

Trooper of the Year 2017

Director's Medal of Valor, Purple Heart Recipients

Troop One and Overall Statewide Trooper of the Year

**** Also nominated for Director's Medal of Valor**

Trooper S.J. Price

Post D (Richland)

Trooper S.J. Price of Post D is nominated for her heroic efforts to save a motorist from a burning vehicle on August 12, 2017.

Trooper Price was en route to a collision in Richland County when she drove up on a two-car collision. A City of Columbia Police Officer was on scene and Trooper Price stopped to offer assistance, as the collision was partially blocking the roadway. One of the vehicles involved in the collision fled the scene at a high rate of speed. The city officer on scene pursued the fleeing vehicle.

The other vehicle involved in the collision was starting to smoke heavily. Trooper Price approached the smoking vehicle to find the passenger, an unresponsive female, stuck in the front passenger seat. The key was broken off in the ignition so the vehicle was still running and the accelerator also was stuck.

Trooper Price requested assistance and after several attempts to help, she advised the Richland TCO that she was unable to free the passenger and that the vehicle was becoming fully involved with fire. At this point, Trooper Price attempted a fire rescue and Trooper C.M. Flitter arrived on scene. Trooper Flitter cut the seatbelt that was preventing the passenger from being freed.

With the assistance of Trooper Flitter and another city officer that arrived on scene, Trooper Price was able to free the passenger's legs that were pinned under the dashboard and pull her to safety just before the vehicle was overtaken with fire.

Trooper Price, a native of Statesville, NC, is consistently praised by the public, her supervisors and peers on her professionalism and demeanor as a Trooper.

In addition to her nomination as Troop One Trooper of the Year, Trooper Price as well as **Trooper C.M. Flitter, also of Post D**, are also recognized with the Director's Medal of Valor Award for their tremendous bravery and determination to save the passenger's life in this incident.

Troop Two:

Trooper T.R. Matthews

Post A (Newberry)

Trooper Matthews is nominated for his efforts in arresting an intoxicated driver who was transporting children from an event on a school bus.

On February 19, 2017, at approximately 7:24 p.m., Trooper Matthews, along with his field training officer, L/Cpl. L.D. Perry, were on routine patrol in Newberry County on SC-34 when a large school bus, with no headlights on, crossed left of center and nearly struck his Patrol vehicle. Trooper Matthews turned around and initiated a traffic stop as the school bus was turning onto the entrance ramp of Interstate 26.

The school bus came to a stop at the end of the entrance ramp just prior to merging onto the interstate. The bus was carrying several adult chaperones, as well as several students, who had earlier participated in a drama competition. Trooper Matthews noticed several clues that indicated the bus driver may have been impaired. After field sobriety tests, Trooper Matthews determined the driver to be impaired and placed the driver under arrest for driving under the influence and child endangerment.

Tpr. Matthews took the suspect to the Newberry County Detention Center to request a breath sample and his blood alcohol content was measured at .18%. The adult chaperones on the bus expressed their gratitude for Trooper Matthews' actions and stated that they feared for their safety, and the safety of the children.

Prior to joining SCHP, Trooper Matthews served in the US Marine Corps for 11 years and then, gained a wealth of law enforcement experience at State, County, and Federal level law enforcement agencies.

Troop Two Medal of Valor Award:

Cpl. J.S. Heaton

Cpl. J.S. Heaton from Troop Two was presented the Medal of Valor Award for his heroic efforts to save two suspects from a burning vehicle.

On March 29, 2017, the Laurens County Sheriff's Department was conducting a driver's license checkpoint on SC 14 at Interstate 385. A vehicle came through the checkpoint and refused to stop. A vehicle pursuit ensued that traveled throughout Laurens County and eventually into Greenwood County where SCHP units became involved. Cpl. J. S. Heaton was the supervisor working in Greenwood that evening. Due to the length of the pursuit and risks involved, the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office requested an SCHP unit that was trained in the PIT maneuver to attempt to stop the violator's vehicle.

Cpl. Heaton was able to stop the vehicle using the PIT maneuver. The violator traveled off the roadway and caught fire. Within a matter of seconds, Cpl. Heaton was out of his vehicle with his fire extinguisher in hand. He was able to rescue both occupants who received only minor burns due to the quick actions and the ability of Cpl. Heaton to operate under stress.

