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Killed Suspected Molester Previously : Officer Pleads Innocent in Sex Case

May 02, 1986 | STEPHANIE CHAVEZ | Times Staff Writer

A Van Nuys patrol officer who recently shot and killed a child-molestation suspect in the line of duty pleaded not guilty Thursday to 23 counts of felony child molestation, including rape and taking sexually explicit photographs.

Albert W. Cunningham, 37, of Simi Valley was being held on \$500,000 bail after his arraignment in Los Angeles Municipal Court. Cunningham, a 12-year police veteran, was accused of molesting four girls, three of whom are now 16 and one of whom is now 19. The molestations were alleged to have occurred from 1980 to 1984.

Cunningham was charged with 13 acts of molesting the older girl, including four counts of raping her while she was under the influence of alcohol and drugs, six counts of unlawful sex with her when she was a minor, and taking nude photographs of her, according to the criminal complaint.

Other counts against Cunningham include eight accusing him of lewd conduct with one girl and one accusing him of lewd conduct with each of the two other girls.

Not on Duty

A Los Angeles Police Department spokesman said none of the charges alleges acts occurring while Cunningham was on duty. The acts occurred in Cunningham's former Canyon Country home and in cars, a spokesman for the Los Angeles County district attorney said.

Jane Blissert, deputy district attorney, and police refused to say how Cunningham knew the girls. One victim reported several weeks ago that she had been molested, said Lt. Dan Cooke. Cunningham was questioned Wednesday and arrested at the Van Nuys police station. The department's Internal Affairs Division investigation is continuing, Cooke said.

During the arraignment, Municipal Judge Glenette Blackwell told Cunningham that he could make and accept telephone calls only from his immediate family and attorney. She ordered him not to contact or call "any actual or potential witnesses in this matter."

'All Fabricated'

Cunningham's wife, Annie, said outside the courtroom after the hearing that the charges were "all fabricated by his ex-wife and we are going to prove it." She refused to say more.

His attorney, Bradley W. Brunon, also refused to comment on details of the charges, but said he "understands" that they may be related to a previous divorce. He said Cunningham's bail is so high because "he's a police officer and police officers are not treated equally."

Cunningham is also under Police Department investigation for the February shooting death of a suspected child molester, Cmdr. William Booth confirmed after a Times inquiry.

On Feb. 22, Cunningham answered a radio call about a child-molestation suspect who was possibly armed and under the influence of drugs, Booth said.

Cunningham was alone when he spotted the suspect in a Van Nuys apartment complex. When the man, William Beard, 25, failed to stop running toward Cunningham after the officer identified himself, Cunningham fired four rounds from his service revolver, killing the suspect, Booth said.

Shooting Investigation

All officer-involved shootings are investigated by the Police Department and district attorney to determine if they were justified, Booth said.

"There is nothing inherent in this case that would indicate that it is related to the criminal charges" against Cunningham, Booth said. But, he said, "we will look anyplace that needs to be looked at."

Cunningham has been placed on an unpaid leave of absence, pending his resignation from the department, Booth said. If he does not resign, he will remain suspended until the department's board of rights decides on his continued employment.

Blackwell continued the preliminary hearing until May 6 in Los Angeles Municipal Court.