

## **One dies after off-duty police drive into Cumberland River**

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By CHRISTIAN BOTTORFF  
*Staff Writer*

An off-duty Metro police officer was killed Saturday night after a car he was in crashed through a guardrail in Madison and plunged into the Cumberland River.

Police identified him as Paul Cleveland, 28, a three-year Metro officer.

The car's surviving occupants — William Bishop, 32, who was the driver, and Cody O'Quinn, 28 — also were off-duty Metro officers, police said. Scraped and bruised after escaping from the submerged vehicle, they were treated at Nashville General Hospital at Meharry and released.

Bishop and O'Quinn are assigned to the department's Central Sector as was Cleveland.

Metro police are investigating, said Valerie Meece, assistant chief for Metro police. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation is analyzing blood samples taken from both officers.

Nashville attorney David Raybin, who is representing Bishop, said all three officers had been drinking in the hours before the 9 p.m. crash. It occurred about 150 yards from the home that Cleveland shared with Bishop.

Witnesses said Bishop's car was speeding down Howse Avenue off Neely's Bend Road and tried to stop but could not. Metro police said last night that the car, which was Bishop's and not a police cruiser, crashed through trees and tumbled into the river.

Underwater, Bishop and O'Quinn were able to crawl out of a sunroof that was broken out during the crash, and they swam to safety. Cleveland was stuck inside and drowned, Raybin said.

Rescue divers searched the water for about an hour before finding Cleveland's body.

Search crews pulled the maroon, four-door sedan out of the water yesterday at 1:30 p.m. A tow truck then removed the car, which was mangled. Its windows were broken, doors were crumpled and the engine compartment appeared to have been damaged.

Meece said last night that she did not know the car's make and model.

Police officers were combing the car's interior as it was pulled to the bank. Officers were seen pulling out pieces of paper. Other items were tossed into the trunk.

Meece said she had not talked to investigators since the car was recovered and was not aware anything was found inside. Police at the scene referred all calls to Meece.

**Investigations pending**

Bishop and O'Quinn were placed on administrative duty, which is routine when a fatal incident involving an officer is investigated, Meece said.

Meece said officials would be looking at whether any alcohol consumption by Bishop or the other officers violated the department's policies.

Before the crash, all three officers had been at a Hooter's restaurant on Second Avenue North downtown and had been drinking alcohol, Raybin said. Bishop was the designated driver, he said.

Raybin said Bishop had "two or three" cups of beer all night and was not intoxicated. The lawyer said he was confident that blood samples taken by doctors would show that alcohol was not a factor in the crash.

Police officials last night indicated that the department's investigation would be two- fold:

- An internal investigation will focus on whether the officers broke any of the police department's internal rules. Officers are guided by written Police Department rules, which include policies on alcohol consumption and conduct while off duty.
- Meanwhile, the Police Department's investigators are consulting with the Davidson County District Attorney's office about whether to file criminal charges, Meece said last night.

Meece said police were in charge of transporting the blood samples to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation for testing. She said she was confident that police would conduct a thorough and fair investigation, working with the Davidson County District Attorney's office to levy charges if necessary.

"We would conduct this investigation as we would any other," Meece said.

It could be several weeks before a blood sample is returned, she said. A decision by prosecutors probably would not occur before then, she said.

### **'They were going really fast'**

Raybin declined to address reports by witnesses who said the car was speeding on the half-mile, two-lane road, saying he had not reviewed any reports or discussed the crash with any witnesses.

Meece said police had not determined whether speeding was a factor. Witnesses are being contacted, and investigators will evaluate the car, she said.

Brittany Favors, 15, said she was sitting in front of her home near the street as Bishop's car went by on Howse Avenue and then crashed into the guardrail.

Brittany was with her boyfriend, Justin Hawkins, 15, and said they were shocked by how fast the car was going and that it did not slow until just before the car went off the road. Howse is a half-mile long and dead-ends at the river.

She said it was frightening watching the car because it seemed the driver was unaware that the end of the road was ahead. They, too, were close to the car's path. "If we had been 2 feet closer, the car would have hit us," Brittany said. "They were going really fast."

Brittany's mother, Wanda Beaver, said her daughter came in the house and was "white as a ghost." The family telephoned 911.

### **Officers mourn friend**

Raybin said that officers Bishop and O'Quinn — once freed — tried to go underwater to get Cleveland, who was still inside the vehicle.

"It was horrible for them because they did not know where (Cleveland) was," Raybin said, speaking of Bishop and O'Quinn. "They thought he got out, but then they tried to swim down and save him. It was just too dark."

Bishop had been scheduled to go to work Saturday night to cover the midnight shift, Raybin said. Last night he was mourning the loss of his best friend, Cleveland, and was staying with friends away from his home, Raybin said.