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For immediate release:
KCSO news release #07-021 / 125

Monday, June 18, 2007

Nightclub brawl leads to assault with a firearm

Silverdale, Wash. -- A definite set of fortunate circumstances, coupled with an immediate response by sheriff's deputies and Washington State Patrol troopers, prevented a potential homicide or serious injury situation around midnight, Friday (June 15), when a bar fight escalated into an outright brawl.

Sheriff's patrol deputies were dispatched at 11:59 p.m. to reports of multiple people fighting, and an assault involving a man with a gun, outside of the Golden Grill Mongolian Barbeque Restaurant and Nightclub, 9469 Silverdale Way NW, Silverdale. Initial reports indicated that a male had fired the gun several times, however no reports concerning injuries were received.

It was next reported that the suspect(s) had fled the area in a silver-colored sports utility vehicle.

Deputies arrived within 70 seconds and faced a chaotic and high risk scene: an estimated crowd of 30 to 40 people outside of the nightclub, many in various states of intoxication, and no clear indication of who was involved or the location of the gun.

State patrol troopers had detained a number of nightclub patrons in the strip mall parking lot based on physical descriptions of those involved in the assaults. They recovered a loaded handgun ammunition magazine.

At the same time a sheriff's deputy observed a silver-colored Jeep Cherokee leaving the area of the fight and conducted a vehicle stop of the Jeep a few blocks to the south, at a convenience store / gas station located at the intersection of Silverdale Way and Anderson Hill Road. Backed-up by two additional deputies, three male occupants of the Cherokee were removed from the vehicle and detained for officer safety and for investigation of the alleged assault(s).

At the nightclub deputies tried to identify and interview witnesses and begin to process the crime scene. Their efforts were met with varying degrees of cooperation and obstinacy, while some lied outright. At issue, still, is why the fight erupted in the first place. No clear reason or motive has been determined. Some people claimed that it involved "disrespect" between various parties inside the bar; others felt that it stemmed from an assault on a pregnant woman inside the bar, and many stated that it was military personnel against civilians, or black patrons against white patrons. No claims have been fully substantiated as accurate.

Eventually, through the course of interviewing some of the fight participants and witnesses, facts began to emerge that the brawl started inside and was pushed outside by nightclub security staff. Once in the parking lot the brawl continued. At one point a black male removed a black-colored semi-automatic handgun from the waistband of his trousers and pointed it at a white male.

Reports vary about whether or not the man with the handgun tried to shoot the weapon; some witnesses stated that the armed suspect attempted to shoot the gun multiple times but the gun malfunctioned or otherwise didn't fire. Others stated that they didn't see the gun or that they saw the gun but didn't hear the suspect pull the trigger.

What is known is that the suspect in possession of the handgun pointed it at another involved party then used it to strike someone in the head. During the course of this assault the gun's ammunition magazine was dislodged and fell out onto the pavement. The suspect ran from the scene and jumped into the silver-colored Jeep Cherokee and the vehicle left the parking lot.

Back at the scene of the traffic stop sheriff's deputies searched the Jeep Cherokee and located a black-colored, semi-automatic handgun that was missing its ammunition magazine. The weapon was located in the pocket of a hooded sweatshirt found on the back seat of the Jeep. The sweatshirt was identified, based on witness statements and other evidence, as belonging to one of the occupants of the Jeep Cherokee. The ammunition magazine found in the strip mall parking lot matched the handgun found in the Jeep.

Separate individual identifications of the suspect, by others involved in the fracas, confirmed that the man detained from the Jeep was the same person who had pointed the handgun in the parking lot and used the gun to hit one of the involved parties in the head.

The suspect was identified as Earl Lidget Chapman, age 30, from Bremerton. He was arrested and booked into jail for assault, 1st degree (deadly weapon) and for unlawful possession of a firearm, 2nd degree. Bail was set initially at \$250,000. A records check indicated that Chapman is a convicted felon, prohibited from being in possession of a firearm.

Chapman made an initial appearance in Kitsap County Superior Court at 3:00 p.m. this afternoon. The judge remanded him back into custody based on the probable cause for his arrest. His bail amount remains at \$250,000. His next court appearance is scheduled for July 12.

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