

Trooper of the Year 2020

Corporal Jacob T. Atwood

Troop 1, Post D (Richland)

Corporal Jacob T. Atwood joined the Highway Patrol in 2014 and is stationed in Troop One, Post D/Lexington County. In 2018, Corporal Atwood joined the Criminal Interdiction Unit and was assigned to his partner, K-9 Parker.

On the morning of September 23, 2020, Corporal Atwood had stopped in the abandoned rest area on Interstate 20 near the 47 mile marker in Lexington County to allow his canine, Parker, to get out of the vehicle and walk around. While walking Parker, Corporal Atwood located a deceased male subject lying in the edge of the wood line. Corporal Atwood immediately called for assistance and secured the area. The Lexington County Sheriff's Department responded to begin their investigation. It was determined through the Lexington County Sheriff Department's investigation that the male subject had been a victim of a homicide. Further investigation indicated that the homicide took place at another location and that the body had been dumped along the wood line in the closed parking area. Subsequently, a subject was arrested and charged with murder.

Due to Corporal Atwood checking the abandoned rest area and paying attention to his surroundings, he was able to locate a deceased body that resulted from a murder.

Trooper First Class Andrew J. Cwynar

Troop 2, Post B (Abbeville/Greenwood)

On October 16, 2020, while patrolling SC Primary 72 in Abbeville County, Trooper First Class Andrew Cwynar observed a vehicle on the shoulder that appeared to be abandoned. As he approached this vehicle, TFC Cwynar observed a severely injured man lying in a ditch with a gaping laceration on his face. TFC Cwynar immediately notified the telecommunications operator and requested that EMS respond to his location. While investigating the situation, he observed that the passenger's door was open and a loaded handgun was on the front passenger seat. TFC Cwynar examined the injured man in an attempt to determine if he had been struck by a vehicle or possibly suffering from a gunshot wound.

While assessing the subject, TFC Cwynar noticed that the subject was losing consciousness and becoming cold to the touch. TFC Cwynar determined that the individual had neither been involved in a collision nor shot, but had likely been assaulted. The Abbeville County Sheriff's Office responded and took over the investigation. Due to the seriousness of the injuries, a medical helicopter was dispatched to the scene. TFC Cwynar assisted EMS with preparing the helicopter's landing zone in order to expedite transport to Greenville Memorial Hospital. Although the victim was unable to provide a description of the perpetrator, doctors were able to save him and he eventually recovered from his injuries. Had TFC Cwynar not taken the time to stop and investigate what appeared to be an abandoned vehicle, the victim may not have survived.

TFC Cwynar is a dependable, reliable employee who can be counted on to go above and beyond with any task he encounters. Not only is TFC Cwynar dedicated to the mission of the Highway Patrol, he is an asset to our profession with his thoroughness and relentless investigative skills.

**Lance Corporal Tyler D. Landreth
Troop 3, Post C (Greenville)**

On June 25, 2020, L/Cpl. Tyler Landreth was dispatched to a hit-and-run collision on South Washington Avenue in Greenville County. Upon arriving on the scene, L/Cpl. Landreth interviewed the driver who was operating a taxi at the time of the collision. He advised L/Cpl. Landreth that he was transporting a customer and his vehicle was struck while traveling through the intersection and the driver fled the scene. An unrestrained passenger in the rear of the taxi, was transported to the hospital for minor injuries.

A witness who followed the suspect vehicle provided a partial tag number. L/Cpl. Landreth obtained surveillance footage from nearby cameras that supported the driver's account and was able to identify what type of vehicle fled the scene. At the hospital, L/Cpl. Landreth interviewed the passenger who was conscious but complaining of a slight headache. L/Cpl. Landreth provided the partial tag number and description of the vehicle to have SLED search their database. L/Cpl. Landreth also received an anonymous tip identifying the owner of the suspect vehicle. This information was provided to SLED, which led to a suspect vehicle being located in the area of the collision.

On June 29, L/Cpl. Landreth went to the registered address and obtained a contact number for the registered owner, who when contacted by phone saidp her boyfriend was driving the vehicle and provided his information. L/Cpl. Landreth arranged a meeting to inspect the woman's car. His inspection revealed damage and paint transfer that were consistent and a match to the damage on the taxi. The vehicle's owner also provided information about the collision that was relayed to her by her boyfriend. Upon completion of the investigation, L/Cpl. Landreth obtained warrants for the suspect for failure to yield, hit-and-run with minor injuries, driving under suspension and habitual traffic offender.

During a follow-up with the victim, L/Cpl. Landreth learned that the victim's injuries were much worse than originally advised by medical personnel. She collapsed in the emergency room and had brain surgery and ultimately, succumbed to her injuries. L/Cpl. Landreth's thorough investigation of what seemed to be a minor collision led to the arrest of the suspect and the charges being upgraded after the victim's passing.