Troop Three:

L/Cpl. J.B. Beebe Post C (Greenville)

L/Cpl. Beebe is recognized for his efforts in arresting a suspect in an armed robbery.

On December 28, 2017, a BOLO was issued concerning a vehicle that had been involved in an armed robbery within the city limits of Greenville. The BOLO indicated that multiple subjects were armed and the firearm had been discharged during the robbery. L/Cpl. Beebe, while traveling to a call for service, observed the vehicle pull into a gas station and continued to monitor the situation while waiting for back-up. When Trooper J. M. Ballish arrived, he and Beebe drove into the parking lot and exited their Patrol vehicles.

The subject that had remained in the vehicle fled the scene on foot and both Troopers pursued on foot. L/Cpl. Beebe apprehended the subject a short distance away. With the subject detained, L/Cpl. Beebe was able to provide other responding units with the description and direction of travel of the remaining subjects.

The investigation found that the subjects had stolen the vehicle the previous night in Spartanburg County and had possibly been involved in two shootings the previous night, also in Spartanburg. The morning of the 28th, they had robbed two people near the Haywood mall area. The subject that L/Cpl. Beebe apprehended was the alleged shooter in the robbery earlier in the day in Greenville City.

Troop Four:

Cpl. W.C. West ** Also Medal of Valor Winner Post C (Chester, Fairfield)

The nominee for Troop Four, Cpl. W.C. West, is recognized for apprehending suspects wanted for numerous robberies across three states.

On February 10, 2017, at approximately 11:40 p.m., the SCHP Telecommunications Center notified Troop 4, Post C Troopers of a BOLO vehicle that was involved in an armed robbery. Trp. P.A. Wise spotted the vehicle on I-77 in Fairfield County. Cpl. West and Trp. Wise then attempted to initiate a felony car stop. The vehicle failed to stop for blue lights and siren and Cpl. West, Trp. Wise and TFC C. M. Thompson became involved in a vehicle pursuit on I-77 southbound.

Cpl. West was the primary pursuit officer. As the pursuit continued southbound on I-77 around the 38 MM, both rear passengers fired multiple shots at the pursuing officers. The pursuit then continued into Richland County when the driver of the vehicle exited I-77 at the 22 MM southbound. Cpl. West performed a PIT maneuver, which disabled the vehicle. Four males exited the vehicle and fled the scene on foot. Cpl. West gave descriptions to the deputies from

Richland County Sheriff's Office who responded with multiple K-9 units, along with agents from the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division. Three of the passengers were arrested that night. The driver was identified through the investigation and arrested on February 14, 2017, by the SLED Fugitive Task Force.

The four subjects were linked to an armed robbery of a Verizon Store in Waxhaw, North Carolina, earlier in the evening. Further investigation determined these individuals were linked to more than 40 robberies in three states.

Cpl. West was a member of the SC Air National Guard as a Crash/Rescue Firefighter before joining the Patrol and remains a volunteer firefighter.

In addition to his nomination as Troop Four Trooper of the Year, Cpl. West is also recognized with the Director's Medal of Valor Award for his actions in bringing dangerous suspects to justice.

Troop Five:

L/Cpl. J.B. King

Post B (Florence, Dillon, Marion).

L/Cpl J. B. King is recognized for his work in arresting suspects in a home invasion who fired at deputies and at his Patrol vehicle during a pursuit.

On July 26, 2017, L/Cpl. King responded to a call for assistance from the Marion County Sheriff's Department with regard to a home invasion in the Zion Community of Marion County. The suspects involved had fired multiple gunshots at the deputies as well as their patrol vehicles.

L/Cpl. King became the primary pursuit vehicle and pursued the violator's vehicle into the City Limits of Marion as the suspects continued to fire gunshots at his vehicle. The suspects collided with another vehicle but continued to flee. L/Cpl. King then decided to end the pursuit by making contact with his patrol vehicle in an attempt to disable the suspect's vehicle. The impact knocked the handgun out of the passenger's hand and at which point he surrendered; however, the driver fled on foot. L/Cpl King initiated a foot pursuit and was able to apprehend the driver. It was later revealed that L/Cpl King sustained a concussion from the impact of the vehicles.

