

## 2023 Trooper of the Year Narratives

### **Troop 1 - Trooper First Class C.B. Cherry**

Troop 1 nominates Trooper First Class C.B. Cherry for 2023 Trooper of the Year.

TFC Cherry began his career with the Highway Patrol in September 2021. He is a very dependable trooper who always reports to work very neat in appearance, on time, and with an excellent attitude. TFC Cherry ensures that Sumter and Clarendon counties, along with the Citizens of the state, get the best service one can offer. While on duty, TFC Cherry uses good time management, and when not in court or other assigned training, he patrols Post A looking for traffic violations that cause fatal collisions. TFC Cherry excels at his job duties without being asked and without a promise of reward, and has a genuine concern for the motoring public.

On February 7, 2023, TFC Cherry was on routine patrol in Sumter County when he overheard radio traffic from the Sumter County dispatcher about an armed robbery in progress at the Dollar General on US-378 in Sumter. TFC Cherry was nearby and arrived at the Dollar General within minutes. Upon his arrival, he noticed an individual matching the description given by the Sumter County dispatch. Money was falling to the ground from the suspect's waist as he walked away from the store. TFC Cherry exited his vehicle and gave loud verbal commands, holding the suspect at gunpoint until his backup arrived. TFC Cherry and his supervisor were able to take the suspect into custody without further incident. While searching the suspect, TFC Cherry found a handgun in his pants pocket.

TFC C.B. Cherry's actions on that day showed his true dedication to the residents of Sumter and his willingness to go beyond his normal duties

### **Troop 2 - Lance Corporal R.W. Spires**

Troop 2 nominates Lance Corporal R.W. Spires as 2023 Trooper of the Year.

Although Lance Corporal R. W. Spires has a solid business background, he felt his true calling was in law enforcement. So, in July 2016, he began his career with the SC Highway Patrol and was assigned to Troop 2, Post A (Laurens and Newberry Counties). In addition to his law enforcement responsibilities, L/Cpl. Spires is a Field Training Officer (FTO), driving instructor, specific skills instructor, TASER instructor, and a background investigator. As an FTO, L/Cpl. Spires has trained three troopers, taking on the added responsibility of traveling to another post to train two of them. L/Cpl. Spires is currently assigned the only Highway Patrol "Ghost" car in use today: A black Dodge Charger with specialized detailing that makes it practically indistinguishable from a non-law enforcement vehicle. L/Cpl. Spires was patrolling on October 17, 2023, when he stopped a vehicle for a window tint violation. While speaking with the driver, L/Cpl. Spires noticed a strong odor of marijuana coming from the vehicle. Once backup arrived, he conducted a search and located nearly 1.5 pounds of marijuana. In addition to the marijuana, he located and seized nearly \$77,000 in cash. Just weeks before this arrest, in a separate incident, L/Cpl. Spires seized half a pound of marijuana, half a gram of cocaine, and a handgun.

In 2023, L/Cpl. Spires made 18 drug arrests. In addition to the marijuana and cocaine mentioned above, he also took significant amounts of methamphetamine and oxycodone off our streets. DUI enforcement remains a top priority for L/Cpl. Spires, who made 23 DUI arrests in 2023 and works closely with the solicitor's office to ensure the successful prosecution of his cases.

When he's not working, L/Cpl. Spires enjoys spending time with his wife and their three children. He also owns and manages a successful real estate business, R.W. Spires Realty, LLC.

L/Cpl. Spires continues to be a self-motivated, committed trooper dedicated to making our roadways safer. He has proven that he can manage his time

effectively and has maintained solid enforcement activity, especially considering his other Highway Patrol obligations.

Troop 2 is honored to nominate L/Cpl. R.W. Spires for the 2023 Trooper of the Year Award.

### **Troop 3 - Lance Corporal J.C. Owens**

Troop 3 nominates Lance Corporal J.C. Owens as 2023 Trooper of the Year.

As we mentioned during our presentation of the Medal of Valor award for Lance Corporal Owens, he was on routine patrol in Greenville County in September of last year when a traffic stop attempt turned into a pursuit and ended with Lance Corporal Owens being shot at with an assault style rifle. The suspect shot dozens of rounds at L/Cpl. Owens but his tactical response to this situation was by the book. He rolled out of the vehicle and crawled to the rear of his patrol vehicle for cover. It was an intense gun battle between the two, but ultimately L/Cpl. Owens was able to eliminate the threat and call for backup without being shot during the suspect's attack.

