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Stand-off ends in death

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Article Text:

WALTON COUNTY - Unofficial autopsy reports released by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation confirmed law enforcement officers did in fact kill Elbert Jesse White after a four-hour standoff Tuesday.

According to GBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Michael Ayers, while the autopsy is not officially completed pending the results of toxicology reports, he could confirm White was struck twice - once in the torso and once in the arm - and neither appeared to be self-inflicted.

GBI officials are being utilized as an outside investigative agency because it was an officer-involved shooting.

"The whole incident was unfortunate for all parties involved, but Mr. White chose to be defiant and chose his own course of action," Walton County Sheriff Joe Chapman said. "The deputies and all officers present showed extreme restraint and everyone involved showed tremendous professionalism and dedication.

"In looking at the crime scene, we were very fortunate no law enforcement officers were injured."

The stand-off began after deputies tried to execute an arrest warrant on White, 72, at his residence at 3198 Turkey Mountain Trail. The warrant was issued after an alleged incident at the Walton Truck Stop, located on Highway 78 east of Monroe. According to police reports, Monroe Police Department officers were called out to the truck stop at 3:52 p.m. in reference to a man wielding a gun and threatening persons at the location.

When officers arrived, witnesses told officers White became violent after a customer told him to stop urinating in the parking lot of the truck stop. A verbal altercation ensued during which White reportedly went to his truck, grabbed what was described as a .25 or .32 mm caliber pistol and made threats to shoot. White eventually returned to his truck, removed a purse and threw it at the back door of the truck stop, according to reports, before leaving the scene.

Two females were allegedly with White at the time. Stephanie Royster, 32, no address listed, was arrested for providing false information and for an outstanding warrant from Gwinnett County. The other was released.

MPD officers took out a warrant for White on charges of pointing a gun or pistol at another and reckless conduct.

Walton County Sheriff's Office deputies executed the warrant at White's address soon after the incident and approached the homeowner, who then "became belligerent with the deputies and made several threats directed toward the deputies," according to a press release. White then entered his residence and remained inside except to allegedly fire on officers.

While initial officers tried to negotiate with White, SWAT officers from Walton County, Monroe, Loganville and Newton County were called to the scene, established a perimeter around the residence and cut power to the house. Family members were reportedly at the scene, but White

refused to talk with them.

The first of four volleys of shots were fired at officers at approximately 8:45 p.m. and continued intermittently for 30 minutes.

"Mr. White knew that officers were at his residence and he wasn't shooting in the air. He was putting officers in harm's way," Walton County Sheriff's Office Capt. Chris Cannon said, who was at the scene and attempted to conduct negotiations with White.

Officers reportedly did not return fire until after the second round of shots, just after 9 p.m. The final round of shots fired by White came at 9:13 p.m., and after several hours without communication, a GBI robot was sent into the residence and White was discovered dead on the floor of his residence.

'He had a gun'

Vicki Wright, who lives on Turkey Mountain Trail, said she knew White "since she was little." She said the elderly man moved into the house about two years ago from Stone Mountain following a separation from his wife.

According to Wright, the gunman's health had been failing in recent years and he used the house as a retreat during raccoon hunts.

White was a kind-hearted man but did have an aggressive side, Wright said.

"He has two different personalities. One day you'll see him and he is the kindest, gentlest man you'll ever meet. Some days you don't know what he is talking about," she said.

Wright said most people in the rural neighborhood east of Monroe knew White carried a gun.

"He would let you know that he had that gun and he had a license for it," she said.

'On the spot'

This was the first time since 2002 that WCSO deputies fired and killed someone.

Ayers confirmed that at least two weapons - a handgun and a rifle - were recovered from the scene but did not release any other details of the investigation.

No officers were injured during the ordeal.

"Decisions made were ones that had to be made on the spot, right at that time and I think they were the right ones," Cannon said. "We hate to have to encounter situations where we may have to use deadly force. But that is what we do for a living. The officers used a great deal of restraint and I think this incident could be used as a template of how these type of situations should be handled."

This was not the first time deputies were called out because of White.

On July 9 officers responded after a complaint was filed that White fired shots at a neighbor he shares a driveway with.

According to reports, White showed a pistol to one of his neighbors after a dispute. White allegedly shot at the neighbor, who was in a car at the time, with the shot reportedly passing through two open windows in the vehicle as the driver ducked down.

The weapon was a .22 Ruger pistol that he had a permit for, and an investigation into the incident found that it appeared no shots were fired from the weapon and all rounds were accounted for.

'He had all he could handle'

Wright said she thought her neighbor "feared for his life" and put bars on the windows of his cement block, two-room house.

"He said he was scared to stay there by himself," Wright said, adding White told her someone broke into his house and stole guns and money. "People showed up and asked for money and when he didn't give it to them, they get mean to him."

Wright said younger people in the area were harassing White, using him for beer money and when he refused to give them money, they would pick on him.

The gunman once told Wright he was tired of it all.

"It think he felt fear about people messing with him," Wright said. "He really had all he could handle with all of it."

Wright and other neighbors stood on the dirt road that leads to White's house and others clustered in the woods off Turkey Mountain Trail when the stand-off began.

The neighbor said she heard a series of gun shots back and forth on two separate occasions Tuesday.

Wright said White was "tired of talking" to police and went in house.

"He said 'If you all don't go home and leave me alone I am going to have a heart attack,'" Wright said. "We pretty well knew he was dead after that last round, because we heard nothing else after that. When his (shooting) stopped, theirs' kept going."

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