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Man dies at age 72 in shootout with cops

Last stand in Rabun County: Alabamian wounds four in spree lasting nine hours.

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Article Text:

Ruth Pitts said she always figured her brother would die violently. That it came so late in his life was the only surprise.

Alex Pitts, 72, of Tuscaloosa, Ala., was killed early Saturday in a gun battle with law enforcement officers in Rabun County after he went on a nine-hour shooting spree that wounded four people, including a Georgia State Patrol trooper, police said. None of the wounded had life-threatening injuries, according to police and hospital officials.

The only victim identified by authorities was State Patrol Sgt. Mike Nash of Athens. He was taken to the Greenville (S.C.) Memorial Hospital Trauma Center, where he was listed in guarded condition after surgery for gunshot wounds to both arms.

"I told (police) he was going to hurt somebody," Ruth Pitts, of Tuscaloosa, said after being informed of her brother's death. "He's been violent all his life."

She said her brother had served time in Alabama, Florida and Kentucky prisons for violent crimes, including 12 years for the murder of a man in Florida.

She said her brother was currently on probation and had spent time in mental institutions in Alabama over the past few years.

Neither she nor law enforcement officials knew of any motive for the shootings, which began late Friday night near a DUI roadblock by Rabun County sheriff's deputies near Lake Burton, according to Georgia Bureau of Investigation spokesman John Bankhead.

"We're still looking at why," he said.

According to Bankhead, a motorist approached deputies at the roadblock near Moccasin Creek State Park about 11 p.m. Friday and said he had been shot when he stopped to help another motorist who had pulled to the side of the road.

A few minutes later, a car carrying a man and woman was fired on as it approached the scene of the first shooting. The man was wounded in the elbow and the woman slightly injured by shrapnel, Bankhead said.

At some point Pitts apparently abandoned his vehicle, a Chevrolet Suburban, and went into the woods. When a revenue agent drove to the scene, his car was shot at a number of times, as were deputies from the roadblock who surrounded the Suburban.

Pitts continued to fire sporadically at the deputies throughout the night.

A SWAT team made up of State Patrol and GBI officers was deployed at daylight to search for the gunman, who was armed with two .357 Magnum handguns, authorities said.

Team members were walking down a road about 7:30 a.m. when they were fired on and Nash was wounded, according to Bankhead.

Nash fell to the ground in an open area and was under fire when GBI agent Brad Parks and Trooper Jamie Brown rushed in to help him, Bankhead said. They dragged Nash 15 yards into a ditch while returning fire.

Pitts apparently was wounded in that exchange but continued to fire.

"A little later the state SWAT team cornered him and ordered him to drop his weapon and get down," Bankhead said. "He refused and fired on the team. They returned fire and killed him."

Pitts had worked as a plumber but was unable to keep a steady job, Ruth Pitts said. "He would work at a place for three or four weeks, then leave because he said people didn't like him," she said.

In recent years, she said, he had taken to filing multimillion-dollar lawsuits against businesses and individuals he thought had wronged him.

Although the sister and brother lived in separate houses on the same lot, she said she often feared for her safety.

"I had to put up a fence with barbed wire between us to keep him away," she said.

Caption:

Graphic: SUSPECT KILLED

Georgia authorities shot and killed a 72-year old man suspected of wounding three motorists and a state trooper.

Map shows site of incident near Moccasin Creek State Park in RABUN COUNTY. Inlaid map shows area in relationship to Atlanta and the state of Georgia. / VERNON CARNE / Staff

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