Warrants name 4 hunting fugitive
Bounty hunters didn’t notify lawmen

BY LISA TURNER
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

ASH FLAT — Felony warrants were issued Tuesday in Sharp County for the arrest of a former deputy sheriff and three other men who police say broke the law while acting as bounty hunters.

Former Ouachita County sheriff’s Deputy Gerald Gardner, 48, of Camden; Benny J. Blann, 56, of Hampton; Monty R. Meredith, 47, of Waldron; and Archie L. Johnson, 41, of Paragould are accused of failing to inform local police of their plan to apprehend a fugitive July 30 at Ozark Acres.

The bond agents’ nighttime attempt to capture Terry McDonald resulted in chaos when, police report, McDonald opened fire at the four men as they surrounded his hiding place. Blann was shot in the head during the altercation.

Sharp County prosecutor Stewart Lambert said the state’s case against the four is unprecedented in Arkansas.

“We want to make a point that the appropriate law enforcement agency must be notified,” Lambert said. “The law is there so law enforcement agencies can properly respond when things like this occur.”

Jonesboro attorney Dustin McDaniel, who is representing Johnson, said the four men followed the law July 30 when they went to Sharp County to apprehend “a violent fugitive.”

“It’s outrageous that any of these men have been charged with a crime,” McDaniel said. “The state is prosecuting the good guys in this case.”

Arkansas requires bail bond agents to notify local law-enforcement agencies about their plans to apprehend a defendant who is suspected of skipping bail. Failure to do so is a Class D felony.

Sharp County Sheriff T.J. “Sonny” Powell said the four men didn’t notify his office when they were in Ozark Acres to apprehend McDonald on behalf of Bail Bond Financing of Pine Bluff. Four other police agencies told prosecutors that they weren’t notified either.

McDonald, 41, of Paragould, had skipped out on a $5,000 bond and been declared a fugitive after he failed to show up Feb. 8, 1999, in a Greene County circuit court to answer to a charge of attempt to manufacture methamphetamine, authorities reported.

The bond agents converged on a mobile home where McDonald was staying with Sonya Lynn Swink, 28, of Paragould, who was inside the mobile home with McDonald, police reported.

According to police, Swink opened the front door to see what was causing a dog outside to bark and found Blann and Gardner on the front porch with guns drawn. Swink screamed and slammed the door, and as bond agents tried to kick in the door, McDonald grabbed a .22-caliber handgun and fired a single round through the front door, hitting Blann in the head, police reported.

Gardner, who had since been terminated from the Ouachita County sheriff’s office, retreated and fired several rounds from his .40-caliber handgun into the mobile home. A neighbor heard the shooting and called 911. No one else was injured.

Blann was carried away in an See BONDSMEN, Page 68.