

Far-right militia member arrested for fatally shooting two protesters and wounding a third in Kenosha, Wisconsin

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27 August 2020

Kyle Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old former police cadet from Antioch, Illinois, located less than 20 miles from Kenosha, Wisconsin, was arrested and charged with first degree homicide on Wednesday morning in connection with the fatal shootings of two protesters and wounding of a third.

The killings came on the third night of protests over the shooting of Jacob Blake by Kenosha police on Sunday. Police officer Rusten Shesky, a seven-year veteran of the department, fired seven shots point blank into the back of the unarmed 29-year-old African American father of six as he was attempting to get into his SUV. The fusillade severed Blake's spinal cord, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down.

The arrest of Rittenhouse took place some 10 hours after he was identified on social media video and by eyewitnesses. The video shows that Rittenhouse shot multiple people in two separate incidents, first in a car lot and minutes later in the middle of the street.

Police have yet to publicly identify the victims. However, at a Wednesday press conference police confirmed that all of the victims were from Wisconsin, including the two who died—a 26-year-old Silver Lake resident and a 36-year-old Kenosha man—and the injured individual, a 36-year-old man from West Allis. The two who were killed were unarmed.

Comrades and friends have placed posts on social media identifying one of the murdered protesters as Anthony Huber of Silver Lake. A GoFundMe page established to help pay for funeral expenses for Huber exceeded its \$25,000 goal in less than eight hours.

A friend of Huber told the local CBS television affiliate he believed Anthony was a hero because he tried to stop the shooter. "He is a peaceful person," said the friend. "He didn't go out looking to beat people up. He's more of a defender. And he put his life on the line for others. That's what he did."

Immediately after the shootings, the police refused to question, much less detain, Rittenhouse. In a graphic video viewed over 2.6 million times, Rittenhouse is seen walking past police and armored trucks with his AR-15 slung over his chest after having fired dozens of rounds less than a minute before, leaving several people injured or dying. Police can be seen ignoring shouts from protesters claiming Rittenhouse was responsible. Instead, they drive down the street, allowing the killer to leave the city and drive

home to Illinois.

Rittenhouse was drawn to the anti-police violence protest by a group called the Kenosha Militia, which had posted a "Call to Arms" on Facebook. The call for right-wing forces to arm themselves and confront protesters in Kenosha on Wednesday was promoted on the far-right conspiracy website Infowars. In interviews given throughout the evening to internet streamers, Rittenhouse boasted that "we don't have non-lethal" weaponry and that he was there "to protect the property."

In another recorded interaction, Rittenhouse, AR-15 in hand, is seen with several older members of the militia outside of a boarded-up business. Police drive up and through their loudspeaker offer their "appreciation" to the heavily armed militia members. "We really appreciate you guys," one cop says over the loudspeaker, while another asks "if you guys need any water."

President Trump has repeatedly made statements inciting far-right and fascist forces to attack opponents on the left. The murder of the Kenosha protesters took place in the midst of the Republican National Convention, which has featured speaker after speaker denouncing anti-police violence protesters as anarchists, Marxists, terrorists, looters and rioters. In April, Trump posted a tweet urging armed militia groups opposed to state lockdown orders to "liberate" states with Democratic governors such as Michigan, Minnesota and Virginia.

Far-right groups including Proud Boys and boogaloo bois have gone to Kenosha, a rust belt city devastated by the closure of factories and destruction of manufacturing jobs, to confront and threaten protesters, as they have in other cities across the country where protests have continued since the May 25 police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In seeking to build his personalist base of support, Trump has embraced the fascistic conspiracy group QAnon, which pledges to carry out a "storm" that will end in the execution of Trump's political opponents.

Trump took to Twitter Wednesday afternoon claiming he had spoken to Wisconsin's Democratic governor, Tony Evers, and would be sending "federal law enforcement and the National Guard... to restore LAW and ORDER!"

Evers has already declared a state of emergency, imposed a curfew and ordered hundreds of National Guard troops into the city, underscoring the fact that state violence against protesters is a

bipartisan policy.

Kenosha Mayor John Antaramian, also a Democrat, has unleashed his police force to attack peaceful demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets and deployed military-style armored vehicles on the streets. Unlike protesters, the gun-toting fascists have been permitted by police to break curfew each of the last two nights.

