Trump. The businessman has cast aside decades of Republican orthodoxy in his unexpected political rise, creating a crisis within the GOP about its future.

Republican divisions erupted briefly on the convention floor Monday afternoon after party officials adopted rules by a shouted voice vote. Anti-Trump forces seeking to derail his nomination responded with loud and angry chants, though they were quickly quieted and there were no lingering signs of the protests as delegates returned to the cavernous convention hall for the evening program.

Trump hoped the chaos would be little more than a footnote. Despite persistent party divisions, his campaign is confident Republicans will come together behind their shared disdain for Clinton.

Convention speakers highlighted at length the deadly 2012 attacks on Americans in Benghazi, Libya, while Clinton was serving as secretary of state. The mother of one of the victims choked back tears as she personally blamed Clinton for her son’s death and accused her of giving a false explanation for the attack.

“If Hillary Clinton can’t give us the truth, why should we give her the presidency,” Pat Smith said.

Third officer acquitted in Freddie Gray death

BALTIMORE (AP) — A judge further hollowed out the case against six police officers charged in the death of a young black man, delivering a third consecutive acquittal and ruling once again that prosecutors failed to prove officers intentionally hurt Freddie Gray.

In acquitting Lt. Brian Rice, the highest ranking officer charged, Baltimore Circuit Judge Barry Williams was unequivocal in his ruling Monday. He told prosecutors they failed to establish that Rice was aware of his duty to buckle Gray into a seat belt, and more importantly, that he deliberately breached his duty in order to put Gray in danger.

“There are a number of possibilities this court could entertain, some that are innocent and some that are not,” Williams said. “However, the burden of proof rests with the state, and the court’s imaginings do not serve as a substitute for evidence.”

Gray was arrested in April 2015 when he ran from police in a high-crime area. He was handcuffed and shackled but left unbuckled in the back of a police van and suffered a critical neck injury. Gray’s name became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement, fueling outrage nationwide over the treatment of black people by the criminal justice system and prompting the worst rioting in the city in decades.

The U.S. Justice Department launched a patterns and practice investigation into allegations of widespread abuse and unlawful arrests by the Baltimore Police Department.

Rice was cleared of manslaughter, reckless endangerment and misconduct in office. Earlier this year, officers Edward Nero and Caesar Goodson, the van driver who was facing a murder charge, were also found not guilty. Officer William Porter’s trial ended in a hung jury in December and his retrial is scheduled for September. The last two officers have trials this



Jerry Jackson/Baltimore Sun via AP
Baltimore Police Lt. Brian Rice, center, is escorted from the courthouse to a waiting car after being found not guilty on all charges related to the death of Freddy Gray, Monday in Baltimore.

month and in October. Gray died April 19, 2015, a week after he suffered a critical spinal injury in the back of Goodson’s police wagon. Prosecutors say the officers were criminally negligent when they failed to buckle Gray into a seat belt or provide medical attention after he indicated that he wanted to go to a hospital.

With no courtroom victories, activists are focusing on protests and police department reforms. A protest Saturday that blocked the interstate through downtown resulted in more than 60 arrests. Activists said they were demonstrating in support of having civilians sit on boards that review police misconduct cases, and spending more public money on community programs instead of policing.

“I’m disgusted, as usual, and they’re sending a daily message all across the world that our lives don’t matter, and that’s sad,” said Tawanda Jones outside the courthouse Monday. She was there marking the third anniversary of her brother’s death in a separate case

involving Baltimore police. “We’re more than hashtags and body bags,” she added.

The Gray case hasn’t fit quite so neatly into the narrative of white authorities imposing unfair justice on minorities.

Three of the officers charged are white and three are black. The victim, judge, top prosecutor and mayor are African-American. At the time of Gray’s death, so was the police chief.

In his verdict, Williams said the failure to seat belt a detainee in a transport wagon is not inherently a crime.

“The state failed to show that the defendant, even if he was aware of the risk, consciously disregarded that risk,” the judge said.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys are barred from commenting due to a gag order.

During the trial, prosecutors had said Rice was most responsible of the six officers charged for following police procedures to fasten a prisoner in a seat belt, citing his 18 years of experience on

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the force.

The officer’s attorney said police could use discretion, if they believe their safety is at risk. Rice attorney Michael Belsky said officers had concerns because Gray was not cooperative and they weren’t sure what onlookers would do if extra time was taken to fasten Gray in the van.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys gave different characterizations of the onlookers. Prosecutors described them as concerned observers, while Belsky said officers heard threatening comments during the arrest.

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