L/Cpl King has consistently set a high bar for himself and is a good example to his peers. He is well-respected among local law enforcement agencies. He is dedicated to physical fitness and has always earned the top "platinum" award for his performance on the annual physical fitness test.

Troop Five/Purple Heart Award:

L/Cpl. J.J. Ragazzo

Post C (Georgetown/Williamsburg)

Lance Corporal J. J. Ragazzo was presented the Purple Heart Award following a very serious on-duty injury when he was struck by an impaired driver.

Originally from New Jersey, Lance Corporal J. J. Ragazzo became fascinated with the South Carolina Highway Patrol vehicles and uniforms while vacationing in Horry County as a child. This impression lead Lance Corporal Ragazzo to apply and become a member of the South Carolina Highway Patrol on July 6, 2012. Upon completion of Patrol school, Lance Corporal Ragazzo was assigned to Troop 5 Post C (Georgetown/Williamsburg).

On October 14, 2017, Lance Corporal Ragazzo was patrolling the Murrells Inlet section of Georgetown County. At approximately 1:28 a.m., Lance Corporal Ragazzo, along with Trooper H. B. Causey, responded to assist a Georgetown County deputy who was on a traffic stop with a potential impaired driver on US 17 near Brookgreen Gardens. A vehicle swerved to avoid making contact with Lance Corporal Ragazzo's patrol vehicle and then skidded past the left side of the patrol vehicle and made direct impact with Lance Corporal Ragazzo. Lance Corporal Ragazzo sustained severe trauma from the impact and was transported to Grand Strand Hospital where he remained for several weeks for treatment as well as surgeries.

The driver of the vehicle that struck Lance Corporal Ragazzo was charged with Felony DUI by the Georgetown County Sheriff's Department. Lance Corporal Ragazzo is presently still on leave and rehabilitating in hopes of one day continuing his dream of being an active member of the South Carolina Highway Patrol.

Troop Six:

Trooper J.M. Ross

Post B (Colleton/Dorchester)

Trooper Jennifer M. Ross is nominated for her efforts in taking impaired drivers off the roadway.

Since graduating Patrol School, Trooper Ross has proven to be a motivated Trooper; especially in the area of DUI enforcement and apprehension. Trooper Ross has a true passion for arresting and prosecuting DUI offenders and this was partly born out of the loss of a family member to a DUI-related collision. In 2017, Trooper Ross took her dedication to fighting the problem of DUI to the next level by completing the DRE program and obtaining her certification as a Drug Recognition Expert. She uses these skills learned on a daily basis both for her and other Troopers in her post.

In 2017, Trooper Ross led Troop 6 with 58 DUI arrests, despite being off the road on several occasions attending training. She works in a Post without a prosecutor so she has spent countless hours, many of which were off duty, to prepare for court. Trooper Ross takes each case seriously and does any research necessary. She reaches out for assistance when necessary to aid her in prosecution. She fights hard on all of her cases.

In addition to the 58 DUI arrests, Trooper Ross also excels in making drug arrests. She has become an SFST instructor and was selected to become an FTO. Trooper Ross enjoys has volunteered to attend churches, schools and recruitment events to spread our Target Zero message and help recruit others to SC Highway Patrol. She has a positive attitude and can be counted at any time.

Troop Seven:

F/Sgt. C.B. Burns

Post A (Bamberg, Allendale, Barnwell, Hampton)

On March 8th, 2017, at approximately 9:26 a.m., F/Sgt. C.B. Burns advised Telecommunications he was pursuing a vehicle on S.C. 61 in Bamberg County. The vehicle had been put out as a BOLO involving three armed men whom had just robbed the Enterprise Bank in the town of Blackville in Barnwell County. F/Sgt. Burns advised they were traveling at speeds in excess of 100 mph and had disregarded a stop sign. They were traveling into Colleton County towards I-95. F/Sgt. Burns was given authorization to utilize the PIT maneuver to disable the suspect's vehicle when the opportunity presented itself. F/Sgt. Burns decided to delay the maneuver until it was safe to perform. The Colleton County Sheriff's Office advised that officers were positioned near I-95 prepared to deploy their tire deflation device.

