

Error by Lawmen Eyed in La. Killings



United Press International

Gov. Edwards leaves Southern University's tear gas-filled administration building with Gen. O. J. Daigle of the state guard.

11/18/72 By Austin Scott

Washington Post Staff Writer

BATON ROUGE, La., Nov. 17 — Gov. Edwin Edwards said today it was "possible" that two young black men died at Southern University Thursday because sheriff's deputies mistakenly put buck-shot-filled shells in their shotguns instead of the tear-gas cartridges they were supposed to use.

At a news conference, Edwards backed away from earlier flat assertions that law enforcement officers fired no shots, only tear gas, during Thursday's routing of students from the campus administration building.

Edwards said that after talking with the different law-enforcement agencies involved, and reviewing films of the confrontation "it is obvious there are discrepancies and uncertainties."

"Therefore I have asked the [state] attorney general to initiate an investigation," the governor said. "We would welcome a separate or cooperative investigation with the Justice Department."

In Washington, Deputy U.S. Attorney General Ralph E. Erickson ordered the FBI to investigate "to determine whether there was any violation of federal law."

A number of other "discrepancies and uncertainties" hung over Thursday's battle between students and law-enforcement officers at this 9,100-student, largely black campus set on flat land in a sharp elbow of the Mississippi River.

Leaders of the student protest movement that had planned a series of actions throughout the semester focusing on demands for administrative change and the removal of the school president charged at their own news conference that they had been "set up" to be killed in the confrontation.

They insisted, as did many nonactivist students, that they were told by university

See SOUTHERN, A8, Col. 1

Deputies May Have Fired By Mistake, Edwards Says

SOUTHERN, From A1

president G. Leon Netterville to wait in his office until he returned from a meeting and talk to them.

Edwards flatly disputed their claim.

He said Netterville told him that word of a planned takeover of the administration building reached university authorities as early as Wednesday afternoon, and that parish (county) sheriff Al Amiss was asked to stand by.

Neither Netterville nor Amiss was available to reporters today.

Netterville issued a statement saying he was "grieved and saddened."

Amiss, who said Thursday he was reasonably positive his men had fired nothing but tear gas, walked out of the governor's press conference before reporters had a chance to talk to him.

Edwards told reporters that sheriff's deputies were armed with both regular shotgun shells and tear gas shells, and that the two were so close to being identical that, "if I held them up, you couldn't tell them apart."

He said no student weapons other than a large knife were found as the campus was evacuated and closed until the Monday after Thanksgiving.

But he emphasized he was drawing no conclusions about what happened in the frenzied moments, filmed by at least two television cameramen, when two young men ran out the main door of the tear-gas-filled administration building, were struck by metal pellets appearing to be buckshot, and fell to the sidewalk to die of head wounds.

In the heat of that kind of action, if a deputy was to reach in his pocket and pull out the wrong kind of shell and slip it in the gun, even he may not know that he did it," the government said.

Parish coroner Hypolite Landry said both men died from "multiple wounds of the head." One undamaged pellet he recovered was "consistent with No. 3 buckshots," the coroner said, adding that all

other pellets recovered from the bodies were nearly identical in weight and had left similarly sized—round holes.

One of the two bodies, a black male in his early 20s, remained unidentified today. The other was identified as Denver A. Smith, 20, of nearby New Roads.

Edwards said state police on the scene assured him they did not fire their weapons. Some 650 National Guardsmen who occupied the campus late Thursday and sealed it off were not on the scene at the time.

Southern's campus remained closed and quiet today. A steady stream of students flowed from the campus all day, packing their trunks and laundry bags past the National Guard checkpoint at the main entrance.

Edwards said he anticipated no further trouble, but would keep East Baton Rouge Parish under a state of emergency, which prohibits the sale of all guns and ammunition except that used for deer hunting.

The smaller New Orleans campus of Southern University was also closed and was quiet.

For most of today, concerned parents moved sluggishly through a half-mile-long traffic jam caused by state police searches of the engine compartment, trunk, and personal belongings in every car allowed on the campus.

In front of the "brown brick administration building, workmen scrubbed the sidewalks where the two bodies had lain 24 hours before. Several fresh chips were noticeable in the brick wall behind where they fell.

All doors of the building were propped open to help dispel lingering tear gas.

Overtured chairs and papers littered the president's office, and the rug was stained office, and the rug was stained table in his office, amid empty Coca Cola bottles, rolls of toilet tissue, and a black karate belt, a humorous greeting card was prominently displayed.

"These last few days at the office have been hell," it read. Edwards placed damage to

the campus at "at least \$200,000," adding he believed most of it was covered by insurance.

He termed "stupid" a fire in the registrar's office that destroyed large numbers of academic records.

"That's going to create an almost impossible situation to determine who passes, who fails... who gets a diploma and who doesn't," the governor said.

The sequence of events leading up to Thursday's deaths began about a month after the school term opened, with a series of demands that focused on better equipment in all areas of the university and more control by students over academic affairs.

On Oct. 24, an estimated 1,000 Southern University students marched on the state capitol here demanding that Netterville be fired.

Two days later, a small group of student leaders took that demand with others before the state board of education, which named a committee to study the issue.

Officials closed the campus Oct. 31 after students marched on the administrative building and said they were going to personally escort President Netterville of the campus.

One day later, students took over the administration building at the New Orleans campus. Authorities were alerted, but did not move in. When that campus was reopened Nov. 6, students boycotted classes.

Among the demands on the New Orleans campus was the resignation of Dean Emmett Bashful. Both Bashful and Netterville are black.

Students defied orders from Edwards to leave the administration building until Nov. 9, when Bashful turned in his resignation and the students left the building.

The next day students began a boycott on the Baton Rouge campus in support of all of the demands. Both boycotts continued with large numbers of students still attending classes until the schools were closed Thursday.

Not the original