

Slain suspect had history of arrests; Berks man served time over last 4 years for various crimes.

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FULL TEXT

With his car on fire following a wild police chase in Northampton County in 2014, Aaron Ibrahim held his hand behind his back as if he had a gun.

When Colonial Regional police officers drew their Tasers, calling his bluff, Ibrahim surrendered and later went to jail for the first time in his life. He apologized during his sentencing, telling a judge he had bipolar disorder and was going through a tough time.

More than three years later, on Wednesday night, Ibrahim was again running from police, this time as he fled a shoplifting attempt at a Walmart in Lower Macungie Township.

But this time, instead of surrendering to the state trooper who had been ordering him to stop during the foot chase through the parking lot, police say, Ibrahim drew his gun and fired, costing him his life when the trooper returned nine shots, hitting him multiple times.

Lehigh County Coroner Scott Grim, in a news release Friday, identified Ibrahim, 26, of Longswamp Township as the masked man killed in Wednesday's shooting.

Grim said Ibrahim died from multiple gunshots, adding that he would wait to rule on the manner of death until the completion of the investigation, which is being handled by three members of the Lehigh County district attorney's Homicide Task Force and the state police's Major Case Team.

Authorities said Thursday that early indications point to a justified use of force by the trooper, who has not been identified.

State police said Ibrahim fired once at the trooper while fleeing to a white minivan in the Walmart parking lot.

Police said they recovered a .40-caliber Glock from Ibrahim's lap.

Ibrahim had an extensive criminal history, with four arrests from 2014 to 2016 in Montgomery, Berks and Northampton counties for crimes ranging from retail theft to aggravated assault and reckless endangerment.

In two of the four arrests, Ibrahim resisted arrest, fled from police or threatened them with violence.

During his sentencing for an Aug. 15, 2014, police chase in Hanover Township, Ibrahim told a Northampton County judge that he struggled with bipolar disorder and his attorney called his attempt to flee from police a "stupid decision" that happened because of his struggles with his mental health.

Ibrahim was driving a car with a shattered windshield when a Colonial Regional police officer pulled him over on Bath Pike. A records check revealed his driver's license was suspended because of a drunken driving arrest and his car had no registration or insurance.

Ibrahim pleaded with the officer to cut him a break, but when the officer refused, Ibrahim gunned his car and sped off, running stop signs, nearly hitting several pedestrians and sideswiping a parked car. Ibrahim drove through grass fields at a community park, a tree line and business parking lots, police said.

Three of his tires were flattened during the chase, but Ibrahim kept driving, police said, stopping only when his car caught fire.

Ibrahim got out of the burning car and held an unknown object behind his back, indicating he had a gun and threatened to shoot police. The standoff ended when officers drew their Tasers.

"When this event occurred, I was going through a tumultuous time. I know that's no excuse," Ibrahim told Judge

Emil Giordano during his sentencing four months after the chase. He was sentenced to 1 1/2 to nine years in state prison after earlier pleading guilty to reduced charges and was granted parole 10 months later. Giordano recommended Ibrahim be jailed in a state prison with mental health treatment.

After the chase, Ibrahim was arrested at least two more times, most recently in May 2016 for retail theft in Upper Hanover Township in Montgomery County, which landed him in jail for three months.

While his last arrest was almost two years ago, police suspect he may have still been committing crimes, including a retail theft March 15 at a Schuylkill County Walmart where the robber wore a mask and pulled a gun on an employee who confronted him as he fled the store with a shopping cart full of items, police said.

State police say Ibrahim was wearing a wig and a lifelike mask - the kind seen in horror movies - when he walked into the Lower Macungie Walmart at 8:50 p.m. Wednesday.

For 15 minutes, Ibrahim went up and down aisles filling a shopping cart, catching the attention of a loss prevention officer who remembered the alert given to area Walmart stores after the robbery at the Schuylkill County store, police said. The loss prevention officer followed Ibrahim and phoned state police at 9:07 p.m. A trooper arrived in two minutes.

While looking for the loss prevention officer, the trooper encountered Ibrahim in the vestibule of the store, state police said. Ibrahim abandoned the shopping cart and began to walk toward the side exit of the store.

Once Ibrahim stepped out of the store, the trooper ordered him to stop, but Ibrahim took off running through the parking lot, nearly getting hit by a passing car, police said. Ibrahim fired once at the trooper from 15 yards away once he reached his minivan, police said. Ibrahim managed to get in the minivan and continued to point his gun at the trooper, who fired through the van's window and door, police said.

Police have still not concluded if Ibrahim committed the robbery in Schuylkill County, but Capt. Richard D'Ambrosio said Thursday that he's "pretty sure" he's the same person. Besides the mask and gun, the Schuylkill County shoplifter fled in a white minivan similar to the one in the Lower Macungie robbery.

The trooper, a four-year veteran working his first week at the Fogelsville barracks, has been placed on administrative duties, as is protocol on all police-involved shootings, D'Ambrosio said.

Credit: By Manuel Gamiz Jr. - Of The Morning Call

Caption: Aaron Ibrahim is taken to court in 2014 after one of several arrests he had before Wednesday's fatal encounter with a state trooper.

MORNING CALL file photo

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