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One Officer, Suspect still in Hospital

2 other cops treated, released

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CHAMPAIGN, - Deputy Police Chief John Murphy was thankful this morning as he rested in his Mahomet home after being injured in a shootout involving Champaign police and an apparently homeless man.

Murphy, another male officer and a female officer and another man were wounded in a "near-worst-case" shooting near West Side Park on Thursday evening.

"I'm all right," Murphy said in a brief phone interview. "My vest did what it was supposed to do, so I'm in good shape."

Murphy said he was also grateful for all the support he and fellow officers received Thursday night and this morning.

"There was quite an outpouring at the hospital," Murphy said. "That was appreciated." Murphy said he and his wife, Jodi, want to thank all the well-wishers.

He declined to comment on the circumstances of the shooting.

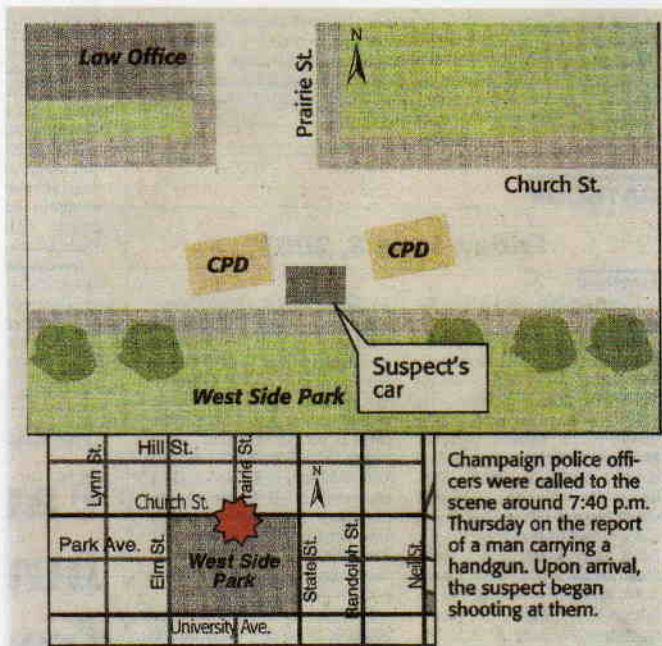


ABOVE: A police officer marks the positions of spent shell casings Thursday evening after Champaign police officers exchanged gunfire with a suspect at the edge of Champaign's West Side Park on Church Street. **BELOW:** Bullet holes riddle the front passenger side of the suspect's vehicle. Robert K. O'Donnell photo/The News-Gazette

A man in a car near the park caught the three officers "completely off guard" in a shootout about 7:40 p.m. Thursday, according to Police Chief R. Finney.

The officers and the man with a gun were all injured. The identities and medical conditions of the officers and the other man were not being released, police said. Finney said police are making sure that families of the wounded officers are notified.

Officers were sent to the 300 block of West Church Street near West Side Park about 7:40 p.m. Thursday on a report of a man with a gun, according to a statement released by Champaign police spokeswoman Rene Dunn.



When police arrived and approached the man, he started firing at them, according to Dunn. The police returned fire. The three officers and the other man were all wounded by gunfire and taken to a hospital for treatment, the statement said.

All three officers were wearing standard protective vests, according to Finney.

"The problem is you can't pick where the bullets will hit," he said. "The vest doesn't cover everything."

Champaign County State's Attorney Julia Rietz said this morning that one of the police officers, a woman, was hit above her protective vest, and a bullet went through her left lung. She said the other two officers, both men, were treated and released.

"These officers go through this potential danger every day," Finney said this morning. "Unfortunately, this was a near-worst case scenario."

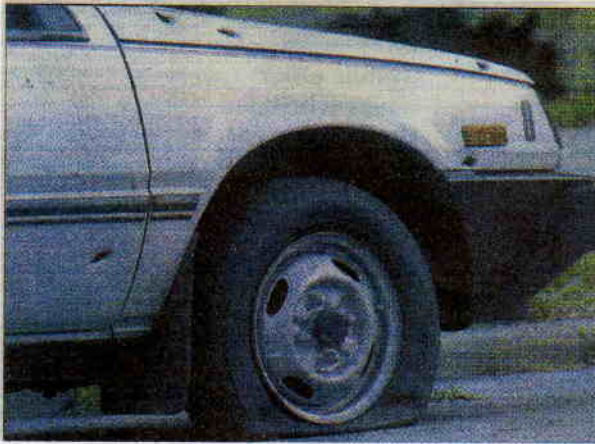
"This guy caught the two officers and backup officer completely off guard by his actions," Finney said.

