

Detective had been at farmhouse before shooting - Kalamazoo Gazette (MI) - January 28, 2018 - page A5

January 28, 2018 | Kalamazoo Gazette (MI) | Al Jones ajones5@mlive.com | Page A5

Michigan State Police said a detective who was shot while trying to serve a search warrant at a farmhouse Wednesday in rural Branch County had been to that house before — without a problem.

In addition, troopers have said they don't know why the homeowner, identified as **David Kidney**, 62, opened fire on the detective and another trooper.

"It was readily apparent they were police officers," Michigan State Police 1st Lt. Dale Hinz said of the two troopers who knocked on Kidney's door about 11:15 a.m. Wednesday. "They had police markings and a search warrant for the residence. But Mr. Kidney decided that he was going to meet them with a long gun."

Hinz said state police Detective Sgt. Aaron Steensma previously had been to the house in the 500 block of Francisco Road in Union Township without incident.

He said offering a reason why the homeowner attacked "would be complete speculation by me."

State police command officers have said Kidney grabbed a rifle after the officers knocked at the door. Steensma and Trooper Daniel Thayer quickly took cover and called for help, but shots were fired after Kidney came out of the house and then ran into a field.

Kidney died as a result of a single wound suffered during the exchange of gunfire with the troopers. He was found in a field south of his residence.

Steensma suffered a gunshot wound to his upper chest, in the area of his collarbone. He was listed in serious condition Friday at Borgess Medical Center after undergoing surgery Wednesday.

Police said although Thayer was struck in the center of his chest by a rifle shot, he was not seriously injured. The shot was deflected by a bulletproof vest he was wearing. He sustained a shrapnel wound to one of his hands, troopers said.

The officers went to Kidney's house Wednesday to look for a gun registered to Kidney and to collect a DNA sample. Referring to the gun, Detective 1st Lt. Chuck Christensen said, "It was another investigative lead that detectives were following up on."

LEAD DETECTIVE ON COLD CASE

A little more than a year ago, the state police Special Investigations Section began working with the Branch County Sheriff's Office to pool resources and try to solve the 2009 homicide of Duane

Finney, 62, of Coldwater.

Christensen, who oversees SIS, assigned Steensma to be lead detective in the case. It has received the combined resources of the two police agencies and the attention of up to 26 officers, off and on, since the investigation was reopened.

Finney was found shot to death behind the wheel of his car May 12, 2009. He was about a mile from his home in Coldwater, but apparently had left home a few hours earlier, headed to work.

"We're still actually trying to determine a motive on that," Christensen said of the Finney homicide. "There was still nothing that presented a motive."

Kidney was a former neighbor of Finney in Coldwater, officers confirmed.

The weapon used in that incident was never recovered, Christensen said. While he said troopers ultimately completed the search Steensma and Thayer tried to conduct at the farmhouse, he would not say what they found or where things stand with that investigation.

Asked Thursday if he knew what caused Wednesday's shootout near Union City, Christensen said, "No, not at this point."

Of Kidney, he said, "I think he had some circumstances going in his personal life that may have caused some of this. But we're still trying to determine what it was."

Kidney suffered the loss of a few family members in the past few years, including the December death of his wife of 26 years.

The command officers said they did not know what Kidney did for a living or whether he was retired.

Among things they did say:

› Kidney's death does not put an end to the Finney homicide investigation. › Kidney's teenage grandson was in the farmhouse when the shooting incident began. Hinz said the teen, who was estimated to be 18 or 19 years old and was described as disabled, apparently was asleep when the incident started and was not involved in the incident.

› Thayer, whose hand wound did not require hospital treatment, will be on paid leave pending an investigation of Wednesday's shooting. Hinz said that is the case "anytime we have an officer-involved shooting."

› Wednesday's incident will be investigated by detectives from the Michigan State Police's Sixth District, which is based in Rockford.