

**SOUTHFIELD OFFICERS
SGT. MATTHEW COLLINS AND SGT. GARY LASK,
WITH OFFICER NICK CAZAN**

Over the course of their careers, police officers are dispatched to many scenes of trouble. It's a fundamental part of the job, and whenever they respond they anticipate the possibility they are going into danger.

But none of the officers who were on duty inside the Southfield Police Station just after 2 o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday, November 11, 2012, could possibly have anticipated the trouble that came *to them*. That's when a man entered the lobby of the department's headquarters and within moments ignited an exchange of gunfire in which he wounded an officer before being fatally shot.

To describe the situation created by the shocking attack as dangerous is accurate, but it is also an understatement. This was a sudden, *right now*, face-to-face confrontation with deadly force and murderous intent to use it.

The bizarre incident began when the subject walked up to the front desk and stood silently, staring at Officer Anthony Rodgers who was seated behind it. Rodgers asked if he could help the man, but received no response. When he repeated the question the subject pulled a handgun from his jacket pocket and pointed it at him. As he was diving for cover under the desk he heard a click. The subject had pulled the trigger, but the gun had not fired. Rodgers drew his own

weapon and repeatedly ordered the man to drop his weapon. He did not comply, but instead chambered a round into the gun and began waving it around.

Lieutenant Fitzgerald in the watch commander's office heard Rogers' shouted commands to drop the gun and quickly radioed for backup while moving to assist Rodgers. His urgent call brought Sergeant Matthew Collins and Sergeant Gary Lask rushing to the lobby from their nearby office.

Sgt. Lask was first to enter the lobby. He maneuvered to his left to a more effective position while pointing his gun at the subject and shouting "drop the weapon." Sgt. Collins began to enter through a glass door but was forced to stop in the threshold with the door open when he observed the man waving around his handgun. He also pointed his service weapon and commanded the subject to disarm himself.

A number of officers who had been in the station's report writing room also responded to the call for backup. Included were Officer Nick Cazan, Officer Christine Miller, Officer Walter Menzel, Officer David Crysler and Officer Jeremy Panski. This group was unable to clear the door and although they had to remain in the area directly behind Sgt. Collins each of them still would be a potential target until the gunman relented or was stopped.

For a hopeful moment it appeared that the subject was going to end the incident on his own volition, before any blood was shed. He turned toward Sgt.

Lask and Sgt. Collins and began lowering his weapon toward the floor as if finally complying with the repeated verbal command drop it.

However, in the next few moments the man destroyed that hope and – in effect – himself. He abruptly raised the gun and fired a shot which lodged in the lobby ceiling. He then leveled the weapon and fired another round, which struck Sgt. Collins in his left shoulder. Both Sgt. Lask and Sgt. Collins returned fire, fatally wounding the subject.

As soon as the shooting ended Officer Cazan rushed to Sgt. Collins and began rendering first-aid, minimizing his wounded colleague's blood loss over the crucial minutes before emergency room physicians would take over. Officer Menzel kicked the subject's weapon out of the man's reach while others established scene security. The weapon was cocked and the safety was off.

Sgt. Lask quickly retrieved his patrol car and raced Sgt. Collins to Beaumont Hospital. The subject was transported to the same facility, where he was pronounced dead.

It was a tragic incident, but there is no doubt that it could have been much worse had Sergeants Lask and Collins not brought it to a close when they did. After using great restraint until the very moment restraint was no longer an option, they protected not only themselves, but also the many other officers in the immediate area who might otherwise have been injured or killed.

Sergeant Matthew Collins and Sergeant Gary Lask, you showed great courage by rushing into extreme peril in order to help colleagues who were in great jeopardy. You performed with outstanding professional discipline and judgment from the moment you arrived at the scene to the ultimate step you were forced to take. Your actions throughout the chaotic course of events, taken at your own considerable risk, protected the lives of many others.

We are proud to salute you with POAM's 2013 Police Officer of the Year Awards.

Officer Nick Cazan, your instantaneous first-aid assistance to Sgt. Collins, which you began before it was even certain that the shooter had been incapacitated, was a brave and selfless act on behalf of a fellow officer. We honor you with POAM's 2013 Distinguished Service Award.

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