As the vehicles approached the area, the fleeing driver attempted to avoid the device, but it struck his front passenger side tire. Although disabled, the vehicle continued east on S.C. 61. F/Sgt. Burns was instructed to utilize the PIT maneuver as the suspects' vehicle decreased speed. F/Sgt. Burns acknowledged and attempted the maneuver, but was unsuccessful on the first attempt. A short time later, he was successful with the PIT maneuver and the suspects' vehicle ran off the left shoulder of the road and overturned. A few moments later, F/Sgt. Burns advised that he was ok and all three subjects had been taken into custody.

The Colleton County Sheriff's Office also advised the apprehended suspects were believed to have been involved in several armed robberies in different jurisdictions. A search of the vehicle revealed several items used by the suspects during the bank robbery along with the US currency and dye canister that had detonated inside the vehicle. All three suspects involved have been charged by Federal Agents with Armed Robbery. A joint investigation is being continued by SLED and the FBI regarding the suspects' involvement in other bank robberies.

Troop Eight ** Also Medal of Valor Winner:

TFC B.L. Crocker

Lowstate Target Zero Team

TFC B.L. Crocker is recognized for saving the life of an infant when he was approached by a motorist during a traffic stop seeking his assistance.

On November 8th, 2017, TFC B.L. Crocker was conducting a traffic stop westbound on I-26 in Charleston County. TFC Crocker heard a second vehicle pull up behind his patrol car and start blowing the horn.

TFC Crocker walked back to the second vehicle where he observed a female driver who was frantically screaming that her baby was not breathing. The 3-month-old male, was found to be unresponsive in the backseat of the vehicle. TFC Crocker requested dispatch to notify EMS and then got into the backseat of the vehicle to assist the baby. Noting that the infant was barely

breathing, TFC Crocker performed a sternum rub until the baby became responsive and began to cry. TFC Crocker remained with the family until EMS arrived a short time later. EMS transported the baby to a local hospital for evaluation. TFC Crocker played a vital role in helping calm the mother and possibly saved the infant's life.

TFC Crocker is a graduate of The Citadel and an Officer in the United States Army.

TFC Crocker is also award the Director's Medal of Valor for his heroic efforts to save this baby's life.

Troop Eight, Director's Medal of Valor:

L/Cpl. K.M. Small

L/Cpl. K.M. Small is awarded the Medal of Valor for his actions in saving a man following a motor vehicle collision:

On November 2, 2017, at approximately 5:30 p.m., while off duty and traveling in his personal vehicle, L/Cpl. Small came upon a traffic collision that had just occurred in Florence County involving two vehicles. L/Cpl. Small saw that the collision was significant and pulled off the road to call for assistance. He checked on one driver and then, noted that one of the vehicles was severely damaged. Another passerby who had stopped to assist told L/Cpl. Small that the driver of the pick-up had been ejected. The passerby stated that "the guy in the ditch is too far gone, there is nothing that can be done for him."

L/Cpl. Small looked in the ditch and saw a man lying on his back struggling for breath. L/Cpl. Small jumped into the ditch to assist the man and called dispatch to advise them of the critically injured person.. SChP dispatch connected L/Cpl. Small with Florence County 911 who asked him if he knew CPR. L/Cpl. Small advised that he was an off-duty Trooper and he knew how to perform CPR.

Florence County advised L/Cpl. Small to start CPR. L/Cpl. Small and a concerned citizen continued CPR until EMS arrived. L/Cpl. Small has continued to inquire about the critically injured man who remained in ICU for several weeks and is now at home recovering from his injuries. L/Cpl. Small played a vital role in saving the critically injured man's life. ** Small was also named 2016 Trooper of the Year.

Troop Nine:

L/Cpl. J.L. Craig

Post A/Piedmont MAIT Unit

L/Cpl. Craig is a 24-year veteran of the South Carolina Highway Patrol. L/Cpl. Craig has honed his skills in Interview and Interrogation to the extent that he is regularly sought after to assist in conducting interviews. New personnel are instructed to listen to interviews conducted by L/Cpl. Craig and adopt his methodology.

