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DEPUTIES KILL SPOTSYLVANIAN

HE THREATENED TO KILL HIMSELF AND OPENED FIRE

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Dateline: SPOTSYLVANIA

Article Text:

Sheriff's deputies shot and killed a Spotsylvania County man who opened fire on them early yesterday after threatening suicide, authorities said.

The man, identified as Jamie Churchill, 23, had arrived home about 9:30 p.m. Sunday to say goodbye to his mother, Maj. Howard Smith of the Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office said in a statement.

The mother called 911 and told a dispatcher her son had arrived in a red pickup truck she didn't recognize, Smith said. Authorities determined the truck had been reported stolen in Caroline County earlier in the evening.

A deputy arrived at the home in the 4400 block of Shepherds Road about 25 minutes later and found Churchill on the porch. Smith said Churchill asked responding deputies to come inside to talk. As they followed, the officers noticed a handgun in one of Churchill's pockets, Smith said. Authorities said they had determined by then Churchill was wanted by state police on one count each of carjacking, grand larceny of a pickup truck, grand larceny of a car and grand larceny of a firearm.

As Churchill continued into the home's kitchen, the deputies took cover in an adjoining living room. The officers and a crisis negotiator tried to persuade Churchill to surrender, but he indicated he wanted to end talks and kill himself about 1 a.m. yesterday, Smith said.

Churchill then fled to a laundry room and hid behind a door as an emergency-response team of deputies prepared to distract him and take him into custody, Smith said. As deputies entered the doorway, Churchill fired his weapon, Smith said. Deputies returned fire, killing Churchill, who was pronounced dead at the scene, Smith said.

The deputies involved in the shooting have been placed on administrative leave, a routine procedure after a shooting. Sheriff's officials would not release their names or further information, pending an internal investigation. The matter will be forwarded to Spotsylvania

Commonwealth's Attorney William F. Neely for his review.
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SHOTS JUSTIFIED, PROSECUTOR SAYS

OFFICERS CLEARED IN SPOTSYLVANIA

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Dateline: SPOTSYLVANIA

Article Text:

Officers were justified in fatally shooting a suicidal Spotsylvania County man who fired a handgun as they tried to subdue him last month, a prosecutor has found.

Jamie Churchill, 23, was shot 18 times by officers at his home early Jan. 28, an instant after he fired a single shot through his chin and into his head, Spotsylvania authorities said.

At the same time Churchill fired, the lead member of a tactical response team tripped and cried out, thinking he had been shot, said Maj. Howard Smith of the Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office.

Three other team members, fearing for their safety and that of the lead officer, opened fire, two of them with sub-machine guns, Smith said. Churchill was pronounced dead at the scene.

An autopsy determined Churchill was killed by shots fired by the officers, although the self-inflicted wound itself could have proven fatal over the course of several hours, Smith said yesterday.

"It's possible he could have succumbed in hours or days," Smith said.

At the time sheriff's deputies responded, state police had obtained four warrants in connection with Churchill's alleged carjacking of a vehicle several hours earlier in Caroline County. Churchill had allegedly stolen a pickup truck and the handgun he later turned on himself from a motorist who had stopped to help after Churchill's own vehicle had apparently broken down on state Route 2 near Bowling Green, authorities said.

Churchill had recently been released from a private mental-health center and had told relatives

he wanted to take his life, Smith said. Churchill's mother called 911 after her son, in the stolen pickup, stopped by their mobile home in Spotsylvania's Partlow area to say goodbye to her around 9:30 p.m. on Jan. 27, authorities said.

The four members of the sheriff's department's tactical team tried to subdue Churchill after he broke off negotiations around 1 a.m. Jan. 28, Smith said. The deputies who fired their weapons were placed on routine administrative leave but have now been cleared to return to regular duty. They are Wilbert R. Morgan, a 10-year law-enforcement veteran; John T. Seay, a 3 1/2-year law-enforcement veteran; and Steven Clem, a 14-year law-enforcement veteran.

Spotsylvania Commonwealth's Attorney William F. Neely determined that the officers were executing their sworn duty to take a suspect into custody and that they reasonably believed they were under fire before returning fire themselves, according to a statement.

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