

5 Berrien deputies honored for valor

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The awards were late in coming, but Berrien Sheriff Forrest "Nick" Jewell says they're still straight from the heart.

In one of his last official acts as sheriff, Jewell presented Valor Awards to five sheriff's officers for acts of courage in life-threatening situations. Two of the men were wounded in the line of duty.

The awards were presented Tuesday for bravery in incidents dating back to 1970. Jewell said he was "a little embarrassed" to be presenting them now, three days before his retirement, but said the timing doesn't take away from what the officers did.

"It's been a real pleasure being your sheriff for all these years," said Jewell, whose last day is Thursday. "There's not another (department) anywhere in the state that has a finer group of people to work with."

The Valor Award, the department's highest honor, was presented to Capt. David Tiefenbach, Lt. Gary Ruhl, Lt. Robert Greer, Lt. Ronald Immoos and Sgt. Abbott Taylor.

Taylor, now a detective, was wounded March 21, 1972, in a shootout with a father and son who



DAVID TIEFENBACH



GARY RUHL



ROBERT GREER



RONALD IMMOOS



ABBOTT TAYLOR

were both killed. Taylor and Immoos both were cited for their roles in the incident.

Taylor was hit on the finger by a gunshot, and another officer, Jimmie Coburn, suffered bullet wounds of the arms. Coburn is now with the Benton Township Police Department.

The incident occurred when officers went to a Lake Michigan Beach home to serve a non-support warrant on Richard Manns, a guest in the Percy Wright home. Percy Wright opened fire on the officers, and he and his son, Roger Wright, were killed by return fire.

Ruhl's award was presented for

his actions on Nov. 13, 1979; the night he was stabbed nine times by David Riippa, a driver he stopped for a traffic violation in Benton Township. Ruhl, then a sheriff's deputy, managed to detain the suspect at the scene, although his injuries were nearly fatal.

Ruhl was in surgery seven hours, lost a kidney as a result of wounds, and returned to work 2½ months later. Riippa was convicted of assault with intent to murder and sentenced to a 40-110 year prison term.

Tiefenbach, now captain of detectives, played a key role in the capture of a suspect in the April 29,

1970, slaying of Benton Township police Sgt. Robert Stevens. Stevens was shot without warning by a man who took the officer's gun from his holster at a township restaurant. Tiefenbach was with Stevens at the time, and returned fire at the suspect.

Detective Frederick Reeves, who was about to enter the restaurant, ran to a rear door and fired at the fleeing suspect, wounding him three times. The suspect, Earl E. Harrison, was declared incompetent for trial and committed to a state mental institution.

Greer was shot at on Jan. 9, 1982, by a driver he stopped for a

traffic violation on Church Street in St. Joseph. As Greer walked toward the car, the driver, Frederick Edwards, got out and pointed a loaded pistol, ordered Greer to return to his car, and turn off the engine and radio.

Greer, seated in the squad car, feigned a reach toward the ignition and grabbed the barrel of the pistol, forced the muzzle down, and attempted to draw his service revolver. Edwards' gun discharged, sending a bullet through the floor of the police car. A passerby helped Greer subdue the suspect, who served seven years in prison for the assault.