

2023 Medal of Valor Awards

The Medal of Valor Award is the highest award bestowed by SCDPS. This award recognizes those who have distinguished themselves by their acts of bravery and courage while taking great personal risks above and beyond the call of duty. This medal may be awarded for acts that occur while the employee is on duty or off duty.

First Sergeant D. Johnson

On April 6, 2023, at about 7:45 a.m., First Sergeant D. Johnson was driving to SCDPS Headquarters in Blythewood when he encountered a severe traffic collision that was blocking both lanes of SC-215 in Fairfield County. He saw a damaged, empty logging truck off the left side of the roadway, an overturned and severely damaged vehicle that was just off the right side of the roadway, and an uninvolved vehicle stopped in the road.

While checking on the driver of the overturned car, he realized it was SC Highway Patrol Captain D.E. Dickerson. The captain was badly injured and trapped in the wreckage of the vehicle, hanging upside down, being held up by his seatbelt. As First Sgt. Johnson tried to enter the vehicle and free the captain, the vehicle began smoking and eventually burst into flames. Unable to free Captain Dickerson, First Sgt. Johnson grabbed a fire extinguisher from his patrol vehicle to control the growing fire that was entering the front cab of the vehicle.

While he continued trying to remove Captain Dickerson from the vehicle, he reassured him that help was on the way. Moments later, several first responders from Fairfield County Emergency Services, as well as troopers from Richland and Fairfield Counties, arrived on the scene. After about 20 minutes, Captain Dickerson was completely freed from the wreckage. Miraculously, he was not seriously injured. Captain Dickerson was taken by ambulance to a landing zone, where he was transported by helicopter to Prisma Health Richland and was released the next day. If not for First

Sergeant Johnson's quick thinking and the life-saving measures he took that morning, Captain Dickerson may have perished in the fire.

For his selflessness and devotion to saving the lives of others, without regard for his own safety, we commend First Sergeant David Johnson and award him the South Carolina Department of Public Safety's Medal of Valor.

Lance Corporal J.C. Owens

In the early evening hours of September 19, 2023, Lance Corporal J.C. Owens, of Troop 3, Post C (Greenville County), was on routine patrol in Greenville County when he noticed a white pickup truck traveling in the opposite direction with a defective headlight. As L/Cpl. Owens turned around and initiated a traffic stop, the suspect refused to stop and a pursuit ensued for several miles into a rural area of Pickens County. The pickup eventually came to a stop after driving up an embankment, which exposed the driver's window to L/Cpl. Owens. Before he could exit his patrol vehicle, the suspect began firing an assault-style rifle at the patrol vehicle.

L/Cpl. Owens rolled from his vehicle and quickly crawled to the rear of his patrol vehicle for cover. He then began to return fire towards the suspect with his issued sidearm. An intense gun battle between the suspect and L/Cpl. Owens ensued for several seconds. After expending all rounds in the assault-style weapon, the suspect switched to a sidearm and continued to fire at L/Cpl. Owens. L/Cpl. Owens stayed behind the cover of his patrol vehicle and continued firing his firearm in a controlled and targeted fashion, eventually neutralizing the threat. He then switched to his issued patrol rifle and maintained cover while requesting backup and an ambulance.

During this extremely stressful moment, L/Cpl. Owens kept himself calm through controlled breathing techniques, and checked himself for injuries. He remained in a safe position until backup arrived, at which time the pickup truck was approached and cleared of further danger. The suspect's rounds hit L/Cpl. Owens' patrol vehicle in the windshield, traveled through the dash,

and into the passenger area. L/Cpl. Owens' fast action in rolling from his patrol vehicle onto the ground contributed in saving his life. His calm, composed, and professional demeanor during an incredibly stressful and terrifying experience show the high standards and use of his training.

For these reasons, we commend L/Cpl. J.C. Owens and award him for the South Carolina Department of Public Safety's Medal of Valor.

Trooper First Class B.J. Fowler

On February 28, 2023, at around 10 p.m., Trooper First Class B.J. Fowler tried to stop a vehicle on Interstate 77 in York County for speeding 94 mph in a 60 mph speed zone. The driver refused to stop and increased his speed in an attempt to elude. TFC Fowler pursued the vehicle off the interstate, and the violator made several turns while disregarding several traffic lights. The driver of the vehicle drove extremely recklessly, which ultimately caused him to lose control and run off the right side of the road. The vehicle traveled down a steep embankment and came to rest after hitting a bridge abutment.

TFC Fowler exited his patrol vehicle, and as he approached the collision, he saw that the front of the vehicle was on fire. TFC Fowler quickly assessed the situation and identified that two occupants inside the vehicle were seriously injured, and one occupant was lying nearby after being thrown from the vehicle.

TFC Fowler determined the immediate need was to move the passengers away from the car fire. With the help of a sheriff's deputy, TFC Fowler moved all three individuals to a safe distance. Due to the severity of their injuries, it is unlikely that they would have been able to separate themselves from the danger, which likely would have resulted in a tragic ending.

