

Family of man who shot 3 officers in South Elgin standoff says he was distraught with health, financial woes

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FULL TEXT

The man who shot and injured three law enforcement officers from the stairwell of a South Elgin condo building last week was beset by health and money problems and driven to desperation by a final phone call of bad financial news, his family said.

Frank Dripps, 52, was shot and killed by police on the Fourth of July, ending an hours-long standoff during which Dripps hunkered down with a shotgun and a rifle and fired at officers multiple times.

In an interview with the Courier-News, Dripps' wife, sister and parents offered their apologies to the injured officers. They said they don't want to make excuses for Dripps, but they also want to explain what they believe prompted Dripps' actions that night.

"It pains us that there were officers injured," Dripps' sister Deborah Martin said from her parents' living room in Batavia.

On July 3, hours before his death, Dripps learned his Social Security benefit was being eliminated, said his wife, Paula Dripps. A letter to Frank Dripps dated May 28 said his \$750 monthly Supplemental Security Income would be reduced to \$167.50 due to a change in his family's income. Paula Dripps called that an error by the Social Security Administration in calculating her income.

Then in a phone call last week, Frank Dripps was told his benefit would be cut to zero and he had been overpaid for several months and would owe a repayment of \$6,000 to \$7,000, his wife said. Dripps had been receiving benefits after he was diagnosed with two diseases that affected his spine and made it difficult to move and impossible to work, his family said.

"They said he was owed nothing and that we owed them," Paula Dripps said. "He was mad at the government."

Police shoot and kill man in South Elgin after 3 officers injured during standoff »

The July 3 phone call —on top of his spinal problems that had sidelined his career as a home construction contractor, depression, and feeling "less" for not being able to care for his wife —was the last straw, Paula Dripps said.

That night, Paula Dripps was returning home from work when Frank Dripps turned to the couple's condo roommate and said, "Will you take care of Paula?" Dripps then grabbed the shotgun and rifle.

Officers responded to a report of shots fired at the condo at 10:50 p.m. In a desperate, misguided attempt to end his life, his family said, Dripps fired at police officers as they arrived at the 300 block of Woodridge Circle. Police said at least two shotgun blasts were fired. No one was hit.

Officers did not fire back but evacuated nearby residents. SWAT teams from Elgin and Kane County responded as did officers from 11 area police agencies.

From the stairwell, Dripps yelled at police and threatened to shoot if they approached, officials said.

After nearly four tense hours, around 2:30 a.m., Dripps fired at authorities again, striking three officers —one from Geneva police, one from Hanover Park police and one from the Kane County sheriff's department. Authorities shot back, killing Dripps.

"He wanted to end things himself, but he couldn't bring himself to do it," Martin said of her brother. "He wanted a way for someone else to relieve his pain for him."

The injured officers were treated and released from the hospital later that day.

Dripps' family conveyed their concern for the injured and for the officer who fired the fatal shot. "We feel for him," Martin said.

The family is convinced the news about Dripps' Social Security benefits and debt had set him off, and they believe he did not want to hurt anyone but himself. At the same time, they are troubled by his actions during the standoff.

"The last four hours ...didn't represent the last 10 years of his life," Martin said.

For the past 10 years, Dripps had struggled with spinal deterioration and had a dual diagnosis of diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis and ankylosing spondylitis.

Dripps at times had used a wheelchair, scooter, walker and sometimes a cane. A cane was with him when he was shot.

Since moving to Illinois 13 months ago, finding a health care provider who would take on his case proved difficult, his wife said. There were a bevy of surgeries over the years —toes amputated, surgery on both feet, replacement of his left shoulder and plans for a hip replacement.

"He was in constant pain, every day," Paula Dripps said.

Dripps had a criminal record in California but detailed records were not immediately available, and he had put those problems behind him, his family said.

Despite those setbacks, Frank Dripps' life took a turn for the better about 10 years ago when he married Paula, family said. The couple, who had been friends for 25 years before their courtship, got involved in a California church, recommitted their lives to Christ, and were baptized together, Paula said.

"He had turned his life around," Martin said. "He was such a changed person in the last 10 years that makes the last four hours more difficult to understand."

Janelle Walker is a freelance reporter.

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