

DeKalb cop kills man who seemed 'deranged' 05/17/07

A man waving a Bible and a butcher knife Wednesday afternoon was shot and killed when he lunged at one of four officers attempting to subdue him.

DeKalb County police Chief Terrell Bolton said the officers apparently "did everything they could" to avoid the first fatal shooting by a DeKalb officer in more than six months. DeKalb police shot and killed 12 people in 2006, prompting protests and an ongoing special grand jury investigation.

Bolton said he would await the results of an investigation to make a final judgment about Wednesday's shooting near Stone Mountain, but he said preliminary accounts showed officers tried repeatedly to disarm the man without gunfire.

The chief said the confrontation began shortly after noon, when a man approached a police sergeant at a convenience store on Juliette Road, near the intersection of Ponce de Leon Avenue and U.S. 78.

The man threatened the sergeant with a knife, Bolton said. The sergeant backed off, and the man next appeared near an apartment complex a short distance away.

"We received calls of a man with a Bible and a butcher knife" who was standing in the road and shouting, the police chief said.

Bolton said the sergeant and three other officers tried to subdue the man with pepper spray. Bolton said that "had no impact" on the man, who Bolton described as more than 6 feet tall and weighing well over 200 pounds.

The officers also tried to knock the knife out of the man's hand using batons, Bolton said, and when that failed, they tried to tackle him.

Bolton said the man broke free and then lunged with the knife at one of the officers, who shot him.

The man was pronounced dead at a local hospital. He carried no identification, and police were trying to learn his name on Wednesday.

"This was a tragedy," Bolton said in an interview at the scene. He said the man appeared "deranged."

The man was the first suspect killed by DeKalb police since Nov. 13, 2006. Two suspects have survived gunshots by DeKalb police this year, including a 17-year-old carjacking suspect who was shot Tuesday.

One DeKalb officer was killed in 2006, and one officer has been wounded by a suspect's gunfire this year.

A special grand jury is expected to take up to a year to review the 2006 cases and may recommend changes in police procedures and training.

Bolton, who took office in January, began a policy of bringing observers from state and federal law enforcement agencies to scenes of shootings by observers. He said the observers were on hand Wednesday.