

Incident Account

La Mesa Protests and Ensuing Civil Unrest

May 30-31, 2020

On Saturday, May 30, rallies protesting police use of force took place around the nation, including multiple events around San Diego County. Planning for the anticipated weekend events began the Thursday before.

On May 28 La Mesa Police Department (LMPD) informed the Sheriff's Emergency Service Unit of the potential protests on May 29 and May 30. LMPD shared the information with the San Diego Sheriff's Office (SDSO) and discussed a potential plan. SDSO agreed to have SDSO platoons on standby, ready to deploy to the City of La Mesa, from a staging location in San Diego.

On Friday, May 29, there was a peaceful protest outside the La Mesa Police Department lobby with approximately 200 protestors.

On May 30, LMPD had additional information suggesting larger protests were planned for that day. At approximately 9 a.m., LMPD coordinated with SDSO to have two SDSO squads (28 deputies) stage at the City of La Mesa's Public Works Department, approximately half a mile from the La Mesa Police Department. SDSO had 2 additional squads staged approximately 15 minutes outside of La Mesa.

LMPD also coordinated with California Highway Patrol (CHP) who was overseeing the available Mutual Aid CHP officers in the San Diego area. As the group of protestors arrived, LMPD requested the additional 2 SDSO squads respond and also stage at the Public Works facility. CHP brought platoons (10 officers each) to stage along Interstate 8 in La Mesa, in an effort to keep the protest from entering the freeway.

On May 30 at 12 p.m. a Command Post opened at LMPD and included San Diego Sheriff's and California Highway Patrol. The La Mesa protest began peacefully a little after 2 p.m.

At 3:27 p.m., the city sent a Nixle alert text message telling residents a protest was occurring on city streets near University/Baltimore and to please avoid the area. The message was repeated on the La Mesa Police Department Twitter account.

Around 3:30 p.m., protestors moved to the I-8 freeway, shutting down eastbound traffic, at which time CHP asked for all available police personnel to aid in crowd control.

At around 4 p.m., a group of protestors on the freeway began getting more aggressive. Some protestors began throwing bottles at officers stationed on the westbound side of the freeway. Officers watching a protester's Instagram Live video heard her announce that they were going to raid Walmart at the Grossmont Center mall; a group jumped over the wall into the center near the Game Stop.

Approximately 1,000 people marched on Murray Drive, and a crowd of about 200 people assembled in front of La Mesa Police station at the Civic Center.

At this point, multiple groups are protesting throughout the city, with reports coming in that protests are morphing into violence and destruction. A 911 caller says she was struck in the face by a protester in a restaurant parking lot.

Amid rising intensity of the protests in front of La Mesa Police Station, just after 4:45 p.m., police prepare to give an order to disperse. In the next several minutes, a riot begins to take shape, with the U.S. flag in front of the police station set on fire, people throwing rocks at the building and at officers, and vandalism of the station. A police vehicle is attacked at the intersection of Baltimore and University.

La Mesa Police Department's Special Response Team begins reinforcing the police station's front doors, and shortly thereafter, mutual aid (two squads from the Sheriff) arrives. Sheriff's deputies are greeted with rocks and water bottles being thrown by rioters. One deputy is hit by a rock.

During this time and continuing throughout the night, SDSO issues calls to jurisdictions throughout the county to send additional resources with expedited response. Over the course of the event, approximately 250 officers from jurisdictions throughout the county are deployed to assist La Mesa. Jurisdictions sending aid include San Diego Sheriff's Office (SDSO), Carlsbad Police, Chula Vista Police, the San Diego Community College District, SDSU Police, National City Police, Oceanside Police and San Diego Harbor Police.

From approximately 5:09 – 5:30 p.m., multiple dispersal orders are given as people attempt to breach the walls of the station and throw bottles and rocks at officers.

At approximately 5:30 p.m., officers attempt to use bullhorns and an armored vehicle (Bearcat) equipped with a public address system to issue dispersal orders. The Bearcat and other police vehicles are attacked and vandalized with officers inside. With rocks going into the broken Bearcat windows, officers are forced to deploy a pepperball to free the vehicle and officers.

At 6:02 p.m., Sheriff's officers deploy tear gas and pepperballs as rock-throwing and destruction continues unabated. Officers continue efforts to disperse the crowd multiple times over the ensuing half hour as the fire station comes under attack. At 6:24 p.m., a Heartland Fire battalion chief informs LMPD they will only respond to calls if provided a safety escort because of concerns for employee safety.

At around 6:40 p.m., dispersal orders were being given at all protest locations across the city, with San Diego Police Air Borne Law Enforcement (ABLE) deployed to assist in dispersal orders and provide air support to the incident. With rioters not heeding the dispersal orders, officers continue to deploy gas and pepperballs in an attempt to disperse crowds. Individuals break in to City Hall. There is an apparent arson attempt at the American Legion (VFW) hall and the U.S. flag in front is set on fire.

Two squads are deployed from Command Post 2 to form arrest teams. When they arrive, their cars are attacked.

By 7:35 p.m., officers use a Long Range Acoustical Device to ensure dispersal orders are loud and able to be heard clearly. ABLE reports that City Hall appears to be on fire; a door

to the City Hall Annex is open, and people are starting a fire. Officers continue to deploy gas in an attempt to disperse the crowd while arrest teams are deployed to secure City Hall.

At 8:16 p.m., a beanbag round is fired from approximately 40 yards away toward a woman (later identified as Leslie Furcron) who was observed throwing an object at SDSO deputies. An officer reports that a female is down; within 30 seconds of the report, Ms. Furcron is carried away by members of the crowd, loaded into a vehicle and driven away. Officers report she may have been hit by a bean bag round.

Unrest continues as crowds continue to throw rocks at officers, break windows on police patrol cars and set a fire truck on fire. Multiple vehicles are engulfed in flames around 9 p.m.

Over the next several hours, rioters loot businesses in the La Mesa Springs Shopping Center and the Grossmont Shopping Center. Chase and Union Banks are set on fire and engulfed in flames. Officers are deployed to these stores as available, but there are delays in organizing resources at Command Post 2. Three requests were made to CHP command to deploy CHP units staged on the eastbound I-8 ramp, but units did not respond. A request is made for all available resources in the county to respond.

At approximately 11:30 p.m., SDSO inquires about potential National Guard assistance from the State Office of Emergency Services but is told troops are deployed in Los Angeles.

At approximately 12 a.m. on Sunday, SDSO assumes command of the incident.

The City Council meets at 12:30 a.m. on May 31 in an emergency session as police and civic structures remain under attack.

At 1:10 a.m., La Mesa's City Manager, acting as Director of Emergency and Disaster, declares a curfew from 1:30 a.m. to 7 a.m. and ABLA makes an unlawful assembly announcement. Councilmembers alert the public to the curfew via social media.

Rioting continues for an additional two hours.

Volunteers begin showing up around 6:30 a.m. to begin cleaning up the areas destroyed and vandalized by the previous night's events.

A 7 p.m.-5:30 a.m. curfew was declared for each night following until Monday, June 8.