

Sheriff



Larry Ashley, Okaloosa County Sheriff

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January 30, 2012

INVESTIGATOR RECEIVES MEDAL OF VALOR AND PURPLE HEART



From left to right: Investigators Steve Hough, Jeff McGill, John Merchant and Todd Watkins

An Okaloosa County Sheriff's Investigator shot three times while working to take a violent fugitive into custody received the Medal of Valor from the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office today. His fellow OCSO officers involved in the incident were also recognized for their bravery.

Investigator Steve Hough was working outside the suspect's Milton home December 9th, 2011 as part of a U-S Marshals Service perimeter team. There was very little area to provide cover and the suspect, Christopher Lewis, abruptly came out of the house with guns in each hand and began firing at officers. Investigator Hough returned fire but was shot once in the face and two times in the leg. Lewis did not stop firing until all his ammunition was gone. Lewis received multiple gunshot wounds that eventually proved fatal.

Investigator Hough put himself at personal risk to ensure Lewis did not escape, knowing the threat he posed to others.

In awarding Hough the "Medal of Valor", Sheriff Larry Ashley said Investigator Hough "performed in an exemplary manner exhibiting bravery, professionalism, rigid self-discipline, commitment, selflessness and courage under extreme duress."



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Three additional Okaloosa deputies working with the Marshals Service during the incident also received honors.

During the firefight, OCSO Investigator Todd Watkins's weapon malfunctioned. Watkins, holding a ballistics shield, attempted to move to position himself between the advancing suspect and his fallen partner. The shield was hit by multiple rounds. As the suspect was downed, Investigator Watkins got Investigator Hough out of the immediate area and began aid. Investigator Watkins was awarded the "Medal of Valor".

Investigators Jeff McGill and John Merchant received the OCSO "Medal of Merit" award. During the firefight, they moved to more tactical positions to aid fellow officers and prevent Lewis from escaping. When the suspect was downed by law enforcement gunfire, McGill moved immediately to help Investigator Hough and evacuate him to a nearby hospital. Investigator Merchant and others entered the dwelling to make sure it didn't contain additional threats to those giving aid to Investigator Hough.

Hough was also presented a special plaque from the Military Order of the Purple Heart's First Responders Program.

Sheriff Larry Ashley said all four officers upheld the highest standards of the law enforcement profession.

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