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Off-Duty Police Officer Killed at New Jersey Restaurant



Dith Pran/The New York Times

Investigators conferred Sunday outside Broadway Fried Chicken in Paterson, N.J., where Officer Tyron D. Franklin was shot and killed.

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An off-duty police officer in Paterson, N.J., was killed early yesterday at a restaurant there when a man shot him after he refused to give up his wallet, the authorities said.



The New York Times; The slain officer, a rookie, drove to the restaurant with a friend.



Dith Pran/The New York Times; Tyrone D. Franklin, a rookie police officer in Paterson, N.J., was killed while off duty early Sunday during a robbery attempt at a restaurant.

The officer, Tyrone D. Franklin, a 23-year-old rookie, was accosted as he stepped up to the counter at Broadway Fried Chicken about 1:15 a.m. in a section of Paterson just east of the Passaic River, the police said.

The gunman did not show his weapon at first but demanded the officer's money and tried to grab his wallet, the police said.

When the officer refused, the man took out his gun and started shooting, hitting Officer Franklin "several times" and a 42-year-old restaurant patron at least once, said Detective Lt. Anthony Traina, a police spokesman. The gunman fled in a minivan or sport utility vehicle, Lieutenant Traina said.

The patron, whom the police did not identify, was hospitalized last night, Lieutenant Traina said. Two people who were working at the restaurant at the time were not hurt, he said.

Officer Franklin was pronounced dead at St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center at 2:05 a.m. He was in plain clothes and was not carrying his weapon, Lieutenant Traina said.

The authorities were not sure last night if he had identified himself as a police officer during the confrontation.

Officer Franklin is the second Paterson police officer to be killed in a decade, and the first person to be murdered in the city this year, Mayor José Torres said.

State Police troopers, Passaic County sheriff's deputies and officers from Paterson and several neighboring communities scoured the city and surrounding areas yesterday in search of the gunman, but as of last night, they had not made an arrest.

Officer Franklin had a 16-month-old son, Tyron Jr., whom he called T.J., the police and relatives said.

Officer Franklin grew up dreaming of becoming a police officer, even as his father, Larry, tried to encourage him to join the Paterson Fire Department, where his father had worked for two decades and became the first black man to rise to the rank of captain, according to neighbors, officials and friends.

"My son always wanted to be a policeman," Mr. Franklin said as he stood outside the ranch-style home in Westwood, N.J., where he lives with his wife and children.

The family moved there from Paterson in the mid-1990s, when Officer Franklin was in eighth grade, his father said. Officer Franklin had still lived with his family.

“He was very proud of his job. There was nothing more he wanted to do,” Mr. Franklin said.

Officer Franklin graduated in 2001 from Westwood Regional High School, where he was a member of the football and wrestling teams.

He graduated from the Police Academy in April and joined the patrol division, a job that paid about \$28,000 a year, Police Chief James Wittig said.

“He was a respectable, pleasant young man,” Chief Wittig said. “He always had a smile on his face.”

Chris Speights, a close friend of Officer Franklin’s, said he once asked his friend what it was like to be a police officer in Paterson, a city of 150,000 troubled by drug and gang violence. “It’s real tough out there,” the officer replied, according to Mr. Speights.

Officer Franklin’s mother, Belinda, worried so much about him that she once asked fellow parishioners at Lebanon Baptist Church in Westwood to pray for him, said one of the parishioners, Nina Lewis, 43.

“What’s ironic is that he’s killed off-duty,” Ms. Lewis said.

Officer Franklin had the day off and went on to visit a friend in Paterson hours before his death, said Lieutenant Traina, the police spokesman. The officer and his friend drove to the restaurant together; she stayed in the car while he went inside.

People who live and work near the restaurant, in an area the police described as plagued by drug dealing and prostitution, said they heard five or six shots.

Jonathan Miller contributed reporting.