

Deputy Recalls Deadly Confrontation As Assailant Is Shipped Off To Prison

BY ERIC CARLSON

A 43-year-old Raleigh man was sentenced to six years in prison Monday after admitting his guilt in an incident that could have resulted in his own death or that of a Brunswick County sheriff's deputy.

"If I had been just a little bit slower, I would have been dead," Deputy Sgt. Gene Browning said Tuesday. "It was the worst thing that ever happened to me."

It started as routine occurrence in the life of any law enforcement officer on late shift. At about 2 a.m. last Nov. 12, Browning began following a car travelling at an unusually slow rate of speed on U.S. 17. As his patrol car got closer, the vehicle pulled over to the roadside and stopped.

Thinking that the driver might be having mechanical difficulties, Browning said he walked toward the car and shined his flashlight into the driver's window.

That's when he spotted the 12-gauge shotgun across the man's lap with its muzzle pointed in Browning's direction. As the weapon began to move toward him, Browning said he reached into the car and grabbed the barrel, trying to keep it aimed away.

"The suspect then pulled me into the driver's window and I pulled back," Browning said in his

"I ordered the suspect to drop the shotgun and he refused and started to walk toward me."

—Gene Browning, Deputy Sgt.

report of the incident. "This occurred about three or four times. I also challenged the suspect to drop the weapon several times and he said no."

As the struggle continued, Browning said he swung his flashlight at the man, but it hit the car's roof and flew out of his hand. As he reached for his service weapon, the shotgun went off, pushing Browning backwards and causing him to lose control of the barrel.

"I was lucky that it was a single shot, or he probably would have fired again," Browning said.

Instead, the man took off at high speed with Browning in pursuit. He radioed for assistance and chased the car for about three miles before it ran off the highway into a ditch. The driver crawled out through the passenger door with the shotgun in his hand.

"I ordered the suspect to drop the shotgun and he refused and started to walk toward me," Browning's report said. "I ordered the suspect eight or ten times to drop his weapon and he kept coming toward me."

With his sidearm aimed at the suspect, Browning had moved behind his patrol car as the man—still carrying the shotgun—reached the driver side door. Browning said he wanted to avoid shooting the man.

"He was obviously very drunk and I figured the shotgun was empty," Browning said.

Just then, Deputy Richard Long arrived and challenged the suspect to drop the shotgun. This confused the man long enough for Browning to rush him and knock the shotgun to the ground, the report said.

When he picked up the gun, Browning found a shell in the chamber. The man had reloaded while speeding away to elude arrest.

In district court Monday, the suspect, James Arthur Adair, pleaded guilty to one count each of assault with a deadly weapon on a law enforcement officer, failure to stop for a blue light and siren, driving while impaired by alcohol and driving while his license was revoked.

He was given three consecutive two-year prison sentences and ordered to participate in the N.C. Department of Corrections Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Training (DART) program.



PHOTO BY JIM PRICE

Well-Loved Clerk Retires

Ruth Johnson, longtime attendance clerk at West Brunswick High School, accepts a plaque from Principal Ed Lemon on her retirement Friday after 16 "good" years at the school. In addition to handling attendance and securing substitute teachers, Johnson served as cheerleading sponsor for nearly a decade. She was a substitute teacher before joining the staff in August 1977, a few months after Lemon first signed on as vice principal. Johnson said Monday that she's looking forward to her "new adventure" as live-in companion to an active, elderly woman. "I just love all people," she said, "but now I'm going to be loving one particular lady more than any others." Johnson said she'll always be a loyal Trojans booster.

Whiteville Attorney To Seek 13th District Court Judgeship

Whiteville Attorney Tom Aldridge has announced he will be a candidate for district court judge on the Democratic ticket in the spring primary.

Aldridge will seek the judgeship for the 13th Judicial District which is comprised of Bladen, Columbus and Brunswick counties. Aldridge, 46, was an assistant district attorney in the 13th Judicial District beginning in 1983 and is now in the private practice of law.

"During my legal career I have had the opportunity to work extensively in the civil, criminal and juvenile courts in the 13th Judicial District," he said. I have a wealth of experience and knowledge that I would like to use for the betterment of the judicial system."

A native of Siler City in Chatham County, Aldridge graduated from Atlantic Christian College in 1969 and the UNC School of Law in 1972. He was a prosecutor for approximately 15 years and has been an attorney in private practice for six years.

He is married to the former Janie Aderholt of Lincolnton, who owns

and operates Rag-a-Muffin, a children's clothing store in Whiteville. They have four children.

Aldridge is a member of the First Baptist Church of Whiteville where he sings in the adult choir. He was a member of the N.C. National Guard for 15 years and has been active in Boy Scouting, Dixie Youth Baseball and the Masons.

He said he is proud to have established the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program in the Whiteville City and Columbus County schools when he served as assistant district attorney.

The judgeship Aldridge is seeking is currently held by Judge David G. Wall of Elizabethtown, who is not seeking re-election.

Tip From Citizen Leads To Cocaine Bust Of Local Man

A telephone tip from a concerned citizen led to the arrest of a 35-year-old Shallotte man and the seizure of about \$880 worth of crack cocaine recently, a Brunswick County narcotics officer said Monday.

At about 11:45 a.m. on Dec. 9, someone called the sheriff's department to report that a man was selling drugs from a vehicle in the Pine Crest area, according to Detective Billy Hughes. The caller gave a description of the man's car and its direction of travel.

Hughes said he stopped the suspect's truck near Grissetown. While patting down the driver for weapons, the detective found a container filled with 44 doses of crack. Each dose commonly sells for about \$20, he said.

The suspect, Thomas Wilbert Price of Route 1, was arrested and charged with one count each of possession with the intent to sell and deliver cocaine and maintaining a vehicle for the purpose of selling and delivering cocaine.

Hughes urged anyone who observes or has information about illegal drug activities to call the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department.



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