

Judge sentences driver who attacked deputy to 8 years in prison

By [Melinda Miller](#) | Published January 10, 2018 | Updated January 10, 2018

A Grand Island man who called in a death threat to an Erie County Sheriff's deputy and then later attacked and choked him during a traffic stop was sentenced Wednesday to eight years in prison. Sammy Abdellatif, 23, pleaded guilty in Erie County Court in August 2017 to a charge of attempted murder for his August 2016 attack on Deputy Jason Clark.

Abdellatif and Clark knew each other from a traffic incident earlier that summer that resulted in Clark having Abdellatif's car towed. Shortly after that happened, Abdellatif called Erie County dispatchers and threatened to kill Clark, which resulted in an aggravated harassment charge.

Then, on Aug. 24, 2016, Abdellatif reportedly targeted Clark by driving past him and taunting him, until the deputy pulled Abdellatif's car over on East River Road. Both men got out of their cars and a fight ensued. Abdellatif pinned down the deputy and choked him until he was unconscious. Before it went further, a retired dock worker driving by saw the fight, stopped his car and intervened, pulling Abdellatif off Clark.

On Wednesday, an emotional Clark said in court the only reason he is alive today is because of the actions of that man, a stranger. Turning to the defendant, Clark said, "Peter O'Brien, who wouldn't know me from a hole in the wall — he stopped you from completing the promise you made to kill me."

In tears, Clark described the fear his family felt when they received the call that something had happened to him; how he can't tell his children the truth about what occurred; and his countless sleepless nights, "feeling like I'm lying in that ditch, and I can't breathe." He also said that he would never accept an apology from Abdellatif. He asked Erie County Judge Kenneth F. Case to consider as long a sentence as possible. About two dozen members of law enforcement were in court to show support for Clark.

Deputy District Attorney for Litigation Joseph A. Agro, who prosecuted the case with Assistant District Attorney Nathanael C. Kapperman, pointed out, "Luckily, no one was hurt — either party — especially with what is going on in the world."

Defense attorney Herbert L. Greenman also emphasized Clark suffered no permanent physical injuries. He said his client took full responsibility for allowing his problems with the deputy to escalate. Greenman mentioned that Abdellatif, who had been working three jobs, overreacted to the loss of his car. Since then, Greenman said, his client has felt nothing but shame for his actions.

Although Clark has said he never would accept an apology, when given a chance to speak, Abdellatif told the court, "I don't know if I could sleep at night if I didn't say this," before apologizing to the deputy and his family, and saying his actions were "out of his character." Case agreed the situation got out of hand, but also said he found it "refreshing" that Abdellatif didn't try to blame the deputy for the attack. He also said, looking at what led up to the incident, that Abdellatif probably was sleep-deprived and feeling singled out.

"But, of course, trying to settle something on the side of the road is not the right solution under any circumstances," Case said. The judge then praised the work of law enforcement, saying those who serve "certainly don't need to be receiving threats through dispatch."

"I don't think, for the most part, that people realize how much crap they put up with on a daily basis," Case said. In addition to the eight-year sentence, the judge ordered four years post-release supervision. Abdellatif's fiancée, Brittany Ashley-Graser, 22, also was charged in the case for trying to intervene in the struggle between the two men. In October she was sentenced to time served and five years probation.