

Suspects in shooting by officer unarmed

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By Brandon Macz of the Tribune

FBI is leading probe after tribe members shot, one fatally



Clifford Allen, owner of the property east of Lewiston where a fatal shooting took place Monday, ref...

Two suspects shot by an Idaho State Police officer, one mortally wounded, were unarmed during a physical confrontation with the officer 20 miles east of Lewiston Monday.

Special Agent Juan Becerra reaffirmed that Randall Vernon Ellenwood, 50, was unarmed when he was shot and killed by an ISP officer at approximately 5:30 p.m. Monday at 22021 Cottonwood Creek Road, as was Ricardo Daniel Rodriguez, 37, who was shot and taken to St. Joseph Regional Medical Center. He is listed in critical condition.

The officer was patrolling the highway when he attempted to pull over a vehicle Ellenwood and Rodriguez were inside, according to a news release issued by FBI Special Agent in Charge Timothy J. Fuhrman and ISP Col. Jerry Russell.

Because Ellenwood and Rodriguez are Nez Perce tribal members, the FBI is acting as the lead agency in a criminal investigation into the shooting, Becerra said.

The name of the officer involved in the shooting will not be released, according to ISP, including whether the officer is still on active duty.

Lt. Charlie Spencer, from ISP's Lewiston office, said an administrative investigation is being conducted by ISP to determine if the officer followed proper procedures.

"It is a completely separate investigation," he said. "Our investigation is used for internal purposes only."

Clifford Allen, who owns the property where Ellenwood and Rodriguez were shot, provided additional information about Monday night's shooting.

Allen said Rodriguez and Ellenwood were in a pickup truck that pulled into the driveway and around the house around 5:30 p.m. Monday, stopping on a dirt road that is now almost completely covered by grass. The pickup was pursued by an ISP vehicle, he said. Allen said he heard five shots fired, and found out Rodriguez was shot twice in the stomach and Ellenwood was shot at least three times.

Tribal members met at Allen's home around 5 p.m. Tuesday to bless the ground where Ellenwood died. Allen added he hoped something would be placed on the ground as a marker for a tragedy he said shouldn't have happened.

A proponent of tribal rights, Allen said he received phone calls from concerned tribal members that didn't stop until 3 a.m. Tuesday. They were upset, he said, both with ISP and the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee for not being more involved in the incident.

NPTEC Chairman Samuel Penney, in a news release issued Tuesday afternoon, assured tribal members the committee was taking an active role in the investigation, requesting a meeting with FBI officials and contacting the Region 10 office of the Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice in Seattle.

"The Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee would like to extend its condolences and heartfelt sympathies to the family members affected by this tragic event as well as the officer involved in the incident," Penney said in the news release. "I understand that this is an extremely trying time for everybody as other incidents have occurred recently and our condolences go out to those family members as well."

In an unrelated incident, Nez Perce tribal member Gabriel D. Pena Warden, 21, of Kamiah was fatally shot on April 24 while allegedly attempting to break into the Stites Grocery Store by a man who was sleeping upstairs in the store.

Macz may be contacted at bmacz@lmtribune.com or (208) 848-2275.