

REAL STORIES OF EVERYDAY PATROL



Officer Austin Collier 2018 Collection
MPD OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Officer Austin Collier is the Mobile Police Department Officer of the Year. In 2018, Collier responded to 994 calls for service, backed on 643 complaints and made 60 felony and 214 misdemeanor arrests. He issued 217 traffic citations and patrolled a total of 18,201 miles.

Collier joined the force March 2016 and works patrol in the Fourth Precinct. Known as a natural leader, he understands how to effectively perform his job while treating the citizens of Mobile with the upmost respect.

Fellow officers describe him as the officer who can “sniff out the bad guy.” There is not one particular incident that sets him apart, but rather the consistency of performing a superior job on a daily basis. Here are the real stories of everyday patrol that earned Collier Officer of the Year.

Better to Walk in on Foot

On Feb. 10, 2018 at 1:59 a.m., Collier and officers of the Fourth Precinct received a suspicious call at Knollwood Apartments, located at 1651 Knollwood Drive. The caller, who remained anonymous, advised that four men were walking through the parking lot around Building 17 pulling on door handles checking for unlocked vehicles. When Collier arrived at the location, he advised the other officers not to drive their vehicles into the apartments, but to shut off their vehicles, meet him in the front of the location, and to walk in on foot.

As the officers walked down the center divider of 1685 Knollwood Drive, they observed the suspects described by the caller. When the officers approached the suspects they attempted to flee on foot, but due to the action plan of Collier to walk in on foot, all the involved suspects were quickly apprehended. The suspects were charged with breaking and entering a vehicle, and possession of burglar tools.

More than a Switched Tag

On April 18, 2018 at 3:37 a.m., Collier initiated a traffic stop on Airport Blvd. in front of the UJ Chevrolet dealership on a vehicle that had a switched tag. During Collier’s investigation, he found enough probable cause to detain both occupants of the vehicle. After the inventory of the suspect’s vehicle, officers located crystal meth, several drug paraphernalia items, 12 different checks, an income tax return, a money order and eight credit cards that did not belong to the suspects.

Through Collier’s relentless search, he confirmed that one of the credit cards inside the suspect’s vehicle was reported stolen out of the Second Precinct. Collier could have written the driver of the vehicle a ticket and left it at that, but his police instinct kicked in and he knew this was more than just a simple switched tag ticket.

Fast Tracking in Sonic Drive-In Robbery

On May 12, 2018 at 12:11 a.m., Collier responded to a commercial robbery at the Sonic Drive-In located at 6450 Cottage Hill Road. Upon arrival, the employees stated two men wearing black hoodies, about 5 feet 6 inches tall to 5 feet 8 inches tall, dressed in all black entered the location armed with black handguns with lasers on them. The men removed the cash and took the employees' cell phones as they exited the location. They were last seen running west down Cottage Hill Road.

Collier knowing that time is extremely critical in this situation immediately got the victim’s cell phone numbers and began tracking one of the phones. The phone was showing a stationary location at Montlimar Park. Collier started several units to the location. Once units arrived, they observed a white Ford Fusion occupied by three people. After they were detained, the officers found a deposit bag,

money scattered throughout the vehicle, and a handgun with a laser attached – all in plain view. The three people matched the description given by the Sonic Drive-In employees. All were arrested.

The Attempt to Elude

On May 4, 2018 at 11:44 a.m., Collier was in the area of Cody Road and Providence Park when he observed a man driving recklessly. When attempting to stop the vehicle, the driver refused leading Collier on a vehicle pursuit. The driver ran red lights, accelerated the speed of his vehicle, and made quick turns. When the suspect realized Collier was relentless in his pursuit of him, he surrendered. The suspect was taken into custody without incident. Inside the suspect's vehicle, Collier located several plastic containers, electronic scales, \$1,134 in U.S. currency and mason jars filled with marijuana totaling 1.24 pounds. The Narcotics Unit was notified and responded to continue the investigation due to the amount of narcotics and money.

Suspicious Silver Van

On May 9, 2018 at 1:30 p.m., Collier responded to Causey Middle School, 2205 McFarland Road, and conducted a walk-through of the school. The resource officer approached Collier and advised him of a suspicious silver van that had been observed coming to the location for the past two months. He said the driver of the van sits in the parking lot watching the children leave school and watching the after-school basketball practices. As the resource officer was talking about the circumstances, Collier observed the van in the school parking lot occupied by a male suspect. Collier notified dispatch and approached the vehicle.

