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Slain VPSO was trying to run when he was shot, troopers say

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VPSO Thomas Madole

ALASKA STATE TROOPERS

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A Manokotak man told state troopers he shot and killed a village public safety officer moments after the officer knocked on his door. The VPSO, 54-year-old Thomas Madole, was about 20 paces from the man's porch and trying to run when the man opened fire, he said.

Leroy B. Dick Jr., 42, described the shooting to troopers after surrendering Tuesday night, according to first-degree murder charges filed Wednesday in state court. The killing of the former Assembly of God pastor marks just the second time a village public safety officer has died in the line of duty, and the first since 1986.

"(Dick) didn't know how many times he fired his rifle," a trooper sergeant wrote in the criminal complaint. "(He) said he was angry, and he knew what he did was wrong."

Despite a detailed confession outlined in the charges, Dick's motives remained clouded a day after the shooting as Gov. Sean Parnell ordered state flags flown at half-mast Thursday.

Residents of the Bristol Bay village and Bethel churchgoers remembered the victim as a man drawn to law enforcement late in life. He wanted a challenge, said village city administrator Nancy George, to step out from behind the pulpit and help people hands-on.

"He thought being a VPSO would give him that chance to reach out to people. And he did," said George, who interviewed Madole before his hire as a village officer two years ago.

This is how he was killed, according to a trooper affidavit filed Wednesday in support of the murder charge.

"POSSIBLE SUICIDAL PERSON"

Trained by the state at a 10-week academy, VPSOs work for nonprofit agencies to keep the peace in villages. They are supervised by the state and generally prohibited from carrying guns.

At 3:24 p.m. Tuesday, Madole contacted a trooper sergeant in Dillingham to say he planned to investigate a report of a "possible suicidal person" in the old village of Manokotak, the trooper affidavit said.

It's customary for VPSOs to alert troopers to their plans, said trooper Col. Keith Mallard. About a half-hour after the first call, Madole contacted Dillingham troopers again to say he had learned Dick might have somehow hurt his stepfather, causing minor injuries.

Madole first spoke with Dick's mother, Olga Dick, the charges say. He talked about an accusation that Dick had slapped his stepfather in the face. In interviews with troopers, Leroy Dick later said he learned from his mother sometime that afternoon that "someone was going to be coming over to see him."

Dick retrieved his rifle and loaded it "because he thought police were coming over to his residence," he told troopers, according to the affidavit.

Leaving Olga Dick's house, Madole walked to the son's home. He knocked on Dick's door again and again, Dick told troopers.

Dick said he told the VPSO he didn't want to talk. When the VPSO kept knocking, Dick said, it made him angry. He grabbed his rifle and chambered a round, according to troopers.

Dick stood near the doorway and saw Madole about 20 paces away. "Leroy said he saw VPSO Madole look at him, and VPSO Madole ran, and then Leroy shot VPSO Madole," the affidavit says.

CALLS FOR HELP

Nancy George, the city administrator who once interviewed Madole for the public safety job, lives in the same neighborhood as the shooting. Her teenage children were fresh home from school and thumbing through text messages when they heard the racket, she said.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

They thought it was simply the sound of hammers, George said. A new house is being built next door to Dick's home.

Others knew something was wrong.

Olga Dick told troopers that the VPSO had been gone from her home just 10 to 15 minutes when she heard the gunfire. She called for help on the VHF radio, according to the affidavit.

A village health aide reported the sound of gunshots to troopers at about 4:15 p.m., the affidavit says. (Troopers initially said shots were reported around 5 p.m.) Normally a second VPSO works in the village, but was out of town on training at the time, Mallard said.

At least three troopers made the short flight from Dillingham to the village of about 440 people to investigate.

Dick remained in the home, where he spoke to a trooper sergeant on the phone, according to the charges. Dick told the trooper he had shot and killed Madole and agreed to leave his house, unarmed.

He later told troopers that he cleaned his .223 rifle after the shooting, placing it in his gun locker.

Madole's body was discovered about 60 feet from Dick's front door, according to troopers. Investigators found about six rifle shell casings near the doorway. Another casing lie beside the body, the affidavit says.

Madole's body was being flown to Anchorage Wednesday for an autopsy that will determine how many times he was shot, Mallard said. Citing the "facts of the case," Mallard said he did not believe the shooting would have been prevented had Madole been carrying a gun.

"A MAN OF GOD"

Dick is a longtime Manokotak resident who held commercial Bristol Bay fishing permits from 1993 to 2004. His criminal record includes no-contest pleas for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest in 1995 and assault, drunken driving and fourth-degree escape in 1997, among other charges.

Dick showed no sign that he had been drinking or taking drugs the night of the shooting, the charges said.

George, the city administrator, said she went to school with the accused shooter.

"Of all the people, he had to pick Tom? Our cop?" she said. "He wasn't just a cop. He was more of a friend. More of a role model for many young kids that went to school."

Madole is the first VPSO killed in the line of duty since the death of Ronald Zimin in October 1986. Zimin was shot in the chest while responding to a report of a disturbance in South Naknek, also in the Bristol Bay region, according to reports at the time.

Madole had lived in Alaska since about 2000, Mallard said. He served as a pastor for the Assembly of God Church in Bethel for about six years before working as a security guard and, beginning in August 2011, as a VPSO in Manokotak, he said.

"Everybody I talked to ... (speaks) the world of him," Mallard said.

A Bethel Assembly of God church board member, Patricia Zulkosky, said Madole was well-liked during his tenure as a senior pastor. A non-drinker, non-smoker who seemed to practice what he preached.

"He was a man of God, he walked his talk," she said.

Madole is survived by two adult children and his wife, Luan. He seemed to be interested in becoming an Alaska State Trooper but was too old to start a career with the agency, Zulkosky said.

Dick was being held Wednesday at the Dillingham police department, according to an automatic inmate tracking service.

He made his first court appearance the murder charge Wednesday morning in Dillingham, according to radio station KDLG.

He initially refused legal help, the radio station reported. "To be honest, I could say I'm guilty of the crime," he told the magistrate.

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