

## **Narratives for Special Awards:**

### **Colonel's Highway Patrol Hero Awards**

*On December 3, 2012 at 1:33 pm, a fatal collision occurred on I-20 near Bush River Road in Lexington County. This collision involved Nicholas Zachary Johnson, who was a South Carolina Department of Transportation employee. Mr. Johnson was removing debris from the roadside when he was struck and killed by a suspected drunk driver. The driver did not stop after the collision and continued west on I-20. **Mr. Charlie Bishop and Mr. Brett Blanks** were in the same vehicle traveling west on I-20. They witnessed the collision and observed the driver leaving the scene of the collision. Mr. Bishop and Mr. Blanks were able to get the driver to pull over about a mile from the collision scene. They stayed with the driver until Trooper J. R. Blaylock could arrive and take him into custody.*

*If Mr. Bishop and Mr. Blanks had not taken action, the suspect could have gotten away and Mr. Johnson's family would have been subjected to the long process of trying to identify and locate the driver. Their actions allowed the South Carolina Highway Patrol to immediately take the suspect into custody, obtain evidence that the driver was impaired, and most importantly, provide justice for Mr. Johnson's family .*

***The Department of Public Safety has created the Purple Heart Award, given to members of the department who have been seriously injured or wounded during the course of their duties.***

### **Purple Heart Awards**

*On March 12, 2012 around 4 a.m., **L/Cpl. Kristopher K. Bratcher** of Troop Three, Post A (Anderson) observed a motorcycle traveling 106 mph in a posted 45 mph zone on SC-153 in Anderson County. L/Cpl. Bratcher attempted to make a lawful stop on the motorcycle. The motorcycle disregarded the stop and L/Cpl. Bratcher initiated a pursuit with the motorcycle. The pursuit continued into Pickens County on Brushy Creek Road. L/Cpl. Bratcher lost control of his patrol vehicle, left the roadway to the left and struck a large tree with the right side of his patrol vehicle. The patrol vehicle came to rest on its top, down an embankment and erupted into flames. Three Easley Police Officers were nearby and were successful in pulling L/Cpl. Bratcher from the burning vehicle. L/Cpl. Bratcher was airlifted to Greenville Memorial Hospital. The patrol vehicle was totally destroyed in the fire. The motorcyclist still has not been identified. L/Cpl. Bratcher endured many surgeries and a long stay in the hospital, being treated for multiple burns and fractures. L/Cpl. Bratcher was released to full duty on March 4, 2013. It's admirable that L/Cpl. Bratcher managed to start down the*

*path of healing and overcame the trauma of this experience. L/Cpl. Bratcher stands as a strong example of perseverance in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds.*

*On July 11, 2012, at 11:59 pm, while on duty in Troop One Post A (Sumter/Clarendon), **Lance Corporal Robert M. Falls, Jr.** responded to assist the Sumter County Sheriff's Department with a domestic disturbance call, which came from a moving vehicle. The weather at the time of the collision was rainy and roads were wet. As Lance Corporal Falls entered a curve, the patrol vehicle's passenger side tires went off the road on the right shoulder. Lance Corporal Falls attempted to correct and pull back onto the roadway but was unable to gain control. His vehicle then slid off the left side of the road striking a ditch and embankment and then spun around and struck a tree. Lance Corporal Falls received very serious injuries as a result of this collision. He was transported to Palmetto Richland Hospital where he was in the Intensive Care Unit for several days. Lance Corporal Falls made great strides in his recovery. He remained positive and was determined to return to duty. Unfortunately his injuries were too severe and forced him to retire from the job he loved. Today, we honor his career with the South Carolina Highway Patrol and remember that his injuries were a result of attempting to help others in the course of his duties. For that, we offer our heartfelt gratitude for his service to the South Carolina Highway Patrol.*

**The Medal of Valor is the highest award bestowed by the Department of Public Safety in exceptional cases of bravery, gallantry or courage in preserving public safety or for an act of extraordinary nature where the officer is exposed to great peril.**

### **Medal of Valor Awards**

***Senior Trooper Brandon O. Stokes** is assigned to Troop One Post A (Sumter/Clarendon counties). On July 14, 2012, at 6:30 pm, Senior Trooper Stokes initiated a routine traffic stop on US-521 for speeding and improper lane change. During the traffic stop, the driver was cooperative and polite. Senior Trooper Stokes detected the presence of alcohol and suspected the driver of being under the influence. He asked the driver to exit the vehicle to perform field sobriety tests after which he determined the subject to indeed be under the influence. When he began to place the handcuffs on him, the suspect became aggressive toward S/Tpr. Stokes. The suspect charged S/Tpr. Stokes and attempted to create distance between himself and the violator. A struggle ensued and they both ended up in a ditch. S/Tpr. Stokes deployed his Taser. The man was able to climb on top of Stokes and began choking him. In order to preserve his life, S/Tpr. Stokes was forced to discharge his handgun, killing the suspect. As you can imagine, this was a terrifying incident that required Trooper Stokes to draw on his training and keep his cool in a situation that went from*

*completely calm to a life or death situation. His courage and adherence to his training saved his life that day.*

*On August 14, 2012, at 8:16 am, **S/Tpr. Sean M. Groubert** initiated a traffic stop on a subject for speeding. As he approached the vehicle, he detected a strong odor of marijuana. After a few minutes of conversation the subject then put his vehicle in gear and sped off, causing S/Tpr. Groubert to begin his pursuit. The pursuit ended up in the City of Columbia. **TFC J. W. Tompkins** joined the pursuit which ended at the Wells Fargo Bank in Five Points when the subject jumped from his vehicle, shooting at Groubert and Tompkins as he ran toward the bank. S/Tpr. Groubert and TFC Tompkins returned fire, striking the subject as he was attempting to gain entry into the bank. These troopers maintained their composure during the pursuit and the terrifying shootout that followed. They protected – not only their own lives – but those of the bank employees as well.*

*On November 14, 2012. **Lance Corporal Michael D. Looney**, Troop 3/Post A, received a BOLO from dispatch that an armed robbery had just occurred near Clemson Blvd. Almost immediately he noticed a vehicle traveling from the area where the robbery occurred. He attempted to stop the vehicle. At that point the vehicle accelerated and Looney pursued. The passenger in the fleeing vehicle leaned from the window and fired at least three rounds from a shotgun at Lance Corporal Looney. The passenger got out of the vehicle at one point and aimed the shotgun again at Lance Corporal Looney. The pursuit ended up on I-85 where the violator was forcibly stopped and arrested. The suspect has since also confessed to robbing another store previous to this crime. L/Cpl. Looney placed himself in harm's way to take a dangerous felon off the roadways. He was calm and used his training and excellent judgment to guide him when his life was threatened.*