

US: 1 dead, dozens of hostages freed after Los Angeles standoff

22/07/2018 09:14 by admin

One woman was killed inside the supermarket, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said.

US shooting

Los Angeles: A woman was shot and killed when a gunman ran into a busy Los Angeles supermarket where he held dozens of people hostage for about three hours Saturday before handcuffing himself and surrendering to police. No hostages were seriously hurt.

About two hours before taking the hostages, police say the man shot his grandmother seven times and wounded another woman, who he forced into a car. Police chased the vehicle and exchanged gunfire with the man, who crashed into a pole outside the Trader Joe's in the city's Silver Lake section and ran inside.

Frightened customers and workers dove for cover as police bullets fired at the suspect shattered the store's glass doors. Some inside the supermarket climbed out windows and others barricaded themselves in rooms as scores of police and firefighters and 18 ambulances converged on the scene and prepared for mass casualties.

Heavily armed officers in riot gear stood along the side of the store and used mirrors to look inside as hostage negotiators tried to coax the man into freeing his 40 to 50 hostages and surrendering.

At about 6:30 p.m., the man agreed to handcuff himself and walked out the front door, surrounded by four of the hostages. The unidentified man, who police said is about 28, was immediately taken into custody. Police said he had a wound to his arm.

Mayor Eric Garcetti congratulated police and firefighters for their work and mourned the loss of life at the Trader Joe's where he and his wife regularly shopped when they lived in the neighborhood.

"The heroism that was shown today was second to none and the teams that were able to respond, secure the perimeter and engage in conversation with the suspect no doubt saved lives today," he said, adding "our hearts go out to everyone who has been traumatized."

Among those who survived the harrowing afternoon was 91-year-old Don Kohles. He lives in the neighborhood and was walking into the supermarket when he saw "two police cars coming like a bat out of hell" and the suspect crashed into the pole.

The driver got out and police started firing at him as he ran toward the Trader Joe's. Kohles hurried inside and he and others took cover as the suspect ran in.

"Those bullets went right over the back of me as he was running right down the main aisle," Kohles said. He was terrorized as he lay on the floor and others around him sobbed.

Christian Dunlop, a real estate agent and actor who lives nearby and frequents the Trader Joe's, was on a corner near the store when he saw four people run out. One person, an employee, was dragging an injured woman by the hands.

“She appeared lifeless,” Dunlop said.

He then saw about five employees hang out a second-floor window and drop to the ground, and about 15 other people run to safety from the back of the store. Among them was a police officer carrying a small child, he said.

“I know all the employees. I see them all the time. My heart was just racing and thinking about all the endless possibilities,” Dunlop said.

Makela Wilson, 26, an office manager, had finished shopping and was driving out of the parking lot when the suspect crashed his vehicle and police opened fire. She heard three or four gunshots and then officers in SWAT gear arrived and ordered her and other people in their cars to hunch down in their seats.

“Duck down! Duck down!” an officer shouted at her. She estimates she was in the car for a half-hour until officers escorted her to safety. At about the same time, other officers went into the store and rushed out Kolhes and others near him.

Police Chief Michel Moore said the suspect made a “series of demands” during the standoff but crisis negotiators believed they could convince him to surrender peacefully.

“Our hostage negotiators believed they had established a good rapport with him,” the chief said.

Police aren’t sure what led to the initial violence that produced the car chase and standoff. Moore said at about 1:30 p.m. the suspect shot his grandmother and another woman in a South Los Angeles home and then forced the other woman into his grandmother’s car. The grandmother was in critical condition while the other woman suffered a grazing wound.

Officers were able to track the car using LoJack “a stolen vehicle tracking system” and officers tried to stop the suspect in Hollywood, but the man refused to pull over, Moore said. During the chase, the suspect fired at officers, shooting out the back window of his car.

Outside the store, the man exchanged gunfire with police again and the woman was shot and killed, Moore said. It was not clear if she died from police gunfire or was killed by the gunman. Moore said police and firefighters responded quickly but could not save her.

Fire officials said six people, ranging in age from 12 to 81, were taken to the hospital. None had been shot and all were in fair condition.

- AP