

PRESS & SUN-BULLETIN

TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2014



KILLED IN THE LINE

Johnson City officer shot with his own weapon; police gun down suspect



Police work near evidence markers behind crime scene tape Monday on Harrison Street in Johnson City. Officer David Smith was shot and killed Monday in an incident that left his suspected killer, James Clark, of Greene, also dead. JASON WHONG / STAFF PHOTO

Motive unknown; police suspect breakdown

By Anthony Borrelli
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JOHNSON CITY — When the crime scene tape cleared hours after a veteran Johnson City police officer was shot to death by a raving employee at Southern Tier Imaging, who was gunned down himself, investigators struggled to answer the most important question: Why?

For a visibly shaken Police Chief Joseph Zikuski, only small pieces help tell the story.

Officer David Smith, 43, had just started his Monday patrol shift, when at 7:03 a.m., he was dispatched to a disturbance at Southern Tier Imaging on Harrison

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'Officer Smith never even got the opportunity to exit his vehicle. Officer Smith never stood a chance.'

Binghamton and Johnson City Police Chief Joseph Zikuski, on Officer David Smith, left

DIGITAL

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WHAT'S NEXT?

» Police are planning a second news conference Tuesday to further discuss the incident.
» Johnson City Police plan a candlelight vigil at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday outside the police department to honor Officer David Smith.

Suspect's neighbors: 'We're in total shock'

By Jon Harris
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GREENE — Several police cruisers lined quiet Turner Street on Monday, crowded in front of the home of James Clark, the man who law enforcement officials say shot and killed a Johnson City police officer Monday morning.

Clark's neighbors — some of them peering through their windows Monday afternoon while police congregated outside — were shocked to hear that the man they had gotten to know over the last several years was capable of such an act. They described Clark, a MRI technician at Southern Tier Imaging, as a friendly man who

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TIMELINE OF EVENTS

7:03 A.M.

911 call for disturbance at Southern Tier Imaging on Harrison Street in Johnson City. Officer David Smith responds.

7:06 A.M.

Shots fired in struggle between Smith and James Clark. Smith is shot twice. A second officer arrives and shoots Clark.

ABOUT 8 A.M.

An Endicott bomb squad arrives to investigate Clark's claim of explosives near the scene. No explosives were found.

ABOUT 9:20 A.M.

Smith dies from his gunshot wounds.

ABOUT 10:20 A.M.

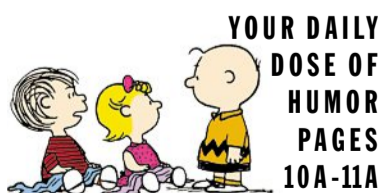
Clark dies during surgery.

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IN THE LINE OF DUTY

Last Broome police death by gun in 2002

JC hasn't seen one of its own killed since 1925

By Jennifer Micale
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Monday marked the first time in a dozen years that a Broome County law enforcement officer has died from a gunshot.

Broome County Sheriff's Deputy Kevin Tarsia was the last, gunned down on July 4, 2002. It was the first line-of-duty death in the department's history, other than that of a police dog in 1985. Tarsia was ambushed at Grange Hall Park in Kirkwood, shot multiple times and run over by three men who had just committed a burglary in Great Bend, Pa.

Farther afield, state Trooper David Brinkerhoff was shot and killed in 2007 during a shootout with a suspect in Margaretville. Brinkerhoff, it was revealed later, was inadvertently killed by another officer. Closer to home, Binghamton police Officer Lee Barta was gunned down on Aug. 3, 1995, by a teenager wanted on a warrant. The gunman took his own life when officers surrounded him.

In the past two decades, officers have died in car crashes and, in one case, a stabbing. State Trooper Jill E. Mattice was killed when her patrol car collided with a tractor-trailer in 2010. Port Dickinson Officer Aldo Rossi was struck and killed by a drunk driver as he talked



Binghamton police Officer Lee Barta.



