

# Georgia sheriff resigns Tuesday after pleading guilty in shooting coverup

The Associated Press

HIAWASSEE, Ga. — Saying he was not above the law, a north Georgia sheriff resigned Tuesday after pleading guilty to four charges related to hindering a state investigation of a drive-by shooting involving two of his deputies.

Towns County Sheriff Rudy Eller, wearing a civilian blazer, pleaded guilty before Superior Court Judge Lynn Alderman to charges of making false statements, tampering with evidence, hindering the apprehension or punishment of a criminal and violation of oath by a public official or officer.

His sentencing is pending but he faces prison time up to 10 years and up to \$100,000 in fines for three of the four counts. Nearly 50 people, from children to senior citizens in overalls, packed the courtroom to witness Eller's plea.

Eller told the judge that he knew what happened in the July 9 shooting at the home of Gary Dean of Hiawassee but chose not to inform Georgia Bureau of Investigation officials, who investigated the deputy-involved shooting at

Eller's request.

"I made a serious mistake, there's no doubt about it," Eller said.

Deputy Jessie Gibson, 56, and Chief Deputy Eddie Osborn, 41, faced aggravated assault and obstruction charges in the shooting. Gibson was found dead on Aug. 8 of a self-inflicted gunshot in what authorities called an apparent suicide. He left a tape-recorded message for his family that was forwarded onto investigators.

Osborn has not yet entered a plea, officials said.

Dean, who was not injured in the shootings, was "involved in an ongoing intimate relationship" with Osborn's wife, according to a Georgia Bureau of Investigation affidavit.

After the plea, Eller announced his resignation to reporters gathered outside the courthouse.

"I must confess to my friends and neighbors, the citizens of Towns County who have given me the high honor of electing me as their Sheriff, that I have failed them — and for that I sincerely apologize and ask for their forgiveness," he said.