

Gunman still gets blame for death, police say - Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA) - March 4, 2018 - page A22

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Tragedy upon tragedy.

That summed up the immediate reaction to the news Thursday that the Jan. 18 shooting death of Deputy U.S. Marshal Christopher Hill in Harrisburg was caused by friendly fire from other police on the scene.

But there was another train of thought, too, at least in law enforcement circles.

And that was, that, even though ballistics tests now show **Kevin Sturgis** — the Philadelphia fugitive who police say opened fire on them during an early morning warrant service — didn't fire the shot that killed Hill, those results in no way exonerate Sturgis, or change the grand arc of the story.

"It's a tragedy the way it happened, but Mr. Sturgis started shooting first," said Harrisburg Police Chief Thomas Carter. "Due to the fact he instigated the incident, it doesn't change anything.

"My heart goes out to the Hill family."

The point was hammered home in this statement released Thursday by the U.S. Marshals Service:

"On January 18, Deputy U.S. Marshal Christopher Hill died in the line of duty in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, while executing an arrest warrant on a female defendant who was wanted by the Harrisburg Bureau of Police for terroristic threat offenses.

"While executing the warrant, Deputy Hill and his arrest team were fired upon by another subject in the house — a male, convicted felon who was wanted for attempted murder of his pregnant girlfriend. During this tragic incident, Deputy Hill was struck by a round that passed through a wall in the residence.

"Initial indications suggested that one of the shots fired by the assailant had struck and killed Deputy Hill. Today, the preliminary FBI forensics and ballistics review indicates that the round which struck Deputy Hill was fired by a fellow law enforcement officer who was engaged in a gun battle with the assailant.

"Deputy Hill made the ultimate sacrifice while executing a lawful arrest warrant on a female suspect wanted for terroristic threats. That fact remains," the statement continues.

"He died a hero while protecting his community from dangerous criminals like the female defendant and the male assailant who opened fire on his team. Those facts remain unchanged

too.

“The results of the FBI’s review do not diminish the heroic acts of Deputy Hill or his team. A convicted felon opened fire on law enforcement officers and ultimately led to Deputy Hill’s unfortunate and untimely death. Those are the facts.

“USMS intends to conduct a thorough review of the official FBI report when it’s received and determine whether there are any lessons to be learned which may be appropriate to re-emphasize in training.”

Reached by telephone as the statement was coming out, Hill’s former boss Martin Payne, who leads the service’s office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, doubled down on Sturgis.

“The catalyst which led us here is a career convicted felon wanted on multiple warrants — the most serious of which was for firing six rounds at his pregnant girlfriend, and striking her with three — who opened fire on law enforcement officers, striking two of them,” Payne said.

Payne’s reference appeared to be to a separate case out of Philadelphia that Sturgis was apparently a suspect in.

That could answer the question about why an elite task force was sent to arrest a woman for a gun charge and two misdemeanors, especially when she had just appeared in court two weeks prior to the arrest warrant.

Some of Sturgis’s survivors had a different take.

While also expressing regret over Hill’s death, they said the new findings will be just as important to Sturgis’s friends and family going forward.

“I’m upset about it,” Jenea Sturgis, Kevin’s widow, told PennLive. “The whole world thinks he’s a murderer and he’s the one that killed that officer. Our kids have to see that” the facts show that he did not kill Hill.

As to the new layer of tragedy?

Payne covered that too Thursday, saying he and his colleagues wanted to thank “the people of the greater Harrisburg and York communities for their outpouring of support for the Hill family.

“We continue to ask that you keep them in your thoughts and prayers.”

Dauphin County District Attorney Fran Chardo said the task force members performed “very well under extremely stressful circumstances. Deputy Marshal Hill died a hero.

Staff writer Christine Vendel contributed to this report.