While we never want to see a situation escalate into the death of another human being, L/Cpl. Owens defended himself well that night and we believe this shows his skillset as a trooper and the importance of the training we provide to our men and women to ensure they can handle these rare, but terrifying situations.

Let's give a round of applause for Troop 3's nominee for 2023 Trooper of the Year, Lance Corporal Owens.

### **Troop 4 - Trooper First Class M.C. Ferrari**

Troop 4 nominates Trooper M.C. Ferrari for the 2023 Trooper of the Year award.

On September 16, 2023, at about 4:00 p.m., Trooper First Class Ferrari, while on patrol on SC-200 in Lancaster County, noticed smoke coming from the rear area of a yard. Due to his former firefighting experience and willingness to investigate further, he exited his patrol car and walked to the rear of the residence. He found large flames coming from a grill on the back porch area of the home. While requesting dispatch to notify the fire department, TFC Ferrari rushed around to the front of the house to see if anyone was inside. The owner of the house noticed TFC Ferrari walking around the house and came out to speak to him, not knowing his house was on fire. TFC Ferrari, while staying calm, had the owner confirm there were no other occupants in the house and also showed concern for the owner's dog, which was at the door. TFC Ferrari maintained the scene while waiting for the fire department to respond, periodically notifying dispatch of the status and safety information so the fire department could safely approach the fire.

TFC Ferrari's observation, and willingness to go beyond his normal investigative duties, more than likely saved the property owner's life, as well as his dog. The information given by TFC Ferrari also allowed the fire department to make a safe approach to combat the structure fire. TFC Ferrari was praised by the Lancaster County Sheriff's Office, Gooches Fire Department, and McDonald Green Volunteer Fire Department for his actions and willingness to help his community.

For this reason, Troop 4 is proud to nominate Trooper First Class M.C. Ferrari.

### **Troop 5 - Lance Corporal J.R. Timmons**

Troop 5 nominates Lance Corporal J.R. Timmons for the 2023 Trooper of the Year.

Lance Corporal Timmons currently serves the South Carolina Highway Patrol as a Field Training Officer, Civil Emergency Response Team member, and

acting supervisor when the Corporal is absent. It is hard to find someone who exemplifies the core values of the South Carolina Highway Patrol while on duty and off duty more than L/Cpl. Timmons. On duty, L/Cpl. Timmons always puts forth a solid work effort. Despite his job responsibilities and time commitments as an FTO and CERT member, his total number of public contacts is amongst the highest within Post A, which includes Darlington and Marlboro Counties. He comes to work with an upbeat attitude and is approachable, always looking for ways to improve.

L/Cpl. Timmons does this job for the right reasons, rather than for personal gain or recognition. This was exemplified in August when L/Cpl. Timmons was returning from Florence after clearing a collision investigation and saw a pedestrian who was on fire. When the man's vehicle had run out of gas, he attempted to fill it using a gas canister. While doing so, his clothing ignited, along with the grass around his vehicle. L/Cpl. Timmons acted promptly by using his fire extinguisher to extinguish the man and the grassy area around his vehicle.

He did not look to receive praise for his actions, and supervisors only learned of it after L/Cpl. Timmons requested a new fire extinguisher. He is a valuable teammate and is always working to lift others up. Troop 5 had a team member who was struggling with enforcement, and L/Cpl. Timmons took it upon himself to work with this person one-on-one to perform saturation patrols. His efforts helped that employee increase his overall performance. L/Cpl. Timmons always completes his assignments in a timely manner and is always looking to help others. When not at work, he serves his community as a pastor, uplifting others spiritually and performing various community outreaches.

L/Cpl. Timmons is the Troop 5 nominee for the 2023 Trooper of the Year.

**Troop 6 – Senior Trooper D.R. Coon**

The Troop 6 nominee for 2023 Trooper of the Year is Senior Trooper D.R. Coon.

Senior Trooper Coon has a passion for DUI enforcement and led Troop 6, Post C (Beaufort and Jasper Counties) in DUI enforcement for 2023. He looks sharp in uniform and is well liked by his peers and supervisors.

On August 5, 2023, Senior Trooper Coon's patrol vehicle was rear-ended by a drunk driver at a traffic light in Beaufort County — ironically, while he was conducting DUI enforcement. The drunk driver struck two additional cars before coming to a stop within a busy intersection. Senior Trooper Coon was injured but proceeded to check on everyone involved, putting the wellbeing of others ahead of his own. His unmarked patrol vehicle was totaled as a result of the collision.