Trump has derided Democratic governors and mayors for not being sufficiently brutal in suppressing protests. In response, police departments in Democratic-run cities such as Pittsburgh and New York City are taking it upon themselves to “disappear” protesters. The same is true in Wisconsin. Within the last 24 hours, video has emerged of police appearing in unmarked vehicles and kidnapping people without due process or explanation.

On Monday, a teenage boy in Madison was taken in by police without explanation after protests had died down. In Kenosha, before the curfew went into effect, heavily armed agents surrounded a “riot kitchen” food truck, which serves meals to protesters and the homeless free of charge, and proceeded to smash the windows and kidnap those inside in broad daylight. Details of the exact sequence of events that led to the shootings in Kenosha are still being determined. However, social media video collected throughout the night shows that the authorities, including the Kenosha police and the Sheriff’s department, were well aware of and encouraged the intervention of far-right militia groups to terrorize demonstrators.

In one video, an unidentified militiaman is seen talking with protesters after the shootings. “Ya know what the cops told us today?” he asks, and then says the police told him they were going “to push them down by you, ‘cause you can deal with them, and then we are going to leave.”

In the first press conference held by Kenosha authorities since Blake was shot on Sunday, Kenosha County Sheriff David Beth acknowledged that he had been approached regarding the prospect of deputizing armed civilians. Beth said he discouraged this primarily because of the “liability” it would entail.

At the press conference, Police Chief Daniel Miskinis denied that he had interacted with the militia group or had any knowledge pertaining to it.

The day prior, in a public Facebook post that has since been taken down, the militia group sent a message to Miskinis signed by the “Kenosha Guard Commander.” The message implored the police chief, “Do NOT have your officers tell us to go home under threat of arrest as you have in the past. We are willing to talk to KPD and open a discussion. It is evident that no matter how many Officers, deputies and other law enforcement officers that are here, you will still be outnumbered.”

Asked during Wednesday’s press conference why the police allowed Rittenhouse to simply walk away after his violent rampage, Sheriff Beth enumerated a laundry list of excuses, citing screaming, sirens, and radio-traffic, which, according to Beth, can cause “tunnel vision.”

Beth has previously had to apologize for “letting his emotions” get the best of him. At a press conference in February 2018, he spoke to the media regarding an arrest involving stolen property from a nearby mall. No one was injured in the incident, but this did

not prevent Beth from pontificating on what he deemed justice.

He declared: “I think at some point society has to get so fed up that they are no longer willing to tolerate people who are not an asset to society. I think we have to create a threshold where, once you cross the threshold, Wisconsin, the United States, builds warehouses where we put these people who have been deemed to be no longer an asset, that are really a detriment...”

Prior to the shootings, hundreds of protesters and residents had gathered outside the city courthouse, defying an 8 p.m. curfew imposed Tuesday night to demand justice for Jacob Blake. No charges have been announced to date against the killer cop Rusten Shesky, who remains on paid administrative leave, along with two other officers.

Leading up to Wednesday night’s protests, police had erected a steel fence around the public safety building, which protesters attempted to knock over. Riot police and several large BearCat armored police vehicles equipped with Long Range Acoustic Devices responded with tear gas, ear-splitting sirens, pepper balls and rubber bullets. Protesters gathered in the park across the street from the building and responded with off-the-shelf fireworks and water bottles, while attempting to shield themselves from the barrage with garbage dumpsters and umbrellas.

Riot police backed by their armored vehicles then formed a line and moved into the park, as they deployed smoke and tear gas. Protesters attempting to flee were blocked off by armed militia men, believed to be part of the Kenosha Guard. The group’s Facebook page was taken down Wednesday, but not before roughly 3,000 people had expressed interest in attending the event called “Armed Citizens to Protect our Lives and Property.”

Meanwhile, officers under the direction of Sheriff Beth blocked off interstate exits and on-ramps prior to the curfew, preventing people from leaving or entering the city.

At the Wednesday press conference, National Guard Major General Paul Knapp said the number of National Guard troops being sent to Kenosha would be doubled, possibly including soldiers from out of state. Sheriff Beth confirmed that federal agents with the FBI; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; and the US Marshals Service were already deployed in the city, along with “equipment and information.”



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