

**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Defendants in Cherokee County SWAT Standoff Sentenced to Prison**  
**State vs. Jeffrey Leighton Danner and Kaleb Hunter Kirkland**

**November 18, 2025** – Cherokee County District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that both defendants involved in a three-hour armed standoff in Ball Ground in 2021 have pled guilty and been sentenced to prison.

Jeffrey Leighton Danner, 35, of Ariton, Alabama, entered a guilty but mentally ill plea on November 12, 2025, to four counts of aggravated assault on a peace officer and one count of criminal damage to property in the first degree. Chief Superior Court Judge David L. Cannon Jr. sentenced Danner to 50 years, with the first 20 years to be served in confinement. The Georgia Department of Corrections will address the defendant's mental health needs while he is incarcerated.

Co-defendant Kaleb Hunter Kirkland, 27, of Dothan, Alabama, pled guilty to the same charges and was sentenced on April 25, 2024, to 50 years, with the first 25 years to be served in confinement.

Charges stem from a multi-agency response that began around 2 p.m. on Sunday, February 28, 2021, when law enforcement officials in Cherokee County learned that a silver Ford Escape, linked to violent crimes in Alabama, was believed to be in the area. A Ball Ground police officer spotted the vehicle on Highway 5 and initiated a pursuit with lights and siren. The defendants then turned onto Leo Taylor Lane, drove behind an industrial building, and ran into nearby woods when the road ended.

Moments after Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies arrived to assist in locating the suspects, shots were fired at four law enforcement officers. No officers were injured. A Georgia State Patrol helicopter and Cherokee Sheriff's Office drones were deployed to track the suspects, monitor their movements, and confirm they were armed. BearCat armored vehicles were also deployed.

After roughly three hours, SWAT members moved in on the suspects. Kirkland, who was armed with a rifle, was shot by a SWAT member after he failed to comply with verbal commands. He was treated on scene by Cherokee County Fire & Emergency Services then transported to the hospital. Danner was taken into custody without incident. A handgun was found near where he had been hiding.

During Danner's plea hearing, the District Attorney's Office asked the court to impose a sentence that reflects the seriousness of the defendants' actions.

"In the criminal justice system, defendants generally fall into two categories: those we are angry with for what they have done and those we are afraid of because their actions reveal true danger and violence. These defendants fall into the latter category," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Geoffrey Fogus, who prosecuted this

case on behalf of the State. “For this reason, it is necessary that a significant and incapacitating prison sentence be imposed for the protection of our community.”

Chief Superior Court Judge David L. Cannon Jr. sentenced both defendants to 50 years, ordering Danner to serve the first 20 years in prison, and Kirkland to serve the first 25 years in prison. Upon completion of their prison terms, they will serve the remainder of their sentences on probation and must comply with all special conditions, including being barred from Cherokee County.

“When these defendants brought violence into our county, our law enforcement officers met that threat head-on with extraordinary courage and professionalism, preventing a dangerous situation from becoming a tragedy,” said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. “These sentences provide full accountability and uphold our obligation to safeguard the citizens of Cherokee County.”

The case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office, with assistance from Ball Ground Police, the multi-agency SWAT team, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and Georgia State Patrol. The prosecution was handled by Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Geoffrey Fogus, Office of the District Attorney, Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit.

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*The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.*

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