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One dead, two injured in Casey store shooting

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Article Text:

LIBERTY - A simmering feud between an estranged couple boiled over into bloodshed on Christmas Day, leaving a Lincoln County man dead and two women injured in a shooting at a country store in Casey County.

Marshall Ray Brown, 59, shot himself in the chest in the middle of Ky. 837 in the Walltown community as Lincoln County Sheriff Curt Folger was closing in to make an arrest about 2 p.m. Friday.

"I came upon the subject and tried to talk him out of shooting himself and it didn't work," Folger said. "When I confronted him, he raised the gun towards himself. I told him, 'Ray, don't do it,' and I said that probably a couple of times. And he went ahead and he did it."

Minutes before, Brown had fired two shots from a hunting rifle outside Down Home Grocery. One struck Brown's ex-girlfriend, store owner Wilma Rice, 55, behind the ear as she was filling her van with gas and the other shot went into the store, wounding clerk Catherine Ping with shattered bullet fragments and glass.

Rice and Ping, who is Rice's niece, were treated at Fort Logan Hospital in Stanford and released Friday night. Ping was back at work on Saturday and Rice was resting at home.

"She's doing OK," Rice's sister, Darlene Padgett, said.

Witnesses and authorities said Brown first came to the store about 9 a.m. Friday and leveled the rifle at Rice's chest from three feet away, but the gun would not fire and Brown drove away before police arrived.

As officers from Lincoln and Casey were searching for him, Brown apparently fixed the gun and doubled back to the store on foot. He opened fire from some trees beside the store as Rice and other family members were preparing to close the business and attend a family Christmas dinner at about 1:45 p.m.

"We knew he was out there somewhere, we just didn't know where," Padgett said. "He was out there laying in wait."

Hershel Padgett, the father of Rice and Darlene Padgett, said he was outside with his daughter when she was shot.

"I was standing right beside Wilma. She went to her knees and I saw the blood coming out," Hershel Padgett said.

The first shot sent those outside the store scurrying to get inside. Brown then fired a shot into the front door, where Ping was standing just inside. At first, Ping thought she had suffered a major wound but was only struck by fragments of the bullet and glass.

"I was scared to death," she said. "My face was numb. My arm was numb. I couldn't hear anything. I thought it was pretty bad, but it could have turned out a lot worse."

After the shots, Hershel Padgett got a pistol from the store and a customer got a shotgun from

his truck. The two men stood guard at the front of the store, waiting for Brown to continue his attack.

But he left on foot instead, walking north along Ky. 837 until he encountered Folger about a mile from the store. Liberty police officer Parker Hatter, who was nearby, responded to the store first and then was closing in on Brown from the south when he ended his life.

Darlene Padgett said that Rice and Brown had been together for about 14 years and had worked at the store together for four years.

But Rice kicked Brown out the house they shared on Sims Branch Road near King's Mountain in Lincoln County four months ago. Rice owned both the home and the store, and Brown was upset because he felt he should have some ownership in the properties, Padgett said.

The couple's break-up and bitter estrangement was fairly common knowledge among the store's customers, Padgett said.

Brown, who was a mechanic at the Lincoln County Road Department, would often follow Rice, who also drove a bus for Lincoln County schools, on her route and "would drive by the store 100 times a day," Padgett said.

He also harassed Rice over the phone and through the mail, sending her two "good-bye letters" on Christmas Eve, Padgett said.

Rice tried to obtain protective orders against Brown in both Lincoln and Casey counties, Padgett said, but authorities refused to issue one.

As Brown continued to spread false stories about Rice and try to make her life miserable, Rice and members of her family would sometimes respond in kind, Padgett said.

"We were bickering between each other," she said. "He'd do something and we'd retaliate."

Cathy McAninch, a regular customer at the store, said she was aware of the feuding between Rice and Brown but never expected it to take such a violent turn.

"I never thought he'd go ballistic and do something like that," McAninch said.

The Casey County Sheriff's Office is investigating.

Brown's obituary appears on Page 2 of Sunday's paper.

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