

Massive police manhunt in Pennsylvania

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A massive police manhunt is well into its second week for Eric Frein, who has been charged in the September 12 shooting death of state trooper Cpl. Bryon Dickson, 38, as he was leaving the Blooming Grove police barracks in a wooded rural area of northeastern Pennsylvania.

A second state trooper, Alex Douglass, was severely wounded as he tried to aid Dickson, and remains hospitalized. Dickson leaves behind two children.

Frein subsequently fled the scene by car through the wilderness, crashing the vehicle into a pond. A search of the car, owned by Frein's parents, retired Army major Michael Frein and his wife Deborah, revealed identification belonging to Frein. Other items stowed in the car suggested that Frein's attack was planned well in advance. These included two empty rifle cases, camouflage paint, two cartridge casings identical to those from the shooting at the barracks, and information on foreign embassies.

Eric Frein is a self-proclaimed survivalist and has been a "military re-enactor" for several years, imitating battles that have taken place in Eastern Europe. He helped found the group Eastern Wolves, whose members dress up in Eastern European armies' military regalia and play out strategy and tactics.

The reasons for his enmity toward the police are still unknown, but could stem from his survivalist and militarist outlook, typical of right-wing and fascistic elements of the population.

Monroe County, the area in which Frein grew up and where his parents still live, lies in the rural hinterland of Scranton, a former coal mining region hit hard in recent decades by mill closings.

The FBI has placed Frein on its most wanted list with a reward of \$175,000 for information leading to his arrest. Even though it is believed Frein is at large in the wilderness near his hometown of Canadensis, billboards throughout the state have his face plastered

on it with the reward money offer.

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett, who is in a gubernatorial race, and losing by double digits in the polls, has seized on the manhunt to bolster his flagging campaign. "Keep your doors locked, keep your cars locked," he said. "This is a very dangerous individual."

The manhunt has encompassed parts of Pike and Monroe Counties. Police have found many of Frein's belongings, including cigarettes, military gear and weapons. They have spotted the suspect on more than one occasion, most recently on Wednesday, but Frein was far enough away for the police to lose sight of him. The main search area, as of this writing, is more than five square miles in Price and Barrett Townships, both located within Monroe County.

According to an announcement heard over police radios on Tuesday, tactical units and troopers have been authorized to kill Eric Frein if they identify him and he refuses to surrender.

Even though police spokesmen and Corbett have insisted that Frein appears to have been on a rampage against police—during the shooting he had the chance to fire at civilians but chose not to—residents have been subjected to a massive police presence and the suspension of basic rights.

Hours after the shooting, state police from Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey, the FBI, and local law enforcement agencies issued a shelter-in-place order, placing the entire area in lockdown. Numerous police checkpoints were imposed. About 1,000 officers have been roaming through the woods and continuously patrolling roads with squad cars, trucks, and armored vehicles.

Residents have variously been denied the right to stay in, return to, or leave their homes. They report that they have had to leave their pets unfed, skip medications, and have lost income because law enforcement did not allow them to drive to work. The elderly have been left

in homes to fend for themselves. Displaced residents have been staying at shelters constructed by the Red Cross or sleeping in their vehicles.

A resident named Paul Keat tried to return to his home Friday, but found his neighborhood swarming with police who had ringed the area. Using an alternative route, Keat was spotted by a police officer, who threw him to the ground, handcuffed him, and conducted a background check. Keat later told reporters that the officer was “on edge.”

Cait Finnegan-Greeneir said that the sound of helicopters has been constant over her Price Township home. Her husband, a local pastor, was barred from returning to the house after he left to officiate at a wedding ceremony.

Late Saturday, September 13, Homeland Security spokeswoman Maria Finn issued an email statement that said the shelter-in-place had been lifted. There are still reports, however, that police are refusing to let people access their homes and are conducting warrantless searches.

Joshua Prince, a lawyer, told the Associated Press that police had banned one resident from entering his house for days after the shelter-in-place was terminated, and another had been evicted from his home by police. Reports have surfaced that describe warrantless searches of all vehicles passing through police checkpoints.

“[T]here is no general blanket allowance for setting the Constitution aside because the Pennsylvania State Police and the FBI are doing an investigation or manhunt,” Prince said. “It’s extremely shocking to me that in this day and age, with our Fourth Amendment protections, that the police would move forward with such actions.”



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