

Tributes flow as slain Michigan State Police Trooper Paul Butterfield remembered

Patti Klevorn | Posted: Tuesday, September 10, 2013 12:00 am

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Michigan State Police Trooper Paul Butterfield of the Hart Post is remembered as a good man and is being mourned by his community today after he was shot in the line of duty Monday night.

“He was a great guy,” said F/Lt. Kevin Leavitt, Hart Post commander, who was with his troopers today (Tuesday) as they mourn the loss of their fellow officer.

The outpouring of support from the community has been so appreciated during this difficult time, he said.

Leavitt said he’ll remember Butterfield as always having a smile on his face.

“He was soft-spoken and a friend to everyone here,” he said. “He’s really going to be missed.”

Butterfield had been with the Manistee post until a reorganization within the state police and was transferred to Hart where he served his past few years.

He was a Mason County resident.

What happened

Butterfield died Monday night in emergency surgery after he was shot in the head during a traffic stop at 6:20 p.m. on Custer Road near Townline Road in Mason County’s Sherman Township, a rural area south of Free Soil and northwest of Fountain.

The suspects from the vehicle — a man and a woman — fled the scene but were found in Dublin near Wellston inside Manistee County two hours later (8:30 p.m.) thanks to information Butterfield relayed to Mason-Oceana 911 dispatch about the vehicle he stopped, according to Lt. Chris McIntire, commander of the Rockford state police post.

“When troopers approached, the (male) suspect displayed a handgun, pointing it at one of the troopers,” McIntire stated. “One trooper fired, striking the suspect.”

The two suspects are in custody. The man is in the hospital with a non-life-threatening gunshot wound, according to police.

The other suspect, a woman, is in jail.

More information about the suspects will be forthcoming as decisions are made about their charges. (See related story, [click Home](#).) Formal arraignments are not expected to occur today (Tuesday).

Butterfield made the traffic stop on Custer Road at 6:20 p.m. Monday.

At 6:23 p.m., a passing motorist called 911 to report finding Butterfield on the ground with a gunshot wound to the head, the Michigan State Police confirmed.

Butterfield was airlifted from the scene to Munson Medical Center in Traverse City, where he died during emergency surgery, police said.

“Tonight we lost a hero,” Col. Kriste Kibbey Elue, director of the MSP, said Monday night. “The entire MSP family, as well as our greater law enforcement family, mourns alongside the Butterfields. Trooper Butterfield’s sacrifice will never be forgotten; may he rest in peace.”

Paul Butterfield

Butterfield became a trooper in 1999, graduating as a member of the 118th Trooper Recruit School. He served at the Manistee post for most of his law enforcement career and Hart post in recent years after a state police reorganization.

He was a veteran of the U.S. Army National Guard, having served three years, 10 months in Hawaii and Michigan. In Hawaii he coached an Army distance running team.

He graduated from Bridgeport High School and was a 1987 Class A state cross country champion, running a 5k in 15:36:04, according to the Michigan State High School Athletic Association.

He went on to the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, in the South Eastern Conference (SEC), as a runner and to study politics and government.

Butterfield continued his outstanding running career, competing in the World Junior Cross Country Championships in Norway and the 1989 Pan-Am Track and Field Championships (10,000 meters) in Argentina.

Mourning the loss

Mason County Sheriff Kim Cole joined local officers Monday night in beginning to mourn the loss of a fellow officer and a friend.

“We all work so close together up here, it doesn’t matter what color uniform you wear, we’re family,” Cole said. “It’s a tough time for us.”

“We were good friends,” Cole said.

“We were talking tonight,” he said of himself and Trooper Butterfield Monday night prior to the shooting. “We’re all one big family.”

The first to arrive were Mason County sheriff’s deputies and Fountain firefighters.

“They gave him first aid until the ambulance got there,” Cole said.

The fire department closed off Custer Road while the scene was investigated.

“We had so many resources,” Cole said.