Broome County Sheriff's Deputy Kevin Tarsia.

motorist in 2008. Ithaca Police Officer Michael Padula was stabbed to death on Nov. 17, 1996, by a woman who had barricaded herself in her apartment.

Johnson City has only one prior line-of-duty death in its history: Harold Huff, who died in 1925. According to the Officer Down Memorial Page, Huff died after a train hit his patrol car while he was responding to a call.

FALLEN OFFICERS IN THE SOUTHERN TIER

» **New York State Police:** Harold C. Mattice, 1923; E.M. Simpson, 1927; John H. Lockhart, 1937; Richard Hedges, 1942; Milton C. Ratner, 1943; Bryant F. Stickles, 1944; Kenneth B. Knapp, 1945; Robert V. Conklin, 1948; Arthur M. Diffendale, 1951; Patrick F. O'Hara, 1952; Richard T. Juna, 1970; Samuel N. Rowe, 1970; Robert M. Semrov, 1973; Ricky J. Parisian, 1994; David C. Brinkerhoff, 2007; Jill E. Mattice, 2010.

» **Binghamton:** Alex Horvatt, 1917; William F. McDonald, 1920; Clarence W. Moran, 1922; Gerald M. Tracy, 1928; George J. Weslar, 1939; William F. Holbert Jr., 1972; Lee E. Barta, 1995; K-9 Sam, 1984.

» **Broome County Sheriff's Office:** Kevin J. Tarsia, 2002; K-9 Duke, 1985.

» **Delaware County Sheriff's Office:** Osman N. Steele, 1845.

» **Johnson City:** Harold Huff, 1925; David W. Smith, 2014.

» **Owego:** Issac Wiltse, 1869; Forrest A. Hall, 1969.

» **Waverly:** Elmer Beers, 1968.

» **Ithaca:** Levi M. Spaulding, 1930; Michael A. Padula, 1996.

» **Oneonta, city and town:** Stanley Monahan, 1942; Norman D. Carr, 1998.

» **Norwich:** Neil Lewis, 1907.

» **Port Dickinson:** Aldo Rossi, 2008.



An emotional Johnson City Police Chief Joseph Zikuski speaks at a news conference Monday at the village hall about the fatal shooting of Officer David Smith. JASON WHONG / STAFF PHOTOS

Shooting

Continued from Page 1A

Street.

Within three minutes, there was a second 911 call of shots fired.

In that time, Smith had pulled up on the scene when he was approached from behind by a man running and yelling with his arms in the air.

The man ran from Southern Tier Imaging, reached into Smith's vehicle and wrestled away the officer's .40 caliber duty weapon in a struggle.

Smith, a village police officer of 18½ years, was shot twice with his own duty weapon outside the building, near the UHS Wilson Medical Center campus. He was pronounced dead after an hour in emergency surgery.

The suspect, 43-year-old James Clark, of Greene, was shot down by another responding officer. Clark died about three hours later during surgery.

The village police department — faced with burying a colleague — must do so without fully understanding how it came to this, Zikuski said with tears in his eyes at a Monday afternoon news conference.

"Officer Smith never even got the opportunity to exit his vehicle," Zikuski said. "Officer Smith never stood a chance."

In light of Clark's death, the incident will not result in a criminal case. But still, Zikuski said, the lack of any motive behind the tragedy is what puzzles investigators most.

Clark, an MRI technician at Southern Tier Imaging since 2005, appeared by all accounts to be a "model employee," Zikuski said.

Investigators have found no criminal record apart from a drunken-driving arrest 15 years ago, Zikuski said, nor is there any documented history of mental health problems.

"He obviously had some sort of mental breakdown," Zikuski said of Clark. "Something happened between the time he left home and got to work."

At one point after Clark got to the Southern Tier Imaging building, he grabbed a co-worker, shook him and made threats indicating there was a bomb in the building, Zikuski said. That claim, which proved false, would prompt a response by the Endicott Police Bomb Squad to the scene.

Within moments after Smith pulled onto the scene and the struggle with Clark ensued, a second village officer arrived.