Trooper Christopher A. Plyler
Troop Four, Post C (Chester / Fairfield)

Trooper Christopher A. Plyler loves the Highway Patrol and it is evident in the performance of his daily duties. Trooper Plyler has exceptionally high activity, and he understands the effect his enforcement has on reducing fatalities and serious bodily injury collisions.

Trooper Plyler is a great example of what a trooper should be, and his character is highlighted by the following incident: In October, Post C troopers identified an elderly homeless female that was living in her car in the northbound rest area in Chester County. The woman had no money and her vehicle was inoperable. Trooper Plyler took it upon himself, on his day off, to reach out to his contacts with United Way and other organizations in an attempt to establish temporary living arrangements for the elderly lady and her dog. Due to Trooper Plyler's efforts, the woman was given sustenance and shelter. This demonstrates Trooper Plyler's compassion and eagerness to help others.

L/Cpl. Elijah A. Metherd
Troop Five, Post C (Georgetown, Williamsburg)

L/Cpl. Elijah A. Metherd has been assigned to Troop 5 / Post C since January, 2013. He is an honest, committed, hardworking trooper, who has the ability to act independently and make good decisions. He even provides I.T. assistance to members of Post C, often while he is off-duty.

During the summer of 2020, L/Cpl. Metherd also distinguished himself while responding to an incident involving a subject threatening to jump from a bridge. On July 24, 2020 at approximately 0300 hours L/Cpl. Metherd and Cpl. C.W. Surratt (*Ret.*) were patrolling near Georgetown. A call was dispatched on the Georgetown County Sheriff's Office radio channel for a subject threatening to jump off a bridge spanning the Black River. L/Cpl. Metherd was in the proximity of the call and immediately responded. While approaching the call location, a motorist flagged him down and pointed to a subject walking north in the southbound lanes on the bridge.

Corporal Surratt and L/Cpl. Metherd activated their blue lights to stop approaching traffic in both directions and exited their vehicles. As L/Cpl. Metherd exited his vehicle to speak with the subject, she ran to the side of the bridge, crossed the rails and attempted to jump. L/Cpl. Metherd grabbed the subject, holding her against the bridge railing to prevent her from falling into the water. He then began yelling for Cpl. Surratt's assistance and with the help of another motorist, pulled the subject back over the bridge railing. The subject was transported to Georgetown Hospital to be evaluated.

A Georgetown County Sheriff's Department investigation determined the female subject had been involved in a domestic-related event in a nearby motel and was under the influence of drugs and alcohol. L/Cpl. Metherd's quick actions that night stopped the distressed subject from jumping off the bridge and possibly drowning as a result.

Lance Corporal Jeb Fay

Troop Six, Post C (Beaufort/Jasper):

Lance Corporal Jeb Fay Began his law enforcement career in Maine. After he and his wife relocated to South Carolina, he worked for the Beaufort County Detention Center as a Corrections Officer until 2014, when he was hired by the Bluffton Police Department as a Patrol Officer. In 2016, he was transferred to the police department's Target Zero Traffic Enforcement Team.

In 2017, he wrote a grant for a DUI Enforcement Officer position and was later transferred into that position when the Bluffton Police Department was awarded that grant. In October 2018, he was hired by the South Carolina Highway Patrol and graduated with HP Basic 106.

Lance Corporal Fay is an outstanding employee who comes to work every day with the mindset that his enforcement actions are making a difference. In 2020, Lance Corporal Fay maintained his consistent, high-volume work ethic. That is extremely impressive due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the limited traffic enforcement that was conducted during that time. Lance Corporal Fay was also out of work for over two months while recovering from hip surgery and teaching DRE school. His passion for removing impaired drivers goes beyond the arrest and into the courtroom, where he has built a reputation among the attorneys in the area for being tough to beat in the courtroom.

Lance Corporal Fay is a certified Drug Recognition Expert, Drug Recognition Expert Instructor, and DUI/ S-F-S-T Instructor. He also holds certifications in Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement, Criminal Interdiction Techniques, and At Scene Collision Investigation.

Lance Corporal Antonio J. Griffin

Troop Seven, Post A (Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Hampton)

Lance Corporal A.J. Griffin has been the model of consistency since becoming a trooper. He is committed to the mission of the Highway Patrol and dedicates all of his time and efforts to the fair and impartial enforcement of traffic laws. Lance Corporal Griffin is a member of the Advanced Civil Emergency Response (ACERT) Team and emphasizes his physical fitness to ensure he can perform any duties required of him. During 2020, he responded to numerous ACERT call-outs for civil unrest on short notice, with no questions asked. He is an SFST and SMD Instructor and assists with the recertification process of other troopers in this Troop. Lance Corporal Griffin is always professional. He treats people the right way and displays a positive image for other troopers and civilians.

