



Department of Justice

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THREE OUTSTANDING AGENTS

WHO INVESTIGATED SHERIFF MATT SAMUELS' MURDER

RECEIVE GUARDIAN OF JUSTICE AWARDS

ATF agent Neal Tierney (Wichita), and KBI agents Bill Halvorsen (Topeka) and Robert Jacobs (Wichita) receive awards from U.S. Attorney Eric Melgren

KANSAS CITY, KAN. – Within hours after Sheriff Matt Samuels was shot at a rural home in Greenwood County, Neal Tierney, Bill Halvorsen and Robert Jacobs were on the scene.

“They could not have known on that cold day in January 2005 that the killing of Matt Samuels would dominate their lives for the next three years,” said U.S. Attorney Eric Melgren.

On Wednesday, Tierney, an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; and Halvorsen and Jacobs, both agents with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, received Guardian of Justice awards for their work on the investigation. Melgren presented the awards during a luncheon at the Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee’s annual conference in Kansas City, Kan.

In January 2008, three years after Samuels’ killing, Scott Cheever was sentenced to death for the Samuels’ murder. Evidence presented at trial showed that Samuels was killed on Jan. 19, 2005, when he went to a rural

home in Greenwood County to arrest Cheever, who was wanted on multiple arrest warrants. Samuels did not know that Cheever was producing methamphetamine in the upstairs portion of the house. Tipped off that Samuels was coming, Cheever waited at the top of the stairs and shot Samuels twice with a .44 caliber revolver. During the next few hours, Cheever exchanged fire with deputies and a SWAT team from the Kansas Highway Patrol before surrendering.

BILL HALVORSEN

At the scene of the killing, Halvorsen was placed in charge. His job was to bring order to the chaotic situation on the day of the murder and to manage the investigation during the following days. When Cheever surrendered, Halvorsen took charge of him. The detailed reports Halvorsen produced would become critical later at trial when Cheever argued that he was too intoxicated by drugs to know what he was doing when he killed Samuels. While Halvorsen interviewed Cheever in the back of an ambulance, he noted that Cheever would act confused when asked questions about the crime, while at the same time he seemed clear headed when answering medical questions from the EMTs.

Later, Halvorsen obtained a key piece of evidence in the case. It was a letter that an inmate in the Lyon County Jail had received from Cheever. Halvorsen negotiated the receipt of the letter, which turned out to be a description of the killing written by Cheever while he was in the Lyon County Jail. Again, Cheever's detailed recollections flew in the face of his drug intoxication defense.

ROBERT JACOBS

Robert Jacobs worked mostly behind the scenes on the investigation, following leads and concentrating on preparing for the penalty phase of the trial, which prosecutors believed would be the most difficult part of their work. Even if Cheever's defense of drug intoxication was not successful in preventing him from being convicted, it could still be used to argue that he should not receive the death penalty.

"Robert was very steady," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Lanny Welch, who assisted the Kansas Attorney General's office in the prosecution. "He was always there when we needed him."

NEAL TIERNEY

Tierney was the face of federal law enforcement during the investigation. The way he worked with state, local and other federal law enforcement officers helped head off turf battles and keep the focus on building a case against Samuels' killer.

"I mean this as a compliment – Neal is a man without an ego," Welch said. "He works hour after hour and he doesn't waste time worrying about whether he's going to be recognized for it or not."

Tierney's job at the crime scene was to examine firearms and run traces. In fact, he did anything he could to assist the investigation, large or small. He suggested constructing a model of the house where Samuels was shot. The real house burned down before trial and the model became a valuable tool for showing the jury exactly what happened during the shooting.

“It would be a pleasure simply to thank these outstanding law enforcement officers for their work,” Melgren said. “It is even more satisfying to draw everyone’s attention to what they have done and to say: We should all try to do our jobs like this.”

Guardian of Justice awards are given annually to federal and state or local law enforcement officers in recognition of outstanding service provided in the prosecution of significant cases by the United States Attorney’s office. The awards are the highest recognition given to a member of the law enforcement community by the United States Attorney’s office. Nominations for the awards come from prosecuting attorneys who worked with the nominees.

For more information, call Jim Cross, public information office, at (316) 269-6481.

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