The second officer, whom Zikuski would not identify, was shot at by Clark but not struck. The officer fired several shots in return to take Clark down, Zikuski said.

Clark emptied Smith's gun of all 15 rounds before he was shot. No other people were injured in the incident.

Smith is survived by a wife and child. A funeral service is being planned.

Fellow law enforcement officers said they knew Smith as an avid golfer, but remembered him best for



Police stand near evidence markers behind crime scene tape Monday on Harrison Street in Johnson City.

his sense of humor, outgoing personality and memorable smile.

"He was a good officer," an emotional Zikuski said Monday. "He's going to be greatly missed."

Police interviewed about 30 people during the day-long investigation of the shooting. UHS staff members were asked to evacuate the buildings at 30 and 22 Harrison St. after the incident.

Crime scene investigators focused on searching around Southern Tier Imaging and nearby UHS buildings, seeking bullet shells and other evidence.

Law enforcement agencies also converged Monday on Clark's residence, at 132 Turner St. in Greene.

Clark was married with children, police said.

News of the incident left neighbors in shock. "He was always such a social, friendly neighbor," one said.

Smith is the first Johnson City police officer to be killed in the line of duty since the 1920s, according to Zikuski, who bore a black band across his own badge during Monday's news conference.

"There's no police training in the world that could've prevented this," Zikuski said. "As tragic as this is, it's more than likely we'll never know what happened."

Suspect

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was often outside playing sports with his young son.

"Jim was a really wonderful neighbor," said Holly VanderBunt, who lives at 141 Turner St. "We're just in total shock."

According to police, Johnson City Police Officer David Smith reported to a disturbance at Southern Tier Imaging, on Harrison Street in Johnson City, shortly after 7 a.m. Monday. When Smith arrived, he was attacked by Clark, who took his duty weapon and shot him twice.

Clark then fired at another officer, who shot him. Clark, 43, died Monday morning during surgery, police said.

VanderBunt said she saw Clark leave for work Monday morning. VanderBunt's only thought at the time, she said, was that the roads were still unplowed, likely making it a tough commute to Johnson City for Clark.

By 9 a.m., police arrived at Clark's home, at 132 Turner St. A search warrant arrived on the scene shortly after 1:30 p.m. Monday, and police entered about an hour later.

"We have spoke to the police and have absolutely nothing bad to say about the man," VanderBunt said. "You would never think about it in a million years."

Clark's home, a gray-sided, ranch-style house with blue shutters and a two-door garage, fits in with the peaceful neighborhood. A mobile basketball hoop and a ball sat at the end of the driveway Monday afternoon. Five bushes lined the front of the house, four of them evenly trimmed but one standing a little bit taller than the others. Above that, one line of green Christmas lights still hung from the home's gutter. Behind the house, neighbors said, Clark grew a great garden every year.

VanderBunt, 53, has been neighbors with Clark for about 10 years, but has known Clark's wife, Jennifer, since she was in high school. VanderBunt said the Clarks have a son, about 10 years old, who is full of life and always running around the neighborhood.

As she thought about Clark and the Johnson City police officer he is accused of killing, VanderBunt stared at the ground and repeatedly muttered, "Unbelievable."

"I'm saying some prayers for both families," she said. "I feel awful for both sides."

Kathy Kellogg lives at 136 Turner St. and was next-door neighbors with Clark for seven years. She said she was horrified when she learned of the news Monday morning. Kellogg said she often saw Clark playing catch with his son in the backyard.

However, over the last few months, Kellogg said, Clark seemed quieter and more withdrawn. But for someone like Clark, Kellogg said, that meant not going out of his way to say, "Hello."

"You couldn't ask for a better neighbor," Kellogg said. "He was always such a social, friendly neighbor."



Several police officials were at James Clark's home, 132 Turner St. in Greene, on Monday morning and afternoon, eventually entering the house about 2:30 p.m. JON HARRIS / STAFF PHOTO