

Eastside Shoot Out

Thomas Haroldson
Chris Singer

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Five black men face charges of having participated in what Detroit police have called a “plot to ambush officers at random” following a shooting incident in which three officers were wounded.

The department’s Special Investigation Bureau (SIB) has admitted they kept the five, and several other blacks, under intensive surveillance for some two weeks prior to the shootings.

The incident appeared to be the culmination of a day during which the five were followed by at least four police vehicles.

On Saturday, June 27, police tailed Richard Edmonds, Hayward DeVrille, Anthony Williams, Lawrence White Jr. and Michael Anderson around the city.

The five traveled in a 1963 Chrysler and reportedly stopped at-eight different locations, including William’s west-side home at 2470 Tyler, and White’s east-side residence at 6154 Rohns.

Edmonds, DeVrille and Williams were arrested at the Tyler address shortly after the shooting incident took place across town near the White home.

Police records showed that both homes were watched from 7:20 p.m. that Saturday night.

Police tailed the five from the Tyler address to the east-side home at around 11:30 p.m. and claim that two men got out of the car and walked north across a footbridge over the Ford freeway toward Harper Avenue.

The other men drove off, police said, and were followed.

Police claim the pair on foot were also followed, but no auto can cross the freeway on the pedestrian overpass, and Rohns (see map) permits only a left-hand turn at the freeway. The pair’s police tails would have had to circle around to get to McClellan and across the freeway.

At 12:05 a.m. a Tactical Mobile Unit (TMU) slowed on Harper at McClellan for the stoplight. Their car was then struck by two bullets.

Patrolman Richard Gordon was hit in the right shoulder by one slug. His partner, Patrolman Norman Sielolf, was cut by bullet fragments below both eyes and in his left leg and arm.

They radioed for help, and their call was answered by several police vehicles, including one commanded by Chief Inspector Anthony Bertoni.

Bertoni was wounded by a bullet fragment when his car was struck by seven bullets as it crossed the freeway on McClellan. He said a lone rifleman fired the shots.

Police surrounded White’s home and shots were exchanged. Shortly after Anderson surrendered, and four hours later White gave himself up.

Anderson and White face charges of assault with intent to murder, and the trio arrested near the Tyler address are accused of possession of dangerous weapons.

Police have never said who fired the shots that struck the TMU vehicle, nor have they been able to explain how the pair was followed over the footbridge across the freeway.

But, an early police report said the TMU unit was fired at by a passing auto. And, police admit the officers in the TMU-car were unaware of the surveillance and the alleged plot against officers.

One observer, who investigated the shooting scene, theorized that the SIB tails, rushing down McClellan to catch up with their suspects, could have fired the initial- shots.

The SIB claims to have received what they called reliable information that the five were engaged in an ambush plot. Police have tried to link the five with the National Committees to Combat Fascism, the political organizing arm of the Black Panther Party.

The SIB also claims to have helped set up an alert system that would protect officers from such attacks, and police say Bertoni knew of the suspected plot and was part of the alert system.

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