While Collier was conducting his investigation, he observed the suspect had a handgun inside the vehicle in plain view. He was removed, detained and identified as a retired sergeant from the Florida Fish and Wildlife. The suspect said he was at the location because he enjoys sitting in the shade watching the children leave when they are let out of school in the afternoon and play after-school basketball. The retired sergeant had recently lost his wife and was a former basketball coach himself. From time to time, he was asked to pick up his friend's children from the school.

Collier called the friend who responded to the scene and confirmed the man's story. The friend said the suspect currently lives with him and that he does enjoy sitting in different parking lots watching construction work. Also, the friend said that the man was suffering from possible early stages of dementia. The man was released to his friend, and was banned from Causey Middle School as well as all other Mobile County schools by the resource officer. The firearm was turned in for safekeeping.

On a later date, the Special Victims Unit called Collier in reference to the investigation. The unit was looking into this case in reference to a suspicious report where a man with a similar description attempted to lure a child inside his van.

The Stop to Countywide Crime Spree

On June 7, 2018 at 9:27 a.m., Collier was in the area of 1601 Knollwood Drive near the front set of buildings when he spotted a possible occupied stolen vehicle. By not drawing too much attention, Collier drove pass the suspicious vehicle to the back of the apartment complex. He found the first available spot to turn his patrol vehicle around and headed back to the front of the complex toward the vehicle. When Collier made it to the front of the complex he observed a Kia leaving at a high rate of speed. He caught up to the vehicle and attempted to stop it but the driver refused. Collier got confirmation that the vehicle was stolen and occupied by four individuals. During the pursuit, the driver lost control of the

vehicle and crashed into another vehicle on Azalea Road at Skyline Drive North. The four occupants then fled on foot. Officers were able to detain three of the four suspects, which included the driver.

While on the scene, Collier was advised that detectives had been actively tracking this vehicle. It was involved in at least three vehicle burglaries involving Mobile County deputies where guns, ammo, bullet proof vests and other police property was removed.

When officers searched the vehicle, a Cobra .380 handgun and one of the deputy's stolen bullet proof vests was found. Because of Collier stopping this vehicle, he was able to put a stop to a countywide crime spree, clearing more than a dozen cases and arresting several dangerous suspects who targeted police patrol vehicles.

About that Meth

On Aug. 7, 2018 at 4:32 a.m., Collier stopped a vehicle with an expired tag on Air Terminal just south of Airport Blvd. During the traffic stop investigation, Collier located 32.72 grams of crystal meth, several Xanax, a generic brand of Valium pills, a small amount of marijuana, needles, spoons, cut straws, small baggies commonly used in the sale of narcotics and three glass pipes used to smoke crystal meth. Due to the amount of meth, the Narcotics Unit was notified and responded to continue the investigation.

When the Vehicle is Still Warm

On Aug. 27, 2018 at 2:22 a.m., Collier and officer of the Fourth Precinct responded to an audible alarm at Goldstein's Jewel located at 887 Hillcrest Road. Upon arrival, the officers found that the window on the north side had been broken and entry was made. The officers cleared the business and began to search the area for possible suspects. As the officers were checking behind Southern Earth Sciences, Inc., 6352 Piccadilly Square Drive, they observed a suspicious dark-colored vehicle in a parking spot. When the officers shined their lights inside the vehicle they observed in plain view a black handgun on the center console. The officers then felt the hood on the vehicle and realized it was still warm to the touch. They then saw a male suspect, later identified as Brandon Williams, walking west on Piccadilly Square Drive toward the suspicious vehicle. The suspect was detained and found to have glass shards stuck in and on his clothing and skin. After further investigation, the subject was arrested and charged with burglary.

As Collier was processing and maintaining the scene, he recalled a BOLO that Detective Long put out at the beginning of his shift in reference to two violent home invasion suspects and their vehicle. The incident occurred at the 300 block of Lakeview Drive West on Aug. 26, 2018. The suspects entered the location while a 14 year old was home alone. When the mother returned home, the suspects left the location and fired a shot at the mother hitting her in the right thigh.

Although the mother was seriously injured, she managed to get a partial description of the suspects and their vehicle. She described the vehicle as a dull black two door with Georgia plates. When the Identification Unit processed inside of the location, they also found a partial palm print that came back to suspect Brandon Williams. When Collier received the information back on the suspect and observed the Georgia plates on the vehicle, he notified the detective to respond to the scene. She determined that the suspect and vehicle that Collier had detained was also wanted in reference to the earlier violent home invasion. Williams was arrested.

