

Police arrest man in shooting of Ferguson police officers

Nick Barrickman and Andre Damon**16 March 2015**

St. Louis County authorities said Sunday that they had arrested a man in connection to Wednesday's shooting of two police officers in Ferguson, Missouri.

County Prosecutor Robert McCulloch said Sunday that Jeffrey Williams, 20, had been detained and charged with two felony counts of first degree assault, three counts of armed criminal action and one count of firing weapons from a vehicle.

Williams' arrest comes amid an ongoing manhunt launched after two police officers were wounded by gunfire during a protest against police violence Wednesday evening in front of the Ferguson police station. In the aftermath of the shooting, the police, media, and politicians have sought to use the incident to paint demonstrators as violent, and shift attention away from the crimes revealed by the Justice Department's report on the Ferguson police department this month.

McCulloch said Williams admitted to having fired the shots, but said he was not aiming at the police officers, and that they had been hit by accident.

These claims contradicted statements earlier in the week by St. Louis County Police Chief John Belmar, who declared immediately that the shooting was an "ambush," and said that the "shots were directed exactly at my officers."

McCulloch said that Williams claims that he fired the shots as part of a dispute that "had nothing to do with the demonstrations that were going on." He added, "The evidence we have supports the charge that he may have been firing at someone else and struck the police," McCulloch said.

Despite this admission, McCulloch sought to associate the shooting with ongoing protests against police violence, declaring categorically that Williams "is a demonstrator." McCulloch added that "He was

out there earlier that evening as part of the demonstration. He's been out there on other occasions as part of the demonstrations."

These claims were disputed by a number of protest participants who said they had never seen Williams. St. Louis pastor Derrick Robinson told CNN, "He's never been protesting," but said he knows Williams from Church. Robinson visited Williams in prison Sunday, and said, "he admitted to me that he had never protested."

Demonstrator Tony Rice told the *Los Angeles Times* "I don't know him at all." Rice, who had witnessed Wednesday's shooting, added, "I have more hours on ground than anyone." Another protestor, DeRay Mckesson, stated on Twitter, "I cannot recall ever seeing the suspected shooter, Jeffrey Williams, at any protests, including the night in question."

Williams had a warrant out for his arrest due to a failure to report to a probation officer for a previous charge of receiving stolen property. His bail has been set at \$300,000.

Police claim Williams fired four shots from a hill over a hundred yards away from the Ferguson police department around midnight on Wednesday. Two of the shots fired struck and injured two police officers, who were standing in a riot line in front of the building. McCulloch said that a .40 caliber handgun found at the Williams's home had matched shell casings recovered at the scene of the shooting.

US attorney-general Eric Holder said in a statement that the arrest "sends a clear message that acts of violence against our law enforcement personnel will never be tolerated." He added, "the swiftness of this action is a credit to the significant cooperation between federal authorities and the St. Louis County Police Department."

Ferguson has been the scene of continuous protests after unarmed youth Michael Brown was shot and killed by police officer Darren Wilson last August. The protest were met by a crackdown by militarized police and the National Guard, as officers toting military-grade weaponry and equipment sought to break up demonstrations at gunpoint.

The arrest of Williams comes as the nationwide wave of police violence continued unabated. Police killed four people over the weekend, bringing the total number since the start of the year to 224. These included 29-year old Richard Castilleja from San Antonio, Texas, 53-year-old Clifton Reintzel from Brooke County, West Virginia, Andrew Driver from Fontana, California and a 26-year old from Kenosha, Wisconsin whose name police have not yet released.



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