Helping Monday night were:

Mason, Manistee, Oceana and Lake county sheriff’s deputies, the Michigan State Police — with officers from Hart, Manistee, Cadillac and Rockford, and the MSP crime lab in Grand Rapids — federal forest service officials, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Ludington Police officers, a K-9 unit from the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians police department and Fountain firefighters.

“I always tell people there’s no such thing as a routine traffic stop,” Cole said. “At times it seems like it’s us against the world.”

Officers were sent home to be with their families while others had to take over to continue to give the area law enforcement coverage.

“We’ll do a debrief with this and give the men and women in our office the help they need to cope with what’s going on,” Cole said.

Manistee County

Manistee County law enforcement officers are among those shocked and saddened by the loss.

Chris Kempf, a Manistee County sheriff’s deputy, said he had known Butterfield for years.

“He’s a good guy,” Kempf said, stating he was still in disbelief about what had happened.

“It’s close to home,” he said Tuesday morning.

Butterfield had served as a trooper at Manistee’s Michigan State Police post for about 10 years before that post was closed and Butterfield was reassigned to the Hart post.

“He was a dedicated trooper — dedicated to his work — and he was athletic and loved MMA fighting, he trained people,” Kempf said.

Manistee County Sheriff Dale Kowalkowski said everyone helped out Monday.

“All law enforcement was out there working,” Kowalkowski said about the manhunt that started after hearing a fellow officer had been shot. “Everybody was out there searching. It all happened very quickly.”

Kowalkowski said he first heard police were searching for an older model red pickup truck and that he later heard a white passenger car was stolen in the area near the shooting.

He said he later heard a Michigan State trooper saw someone gassing up a white car at the Marathon station in Dublin, where the suspects were arrested.

“All the work we’re doing in northern Michigan is more dangerous,” Kowalkowski said. “Everyone, no matter what their uniform, is doing dangerous work. It could have been anybody.”

Manistee County Sheriff’s Office corrections officers Tony Howard and Murl Priestley also knew Butterfield well and are deeply saddened by his death.

“He was a great guy, fun-loving and always had a smile on his face,” Howard said about his friend, who he often saw when Butterfield would drop off prisoners at the jail. “He had a good heart and loved animals.

“He is going to be sorely missed. It’s a terrible tragedy — it’s a member of your family.”

“When you hear something like this it’s shocking — there are tragedies every day,” Priestley said. “But when you actually know somebody, it really hurts.

“I couldn’t sleep last night and then I didn’t know for sure (Butterfield had died) until this morning,” Priestley said about learning about his friend’s death.

“I said a few prayers for him last night,” he said. “I don’t know how to react. You just get up and do what you have to do.

“Tomorrow isn’t promised to any of us,” Priestley said.

“Paul was a good guy, he was a professional and an animal lover — he had cats and dogs,” he said.

Butterfield was to be married to his fiancée, Jennifer.

“He was just a fun-loving guy and very energetic,” Howard said. “He’ll be missed by all the corrections staff at the jail.”

Gov. Snyder, others recognize Butterfield

“Our hearts break when a Michigan State Police trooper, or any of our other police officers or firefighters, is killed in the line of duty,” Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder said. “Their loss is

unquestionably felt by their families as well as the communities they serve and our entire state. We realize the extraordinary difficulty of their jobs and the sacrifices they make for us.

“A tragic event like this shakes us all, but it also bolsters our resolve to make our streets and our neighborhoods safer.

“We thank Trooper Butterfield for his bravery, his service and his sacrifice. Our thoughts and prayers are with him, his family, friends, and colleagues.”

Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette also gave his condolences, as well.

“Trooper Paul Butterfield made the ultimate sacrifice in serving our state. The People of Michigan are privileged to have brave men and women like Trooper Butterfield who ensure the safety of our communities. My wife Cynthia and I extend our deepest sympathies to Trooper Butterfield’s family, friends and colleagues. They are all in our prayers on this difficult day,” Schuette said.

“On behalf of the Traffic Improvement Association of Michigan, my heartfelt sympathy goes out to Trooper Butterfield’s family and the law enforcement community,” said Jim Santilli, executive director of the Traffic Improvement Association of Michigan.

See a photo of Trooper Butterfield, click on Home.

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