On August 10, 2023, Senior Trooper Coon returned to work and checked out a spare patrol vehicle. Senior Trooper Coon was driving south on US-17 in Jasper County when he saw a crowd gathered in a BP gas station parking lot. As he entered the parking lot, he saw a man point a handgun at another person and fire the weapon. Senior Trooper Coon exited his patrol vehicle immediately and ordered the suspect to drop his firearm. Senior Trooper Coon's swift action prevented the suspect from firing additional rounds that would have likely injured or killed someone. Senior Trooper Coon placed the suspect in handcuffs, and he was taken into custody by the Ridgeland Police Department.

It is for the above reasons that Troop 6 nominates Senior Trooper D.R. Coon for 2023 Trooper of the Year.

### **Troop 7 - Lance Corporal B.A. Frazier**

Troop 7's nominee for the 2023 Trooper of the Year is Lance Corporal B.A. Frazier.

Lance Corporal B.A. Frazier has been assigned to Troop 7, Post A (Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, and Hampton Counties) for the last six years and he has developed a solid work ethic, strong relationships with coworkers, supervisors, outside agency personnel, and the community. L/Cpl. Frazier is dependable, maintains a positive attitude while conducting day-to-day activities, and always looks professional in uniform.

As described in our presentation of the Purple Heart award, on April 16, 2023, L/Cpl. Frazier initiated a traffic stop on a vehicle speeding more than 20 miles per hour above the posted speed limit on a rural highway. We are grateful that Bamberg County Sheriff's Deputy D. Duckson stopped to assist that night as he happened to be in the area patrolling. It was on L/Cpl. Frazier's second approach to the vehicle, when the violator began shooting and Frazier was shot in the face. Despite L/Cpl. Frazier's injury, he and Deputy Duckson quickly returned fire as the suspect took off. It was astonishing to hear the composure Frazier exhibited in those moments right after. He called in a distress call and gave great detail of the fleeing vehicle, which resulted in the relatively quick apprehension of the suspect by another trooper, Corporal B.J. Tarter.

L/Cpl. Frazier spent several days in the hospital and had to go through months of rehabilitation due to the incident. Troop 7 proudly nominates him for the statewide Trooper of the Year for 2023.

### **Troop 8 – Master Trooper G.S. Shropshire**

Troop 8 is proud to nominate Master Trooper G.S. Shropshire for the 2023 Trooper of the Year.

On September 18, 2023, one of Master Trooper Shropshire's shift mates was involved in a serious motorcycle collision in Orangeburg County. Paying close attention to the Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) and the notes that were put in by the telecommunications operator, Master Trooper Shropshire located the injured trooper and was first on the scene. Master

Trooper Shropshire assisted the Trooper and helped provide lifesaving techniques until medical personnel arrived. He remained calm and determined during this very stressful situation.

Master Trooper Shropshire is committed to his job as a state trooper. He excels in interdiction work with his detection, investigative and interviewing techniques, is dependable, and volunteers for short-notice assignments with no questions asked. He has provided assistance in multiple troops during his time on Troop 8. He has a great work ethic and is always willing to assist the troops with anything from Area Coordinated Enforcement (ACE) to traffic collision investigations. Master Trooper Shropshire is a great asset to the residents of this state and the South Carolina Highway Patrol.

He is a pleasure to supervise, and Troop 8 is proud to nominate him as the 2023 South Carolina Trooper of the Year.

### **Troop 9 - Lance Corporal T.A. Skoczylas**

Troop 9 nominates Lance Corporal T.A. Skoczylas for the 2023 Trooper of the Year.

Lance Corporal Tyler Skoczylas is a native of Buffalo, New York, and moved to South Carolina when he joined the Highway Patrol in 2016. After patrolling the roads of Horry County for seven years, L/Cpl. Skoczylas took every reconstruction training class offered at the Criminal Justice Academy and hit the ground running when he became a MAIT investigator in February 2023.

