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A COP'S BRUSH WITH DEATH

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Article Text:

Campbell County police Sgt. Stephen Ellison need only feel the side of his head to know how close he came to dying.

Six staples close a gash caused by a .00 buckshot slug fired at close range by a bank robber Friday who'd already shot at police several times that day.

A bulletproof vest saved Ellison from being killed, police say, although he also suffered superficial wounds to his lower abdomen and leg.

"He stood up in the face of danger," Campbell County Police Chief David Sandfoss said.

The bank robber, 46-year-old James Kirk of Shelbyville, later put his shotgun to his head and killed himself. Police revealed Monday that he too was wearing body armor.

"He went into this thing prepared to shoot it out," said Fort Thomas police Lt. Mark Dill, whose department investigated two of the crime scenes involved in Friday's shoot-out, which ended at an Alexandria convenience store after a five-hour chase.

Ellison, who was treated at University Hospital and released Friday night, hopes to return to work this week.

Monday, he talked to the media about the chase and exchange of gunfire with Kirk, whom police say robbed a bank in central Kentucky and then led them on a five-hour chase, driving a stolen truck to Alexandria.

Ellison spotted the truck about 3:30 p.m.

"I figured he might be the bank robber who had already exchanged gun fire with police," said the eight-year police veteran. "That's why I didn't pull him over right away. I got two or three cars behind him and waited for assistance. But before help came, he pulled into a driveway like it was his house."

Ellison followed him.

"He jumped out with a shotgun and started shooting at me in the cruiser," he said.

Chunks of lead (.00 shot is about the size of a .30-caliber bullet) hit the front of the cruiser and shattered glass in the windshield in front of the steering wheel.

Ellison wasn't hit.

"I ducked, put the car in reverse and floored it. I drove down an embankment and hit a tree,"

Ellison said. "I pulled out my gun. I wasn't sure if he was going to come after me and finish me off."

When the gunman didn't, Ellison said he "walked up over the hill to see where he was at. It was my job to try to stop him."

Suddenly, the gunman drove the truck from behind the house, about 50 feet away from Ellison.

"That's when an exchange of gunfire took place," he said.

"I emptied a magazine on him. Eight shots. I wanted to get some rounds off and see if I could hit him or at least make him put his head down."

Kirk wasn't hit.

But Ellison was.

"I think he shot me twice," said Ellison. "I remember getting hit in the head. Then I got hit in the stomach and legs. I didn't know how bad hurt I was."

Ellison radioed for help and Kirk drove off, only to be surrounded by police minutes later at the store. Kirk ended the ordeal by killing himself.

"At the time, I was glad he was dead," said Ellison. "I was angry at him."

"But, I feel sorry for his family, that they have to go through this, that he put them through it."

Ellison said Monday he credits his survival to a guardian angel - his older brother, Bill, an Anderson and Miami townships firefighter who died of injuries suffered fighting a house fire 10 months ago.

"After my brother died, I knew he would keep an eye on me," said Ellison, who turns 34 today.

"There's no doubt in my mind he had a lot to do with the way things turned out (Friday). He was there with me."

Ellison keeps his brother's firefighter badge No. 69 on the steering wheel of his police cruiser and wears a memorial bracelet to his brother on his right wrist.

"It's like American Express, I never leave home without it," Ellison says of the bracelet. "I wear it to remember my brother. I keep him in my mind all the time."

Ellison said one of the scariest moments of last Friday's ordeal was when he lost the bracelet.

"I took my shirt off to stop the bleeding in my head and the bracelet fell off," he recalled. "I looked around for it and couldn't find it."

"Another officer found it and gave it to me. She knew what it meant to me."

Ellison said he also knows what his welfare means to his parents, who still grieve over his brother's death last March.

"My first thought after I was shot was about my mom and dad," he said. "I didn't want to put them through it again."

When his mother, Donna, arrived at University Hospital on Friday, the first thing Ellison did was apologize to her.

"I told mom I was sorry for putting her through this again," he said. "She didn't want to hear any of that."

Ellison visits the doctor Friday and hopes to return to work Saturday.

"I'm sure there will be some apprehension in certain situations, but I'm not scared. I know Bill is there."

"I know he wanted me to carry on and that's what I'm doing."

Caption:

DAVID KOHL/The Post-(Stephen Ellison)

photo

Memo:

SHOOTOUT WITH A BANK ROBBER

"He jumped out with a shotgun and started shooting at me.... I think he shot me twice. I remember getting hit in the head."-Stephen Ellison, Campbell County police sergeant

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