

Fugitive Christopher 'Scott' Kilgore's trail ends in his violent death

Kilgore, who was armed, is fatally shot by Jacksonville police officers.

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For Christopher "Scott" Kilgore, there was nowhere left to hide Friday.

The double-murder suspect who had slipped through trackless woods and evaded hundreds of police was trapped in the open, stuck on a boat far from water when he was shot and killed in a face-off with three Jacksonville officers.

"He was given every opportunity to give up. He chose the course of action," Undersheriff Frank Mackesy told reporters hours after the confrontation on a woody 40-acre homestead off Normandy Boulevard near Maxville.

The outdoorsman accused of slaughtering his family died where he was found, surrounded at a distance by police who feared he was playing possum for a final shootout.

And as news percolated through rural neighborhoods of Jacksonville's Westside and northern Clay County, a wave of relief followed.

"Thank God it's over," said Linda Arnold as she pumped gas at the Kangaroo station near the intersection of Mallard Road and County Road 218 near Middleburg. While Kilgore was loose, she said, "we just made sure we had the shotgun ready."

Four days earlier and less than a mile away, Clay sheriff's deputies had begun scouring 24,000-acre Jennings State Forest after discovering a predawn mass shooting at the family property where Kilgore lived.

His parents, 59-year-old Daulphus and 53-year-old Judy Kilgore, were gravely wounded and remained at Shands Jacksonville hospital Friday. His brother, Raymond Kilgore, 29, and James Coody, 21, his brother's friend, had been shot to death.

Friends described Kilgore, 33, as an experienced woodsman who knew the terrain, and he remained hidden despite searches that used deputies, dogs and helicopters with heat-seeking scopes.

Civilians faced him twice: when he held up a Kangaroo store on Normandy with a shotgun Tuesday night and when he walked away Wednesday from a pistol-packing homeowner a couple of miles away, leaving his parents' Chevrolet Blazer in the man's driveway.

At least seven law enforcement agencies eventually played roles in a manhunt that straddled the county line east of U.S. 301, triggering lockdowns at two schools and an extraordinary offer for police agencies to drive children to school.

A wild goose chase in Baker County led to the arrest in a hoax by a man who had reported seeing Kilgore, and another search turned up a man caught hiding in Nassau County who had his own warrants.

By Thursday, police backed off of saturation searches but positioned officers who could respond quickly. Mackesy said Friday that authorities expected him to surface eventually.

"We were literally looking for a needle in a haystack," he said of hunting for a suspect in thousands of acres of forest. "There were a million places to hide. Then you add on top of that that the person is desperate, and a desperate person will take desperate measures."

Mackesy said Friday that Kilgore may have hidden since Thursday at the property where he died, a home behind a wrought iron and brick gate with a covered bridge where weddings are held.

Photos: [The continuing search for Clay County shooting suspect Christopher Kilgore](#)

Thursday: [Fugitive keeps Jacksonville, Clay, Baker residents on edge](#)

Wednesday: [Fugitive Christopher Kilgore eludes capture in West Jacksonville woods](#)

Tuesday: [Clay sheriff on Middleburg murder suspect: 'We're going to get this guy'](#)

Dogs there had barked at something Thursday, and resumed barking Friday.

Just after noon, two Jacksonville SWAT officers, Jared Reston and Charles Pearson, checked the area with a canine handler, Officer Timothy Stafford.

Kilgore was in a 17-foot boat mounted on a trailer and parked in a cleared area near some woods, Mackesy said.

He had a pistol and shotgun with him, Mackesy said, and shells set out in a way that might have been staged for a shootout.

"Give up. Give up," the officers ordered, "and basically he chose not to do that," Mackesy said.

"We fired first," he said. "There is nothing to indicate that the suspect fired in return."

Mackesy said police waited to disclose the death until they notified his family, including his hospitalized parents.

Reston, one of the officers involved, recently was awarded a Public Safety Medal of Valor by Vice President Joe Biden for being shot multiple times in 2008 by a Regency Square shoplifter who he then killed.

"The reason it's pretty remarkable is that Jared Reston is a remarkable officer," Mackesy said in discussing another dangerous situation Reston performed in.

Authorities expressed relief, but not pleasure, at the outcome.

"I am glad for the public. They can rest a lot easier now," Maj. Craig Aldrich of the Clay Sheriff's Office said. "It is tragic that it ended this way, but I am sure the public is relieved that the threat is still not out there."

Walking along Mallard Road, Jean McKenzie said the manhunt's conclusion meant life could get back to normal.

"I did stop walking" and was glad to be able to go out again, she said.

Brad Poteete, who lives on Nolan Road nearby, said he didn't think Kilgore wanted any more shooting.

"I mean, he could have shot those people in the store but didn't. He didn't seem interested in hurting others," he said.

At Clay Hill Elementary School, a fall festival scheduled for Friday night was held without concerns about how many deputies needed to be stationed there.

"We could all exhale and enjoy this festival, so it is like a time for enthusiasm, entertainment and excitement where we don't feel like we are pressured or under any tension," Principal Larry Davis said.

"This week has been pretty difficult, but we are glad it is over."

Just an hour before police were called to Kilgore's hiding place, mourners joined a funeral service for Coody, the 21-year-old shooting victim, at Clay Hill Baptist Church.

Near the Kilgore family property, candles, American flags and beer cans stood at a makeshift shrine next to a photo montage honoring Raymond Kilgore.

"RIP Ray Ray," lettering over the photos said. "We love you."

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