Master Trooper Donald R. Weatherwalks

Troop Eight, Region II (Safety Improvement Team)

Master Trooper Donald R. Weatherwalks has been with the South Carolina Highway Patrol for 15 years. He began his career in Troop Five (Horry County)

before joining the Safety Improvement Team in 2017. He is currently assigned to the Safety Improvement Team with an emphasis in Work Zone Enforcement. Master Trooper Weatherwalks is a highly motivated Trooper, needs very little supervision and is a great asset to the Safety Improvement Team and the South Carolina Highway Patrol.

Master Trooper Weatherwalks always puts forth the Highway Patrol's core values of selfless service, integrity, and responsibility by putting his co-workers, the citizens of South Carolina, and the motoring public above all. In addition to being a member of the Advanced Civil Emergency Response Team since 2008, Master Trooper Weatherwalks is a squad leader on A-CERT and is a certified instructor for Active Shooter, Less Lethal, and Mobile Field Force. He had several deployments in 2020 with A-CERT, including the State House, Sumter, Charleston, and Myrtle Beach during civil unrest in these areas. In his spare time, Master Trooper Weatherwalks volunteers at two of the local recreation departments where he assists with coaching the youth baseball and football programs, and at Crab Tree Park, where he assists with the youth baseball program.

Master Trooper Weatherwalks is a true asset to the South Carolina Highway Patrol and a pillar in his community.

Master Trooper Eren Demirer
Troop 9, Post D - Pee Dee MAIT

Master Trooper Demirer is a 9-year veteran of the Highway Patrol and was assigned to Troop Nine in July 2017.

On August 28, 2020, Pee Dee MAIT was notified of a Hit and Run with Death collision that occurred on SC-9 in Horry County, involving an unknown vehicle and a motorcyclist in which the motorcyclist was killed. There was no evidence at the collision scene to help determine the year, make or model of a suspect vehicle. The next day, Master Trooper Demirer began gathering surveillance video from local businesses around the area of the collision scene hoping to capture an image of the suspect vehicle that would aid in narrowing the search.

Master Trooper Demirer found a video on September 5, 2020, from a car wash about nine miles from the collision location. In this video, the suspect vehicle pulls into the car wash, where it remained for approximately one minute before driving

away. During this time the suspect driver exited his vehicle to check the damage he sustained in the collision. Using this video, MAIT identified the year, make and model of the vehicle, as well as the North Carolina tag. MAIT also obtained a clear view of the driver and his unique tattoos. Though the vehicle was not registered to the driver, MAIT was able to identify associates of the vehicle's registered owner through DMV records. The driver was then located on Facebook where he not only had pictures of himself and his unique tattoos, but following the collision had posted the suspect vehicle "for sale" in North Carolina. The post indicated the vehicle needed "a little body work" and that the seller needed the vehicle "GONE, the sooner the better..." Posing as a potential buyer of the vehicle, MAIT investigators along with Troop 5 personnel arranged to meet the suspect at the rest stop in South Carolina, where he was apprehended without incident.

If it were not for Master Trooper Demirer's desire and resolve to bring closure to this victim's family, the suspect could have gotten away with this crime. Master Trooper Demirer is a great asset, not only to Troop 9 and Troop 5, but to the Highway Patrol as a whole.

Sergeant Kenneth W. Collins
Troop 10, SCHP Training

Sergeant Kenneth W. Collins is a 14-year veteran of the South Carolina Highway Patrol, beginning his career in Spartanburg County. He is the proud father of twin, 13-year-olds and husband of 17 years. Even with all the demands on his time, he finds time to coach, camp and maintain a balance between home and work. Sergeant Collins is the coordinator for the Basic side of SCDPS Training. This year SCHP Training had to adjust training due to COVID and the restructuring of SCCJA curriculum. This process allowed SCCJA to have classes every two (2) weeks instead of every three weeks and allowed for the ability to recycle trainees more quickly.

On various occasions, Sergeant Collins managed five or six different groups in the training process at one time. He manages their status in training and assists with remediation for failures, uniform issues, graduations and personal issues associated with daily living. He provides weekly updates on all personnel assigned to training. He is directly involved in all scheduling and instruction provided for new hires. Sergeant Collins comes to the academy on his off days to provide extra instruction and to assist trainees prior to entry into the SCCJA.

Sergeant Collins has three corporals under his command. He coordinates with them regarding the classes and distributes all updates and important information needed to run these classes without issue. Managing the Basic Training side is difficult and time-consuming because it changes daily. Sergeant Collins does an outstanding job of managing and coordinating this side of training. Under this current system of training, managing the process is greatly intensified and his efforts, coordination and organization do not go unnoticed.