Locating the Source of the Smoke

On Sept. 4, 2018, during Tropical Storm Gordon making landfall, Collier and Officer McGraw were in the area of Cottage Hill Road and Meadowview Drive diverting traffic due to a fallen tree. While in the area, Collier began to smell and see smoke coming from an unknown location. Dispatched was advised and both officers began checking the area on foot. Officer Boddie and Officer Little were in the area and began assisting with finding the source of the smoke.

Collier finally located the source of the smoke. It was coming from the attic's gable vents at the residence located on the 8900 block of Cottage Hill Road. Collier advised dispatch of the location and to start Mobile Fire-Rescue to the location. Collier began banging on the front door but was not receiving a response. Boddie then began banging on the front windows of the residence trying to alert anyone who might be inside the house. After about a minute of both officers banging on the front windows and door, two elderly women opened the door. The officers informed them of the smoke coming from the roof and that they needed to evacuate as quickly as possible. The women seemed confused about what was happening and even attempted to re-enter the residence that was quickly filling up with smoke. Little and McGraw knowing how quickly the situation was changing for the worse assisted the women out of the residence to a safer location.

Collier and Boddie then entered the location clearing it room by room checking for anyone else who still might be inside needing assistance. After the check was complete, the officers removed the two dogs from inside the location and reunited them with the homeowners. Mobile Fire-Rescue arrived and extinguished the fire that was found in the attic with minimal damage to the residence.

A Hand-to-Hand Drug Transaction

On Oct. 21, 2018 at 1:25 a.m., Collier was in the area of the I-65 Service Road when he observed what he believed to be a hand-to-hand drug transaction between two suspects. He got behind one of the vehicles in question and ran the tag information with dispatch as the driver attempted to leave the area. Dispatch advised that the vehicle was an active stolen vehicle. Collier advised of his location along with his direction of travel directing other officers to the area in case of a pursuit. The driver, seeing police behind her, pulled into the Budgetel Inn parking lot in attempt to elude police. Collier performed a felony stop, detaining the driver and a front passenger. The driver was charged with receiving stolen property first degree. The vehicle was returned to its rightful owner.

The Missing Person Poster

On Oct. 28, 2018 at 10:45 p.m., Collier was at the Greater Gulf State Fair, 1035 Cody Road, when he was approached by a group of kids stating they just saw the person who was on a missing person poster. They showed Collier the poster and said they saw the person about 10 minutes ago. Collier took a picture of the poster, went inside the fairgrounds and began looking for the missing person. Within a short time, Collier located and detained the missing juvenile.

The juvenile had run away from home after he failed a drug test. He had been missing for seven days. The mother was contacted by the MPD Family Intervention Team, who also set up a treatment plan for the juvenile.

The Abused Girl

On Oct. 29, 2018 at 8:42 p.m., Collier was dispatched to the area of Moffett Road and University Loop in reference to a person sitting on the overpass. When Collier arrived, he observed a teenage girl straddling the railing on top of the overpass. Collier attempted to make contact but the girl refused to

talk. As Collier approached her, she placed her other leg over the rail, preparing to jump. Collier's persistence paid off and the girl finally began talking with him. During this time, he directed other officers into position, using his radio, to set up perimeter and get medical staff on standby. Due to the close proximity of heavy traffic on Moffett Road, Collier had to reroute eastbound and westbound traffic, along with northbound and southbound traffic on University Blvd. below the overpass.

Over the course of a 30-minute negotiation, he established that the girl was 15 years old and had been abused throughout her childhood. She expressed feelings of hopelessness and said she no longer wanted to live. Through patience and empathy, Collier was able to establish trust with her while inching closer. He grabbed her and pulled her to safety, with assistance of the other officers, before she could jump or slip to the roadway 30 feet below. Collier's tact and rapport-building efforts directly prevented the serious injury or death of the troubled teen.

Bumper to Bumper

On Oct. 30, 2018 at 4:45 a.m., Collier was in the area of Hillcrest Road and Grelot Road when he observed an automobile pushing another down the roadway bumper to bumper. Collier felt this was suspicious and initiated a traffic stop. One of the drivers immediately fled the scene to elude Collier. After a short vehicle pursuit, the driver surrendered. While Collier was taking the driver into custody, he was able to direct his backing unit to the area of the other vehicle. Following a brief search of the area, the second driver was located and apprehended.