On May 27, 2023, at around 10:40 p.m., the Pee Dee Multi-disciplinary Accident Investigation Team (MAIT) was notified of a hit-and-run collision where a pedestrian was killed on US-17 in Horry County. After MAIT investigators identified the make and model of a suspect vehicle, L/Cpl. Skoczylas, with the assistance of the Myrtle Beach Real Time Crime Unit, located several videos following the collision that showed, and identified, the suspect getting in and out of that damaged vehicle. With only a partial



Virginia license plate initially identified in the footage, L/Cpl. Skoczylas used his computer to run Virginia license plates, changing letter sequences until he found a vehicle that matched the make and model previously identified. Using the information from L/Cpl. Skoczylas, MAIT investigators were able to locate an insurance claim that was falsely filed in Virginia two days after the hit-and-run, where the owner was claiming the damage was caused by hitting an “object” on an interstate in Virginia. MAIT investigators traveled to Virginia, located the vehicle, confirmed the identity of the driver, and arrested him. Without the tireless work of L/Cpl. Skoczylas and his ability to work with other agencies, this identification and arrest would not have taken place.

On December 26, 2023, at about 7:15 p.m., Pee Dee MAIT was notified of a hit-and-run collision in Georgetown County involving a pedestrian who was seriously injured. An online search of a part number on a white passenger side mirror found at the collision scene indicated it was from an F-150 between the model years of 2015 and 2020. MAIT Investigators obtained surveillance video from a nearby home that captured the collision and L/Cpl. Skoczylas located a FLOCK license plate reader about four miles west of the collision scene that was faced in the same direction the suspect vehicle was traveling. Images captured by the license plate reader showed a white pickup truck with a partial plate pass through just minutes before the collision. Investigators expanded the search to include the entire month of December, which returned additional images showing all characters on the license plate.

An Andrews address to which the vehicle was registered in state DMV records was actually a home under construction. L/Cpl. Skoczylas then asked the State Law Enforcement Division to run a CLEAR Report using the owner’s name, which listed a potential updated address for the owner. At the address, a family member confirmed the owner did have a white Ford F-150, but he was currently heading to a job interview in another county. The Troop 5, Post C Commander traveled to the Berkeley County plant and located the suspect’s vehicle and the driver. L/Cpl. Skoczylas’ investigative

knowledge played a pivotal role in bringing resolution to a challenging case that required a combination of analytical thinking and the use of technological resources.

His dedication and perseverance to ensuring justice reflect positively on MAIT and the South Carolina Highway Patrol and this is why Troop 9 is proud to nominate him for this recognition.

### **Troop 10 – Master Trooper J.L. Baldwin**

The Troop 10 nominee for the 2023 Trooper of the Year is Master Trooper J.L. Baldwin.

Master Trooper Baldwin has proven himself as an invaluable asset to the Highway Patrol and the Insurance Enforcement Unit, gaining the respect of his supervisors and fellow troopers.

Upon graduating from Patrol School, Master Trooper Baldwin worked in several different counties and troops, including Troop 2 in Newberry County, the Troop 3 STOP team, the Troop 3 DUI Team, the Troop 8 Safety Improvement Team, and now the Insurance Enforcement Unit. Master Trooper Baldwin is a certified instructor in firearms, driving, PIT maneuvers, and Taser use. He displays an excellent work ethic by consistently performing to the best of his ability, and exhibits a high degree of professionalism when interacting with the public. That was evident on November 22, 2023, when Master Trooper Baldwin stopped a man on I-85 in Oconee County who was speeding and later admitted to being suicidal.

When Master Trooper Baldwin made contact with the driver, he noticed the man was shaking, crying, and anxious. Master Trooper Baldwin started to have a general conversation with him, and the driver explained he was a veteran who suffered from severe PTSD. The driver informed the trooper he had a gun inside his vehicle, which Master Trooper Baldwin immediately secured. The driver stated that he was planning to attempt suicide when Master Trooper Baldwin stopped him, and that he had attempted suicide in

the past. After calming the driver down, Master Trooper Baldwin made contact with First Sergeant David Johnson in order to explain the situation, and they decided to contact the man's mother, who was currently caring for him. The mother arrived on the scene a short time later. She was very grateful that Master Trooper Baldwin observed the signs and got her son some help. The mother left the scene to take her son to the veteran's hospital.

These attributes make Master Trooper Baldwin a well-rounded trooper whose experience and knowledge are a true asset in mentoring newer troopers. He can always be counted on to perform every task asked of him without hesitation. He exhibits the Highway Patrol's core values of Selfless Service, Integrity, and Responsibility.

It's for these reasons that Troop 10 is proud to nominate Master Trooper J.L. Baldwin as the 2023 Trooper of the Year.