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Deputy sheriff's death a tragedy for entire community (7/2/11)

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The Issue: Kyle D. Pagerly is killed while attempting to serve a warrant.

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Our Opinion: The 28-year-old demonstrated throughout his short life a desire to serve his community and his nation.

The senseless murder of Deputy Sheriff Kyle D. Pagerly was a sobering reminder of the dangers that law-enforcement officials willingly face on a daily basis. He was the first Berks County deputy to die in the line of service.

Pagerly, 28, an Army veteran of Kosovo and Iraq, where he served as a member of the military police, was part of a task force that included members of the Berks County sheriff's office, state police and U.S. marshals, who attempted to serve a warrant on 25-year-old Matthew M. Connor, who, according to his father, has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and related disorders.

One of two K-9 officers in the sheriff's department, Pagerly was alerted by Jynx, his K-9 partner, to the presence of Connor, who had taken cover in a sniper's nest at the top of a steep, wooded hill.

Connor, dressed in full camouflage, refused an order to drop his semi-automatic rifle and opened fire, mortally wounding the deputy. Task force members returned fire killing Connor.

Most people are familiar with the dangers that police face on a daily basis, but they probably are far less familiar with the threats that members of the sheriff's department face every time they serve a warrant or transport a prisoner. Deputies, like police officers, put themselves in harm's way, often dealing with the dregs of society. The jobs performed by the deputies help allow the law-abiding members of society to sleep better at night.

Often the deputies never know what they might face when they knock on a door to serve a warrant. It could be an otherwise good citizen who simply forgot he was supposed to report for jury duty, or it could be someone who has no intention of facing the court system and will do anything to get away.

In a bit of an ironic twist, Pagerly and the other task force members did have a good idea what they would face when they went to serve Connor. Earlier in the week Connor had threatened members of his family, firing several shots from a handgun into the ground. Despite the danger, Pagerly willingly went looking for the suspect.

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That was in keeping with Pagerly's all-too-short career of public service. In addition to his job as a deputy and his service as a member of the military police in the Army, he also was a volunteer firefighter with the Spring Township Fire Department, having started while still in high school as a junior firefighter. He rose to the rank of lieutenant.

The death of any law-enforcement official in the line of duty is a tragic event. It is a devastating loss not only to the deputy's immediate family - he and wife Alecia had been married in 2007 - but also to his larger family of fellow deputies, police and firefighters, who lined the streets of Reading and saluted, many with tears streaming down their cheeks, as Pagerly's body was taken from a Lehigh County hospital to a West Reading funeral home.

In addition, it is a loss to the entire Berks County community, which Pagerly had sworn to serve and protect, and indeed, hundreds of residents also lined the streets and saluted in a show of respect as the hearse carrying Pagerly's body passed.

We join that salute, and we mourn the passing of a young man who made a career - all too short - out of service to his community, his county and his nation.

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