TFC Fowler placed himself in jeopardy to save the lives of others. For these reasons he is commended for his actions and is awarded the South Carolina Department of Public Safety's Medal of Valor.

Lance Corporal B.A. Frazier/Corporal B.J. Tarter/Deputy D. Duckson

On April 16, 2023, Lance Corporal B.A. Frazier initiated a traffic stop on a vehicle speeding more than 20 miles per hour above the posted speed limit on a rural highway. L/Cpl. Frazier approached the vehicle, informing the driver who he was and why he stopped him. After receiving the suspect's information, he returned to his patrol vehicle.

Bamberg County Sheriff's Deputy D. Duckson, who happened to be in the area patrolling, stopped to assist. L/Cpl. Frazier told Deputy Duckson that he believed the suspect was giving him false information. Returning to the suspect's vehicle, the violator began shooting at L/Cpl. Frazier with a single bullet entering the right side of his face. Despite his injury, L/Cpl. Frazier and Deputy Duckson returned fire, hitting the vehicle as the suspect drove away.

L/Cpl. Frazier remained calm while calling for assistance on his radio, and quickly provided a detailed description of the fleeing vehicle. A second trooper, Corporal B.J. Tarter, heard the radio call out with the suspect's vehicle description and, after spotting the vehicle, initiated a pursuit. Cpl. Tarter understood the danger of the situation as the suspect was armed and had just shot a fellow trooper.

Cpl. Tarter tactically approached the suspect, which contributed to the successful apprehension of the individual. Cpl. Tarter did an excellent job supervising a chaotic scene in the aftermath. His decision-making under pressure, and his communication of crucial information to other law enforcement agencies during the situation, is to be commended.

The South Carolina Highway Patrol and the Department of Public Safety are grateful for the assistance of Deputy Duckson for providing critical backup for one of our own.

L/Cpl. Frazier spent several days in the hospital and had to go through months of rehabilitation due to the incident.

For their actions, L/Cpl. Frazier is awarded the Purple Heart Award, Corporal B.J. Tarter is awarded the Medal of Valor award, and Deputy Duckson is awarded the Special Recognition award.

2023 Purple Heart Awards

The Purple Heart Award is an award that is presented to sworn employees who have been injured or wounded in the line of duty.

Lance Corporal M.D. Gressette

During the early evening hours of January 13, 2021, at approximately 7:50 p.m., Lance Corporal M.D. Gressette was investigating a fatal collision in Orangeburg County. Although the scene was secured by emergency personnel, a driver disregarded all emergency workers, drove through the scene and struck the already deceased pedestrian who was laying in the roadway. The driver then drove off without stopping.

After realizing what happened, L/Cpl. Gressette, who at the time held the rank of Trooper, rushed to his patrol car and attempted to catch up to the hit-and-run vehicle. Moments later, another vehicle entered the roadway from a private drive and into the direct path of L/Cpl. Gressette. Despite his efforts to avoid a collision, he crashed with the other vehicle at a high speed.

L/Cpl. Gressette was transported to The Regional Medical Center in Orangeburg, where doctors treated a fractured right femur and a fractured left tibia and fibula. After two surgeries and 19 grueling months of pain and rehabilitation, his determination and perseverance paid off. In July 2022, over a year and a half after the incident, L/Cpl. Gressette was able to return to full duty in Orangeburg County.

With these facts in mind, and the obvious dangerous situation Lance Corporal M.D. Gressette faced that night, it is with certainty that he is deserving of the Purple Heart Award.

Lance Corporal Z.G. Rickard

Our next Purple Heart award recipient is Lance Corporal Z.G. Rickard.

On September 18, 2023, Lance Corporal Z.G. Rickard was on routine motorcycle patrol on US-301 in Orangeburg County when he saw a vehicle traveling at a very high rate of speed on the opposite side of the highway. In trying to catch up to the violator, L/Cpl. Rickard attempted to pass a truck, when the truck made a left turn and collided with Rickard's patrol motorcycle. L/Cpl. Rickard broke both of his legs, and the right leg suffered a 300-degree laceration with severe damage around the kneecap. Due to the extent of his wounds, L/Cpl. Rickard was flown to Prisma Health Richland Hospital.

During his stay in the hospital, Rickard underwent 13 surgeries on his legs. He developed a bad infection in his right leg, and ultimately he was forced to make the decision to amputate. The surgery was successful and L/Cpl. Rickard spent several weeks in a rehabilitation facility before returning home. He has a long road ahead of him and he hopes to be fitted for a prosthetic leg in the coming months, but L/Cpl. Rickard has a very positive outlook on the situation and life in general. He has a great support system in place with his family, friends, and the South Carolina Highway Patrol.

For putting his life on the line in carrying out the mission of the South Carolina Highway Patrol, for his perseverance in the face of tremendous adversity, and for his positive outlook that serves as an example to us all, it is a privilege to present Lance Corporal Z.G. Rickard with the Department of Public Safety's Purple Heart Award.