During the investigation, Collier discovered damage to one of the vehicles – broken window, broken steering column and a screwdriver inserted into the ignition switch – which is indicative of a stolen vehicle. Collier questioned both drivers and ran the vehicle's information through the NCIC national database. He attempted to contact the registered owner but was unable to confirm it was stolen. Both were arrested on outstanding traffic warrants and drug charges.

Just before Collier was scheduled to end his shift, the owner of the vehicle called police confirming his vehicle had been stolen. Fourth Precinct detectives advised that these suspects were also suspected of having stolen a second vehicle in the area that same night.

One of the suspects, Alonzo Cunningham, was a delivery driver for Hackbarth Delivery. According to the complainant, Cunningham received items intended for delivery to the businesses' clients and failed to deliver the items. The items were reported to have never been delivered to their proper destinations by the businesses. Although the suspect returned some of the items, the total value for the items stolen exceeded \$6,000.

The Take Down

On Dec. 5, 2018, Collier was tasked with the responsibility of establishing a team for the apprehension of a dangerous suspect who was being actively sought after by the Fourth Precinct detectives for theft. Collier was informed of a possible current location of the suspect and that he was known to carry a firearm. Without hesitation, Collier created an action plan and put together a take-down team. Within minutes, he successfully and safely apprehended the wanted suspect without incident. Once the suspect was in police custody, he began returning the victim's stolen property.

The 'Not So Routine' Traffic Stop

On Dec. 6, 2018 at 4:10 p.m., as Collier conducted a routine traffic stop the passenger, later identified as Michael Lewis, attempted multiple times to exit the vehicle. Collier gave him several verbal commands

to stay inside the vehicle until the traffic stop was completed. As Collier waited on his backing unit, he again noticed the passenger of the vehicle had again opened his door of the vehicle. Knowing the dangers an officer can face on what appears a routine traffic stop, Collier gave an order over his patrol vehicle's PA system for the passenger to remain inside the vehicle and close his door. The suspect complied. But seconds later the passenger exited the vehicle and began walking toward Collier asking, "Officer, can I talk to you?" Collier immediately exited his patrol vehicle, began removing his duty weapon from his holster and advising the passenger, who is quickly approaching him to stop.

The passenger stopped coming toward Collier but turned his body hiding his right hand from the officer's view. Collier then knew that this routine traffic stop had turned to not so routine. The passenger changed his direction of travel and began to attempt to flee on foot. Collier gave chase focusing on the top priority – officer safety and the safety of others.

As Collier began to close the gap between himself and the fleeing passenger, he observed the passenger reach in his front pockets with his right hand. The passenger removed what was later identified as a Heritage .22 handgun. But Collier had already removed his taser device during the chase. Collier was unsure if he could drop his taser device and draw his pistol in time, so he fired his taser device and successfully struck the passenger. The passenger dropped the handgun and complied with Collier's lawful commands.

Off Duty

On Dec. 21, 2018 at 6:05 a.m., Collier was off duty when he heard a burglary in progress call over the radio in the area of University Blvd. and Cottage Hill Rad. The dispatcher advised that the caller witnessed a man wearing a blue-colored jacket driving a dark-colored SUV, possibly a Ford Escape. The witness stated the suspect entered the store after breaking the front glass of the business. He was last seen heading west on Cottage Hill Road. Knowing the area well, Collier proceeded to Cottage Hill Road and Cody Road in an attempt to intersect the suspect. When Collier made it to the area, he spotted the suspect's vehicle in the right-hand lane of Cottage Hill Road heading westbound.

Collier began following the suspect at a safe distance while keeping the suspect in sight until his backing unit could arrive. The suspect was stopped without incident and in plain view officers observed property from the ABC Store and property taken from other locations throughout the night.

The suspect was also found connected to the burglaries that occurred at the ABC Store, 5220 Cottage Hill Road, Greer's, 3170 Dauphin Street, and the attempted burglary at Dollar General, 3226 Dauphin St.

Hiding behind the Dumpster

On Dec. 30, 2018, while Collier was in the area of the 5300 block of Rains Drive en route to a noise complaint, he spotted a man with a large backpack coming from the rear of a residence. When the man saw police, he hid behind a construction dumpster. As Collier approached the man, he ran. Collier was able to catch up to him several blocks over and took him into custody.

The man was found to be in possession of mail from around 30 different locations and had several different types of power tools for which he could not account. The Raines Drive address was checked. Collier observed a rear window busted and several other windows at the location that had been unlocked. Detectives responded to the location to investigate further.