On July 23, 2017, Anderson County Sheriff's deputies were pursuing a stolen vehicle along South Carolina Primary 8 in Anderson County. During the pursuit, the suspects operated the stolen vehicle in a reckless manner, disregarding their own safety as well as that of other motorists. The pursuit terminated when the pursuing deputies were involved in a collision, which resulted in a fatality. The suspect vehicle was not involved in the collision and continued to flee.

L/Cpl. Craig was among the MAIT personnel that responded to the collision scene. Due to the involvement of Anderson County Sheriff's Office personnel in the collision, the Anderson County Sheriff subsequently requested that the Highway Patrol handle all aspects of the investigation to include the stolen vehicle.

L/Cpl. Craig was able to identify the driver of the stolen vehicle, three co-conspirators, and a timeline of events from the theft of the car through to its purposeful destruction by fire. L/Cpl. Craig conducted suspect interviews, which, resulted in confessions, and provided or corroborated existing evidence. L/Cpl. Craig was then able to obtain arrest warrants for all four individuals involved in the theft of the suspect vehicle and/or its destruction.

L/Cpl. Craig's determination, attention to detail and overarching investigative skills are the reason these individuals were brought to justice.

Troop 10/Insurance Enforcement Unit:

L/Cpl. M.D. Looney

L/Cpl. Michael Looney is recognized for his overall commitment to excellence in his enforcement duties and his work serving the community.

Lance Corporal Michael D. Looney joined the South Carolina Highway Patrol on January 6, 2006 at the age of 49. He was assigned to Troop 3, Anderson County where he remained until he was transferred to Troop 10 in March 2016. Lance Corporal Looney currently works with the Insurance Enforcement Unit in Troop 10 and is assigned to the Anderson and Greenville County areas.

He has served in the Insurance Enforcement Unit in an outstanding manner. Last year he made 1,688 contacts and confiscated 1,152 suspended vehicle tags in an effort to remove uninsured drivers off the road. Along with his commendable work ethic is his compassion and commitment to his Patrol family.

L/Cpl. Looney not only does a great job with the Insurance Enforcement Unit, but he is also a talented singer. Mike has used his God-given talents to sing the National Anthem and other songs all over our state. He has provided inspiration to the attendees of many Patrol Graduations, memorial services, funerals and other events. He is always willing to give of his time whenever he is asked and completes his work in addition to his special assignments.

Mike also teaches Sunday School at Temple Baptist Church, Anderson, SC and sings in the church choir.

Troop 11/Special Operations ** Also recognized for Medal of Valor

Cpl. David C. Martin

Corporal David C. Martin is a Team Leader for the DPS Advanced Civil Emergency Response Team (A-CERT), A Platoon Commander for the Regional Civil Emergency Response Team (CERT), and a supervisor for SCHK Honor Guard Unit. Over the past year, Corporal Martin has done an outstanding job of leading all aspects of the DPS Special Operations Unit to include tactical weapons training and mobile field force training for troopers and other law enforcement.

Corporal Martin specializes in teaching advanced courses such as select fire weapons and the ongoing training of our rifle and active shooter programs for all DPS Troopers and Officers.

The Special Operations Unit's Advanced Civil Emergency Team (A-CERT) assisted with a coordinated Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) takedown. The takedown was the culmination of a months-long federal investigation. The investigation resulted in the identification of a cocaine and marijuana trafficking organization operating in the Midlands.

The investigation resulted in the federal indictment of nine individuals and the identification of five locations used by the organization. During the takedown, Corporal Martin was assigned as a Team Leader of one of two Assault Teams. This task was to make entry and secure the property and occupants.

Upon making entry, Corporal Martin's Team took fire through the front door as this team attempted to breach. Corporal Martin called shots fired and evacuated his Team off the front porch to cover. Corporal Martin then used a call out technique that resulted in the peaceful surrender of three occupants. Upon searching the premises a 9mm Hipoint carbine was located near the door. Corporal Martin's decisive actions and training resulted in the protection of his fellow troopers.

In addition to his nomination as Troop Four Trooper of the Year, Cpl. Martin is also recognized with the Director's Medal of Valor Award for his courageous actions.