

## **'A team leader' - Lifelong friends recall - Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA) - January 21, 2018 - page A9**

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Andy Kline had expected to see his lifelong friend Christopher Hill this weekend, when Hill planned to visit his father in rural Union County.

Hill, a deputy U.S. marshal who lived in Conewago Township, York County, was shot and killed Thursday while serving a warrant in Harrisburg. Another officer was wounded in the exchange that ended when police shot and killed Hill's assailant.

The death of the 45-year-old Hill, hailed by law enforcement around the nation as a hero, has devastated the community around Warrior Run High School, in the rural area between Allenwood and New Columbia where Hill grew up.

"It's a total shock," said Cathy Grow, who graduated from the high school in 1991, one year after Hill.

"He was a super nice guy," Grow said. "He would do anything for anyone."

His friends said that when they think of Hill, they remember his smile.

"Every time he greeted you he had the biggest smile," Kline said "He never complained about anything. Everything he did was positive."

"You knew Chris was in the room from his smile and laugh," said Shamokin Dam Police Chief Tim Bremigen, another friend since childhood. "He always had a way of motivating."

Kline's friendship with Hill began in kindergarten in Watsontown Elementary School in 1976. The two and three other friends had remained close.

"We had a tight group of friends," Kline said.

Kline invited Hill to his cabin last weekend, but Hill chose to stay home and attend one of his children's athletic events, Kline said. Hill was on the road a lot, so liked to spend time with his wife and two young children when he was home, Kline said.

But Hill and Kline had planned to get together this weekend, when Hill was going to visit his father, John, who still lives in Union County.

There was a lot of open space near the home and Kline said the two spent many hours hunting and fishing around there when they were young.

Hill was captain of the high school track team. As a running back on the football team, he rushed for nearly 1,000 yards, Kline said.

Warrior Run School District records show Hill, in his senior season in 1989, led the team with 966 yards rushing. He scored 11 touchdowns and caught eight passes.

"He was very much a team leader," Bremigen said.

After high school Kline and Hill both attended Waynesburg College in western Pennsylvania. Hill left school to become an Army ranger.

He could rock climb, repel and parachute, Kline said.

"He wanted to be the best at everything he did," he said.

And by all accounts, Hill was among the best.

He served in Afghanistan, worked in Washington, D.C., and rose to the top of the U.S. Marshal's Service, according to the leader of the agency.

Hill had been working out of the Harrisburg office since 2009 after a stint in Washington, D.C. The following year, he was assigned to the prestigious "special operations group," with a focus on fugitive apprehension, according to U.S. Marshal Martin Pane. The group members represent the top one percent of deputy marshals, he said.

The group is highly trained, and its members would have been prepared for any assignment or situation, Pane said.

"You don't get into that unit unless you have special skill sets," Pane said at a news conference Thursday, eight hours after Hill was mortally wounded. "T actically... you probably would not find a better tactical operator in the state of Pennsylvania."

Pane called Hill: "the cream of the crop."

Hill was inside a house in the 1800 block of Mulberry Street about 6:10 a.m. Thursday with two other officers and they had arrested a woman on an outstanding warrant. The woman, Shayla Lynette Towles Pierce, was in handcuffs.

That's when bullets suddenly rained down from the second-floor, from the top of the stairs, hitting Hill and another member of the task force, Kyle Pitts, officials said.

Pitts is also an officer of the York City Police Department. Pitts was wounded in the right elbow. He underwent surgery on Thursday, and is expected to survive.

Additional officers opened the back door and pulled out their wounded comrades.

The gunman, identified by police as **Kevin Sturgis**, 31, of Philadelphia, then ran downstairs and

fired at officers as he barged out the front door, according to officials. A Harrisburg officer struck by a projectile that hit his bullet-resistant vest fired back at Sturgis, killing him.

Pierce, 30, was wanted by the Harrisburg Bureau of Police on charges of illegal possession of a firearm, a third degree felony, simple assault and terroristic threats.

U.S. Attorney David Freed said the gunman, Sturgis, was wanted on one warrant for failure to appear for sentencing on a charge of persons not to possess firearms, a second-degree felony.

He also was wanted on a second warrant for failure to appear for a violation of probation hearing on original charges of receiving stolen property, unlawful possession of a controlled substance and unauthorized use of a motor vehicle.

Sturgis also had a juvenile adjudication (analogous to a criminal conviction in adult court) on a charge of rape, according to the U.S. attorney's office.

The nature of Sturgis' relationship with Pierce was unclear, although neighbors said he was her boyfriend. She was committed to Dauphin County Prison in lieu of \$200,000 bail.

As part of Hill's career, Hill commanded a group of marshals involved in the drawn-out manhunt through dense forests for Eric Frein in 2014 after Frein killed a state trooper and wounded a second trooper in an ambush.

Hill also was a firearms instructor and trained in explosives used to help distract suspects as officers enter buildings, which is known as "breaching."

Pane said Hill won the U.S. Marshals Service Distinguished Group award for "significant contributions" in an effort to establish a judicial system in Afghanistan.

"This is a man who served his country over there with the U.S. Marshals Service, helping to stand up justice," Pane said. "But this morning, Deputy Hill made the ultimate sacrifice."

Hill previously served in the Army from 1993 to 1996, including an overseas assignment to Afghanistan.

Every year, Hill and his four childhood friends would get together for an outing at Eagle Mere, Kline said. This year, when they gather in March, there will be a hole in the close-knit group.

"It's going to be hard for us," Kline said.

Staff writer Christine Vendel contributed to this report.

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