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Family can't believe man fired at officers

Bullet found at scene matches gun that he used, police say

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Article Text:

Family members said they knew Nicholas S. Hunter carried a gun, but it was more like him to run away from police officers than to shoot at them.

But Hunter, 28, a native of Mississippi, was shot and killed by police on Milwaukee's north side last week after police said he fired at them first.

The two officers involved fired 19 shots, according to a Milwaukee County medical examiner's report. One officer fired 14 rounds, the other five.

"It just doesn't make sense," said Hunter's aunt, Betty Hogue, in a phone interview from Mississippi. "Just because someone tells you to get out of the road, you pull out a gun and shoot a cop?"

Police said veteran gang-unit officers Adam Zieger and Daniel Robinson were driving south on N. 28th St. shortly before 4 p.m. when they saw Hunter walking in the street. The officers began to talk to Hunter "when he began to run and pulled out a gun" and fired three shots at them, the report said.

The officers returned fire. The medical examiner's office said Hunter was struck once in the right chest. Investigators found at least five bullet holes in a house near the scene, and another bullet hole in a convenience store.

Milwaukee police and the Milwaukee County district attorney's office are still investigating the Feb. 12 shooting. But police spokeswoman Anne E. Schwartz said Tuesday night that police matched a bullet found lodged in the convenience store, near the scene, with the gun found next to Hunter's body.

"We also have witnesses who told investigators he fired at police," Schwartz said. "He pulled a gun out of his pocket upon having contact with police. He refused orders to drop his weapon. I understand the suspect had family and they're upset, but the family of the officers could have received devastating news that night as well."

Zieger and Robinson were placed on administrative duty until the inquiry is complete.

Hunter's sister, Sheena, said her brother was born and raised in Union, Miss., but he moved to Milwaukee nearly two years ago to find a job and escape the chronic poverty of rural Mississippi.

Hunter worked at ABC Liquor Store at N. 28th St. and W. Fond du Lac Ave. seven days a week, family members said.

"I asked him one day if he wanted to come back down here, but he said he was happy. And I could tell he was happy," Sheena Hunter said. "There were times when he would call and ask if I needed anything."

Hogue said Nicholas Hunter was sometimes in trouble with police when he was growing up, and he'd often run from them.

She said Hunter carried a gun with him in Milwaukee for protection because he'd been the victim of two attempted robberies and working at a liquor store could be dangerous.

"He worked seven days a week at this store. Everybody liked him," said Wayne Kennedy, Sheena's uncle by marriage, who helps run the store. "I've known him since he was a little boy. I know he wouldn't do anything wrong. . . . Four or five people I know said he never fired the gun."

Immediately after the shooting, Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn said police identified witnesses who confirmed the police officers' version of events.

Hunter's body is expected to arrive in Mississippi today, and his burial is scheduled for Saturday, Hogue said.

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