

# Test shows driver fatally shot by deputy was legally drunk

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

The blood-alcohol level of Jeffrey D. Eggart was .18 percent, the driver shot and killed by an Oakland County deputy sheriff who was being dragged along Joslyn Road in rush-hour traffic was almost twice the level state law defines as intoxicated, according to an autopsy performed by the Oakland County Medical Examiner.

The blood-alcohol level of Jeffrey D. Eggart was .18 percent, according to Dr. Ljubisa J. Dragovic, who did an autopsy on the 34-year-old man Wednesday. Under Michigan law, a blood-alcohol level of .10 percent is legally drunk.

Eggart, whose driver's license listed his address as Madison Heights, was killed about 5 p.m. Tuesday as he attempted to drive away from a deputy who had approached his car stalled in traffic at I-75 in Auburn Hills.

Eggart was holding on to the deputy's arm — dragging him along northbound Joslyn — as the car accelerated, according to officers from the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.

In fear for his life, the deputy, David Ross, drew his service pistol and fired once at the driver, who was subsequently identified as Eggart, according to Capt. Barnett Jones, the principal spokesman at a press conference Wednesday.

Eggart was struck in the head and died within seconds, according to the medical examiner. His car, which witnesses said was gaining speed, then veered off the highway and crashed, according to Jones.

Investigators have not finished talking with Ross and another deputy, Richard Ryan, who is also assigned to the Orion Township substation. Jones emphasized that "we don't know exactly what transpired."

But preliminary reports indi-

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**Capt. Barnett Jones**  
**Oakland County Sheriff/Dept.**

cate Ross and Ryan both performed their duties reasonably and professionally, emphasized Sheriff John F. Nichols, also present at the conference.

Even so, a full report of the incident will be presented to the Oakland County prosecutor's office for review. "That's a standard procedure on a fatal shooting," said under sheriff Henry Buffa.

One thing certain, according to officials, is both officers were lucky to have sustained only minor injuries.

They went through a "traumatic" experience requiring the use of fatal force, said Jones. At this point the department is more concerned about their mental and psychological state than the bruises, cuts and contusions, he said.

Jones declined to answer questions about items in the trunk of the car driven by Eggart. "One of the television stations speculated" the items might be significant, he said, "but I won't comment on that."

The deputies sustained relatively minor injuries in what started out as a routine traffic stop on northbound I-75 between Lapeer and Joslyn roads, according to Jones. "The entire incident took about eight minutes," he said.

Ryan radioed that he was stopping a vehicle and asked for the equipment needed to perform a preliminary breath test — usually administered to a driver suspected to have been drinking — said Jones.

Moments later, Ryan radioed in that he had been injured and the vehicle was fleeing north on I-75, said the captain. There was no explanation as to how Ryan was injured.

Deputy Ross encountered the fleeing vehicle when it exited I-75 at Joslyn and was delayed in the rush hour traffic. "Ross had radioed in asking for a description of the car and a license plate," Jones said. "He knew what he had."

Investigators are not sure about the ensuing conversation, Jones said, but at some point Ross reached through the driver window and attempted to take the keys from the ignition.

"The driver held Ross' arm and started to drive off," the captain said. At least five people witnessed the incident, including some who estimated the vehicle hit speeds approaching 45 miles per hour, he said.

"We know Ross warned the driver," said Jones. What happened next wasn't clear.

After Ross fired his pistol, the deputy dropped from the moving car and fell to the pavement, Jones said. The deputy rolled off the pavement to avoid oncoming traffic, he said.

Parts of what was identified as the uniform Ross was wearing were displayed for photographers. The shirt and trousers were torn and soiled, the leather belt and shoes had extensive scrape marks.

Jones emphasized both officers performed their duties reasonably and professionally. "Deputy Ross feared for his life and only fired his weapon when it appeared the driver was trying to terminate his life," said Jones, "that was a reasonable judgment."

Under sheriff Henry Buffa, who accompanied Jones and Nichols at the podium, said, "That would be mine, too."

## Oakland newspapers win 25 awards

The Oakland County editions of The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers captured 25 awards in the Michigan Press Association's 1997 Better Newspaper Contest.

The Observer & Eccentric competed in Class B — weekly or twice-weekly newspapers with a circulation between 10,001 and 25,000.

The West Bloomfield-Lakes Eccentric won eight awards, including Newspaper of the Year in its circulation class based on total points accumulated in all contest categories. It took second place for General Excellence and first place for Design. It placed both first and third for Enterprise Feature (Pat Murphy and Greg Kowalski, respectively).

Other first-place winners included the Lake Orion Eccentric for Editorial Pages (editor Gerald Frayley), the Clarkston Eccentric for Editorial Writing (editor Karen Hermes Smith) and Local Columns (reporter Carolyn Walker), the Troy Eccentric for Spot News Picture (photographer John Stormzand) and the Oxford Eccentric for Sports Column (sports editor Brad Kadrich).

In the Special section category, the Observer & Eccentric took first place for Eccentricure, its spring fashion magazine edited by retail editor Susan DeMaggio.

Observer & Eccentric opinion columnist Judith Doner Berne of West Bloomfield, who writes for many of the Oakland County editions, placed second for Local Columns for the second straight year. The topics of her award-winning columns included elderly residents Ernie Harwell and Cecelia "C" Himes, both of whom are so vital at their age; the sensitive sentencing of Tsunami Kaga of Farmington Hills by Circuit Judge Jessica Cooper; and the sad effects of the burning of playgrounds in Southfield.

Other award winners were: ■ West Bloomfield-Lakes Eccentric — Picture Story, Honorable Mention (photographer Dan Dean); Sports Column, honorable mention (sports editor Bill Parker); Sports Coverage, third place (sports editor Bill Parker).

■ Birmingham-Bloomfield Eccentric — Local News Reporting, second place (reporter Sally Tatro); Sports Feature, second place (sports reporter Chris Mayer).

■ Southfield Eccentric — Human Interest Feature, second place (reporter Sue Buck); Editorial Writing, third place (editor Wayne Peal).

■ Troy Eccentric-Editorial Writing, second place (editor Alice Collins); Sports Coverage, honorable mention (sports editor Jim Totli).

■ Farmington Observer — Spot News Picture, second place (photographer Sharon LeMieux); Local News Reporting, third place (former Farmington editor Tom Baer now with the Rochester Eccentric, reporter Larry O'Connor, former reporter Bill Coutant).

■ Oxford Eccentric — Sports Writing, third place (sports editor Brad Kadrich).

■ Rochester Eccentric — Sports Coverage, honorable mention (sports editor Jim Totli).

"We're equally proud of all our award winners," said Bob Sklar, Oakland County managing editor. "Such sweeping recognition from our peers underscores the dedication and skill level of our writers, photographers and editors. Plainly put, we're deeply committed to meeting reader needs professionally and creatively in the homepages that we serve."

Newspaper of the Year winners will receive plaques at the MPA's winter convention Jan. 30 in Grand Rapids. Members of the North Carolina Press Association evaluated 3,000 entries submitted by 148 Michigan newspapers in three circulation classes during this year's Better Newspaper Contest. The Lansing-based MPA is a state association serving daily and weekly newspapers since 1888.

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