

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette: Northwest Edition (AR)

November 8, 2005

Section: Northwest Arkansas

Page: 9

Wanted man, 26, commits suicide as police close in

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Article Text:

VAN BUREN - A St. Louis man wanted for questioning in the disappearance of his estranged wife killed himself Monday afternoon as federal officials and Van Buren police were closing in, police said.

Officers with the U.S. Marshal's Service in Fort Smith and the Van Buren Police Department were attempting to arrest 26-year-old Demetrius Mitchell on a Missouri warrant for aggravated rape Monday afternoon when he shot himself, said Mark Spellman, supervisory deputy with the Marshal's Service in Fort Smith.

The shooting occurred inside a recreational vehicle at the Outdoor Living Center RV Park.

FBI officials in St. Louis said Monday that Mitchell had a long criminal history and vowed not to be taken alive. He also faced charges of kidnapping, assault, brandishing a knife and domestic assault related to a July incident.

St. Louis police wanted to question Mitchell, a Dumas native, in the disappearance of his estranged wife, 24-year-old Jamilia Harris Mitchell, according to a Nov. 1 article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The couple's 5-year-old son told relatives he saw his father shoot his mother in the head inside the family car and then place her body in the backyard, the story said.

Jamilia Mitchell has not been found and the case is still under investigation, the story said.

The St. Louis Police Department declined to comment on the case Monday night.

Spellman said his office was notified Oct. 29 that Demetrius Mitchell, who had relatives in the Fort Smith area, might be in Northwest Arkansas.

He said investigators confirmed Mitchell was staying at the RV park early Monday morning.

"We believe he had been here less than a week," Spellman said. "We think he possibly arrived Wednesday or Thursday."

U.S. marshals and Van Buren police surrounded the recreational vehicle and tried to talk with Mitchell at 12:51 p.m. Monday. They heard a single gunshot come from inside the camper a short time later, said Van Buren police Cpl. Rob Rogers.

Officers cleared out the other vehicles in the park and ordered students at nearby Coleman Junior High School to stay inside while they investigated.

Two hours later, members of the Police Department's SWAT team fired tear gas into the recreational vehicle. When they entered, they found Mitchell in the bedroom dead from a gunshot wound from a small-caliber firearm, Rogers said.

Investigators are still trying to determine how Mitchell got to Arkansas.

Police in St. Louis found Jamilia Mitchell's car burned and with traces of blood inside Oct. 30, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

The newspaper said Demetrius Mitchell, a member of a St. Louis street gang, dropped his five

children off with a family friend Oct. 29.

The friend, who wasn't named in the story, said she thought it was odd that Demetrius Mitchell had the children because the couple were separated.

"They didn't have no shoes on their feet; they didn't have no coats on," the woman told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

"I figured [the Mitchells] must have gotten back together."

The next day, the woman called the children's grandfather and he picked up the children, the Post-Dispatch reported.

The children, the oldest of whom is 5, are now in state custody.

The woman told the Post-Dispatch that Demetrius Mitchell called her Oct. 30 and she told him the children were now with their grandfather.

When she told him what the oldest child said, Mitchell told her not to worry about it because the child "makes up stories all the time," the story said. Mitchell was shot in February in an attack that killed his 19-year-old brother, Jeremie Mitchell, the Post-Dispatch reported. The apparent suicide is still under investigation by the Van Buren Police Department. Mitchell's body will be taken to the state Crime Laboratory in Little Rock for an autopsy.

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