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Wounded officer's recovery may take months

Author: Jeffrey Widmer

Marietta Daily Journal Staff Writer

Article Text:

MARIETTA -- Officer Michael S. Hunt, shot in the leg and ankle Thursday during a routine traffic stop, may not return to active duty on the Marietta police force for another 5 to 6 months. Hunt, 29, was shot after he and his partner, Andrew Higgins, pulled over a red Ford Escort with four occupants Thursday morning. Hunt was struck in the upper thigh and ankle and was released from WellStar Kennestone Hospital Friday evening.

He is now at his home with his family, said Marietta police Officer Brian Marshall. Higgins was not hurt in the shooting.

Ronald Eugene Garrett, 20, of Marietta, who was shot and killed when he opened fire on Hunt and Higgins, was wanted on robbery, burglary and assault charges. He also was wanted for violation of probation.

Marshall said Hunt, a Marietta officer for the past four years who is a member of the Community Outreach Unit, may be back at the police department within two weeks in a "non-enforcement capacity."

"His leg is real sensitive right now," Marshall said. "He is taking pain medication and antibiotics, which tend to make him groggy."

The incident occurred when Hunt and Higgins noticed the Ford Escort driving on Powder Springs Road near Garrison Road with four occupants inside, including Garrett. Police Chief Bobby Moody said one of the reasons Hunt and Higgins pulled the car over was because the vehicle picked up an Hispanic male on Powder Springs Road and the officers were attempting to enforce the city's 1999 day laborer ordinance.

The car stopped at Garrison Road and Hill Street and Garrett began firing. Police believe the fact he was wanted on warrants is the main reason he started firing.

Garrett died from multiple gunshot wounds, according to the Cobb County Medical Examiner's Office. Marshall said it is believed that both officers fired at Garrett, but it is not yet known how many shots struck Garrett or where he was struck.

"It is believed that both [Higgins and Hunt] fired at Garrett," Marshall said, "but we're waiting on tests to determine whose bullet was fatal."

Results of ballistic tests conducted by the Georgia Bureau of Investigations will determine whose bullet was the fatal shot, Marshall said.

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Interview

'I knew I'd been shot. It gets real serious at that point'

Author: CRAIG SCHNEIDER; Staff

Article Text:

Marietta police officer Michael Hunt was shot twice April 5 when a routine traffic stop escalated into a life-and-death struggle.

Hunt was patting down Ronald Eugene Garrett, 20, a passenger in the stopped car, when Garrett broke away. As the two struggled, Garrett pulled his own gun and fired. Hunt was shot in the right ankle and the left thigh. Hunt and his partner, Officer Andrew Higgins, who was not injured, returned fire and killed Garrett, 20.

Still wearing an ankle cast and getting around on crutches, Hunt, 29, recently granted his first interview since the incident. He spoke of the high intensity drama of the shootout, as well as his feelings -- and those of his wife -- since then.

Q: How are you feeling?

A: I'm fine. My left side is pretty much healed up. I was shot high on the left cheek, and it came out the thigh. My ankle will be about three more weeks in the cast.

Q: Are you back on duty?

A: I'm doing different things. (He is on light duty.) Typing up some memos, typing up some paperwork for the secretaries.

Q: How do you feel about what happened to you, as well as the outpouring of support?

A: I'm glad to be here. I'm glad to be all right. All the stuff everybody has done makes you feel good.

Q: What made you pull over that car?

A: The car had just picked up a day laborer. That's what got our attention. They did not stop right away when we clicked the lights and siren. They kept going for about a quarter-mile. These guys just kept going. We thought something's going on.

Q: Did you plan on giving them a ticket?

A: More than likely it would have been a warning, telling them they're not allowed to pick up day laborers there.

Q: How did you feel when you were shot?

A: I knew I'd been shot. It gets real serious at that point. That's when you think of getting to your gun.

Q: What else went through your mind?

A: You have a great deal of concern for your partner. When I heard the second shot, I didn't know if he was hit or not.

Q: How do you feel about having killed Ronald Eugene Garrett?

A: I'm dealing with it. I'm fine. I feel bad that he made the decision he made, and he caused his family all this grief. . . . He shot me, and he tried to shoot my partner.

Q: Have you gone for counseling?

A: The Police Department has a psychologist. He talked to me and also talked to my wife. I think it was more important to talk to my wife. I had been shot, and it scared her.

Q: How is she handling it?

A: The psychologist said she might show some hypersensitivity for a while. She might start crying for no reason, watching a sad TV show. She's cried a couple of times, watching a TV show, or reading a card somebody sent. She's been emotional.

Q: You were shot a day after the fatal shooting of Atlanta police officer Sherry Lyons-Williams. How do you feel about that? Were you being especially cautious that day?

A: I think everybody gets a little wound up when something like that happens. Honestly, it was just a traffic stop. We had to deal with a lot of narcotics, so we gear up for a traffic stop. We knew something was going on.

Q: Even though you were still recovering, you attended the funeral for the slain Atlanta police officer. Why did you feel you needed to be there?

A: I planned to be there already. I was going to be in the honor guard detail. I thought it was important to be there. She's a police officer. She's a hero. She gave her life. And I think that's nothing but pure heroic.

Q: Did you try to make contact with the family of Officer Lyons-Williams?

A: I made no contact with the family. We just attended just like all the other police officers. I was just there to pay my respects.

Q: At that time, Atlanta was dealing with two cop shootings in two days. Were you aware of all the publicity that was surrounding the shooting of officer Lyons-Williams and yourself?

A: I was medicated to the point where I was sleeping most of the time. I didn't watch a whole lot of TV.

Q: How has this incident affected your family, your wife.?

A: I was concerned about my wife. She was definitely shaken up.

Q: You actually called her from the scene?

A: Yes, I called her from the ambulance. She was crying. At the hospital, we prayed together.

Q: Where are you from? Did you want to be a police officer as a child?

A: I'm from Wichita Falls, Texas. It's a place with about 80,000. When I was younger, I wanted to be a Texas Ranger.

Q: Are you expected to make a full recovery?

A: Yes. The doctor says I should get the cast taken off in three weeks. Then there's been some talk of physical therapy.

Q: There's been an outpouring of support from your fellow officers. How does that make you feel?

A: It makes you real proud to be part of the real close community like the law enforcement community.

Q: How about the community support?

A: We've gotten a lot of support, including a bunch of handmade cards from the children at

Dunleith Elementary School in Marietta. Police officers don't make a lot of money. But knowing that people care about you and your job makes up for that.

Caption:

Photo: Marietta police Officer Michael Hunt / ANDY SHARP / Staff

Photo: Marietta police Officer Michael Hunt / ANDY SHARP / Staff

Photo: Marietta police Officer Michael Hunt, 29, is expected to make a full recovery after being shot twice several weeks ago when he and his partner made a traffic stop. Behind Hunt is Police Chief Bobby Moody. The crutches belong to Hunt, a result of his injury. / ANDY SHARP / Staff
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