

Louisiana Panel Links Deputies To Deaths of 2 at Southern U.

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BATON ROUGE, La., Dec. 14 —A state-appointed commission investigating the killing of two black Southern University students here last month said today that both were killed by a single shotgun blast from an area where sheriff's deputies were deployed.

It said it was turning its findings over to the East Baton Rouge Parish (county) district attorney for "further investigation by his office of possible criminal liability."

William J. Guste Jr., the Louisiana Attorney General, who appointed the commission and helped it in its investigation, said he expected the shooting to be considered by a parish

grand jury. He said that he would have a staff member working with the grand jury and that he would oversee the district attorney's investigation.

The commission stopped short of saying who fired the fatal shot or whether it was deliberate or accidental. Some commission members reportedly believe the shooting was deliberate.

Mr. Guste said movie film taken of the scene indicated that "about six" sheriff's deputies had been in the area from which the fatal shot was fired, Nov. 16.

"I think it's a fair assumption," he said.

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tion that it came from one of the deputies," he said.

This was the first time that a Deep South state had taken so firm an initiative in investigating a fatal racial confrontation and in intimating that white law-enforcement officers might have been responsible for the deaths.

In the past, the Federal Government has taken the lead in such investigations. Except for an announcement that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was investigating, little has been heard from the Federal Government in the Southern University killings.

Ossie Brown, the East Baton Rouge parish district attorney-elect who, will inherit the Southern investigation when he takes office Jan. 3, had no comment today on how he would pursue the matter.

Early Version Disputed

As reported earlier, the commission, made up of six black and six white persons, including two students, sharply disputed the early official versions of the incident in which sheriff's deputies and State Police troopers were portrayed as blameless.

The commission said that a state policeman—not a student, as Gov. Edwin W. Edwards and other officials had said earlier—had touched off the incident by throwing a tear gas canister into the crowd. It said a student picked it up and threw it back at the officers.

Today's interim report also confirmed these other main points: that the authorities had almost pinpointed the spot from which the single fatal shot was fired; that some sheriff's deputies had carried their personal weapons to the scene as permitted by a sheriff's department policy, and that there had been general confusion and a mixup in orders, especially among the deputies.

Mr. Guste said during a news conference at which the report was announced that the commission had learned from its three weeks of investigation that the fatal shot had come from an area occupied by "about six" deputies. Some of



Associated Press

William J. Guste Jr., Louisiana Attorney General, at news session in Baton Rouge on shooting at Southern University.

those were not carrying shotguns, which narrows the field of suspicion even further, he said.

Mr. Guste indicated that the commission's final report, expected early next year after further investigation, would recommend sharp changes in police practices to help prevent a recurrence of such incidents. He indicated it also would have advice for students and university administrations.

Today's report said a group of students had prevented the normal use of the campus administration building on the day of the shooting and it called that conduct "improper."

But it added, "The investigation of this commission has not uncovered any evidence that students were in the possession of firearms, tear gas, grenade or artillery simulators or launching devices at the time of the confrontation."

Mr. Edwards and other officials had suggested at one point that the two students, Leonard Douglas Brown and Denver A.

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Smith, might have been killed by an explosive device thrown by someone other than policemen.

The commission said, "Investigation thus far has indicated that the students were killed by No. 4 shotgun pellets.

"No. 4 buckshot shotgun shells contain approximately 27 pellets. The students received 19 wounds and 10 pellets were recovered from their bodies. The condition of the wall of the administration building directly behind the area in which the students fell also indicates that the shotgun pellets struck the wall. In all, the commission has been able to account for 23 of a possible 27 pellets,

indicating that their deaths were the result of a single shot."

The trouble arose when a group of students went to the administration building to ask the university's black president, Dr. G. Leon Netterville, to help get some students, who had been arrested released from jail. The arrests had been made during a student protest against the school administration.

Dr. Netterville left the office and his campus security chief called for help from the sheriff's office. About 55 sheriff's deputies and 30 state policemen went to the campus.

The commission reported that the police had been told erroneously by campus officials

that Dr. Netterville and a campus security guard had been held as hostage by the students. No hostages had been taken, the commission said.

Governor Edwards, at a news conference after the report was made public, said Mr. Guste had handled the investigation "admirably."

He said that the report, as had been agreed on in advance, would become the state's official position on the killings. Because the matter might go before a grand jury, he reserved comment on whether he thought anyone should be indicted. He said that he still

believed the first tear gas canister had been thrown by a student, but added that the question was "immaterial."

He said the state was now planning to train "a highly specialized riot squad of state police and National Guardsmen to take primary responsibility for situations such as this."

Referring to possibly inadequate preparation and policies in the Southern confrontation, he said, "It may be that we have not addressed ourselves as much as we should have to the possibility of these conditions existing."

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