

# UPDATED: BCA releases names in shooting death; group protests in downtown Bemidji

Shearer, Jordan . TCA Regional News ; Chicago [Chicago]01 Dec 2018.

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## FULL TEXT

Dec. 01--BEMIDJI -- By the time officials released the name of Vernon May on Friday, the world already knew he was the man killed during an officer-involved shooting two days before.

And, in that brief time, his name became a rallying cry on the Internet, the focus of local debate about whether law enforcement was justified in his shooting death, and the spark for a protest through downtown on Friday night.

May, 34, of Red Lake, was shot by local law enforcement during a traffic stop Wednesday night near the intersection of Ridgeway Avenue Northwest and 30th Street. According to a release from the Bemidji Police Department, an officer initiated a traffic stop and realized that May, who was in the back seat, had a felony-level warrant. A Beltrami County Sheriff's deputy also arrived on scene, and the two officials asked May to get out of the vehicle.

They saw May had a handgun, and the officer began to struggle with May for control of the firearm, the release said. Sometime thereafter, both the deputy and the officer fired their weapons at May, who was later pronounced dead at the scene.

In addition to May's identity, the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension on Friday also identified the Bemidji Police officer involved in the shooting as Bidal Duran and the Beltrami County deputy as Brandon Newhouse. Duran has been with the department nearly six years, and Newhouse has been with the sheriff's office for two years.

Both law enforcement officers were subsequently placed on administrative leave, which is standard procedure in officer-related shootings.

The BCA is conducting the investigation at the request of Bemidji police, the BCA said in a release. When the investigation is complete, the BCA will turn its findings over to the Beltrami County Attorney's Office.

By Friday, a protest had begun forming through social media, ultimately bringing upward of 60 people to the Paul and Babe statues in downtown Bemidji on Friday night. A drum circle filled the winter night with the sound of Native singers.

Although clarifying she was not a spokeswoman for the protest, Tami Liberty spoke to the crowd about the need to move past violence and embrace peace. Another speaker, Bob Shimek, spoke about the prevalence of racism in the local community.

"Everybody wants to be able to walk the streets of Bemidji and not have to worry about being shot by a police officer or somebody else -- or somebody else," Liberty said. "We should not have to live in fear of any of it. Our police officers shouldn't have to be in fear right now."

The crowd walked from the Paul and Babe statues, through downtown, and gathered in the street between the Beltrami County Courthouse and the Law Enforcement Center. On their way, they held up traffic, waving signs at the waiting vehicles.

The crowd could be heard chanting "Hands Up! Don't Shoot!" as they made their way, walking in the middle of the street. The drum circle began singing, once again, in front of the Law Enforcement Center, which is home to both the Bemidji Police Department and Beltrami County Sheriff's Office. The crowd began shouting "Vernon May." Other times, the air simply echoed with the sounds of car horns and random yells.

While Wednesday's shooting may have sparked Friday's protest, several who took part in the march said it was

about a bigger issue the Native community faces.

"It's about all the shootings; I want to find justice for all indigenous people," said Dalene Fajardo of Red Lake. Social media also had a range of other comments since Thursday morning, when news of the shooting broke, some of which were thanking the police and the sheriff's office for doing their part to keep the community safe. Before Wednesday's shooting, May had had previous encounters with law enforcement. Among them, he'd been charged in August with carrying a pistol while under the influence of a controlled substance. He'd also been charged with fifth-degree drug possession in September.

The complaint for the drug charge said May was one of multiple people in a vehicle. The complaint further said the deputy approached the vehicle with caution since both May and the other individual in the car had "routinely been found in possession of a firearm."

May also was shot during a dispute this past spring in Eckles Township, which borders the city of Bemidji to the west.

Wednesday's incident was the second officer-involved shooting to take place in rural, northern Minnesota within two days. In Virginia, Minn., an officer responded to a 911 call on Tuesday from a woman after a man had allegedly approached her vehicle in the street. After arriving, the officers found the suspect holding another man who he'd grabbed from the sidewalk. Sometime after that, an officer discharged their weapon and struck the suspect, who was later identified as J Scot Alan Widmark, 41 of Virginia.

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## DETAILS

Subject:	Social networks; Community; Shootings; Criminal investigations; Law enforcement; Firearms
Location:	Virginia Minnesota
Publication title:	TCA Regional News; Chicago
Publication year:	2018
Publication date:	Dec 1, 2018
Publisher:	Tribune Content Agency LLC
Place of publication:	Chicago
Country of publication:	United States, Chicago
Publication subject:	Business And Economics
Source type:	Wire Feeds
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2140117606

**Document URL:** https://search.proquest.com/docview/2140117606?accountid=14026

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**Last updated:** 2018-12-01

**Database:** Global Newsstream

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