



Ambush Suspect Could Be Aided by Dense Woods

Suspect in troopers' ambush could be aided by rugged terrain in northeastern Pennsylvania

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The Associated Press

BLOOMING GROVE, Pa.

For a second night, authorities on Friday closed roads near a home where a suspect in the ambush killing of a Pennsylvania State Police trooper recently lived with his parents, and this time gunfire was reported in the area.

The shots were fired around 6:40 p.m. Friday, a Monroe County 911 dispatcher said. State police told residents in the townships of Price and Barrett to stay inside and asked others not to travel to the area because of heavy police activity. About 20 people who couldn't get back to their homes took refuge at the Barrett Township firehouse, said township supervisor Ralph Megliola.

The overwhelming police presence late Friday raised hopes that authorities were finally closing in on 31-year-old Eric Frein exactly one week after he allegedly opened fire on a state police barracks in rural northeastern Pennsylvania. Cpl. Bryon Dickson was killed and a second trooper was wounded by a gunman with a high-powered rifle.

Authorities had been focusing their search on tens of thousands of acres of undisturbed forest that offered the self-taught survivalist ample opportunity to hide.

Those woods are "a tremendous place to hide," Patrick Patten, who owns a school that teaches law enforcement officials how to track suspects in the forest, said earlier in the day.

Police say they are methodically eliminating places where Frein could take refuge, including hunting cabins, campsites and vacation homes in the Pocono Mountains.

It's difficult. The terrain in this area of Pennsylvania is so impenetrable in spots that police choppers can't see through the forest canopy. The suspect also has his pick of places to break into and steal food. Pike County alone boasts more than 14,000 seasonal or recreational homes.

Pumping gas into her vehicle, Pike County resident Angela Disilvestre recognized the challenge.

"Even though we have our troopers around and doing what they need to do, it's hard for them to be in so many places at once," she said.

Frein, publicly identified as a suspect Tuesday, is already drawing comparisons to Eric Rudolph, the 1996 Atlanta Olympics bomber who eluded authorities for years in the woods of western North Carolina.

Like Frein, Rudolph was described as an anti-government survivalist who lived off the land, but

authorities say one of his earliest moves after going on the run in 1998 was to swipe a six-month supply of food and a pickup truck from a neighbor's house. He left the man \$500.

In the current search, authorities believe Frein is hiding in the forests near his hometown of Canadensis and the state police barracks in Blooming Grove where authorities say he killed Dickson and wounded Trooper Alex Douglass.

It's a place of rugged beauty, a tourist draw and nature lover's paradise with more than 120,000 acres of federal and state land for hunting, fishing, hiking and boating.

Wanted posters are plastered everywhere - at motel counters, in convenience store doors and on lottery kiosks and digital billboards. Schools closed again Friday.

While any police pursuit of an armed suspect is inherently unsafe, the forest poses a special risk, Patten said.

"What makes it so dangerous is that the subject is uncontained," said Patten, founder of Tactical Woodland Operations School and a lead tracker in the Rudolph case. "In the woodland environment you don't even know where the person is."

Police have said Frein nurses an unspecified grudge against law enforcement and government. Authorities say they consider it unlikely he will target the public.

But a week into the manhunt, residents were taking precautions.

Susan Czahor, 48, of Tafton, said Friday she has been sleeping with a gun. Her husband, a contractor, has stopped work on an isolated house in the woods and won't return until Frein is caught.

"I think the fact that law enforcement is having such a difficult time finding him makes everybody a little more concerned," she said, "because this is a very large area that isn't inhabited year-round and full-time. There (are) a lot of places for him to hide."

At the Tuck-em Inn - near the edge of state game lands where Frein could have made his escape - proprietor Sue Goble began telling guests to keep their car doors locked.

Kathy Coyne, 74, is Goble's tenant and a New York City native who followed her three daughters to the Poconos more than a decade ago.

"I'm worried, but I'm not going to let it get the best of me," Coyne said. "I'm going to bingo tonight."

Matheson reported from Philadelphia. AP video journalist Joseph Frederick in Hawley and AP reporter Sean Carlin in Philadelphia contributed to this story.

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