The chief said Champaign police have received an outpouring of concern and support from other departments.

Within the Champaign department, officers and staff have also banded together, he said. "Our officers are very concerned with each other," Finney said.

While officers are still being treated at the hospital, fellow officers take turns doing shifts to stand by, Finney said.

"We won't leave an officer alone until they are ready to be released," the chief said.



Finney said the other man is in custody of the Champaign County sheriff's office at the hospital.

"We have not filed (charges) yet," Rietz said. She expects to charge him with attempted murder and aggravated discharge of a firearm. "There may be more," she said.

Finney requested that the Serious Use of Force Team investigate the incident. That team is made up of officers and

investigators from Champaign, Urbana, University of Illinois and Rantoul police, the Champaign County sheriff's office and Illinois State Police.

There was no information this morning on the shooter's identity.

The incident happened near the corner of Church and North Prairie streets.

Dozens of police cars arrived on the scene immediately after the shooting, with officers responding from Champaign, Urbana and University of Illinois police departments and the Champaign County sheriff's office, as well as the Champaign Fire Department. All streets on the north side of the park were blocked for the crime scene investigation. A dozen or more shell casings were marked on Church Street, near two parked Champaign police cars and a small silver hatchback car that had its windows shattered and at least one tire flattened.

William Hodgett of Champaign said he was driving home, headed west on Church Street, when he passed a Champaign police car, he thinks with a male and a female officer in it, pulled behind a small silver hatchback. Routine traffic stop, he thought. He slowed down.

Hodgett said he wasn't far past the scene when he heard a series of loud pops.



Residents say the shooting suspect was a common sight in the area. They say the man was apparently homeless and spent a lot of time around his vehicle.

Church Street, near the intersection of State Street, and saw two police cars pull onto Church. He said he heard shots a short time later and looked up to see officers firing.

"I heard it, I looked around," he said. "I could see the cops and I was, you know, 'I think that's gunshots.'"

"I could hear walkie-talkies," Davidson added. "'Have you been hit?' I heard that. I saw a lady walking her dog and she was right where the action was."



John Dixon/The News-Gazette
Champaign police officers David Allen, left, and Bruce Ramseyer walk around the area of the shooting near West Side Park this morning.

"I thought it was firecrackers," he said, standing at the corner of Church and Prairie streets as police and emergency crews worked in the background.

He looked in his rearview mirror and saw the male police officer out of the patrol car in a firing crouch with his gun drawn.

Andrew Davidson of Champaign was walking home west along

Davidson said when he realized he was near a gun-battle, he got down behind a car parked along the street.

C.W. Yantis said he was cleaning upstairs in the First Presbyterian Church of Champaign at the corner of Church and State streets. Like Hodgett, he heard the series of pops and thought it was firecrackers.

"It was like, I don't know, 10 or 12," he said.

Yantis said he looked out a second-floor window and could see one police car on the

"I came down to see what the noise was," he said. "By the time I got down here there was 20 cop cars."

Residents of the neighborhood said the silver hatchback car and its driver, a tall black man, were a common sight there. They said the man was apparently homeless and often slept in the car parked along Church and Prairie streets, even in the winter.

The man also seemed to spend most of the day around the car or West Side Park. He could be seen walking downtown in the late afternoon and early evening, usually carrying a briefcase-type messenger bag.

“These officers go through this potential danger every day.



Unfortunately, this was a near-worst case scenario. This guy caught the two officers and backup officer completely off guard by his actions. ”

R.T. FINNEY
Champaign police chief

He seemed well-groomed and his clothes were normally in good shape and clean, but he had a habit of talking to himself and sounded like he was arguing with someone.

Hodgett said he saw the man and the male officer he had seen firing in his mirror taken away by ambulance.