

OFFICER OF THE YEAR
LIVONIA POLICE OFFICER LARRY NEHASIL (POSTHUMOUS)

Our POAM Police Officer of the Year Award stands as a well-deserved source of pride for its recipients, their families and the broader law-enforcement community.

But this particular Police Officer of the Year Award also brings sadness and a sobering reminder of the ultimate risk all law-enforcement personnel are confronted with as they protect their communities and their fellow officers.

Livonia Police Officer Larry Nehasil, who exemplified the ultimate professionalism and bravery throughout his law-enforcement career, died in the line of duty Jan. 17, 2011, when a surveillance assignment quickly turned deadly.

Nehasil, working with a team of fellow officers, had tracked two brothers suspected in a series of home invasions to Walled Lake, an Oakland County suburb of Detroit.

The officers observed the brothers casing the neighborhood before they settled on a target home just before 6 p.m. One brother remained in the car in front of the house. The other knocked on the home's front door.

When no one answered his knock, the brother circled to the back of the house where he disappeared from the officers' view.

Nehasil volunteered to leave the car and proceed on foot to better see what was going on. The other officers maintained the perimeter in their vehicles.

(more)

LIVONIA/222

At this point, the brother who had remained in the car, got out, pulled his sweatshirt hood over his head and walked toward the rear of the house.

As Nehasil watched, the man reached into a back window of the home and talked with his brother, who was now inside the house. In no time, the two brothers were carrying piles of property from inside the house onto the lawn — all the time unaware that Nehasil was watching them and communicating with the officers who surrounded the property.

The brother who had originally remained in the car then returned to it, opened the hatch and backed into the driveway.

Now was the time! The entire surveillance team, except Nahasil, converged on the residence, attempting to block the car and apprehend its driver.

Although the suspect tried to escape by driving across the lawns of adjacent homes, mobile members of the unit quickly boxed him in. When the suspect tried to flee on foot, several officers chased and tackled him. After a brief struggle, he was cuffed and taken into custody.

But the tragic drama was far from finished. The other brother, who had watched the police activity from inside the home, dashed out through the garage. Nehasil, the only officer in the back on foot, chased him through the yard.

(more)

LIVONIA/333

What Nehasil didn't know is that the suspect had stolen a .45-caliber semiautomatic handgun from the home. As the fleeing suspect reached a six-foot wooden privacy fence at the rear of the yard, he pivoted and began firing at Nehasil, who had just caught up with him.

The bullets struck Nehasil five times at point-blank range, hitting him in the leg, back and buttocks. Although none of the wounds was fatal, they inflicted sufficient injury to motivate even the best of officers to surrender the chase.

But not Nehasil, an officer who had consistently demonstrated steadfast fortitude throughout his 20 years with the Livonia Police Department and before that with the Wayne County Sheriff's Department. Despite his extensive wounds, he returned fire.

His first shot hit the suspect's abdomen. The second, the fatal shot, struck the man's heart. But the gunman did not immediately die. With oxygen still feeding his brain, he managed one last shot, which struck Officer Nehasil behind the ear, tragically ending his life.

Nehasil's colleagues, still involved in subduing the other brother, heard the fire. Grabbing their radios, they tried to reach Nehasil. But there was no response.

(more)

LIVONIA/444

Shouting out to him, they ran toward the rear of the house, where they found their partner's lifeless body lying in blood-covered snow at the base of the fence. The suspect's inert body lay partially on top of him.

Officer Nehasil's tragic death drew tributes of love, admiration and respect from his colleagues.

"After learning the number of years Larry served, you might assume he was an 'old-timer' who would be better suited to sitting behind a desk," mused Scott Morgan, president of the Livonia POAM. "But Larry was a highly decorated officer because he was a tenacious road officer constantly on the prowl for criminal activity."

"Larry did not like giving up the search for persons attempting to escape on foot," agreed Martin Donnelly, a fellow Livonia Intelligence Bureau member, who was on the scene with Nehasil in Walled Lake. "After others gave up searches, Larry – hours later — would always locate the hiding suspects. He had a veteran approach and a rookie officer's zeal to apprehend the 'bad guy.'"

Fellow officers describe Nehasil as "ego-free." "It was never about *him*," observed colleague Lt. Dan McKeon. "It was always about the *team*. He was always willing to do whatever was needed to help the team succeed."

Nehasil's friend and former partner Tom Blauvelt recalled that Officer Nehasil was always the first officer on the scene.

(more)

LIVONIA/555

"He was one of the most aggressive surveillance officers I ever worked with," he said, noting the time — one of many — that Nehasil disappeared to reach the scene while other officers were still loading their cars. Noting how rapidly Nehasil had disappeared, Blauvelt had jokingly asked, "Where's Waldo?" The nickname stuck for the rest of Nehasil's career.

Officer Nehasil was an unselfish, soft-spoken, humble officer, highly respected by all of his peers. Besides working on road patrol, he served in the Special Operations Unit, crime suppression and fugitive apprehension. He was on his second tour in the Intelligence Bureau, narcotics and criminal surveillance, when he was killed in the line of duty.

Livonia Police Officer Larry Nehasil embodied all the attributes POAM members strive to achieve. The Police Officer's Association is proud to name him 2012 Police Officer of the Year Award. But we are truly saddened that we must do it posthumously. Thank you, Larry Nehasil. You gave your best — and you gave all.

#