

SHOW OF SUPPORT



Kevin Motter parked his Jeep, with a thin blue line of painter's tape across the back window, in front of the Montpelier Police Station Friday as a show of support and solidarity for local law enforcement. **JENNIFER J. HELLARD/Staff**

More police officers finding themselves, sometimes literally, under fire

By LYNN THOMPSON

Times Reporter

MONTPELIER — Kevin Motter put painter's tape on the back window of his Jeep Friday afternoon just because it's a thin blue line and he wants people to see it. "It represents the thin blue line of law enforcement that separates victims from violence," he said. "It's a simple way of showing support and respect for those who defend law and order and protect our communities. "I was a police officer in North Carolina when the Rodney King beating happened in Los Angeles," he said. "Every cop in America was stigmatized by that and blamed for it. There was a lot of tension in the Deep South, lots of animosity. That was nothing like today. Nobody expounded rhetoric justifying attacks and ambushes on police back then. Nobody ever called for assassinations.

"Nobody needs that," he said. "You know they don't even believe it themselves. The problem is people on the edge, people not in full possession of their faculties, they take what they hear and they act on it." The Times caught up with Motter and his Jeep outside the United Veterans Organization building on Empire Street. We set up a photo shoot so the police station across the street would be in the background. Montpelier Police Chief Dan McGee came out to see what was going on. He shook Motter's hand and thanked him for the show of support, then started his own conversation.

“People always ask why we act the way we do,” he said. “It’s because of times like this — We don’t want to get shot. We have families and we want to go home at night. Everybody says it will never happen here and they’re right ... Until it does. Somebody shot at a state trooper on I-75 (in Toledo) last Sunday.”

The trooper’s name was Anthony Scherley. He was working a routine accident follow up, on his way to a hospital in Toledo to check on the victims, when he heard a bang and lost his brakes. The bullet hit the driver’s side front quarter panel and ripped through a brake line. The person who fired the shot was from Detroit and thought he was about to get pulled over.

Motter said the same thing could happen anywhere, even to reporters on live television, like in Roanoke, Virginia on Aug. 26. “That guy was nuts,” he said. “I saw the videos. (Reporter Alison Parker and videographer Adam Ward) were so focused on what they were doing they never saw the guy walk up and raise the gun ... Just keep your eyes open. If you see an officer focused on doing his job, keep an eye out. Yell. That’s all you have to do. You don’t even have to get involved. “The majority of people are honest and hard-working, dedicated to their families and their communities but the weak-minded take what they hear and do as their told,” Motter said. “The whole atmosphere is full of rabid rhetoric now.”

McGee said he was alright with people questioning things, even reporters. “If you think rights have been violated, dig in to it and ask the questions. Thoughtful questions and honest discussions help us do things better. Thoughtless chants don’t accomplish anything. “What frustrates me most is that the government hasn’t cracked down hard on those guys,” McGee continued. “They say they want police assassinated? Why haven’t they been labeled terrorists? The president was in office what, less than six months when that thing with the Boston cop and the college professor happened? It took him less than two minutes to step in. Ferguson? Somebody from the White House was down there that day. “A police officer has been shot in the line of duty every day this week and we haven’t heard anything,” McGee said. “The government isn’t willing to take a stand. A million police officers go to work every morning and never do anything wrong but they pass judgment on the whole lot.

“The state’s new Community-Police Collaborative Board? Yeah, that’s just propaganda,” the chief continued. “Millions spent for what? To tell us what we already know, what we’ve always known. Millions spent for political ambition. No wonder the public is frustrated.”

Motter blamed the rhetoric and violence on “a faction that’s constantly trying to separate society along lines, but they can’t do it to this one”.

“Can’t happen,” Motter said, “not between citizens and law enforcement. We separate the weak and powerless from those who would do them harm.”