



St. Petersburg Police Department News Release



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For Immediate Release

January 24, 2011

Two St. Petersburg Police Officers Killed in the Line of Duty

Sergeant Thomas J. Baitinger, 48, was hired by the St. Petersburg Police Department on June 24, 1996. He was later promoted to Police Sergeant on March 1, 2004. He served in several capacities during his tenure with the police department, including the Uniform Services Division (Patrol), Investigative Services Bureau (Auto Theft Detective) and in the Field Training Division. He also had previous law enforcement experience in Wisconsin, where his extended family still resides. He is survived by his wife, Paige. They did not have any children.

K-9 Officer Jeffrey A. Yaslowitz, 39, began his law enforcement career with the St. Petersburg Police Department on April 19, 1999. He was a K-9 officer and who has worked with his canine partner "Ace" for the last two years. He previously served in the Uniform Services Bureau (Patrol) and the Street Crimes Unit. He is survived by his wife, Lorraine, and their three children, two boys - 5 and 12 years of age, and a girl, 8 years of age.

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The United States Marshals, Florida Regional Fugitive Task Force, has been assisting the St. Petersburg Police Department and the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office in locating a fugitive named Hydra Lacy, Jr., DOB: 09-19-71, 6'3", 185 lbs.

Lacy was wanted on an arrest warrant Failure to Appear on a charge of Aggravated Battery that was issued on 11/01/2010. Lacy had a significant criminal history, including Aggravated Assault of a Law Enforcement Officer, Sexual Assault and Kidnapping. Lacy was also a registered sexual offender (listed as "absconded" on the FDLE website).

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The following details are tentative and are based on several conversations with officers and supervisors on the scene. Investigations are now in progress, so many of the details of today's events will not become available to the public until an Internal Affairs Investigation has been completed and Chief of Police Charles "Chuck" Harmon convenes a Shooting Review Board.

On Monday January 24, 2011 at about 6:58 a.m., a St. Petersburg Police Department undercover detective, a Pinellas County Sheriff's Deputy and a Deputy with the U.S. Marshals Service went to 3734 28th Avenue South for the purpose of interviewing a relative of Lacy.

During the interview with Lacy's relative, they learned that Lacy was hiding in the attic of the home.

At 7:07 a.m., the St. Petersburg Police Department detective at the home requested back-up units and several officers, including Sergeant Thomas Baitinger and K-9 Officer Jeffrey Yaslowitz responded to the home. It should be noted that K-9 Officer Jeffrey Yaslowitz was getting off-duty and heading home when he chose to respond to the call for assistance.



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At 7:11 a.m., the St. Petersburg Police Department's detective advised Communications Center that Lacy was hiding in the attic of the home.

At 7:29 a.m., officers on the scene reported gunshots and officers down.

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Initial reports indicate that K-9 Officer Yaslowitz and a US Marshals Service Deputy were positioned near the entrance to the attic when they challenged the suspect to surrender. He refused to surrender and gunfire erupted.

K-9 Officer Yaslowitz was struck by one of the suspect's bullets and he fell wounded inside of the attic. The U.S. Marshall was struck by the gunfire and tumbled to the first floor.

Several officers on the scene, including Sergeant Thomas Baitinger, some of whom were using ballistic shields, entered the house to rescue the fallen officer and U.S. Marshals Service Deputy. The suspect, still hidden in the attic, fired several rounds through the ceiling at the officers after they entered the house.

Sergeant Baitinger (who was wearing a bullet-resistant vest) was struck by at least one of the suspect's bullets fired through the ceiling. The bullet missed Sergeant Baitinger's bullet-resistant vest and struck his upper torso.

The rescuing officers heroically extracted Sergeant Baitinger and the U.S. Marshalls Service Deputy from the house under raining gunfire. They were unable to remove K-9 Officer Yaslowitz from the attic and his condition was unknown at that time.

Sergeant Thomas Baitinger was later pronounced dead at the hospital. The U.S. Marshalls Service Deputy sustained a non-life threatening gunshot wound and was still receiving medical treatment at the time of this press release.

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The St. Petersburg Police Department's Tactical Apprehension and Control (TAC) Team responded to the scene and set up a perimeter around the home. Hostage Negotiators also arrived on the scene and held intermittent conversations with the suspect, who refused to surrender.

Between 9:00 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. (I cannot verify the exact time at this time) TAC Team members entered the home to rescue K-9 Officer Jeffrey Yaslowitz. There was an exchange of gunfire between members of the TAC Team and the suspect. The TAC Team extracted K-9 Officer Yaslowitz and transported him by ambulance to Bayfront Medical Center where he was pronounced dead from a gunshot wound to his upper body.

A few hours later, the suspect allegedly texted a relative and indicated that he had been wounded.

By mid afternoon, members of the TAC Team re-entered the house and found the suspect dead in the attic. Although there is a presumption that the dead suspect is Hydra Lacy, Jr., he has not been positively identified at this time.

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Many people in the community have called us to express their condolences and grief, and have requested to know where flowers or other items could be placed in honor of our two fallen officers. We have established an area in the breezeway near the front entrance of the St. Petersburg Police Department, 1300 First Avenue North for that purpose.

I am attaching a photograph of Sergeant Thomas Baitinger. I will send another media alert with a photo of K-9 Officer Jeffrey Yaslowitz.

Anyone wishing to donate funds to the families of the two fallen officers may send contributions to:

**Suncoast Law Enforcement Charities, Inc.
14141 46th Street North, Suite 1205
Clearwater, Florida 33762
727-532-1722**

Finally, please accept our sincerest thanks to everyone in the media and the public for the kind expressions and sentiments to all of us during this time of untold grief and pain at the St. Petersburg Police Department.

The acts of heroism and bravery by our officers this morning – particularly those officers who rescued their fallen officers under gunfire – should be commended for their heroism in acting without hesitation to save other officers at their own peril. Special thanks to the Tampa Police Department, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, Homeland Security and ICE for their invaluable help during the day.

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