
Veteran First Sergeant Slain At Home

Arrest Has Been Made

By Miles W. Turner III

Taylor's death shocked many people, including the close friends and co-workers in the Department.

First Sergeant Taylor V. Blanton, 46, was shot and killed while sleeping in his Caroline County home early on the morning of Oct. 16, 2003. First Sergeant Blanton, a 23-year veteran of the Virginia State Police, was the supervisor over the computer crimes unit located in Moorefield Office Park at the time of his death. An arrest has been made, but details were not available at press time.

Taylor Vaughan Blanton was born on Sept. 8, 1957, in Caroline County, Va. His mother, Betty Wade, is the Division I receptionist in the Department's Henrico County office. Taylor grew up on the family farm and graduated from Caroline County High School in 1975.

He had two dreams he spoke of to friends and family. One dream was real-



First Sergeant Blanton is seen here in his photo from the department's 2002 yearbook.

ized in 1980 when the Department of State Police offered him employment as a Trooper. The other dream became reality when he came back to live on the farm where he grew up. Taylor perished on that very piece of land.

Taylor's death shocked many people, including the close friends and co-workers in the Department. Reflections of his successful career from those same peo-

ple include humor, one of his trademarks.

It seems that many of Taylor's academy classmates during the 69th basic session selected a nickname for Blanton due to his 'vertically challenged' height of 5'6."

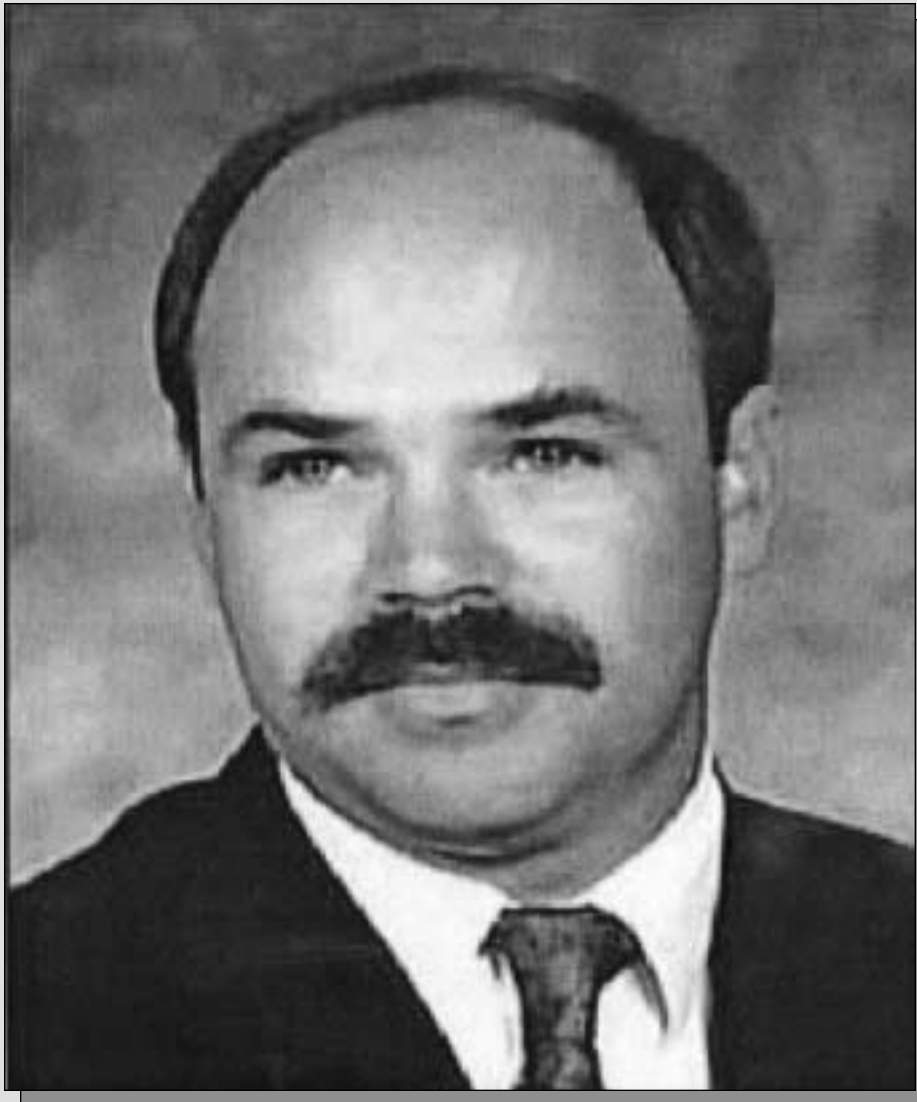
"We called him 'Tattoo' after that little guy on Fantasy Island," Special Agent Ed Kellam, a member of the 69th session, said with a smile.

Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Board Special Agent Phil Bowles, a former trooper who attended the 69th basic session, also had the distinction of being one of Taylor's roommates.

Bowles said, "Probably the most vivid recollection I have of the academy with Taylor is the un-Godly amount of grief he took from everyone about his height. The jokes just never stopped coming, but he took it all in stride. He never once complained about it ... Taylor was a big reason our dorm room at the academy got the nickname 'Romper Room,' after the children's television show bearing the same name. It's a wonder any of us graduated at all."

The "romper room" troopers ultimately persevered and all graduated together on December 19, 1980.

Special Agent Bowles also reflected on Taylor from a much more personal perspective, as the two were neighbors living less than 2 miles apart at the time of Taylor's death. ➤



First Sergeant Taylor V. Blanton



Taylor on his first cycle, age 20 months.

