

Two killed in school parking lot

By JAMES W. WADE III Staff Reporter

In the East Cleveland shooting Thursday night there was no gun inside the suspects' car involved in the high-speed chase that ended with 137 rounds of gunfire East Cleveland Police Chief Ralph Spotts said.

Cleveland police said an officer saw a car drive by near the Justice Center on West St. Clair Avenue and believed a shot was fired from within. That started the pursuit at about 10:30 p.m. and lasted about 25 minutes.

At the end of the chase, two police cars were in front of the suspects' car and were hit head on, Spotts said. Shots were fired at the car behind Heritage Middle School in East Cleveland, killing both people inside.

The Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office said a 30-year-old woman was killed. Spotts said they believe she was homeless and living in a shelter. Timothy Russell, 42, also died.

Spotts said no shell casings were found in front of the Justice Center. He said there is no evidence that this was a shootout or an exchange of gunfire. It is quested about the use of deadly force being used.

"A tragedy, not just for the community, but for the police department," Cleveland Police Chief Michael McGrath said. "This is really with a heavy heart. I can't tell you how much this hurts."

McGrath said 13 officers fired 137 rounds. Those officers will be on administrative leave for three days and will remain on limited duty during the investigation.

A NewsChannel5 photographer, who was on a scheduled ride-along with police, said there were dozens of bullet holes in the suspects' car and the windshield of a police car. McGrath said those shots could have been friendly fire.

"Two people died and we have 13 officers involved," McGrath said. "You've got to carry that weight with you the rest of your life... You try to make sense of it and it's very difficult. All night I'm thinking 'Why, why, why?' And we'll find out why."

No East Cleveland police officers were at the scene at the time, Spotts said. The investigation will be handled by East Cleveland police. The United States Attorneys' Office, the FBI and the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation have been contacted as well to investigate.

The Cleveland Police Department will be moving other officers to work in the second district, since so many are on leave.