

Sheriff



Edward Spooner • Sheriff Okaloosa County



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ARMED SUSPECT WOUNDED AFTER SHOOTING AT EGLIN SECURITY FORCES

A Fort Walton Beach man was taken by medical helicopter to an area hospital after firing a semi-automatic weapon at members of Eglin's 96th Security Forces on the Eglin Reservation around 8:20 a.m. and being injured in return gunfire.

39-year old Ronald Willard, 1009 Holten Avenue, Fort Walton Beach, is a suspect in a shooting on Lewis Turner boulevard shortly after 3 a.m. Investigators say 29-year old Jason K. Ward of Fort Walton Beach had just dropped off Willard's wife near her Holten Avenue home when Ronald Willard began chasing him in his car. Willard shot Ward while both were driving separate vehicles near the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds. Ward was able to drive himself to Fort Walton Beach Medical Center for treatment.

Deputies with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office spotted Willard's car some time later in Shalimar and began pursuit. Willard eventually turned onto Ranger Camp Road on Eglin's Reservation and led deputies down back roads and rut trails before ditching his car. Due to the remoteness of the Air Force property, the Sheriff's Office asked for the assistance of Eglin Security Forces and Range Patrol. A perimeter was established and the Sheriff's Office Special Response Team was also called to the scene.

Security Forces personnel spotted Willard crossing a road around 8:20 Tuesday morning. Willard turned and fired his .223 assault-type weapon at the men, who then returned fire. Willard was struck once in the abdomen. Along with the assault-type rifle he had numerous magazines in his backpack. No one else was injured. Inside Willard's car, investigators found several hundred rounds of ammunition, an additional assault-type rifle and two 40-caliber handguns.

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office is investigating. Willard faces charges of felony attempted murder with a firearm in connection with Ward's shooting. Additional charges are pending as well.

Sheriff Ed Spooner credited the cooperation between the Sheriff's Office and Eglin's 96th Security Forces, as well as their professional training, for successfully protecting the public.

Major Scott Foley, Squadron Commander of the 96th Security Forces said, "The collaborative efforts were instrumental in apprehending an armed and dangerous suspect on Eglin Air Force Base. The efforts ensured the security of Eglin's on-going diverse, and sometimes dangerous, range operations."

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