As their careers continued, Bowles recalled, "We saw each other sporadically, but we kept in touch. My kids were a little younger than Taylor's, and I can remember thanking his children for playing so nicely with mine. Nowadays, a lot of kids don't do that, and I feel this was indicative of how Taylor raised them."

When Taylor graduated from the academy and began his state police career, he was assigned to Hanover as part of Division I, Area 1. After his tour in Hanover, he transferred back to his native Caroline to patrol the roads there. In 1988, he was promoted to Special Agent and assigned to the Bureau of Criminal Investigations. After a period as a special agent, Blanton was again promoted to Assistant Special Agent in Charge/First Sergeant, and assigned to the Auto Theft Unit. He transferred from that position to supervise the newly formed computer crimes unit and remained there until his death.

Virginia Secretary of Public Safety John W. Marshall, a former trooper him-



Taylor in second grade, 1964.

self, was also an academy classmate of Taylor's. Taylor and Marshall were hired on the same date, July 1, 1980.

The Honorable Secretary Marshall said, "I remember

Taylor as being full of energy, focused, tough and confident. While most of us who have been through the Academy had those days when we doubted that we could make it through the training, I don't think those thoughts ever entered Taylor's mind. He was determined to graduate and become a Trooper. Taylor studied and worked hard. His enthusiasm and drive were a source of valued inspiration for many of us."

Many others have made similar favorable, yet humorous, comments about Taylor.

Master Trooper Ed Melton, who is currently assigned to a federal task force, worked with Taylor in Division I, Area 1, Hanover upon Taylor's graduation from the academy. Melton related a story about Taylor from the southwest Virginia coal mine strikes in 1989.

Taylor was set to relieve Melton on a fixed post with several miners. Unknown to Blanton, Melton had "briefed" the miners about Taylor and made a "suggestion" for a greeting. As Taylor pulled up in his

blue and gray patrol car and got out, the miners formed a single line facing Taylor. Blanton walked over to say hello to Melton, and as he got near, all the miners at the same time dropped to their knees, pointed to the sky and began to say, "The plane, boss...the plane!" in honor of Blanton's nickname, "Tattoo."

Blanton smiled, shook his head and walked away.

State Police Computer Aided Dispatch coordinator Julie Henry, who was Taylor's ex-wife, remembers him fondly.

They had two children together, Katie and Joel, who are now 15 and 14 respectively.

"Taylor had three loves in his life: The State Police, farming, and his children," Julie

said. "I never once heard him complain about going to work. He loved working for the State Police. It was truly a life long dream of his ... Living on land that was once part of the family farm was the only place he ever wanted to live."

Blanton's family is extremely close knit and, while Katie and Joel were little, the Blanton children and grandchildren would gather at the home of their grandmother, Betty Wade, nearly every weekend. "When the weather was nice, it was for killer softball, volleyball, or kickball games," Julie said.

In addition to his height issues, Taylor took a lot of kidding about his hair (or lack thereof). Julie Henry once asked Taylor if he could pick one or the other, what would he want -- hair or height. "He truly couldn't decide," Julie said.

Blanton was very involved with his children. He helped his children in everything from T-ball to little league; from school sports to paintball and horse shows. While every divorce is a painful event, Taylor and Julie managed to stay focused on what was best for their children and remained friends.

"We talked often, not only about the kids but about work. I used to tell Taylor he should have been a little ➤

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First Sergeant Taylor Blanton sits at his desk in the Computer Crimes Unit located in Moorefield Office Park.

old woman because he loved a good piece of gossip. He loved to talk. I am truly sorry that his grandchildren will not know him. I think he would have been a fantastic grandfather.”

The children are slowly learning to cope with their loss. Joel is in the Junior Navy Reserve Officers Training Corps and was already planning a career in law enforcement. This senseless tragedy has strengthened his resolve to do so. Katie continues playing softball, only without her father as one of her coaches. She wants to pursue a career as a veterinarian.

Despite being involved in law enforcement all of their adult lives, Julie and the rest of the Blanton family had never been victims of any type of crime. As such, this entire ordeal has been and continues to be a learning lesson for all of them.

“So often in the past I would hear about some one dying and feel sorrow for the family, but I truly had no idea what the family was going through,” Julie said. “This has been and continues to be a nightmare. In the normal rhythms of life and death when someone dies

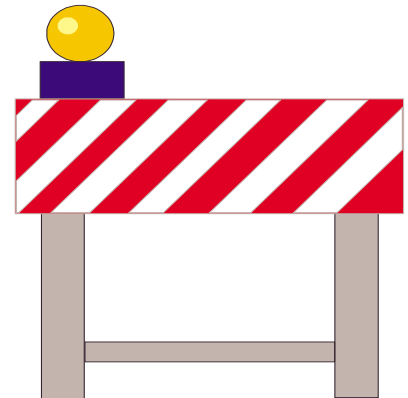
you handle the details, pick up the pieces and move on. Taylor’s untimely and violent loss does not allow for that.”

In the views of many within Taylor’s family, it will be some time -- if ever -- before any sense of closure can be found.

Even though he may have been short in height, Blanton was always tall in the eyes of his state police coworkers. Secretary Marshall said, “Taylor always stood tall as one of ‘Virginia’s Finest’, and as a friend. He was a deeply respected and caring individual who will be missed by the many whose lives he touched.”

Nothing written here could ever truly define the great character of this friend, father, son and coworker. Taylor was a good man with a good heart whose passing leaves ripples through many lives. The family, the Virginia Department of State Police, and the community will continue to feel his loss for years to come. □

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