

# Citizen saves deputy from being choked to death by Grand Island man

## Suspect threatened officer in July over towing of car driven by girlfriend

Sammy Abdellatif charged with attempted murder; his girlfriend Brittany Ashley-Graser, with assault.

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A Grand Island man almost succeeded this week in making good on his threat from last month to kill an Erie County deputy who had ordered his car towed following a traffic stop involving his girlfriend, authorities said.

But the deputy was saved by a citizen who saw the scuffle Wednesday night and intervened.

Sammy O. Abdellatif, with help from his girlfriend and their menacing pit bull, was choking the life out of Deputy Jason Clark when Peter O'Brien joined in the struggle, allowing the deputy to stagger away before collapsing in a ditch along East River Road near Whitehaven Road, Sheriff Timothy B. Howard said, recounting the harrowing incident Thursday.

But the battle was not yet over.

When Deputy Nicholas Coniglio arrived at the scene, Clark pointed at O'Brien and rasped out words letting his colleague know O'Brien had saved his life. Coniglio drew his gun on Abdellatif and ordered him to the ground, but Abdellatif refused to comply. Coniglio ordered several more times before he finally got down on the ground. Clark then crawled over and handcuffed him, Howard said.

When Abdellatif was escorted to a patrol vehicle, he allegedly kicked Coniglio, but eventually got into the vehicle.

Now Abdellatif, 22, is charged with attempted murder and if convicted could face up to 25 years to life in prison. His girlfriend, Brittany Ashley-Graser, 21, is charged with felony assault. Acting Erie County District Attorney Michael J. Flaherty Jr. said a grand jury will review the case.

"Thanks to God and Mr. O'Brien, Deputy Clark is home and celebrating life with his wife and two young children," Howard said at a Thursday afternoon news conference.

"If this civilian hadn't taken it upon himself to intervene, this could have easily resulted in a death," Flaherty said. "It's the second time since June something like this has happened."

Flaherty was referring to the teenager charged with trying to kill a Buffalo police officer who spotted a robbery in progress. The teenager allegedly jammed a handgun into Officer Anthony Fanara's chest and pulled the trigger twice after the officer tackled him. The handgun did not discharge because the safety lock was in place.

“It shows how vulnerable police officers are every time they go to work, even with something like a traffic stop,” Flaherty said.

Clark, 32, suffered neck injuries and will need further medical assessments to determine if the lack of oxygen caused any long-term effects, authorities said. He was released Thursday morning from Erie County Medical Center.

Wednesday night’s incident began as Clark was speaking to the occupants of a suspicious vehicle at a hotel on East River Road at about 8:30 p.m. No arrests were made, but during that investigation, a car drove by at least twice, and a passenger yelled threats and obscenities at Clark, Howard said.

Clark then pursued the second vehicle and stopped it. He identified the passenger making the threats as Abdellatif, the man who had been arrested on July 18 for threatening to kill him. In that incident, Clark made a traffic stop involving Abdellatif’s girlfriend Ashley-Graser, the sheriff’s department said. She was driving Abdellatif’s car with a broken light, police said. Because she refused to give her name or provide her driver’s license, Clark had the car towed.

Abdellatif was [charged July 18](#) with calling county dispatchers and threatening to kill Clark.

Wednesday night, as Clark questioned Abdellatif, he is accused of rolling up his window with the deputy’s arm still inside the car, Howard said. Clark was able to break the window to prevent his hand from getting trapped.

That’s when Abdellatif got out of the vehicle and began “physically and violently assaulting” the deputy, the sheriff said.

As Clark was gaining control over Abdellatif, Ashley-Graser got out and jumped on Clark’s back and that’s when the deputy started losing in the struggle, Howard explained, adding that a pit bull also got out of the vehicle and “was aggressive toward the deputy.”

It was at this time that O’Brien stopped to help Clark, the sheriff said.

Sheriff’s investigators are trying to determine how Abdellatif and his girlfriend happened to be in the area where Clark was investigating the suspicious vehicle.

Howard added that Clark had not been “stalking” or trying in any way to have an encounter with Abdellatif since his arrest in July.

Abdellatif and Ashley-Graser were being held at the Erie County Holding Center, pending their arraignments at 9:30 a.m. Friday in Grand Island Town Court.

O’Brien, who suffered a minor hand injury inflicted by the dog, has agreed to assist in the continuing investigation, the DA said.

As for the pit bull, Flaherty said animal control now has the dog in custody and its fate is unknown.