

03/21/2022

SGT Ross Livingood
Willmar Police Department
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RE: Award Nominations

Dear SOTA Award Committee,

I am writing to nominate Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer for the Meritorious Service Award. Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer is an Operator on the Willmar Police Department SWAT Team. I feel that Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer's actions on the night of 01/15/2022 were an example of exceptional performance and are worthy of recognition.

Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer has worked with the Willmar Police Department since 2018 as a Patrol Officer and during that time had expressed interest in getting onto our SWAT Team. He often attended SWAT training off duty on his own time to gain experience and consistently demonstrated good judgment and tactics and a commitment to training and bettering himself. In 2021, Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer got a position on our SWAT Team.

On the night of 01/15/2022 an anonymous tip was received by police, which linked a partial license plate to a wanted fugitive who was considered armed and dangerous. While working a patrol shift Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer made the extra effort to purposefully searched for this vehicle and located it. Upon locating the suspect vehicle, Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer immediately notified dispatch and other on duty officers of his location and of what he had found. Before other officers could respond to the area the suspect vehicle attempt to evade Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer and he initiated a traffic stop. The passenger of the vehicle then exited the vehicle and fled on foot. Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer recognized the fleeing party as the fugitive that he was looking for and immediately gave chase.

During the brief chase Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer showed good judgment and used excellent tactics such as; having his handgun drawn, using his weapon light to blind the suspect, and taking hard corners wide to give himself a better view before exposing himself needlessly. These sound tactics likely helped save Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer life when the fleeing suspect stopped and produced a handgun after going around a corner. The suspect immediately fired his handgun at Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer when he came around the corner after him. Fortunately, Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer was not hit and I believe this was in part to him using his light to blind the suspect and taking the corner wide.

Immediately after being shot at Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer dove for cover and called out on the radio that shots were fired and advised responding officer of the suspect's direction of travel. Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer, having lost sight of the suspect, made the correct tactical decision to move back around to the other side of the garage to prevent the suspect from flanking him or from returning to the vehicle or residence. This was a much better choice than following directly after the suspect who is believed to have been hiding and waiting for him. Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer then made his way back to the suspect's vehicle where he held the north perimeter while other responding officers got into the area and set up the rest of the perimeter. During this time Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer remained calm and in control and communicated that he did not need immediate help from other officers which allowed them to focus on maintaining and setting up a strong perimeter.

Once a perimeter had been established, it was determined that the suspect was likely still in the area. The Willmar Police Department and the Kandiyohi County SWAT Teams were then called out to begin a search for the suspect. Despite having just been involved in a high stress incident Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer maintained a calm and professional demeanor and was able and willing to kit up and transition over into his SWAT Team role. Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer then provided valuable assistance during the SWAT operations that followed.

Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer assisted during the manhunt with other SWAT units in locating the suspects last known location and tracking the suspect from the scene of the shooting to where he was hiding in a garage. He then assisted in what turned into a stand off by providing cover and assistance to the SWAT Team while; the garage access door was breached, a tactical robot was deployed, callouts were given and while gas was deployed. Eventually, the overhead garage door was breached and contact was made with the suspect. An arrest team, which included Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer, then deployed a less lethal shotgun and approached the suspect and Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer placed him in handcuffs and assisted with searching and getting medical attention for the suspect.

This incident lasted for over five hours. It began with Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer working proactively as he hunted for a fugitive, as a patrol officer, by taking extra steps to follow up on information we had received. Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer then acted bravely and intelligently both while he pursued the fleeing suspect and in the moments after he was shot at. Finally, Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer remained focused throughout the SWAT operations and continued demonstrating sound tactics and exceptional judgement under a prolonged stressful situation. For these achievements, I nominate Officer Joseph Schaeffbauer for the SOTA Meritorious Service Award.

Sincerely,

Sergeant Ross Livingood

Willmar Police Department