

100th Basic Session Graduates

by Tammy Poole

"This is a day for each of us to be proud."

The 100th Basic Session—the final graduating class of the Millennium—graduated from the Virginia State Police Academy on Dec. 21, 2000.

The 69 new troopers were located throughout the Commonwealth – from Coeburn in the Southwest part of the state to Virginia Beach.

Trooper Matthew Okuley of Chesapeake, who was chosen by his peers as class president, said his classmates had "very impressive backgrounds." Their combined experience includes 165 years of military service and 120 years of combined law enforcement. The graduates are, in a word, "well-trained," he said.

Colonel W. Gerald Massengill, superintendent of the Virginia State Police, said, "This is a day for each of us to be proud."

Massengill recalled his own days in the rigorous academy 34 years ago.

After graduation, Massengill said he remembers most looking forward to the freedom to "wake up when I wanted to and go to bed when I wanted to."

Although they are free of the academy, the lessons they learned would stay with them throughout their careers, he said.

Massengill told the graduates that they should keep in mind that they are here to serve the citizens of the Com-

monwealth. The bottom line should be a deep sense of compassion for their fellow human beings.

And, although they are well-trained, he said it is important for them to keep in mind that the job "doesn't get any easier and, in many instances, it gets tougher."

There also will be many rewards, he said. The look on the face of a child who just got handed a Trooper Teddy after a serious accident is a reward in itself, according to Massengill, as is the relief on the face of a distraught driver stranded on the side of the highway when a trooper comes to his assistance.

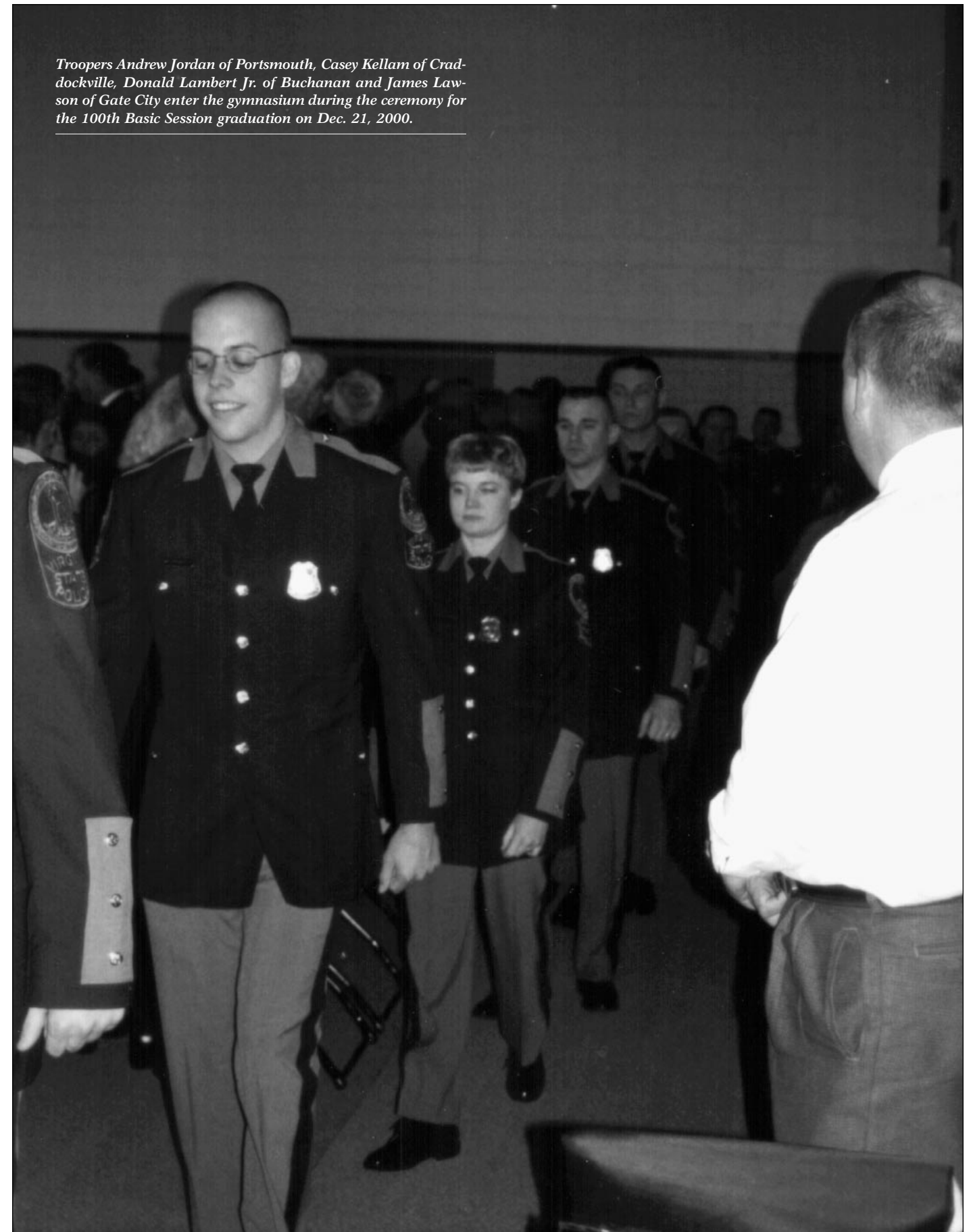
Thanks to the Department of Virginia State Police, Virginia is "a safer place to raise our families," he said.

Massengill told the graduates that many things -- both positive and negative -- would impact their careers. Unfortunately, he said, the negative tends to outweigh the positive in law enforcement. It's important to keep a positive attitude, both in their career and their personal lives, he said.

Keep in mind that one person can make a difference, he said.

"One vote can change a nation. One laugh will conquer gloom. One hug will make us smile. One touch shows you care." ▶

Troopers Andrew Jordan of Portsmouth, Casey Kellam of Craddockville, Donald Lambert Jr. of Buchanan and James Lawson of Gate City enter the gymnasium during the ceremony for the 100th Basic Session graduation on Dec. 21, 2000.





Lt. Col. Martin congratulates a trooper in the 100th Basic Session graduation.

The Hon. John Marshall, director of the United States Marshals Service, was the guest speaker. Marshall, a former Virginia State Trooper, humorously recalled his days in the prestigious uniform 21 years previously.

"I remember looking at the ceiling while doing sit ups," he said, looking around the gymnasium as he spoke. He calculated he performed approximately 2,500 sit-ups during his academy session.

Marshall advised the graduates to do the best they could with what they have and that there is no such thing as a dumb question.

"Give your best" to the Virginia State Police, he said. "Take it slow - one day at a time."

Marshall had the audience laughing as he told of the first time he wrecked his cruiser after following a violator too closely. When the driver stopped, Marshall was unable to stop in time and slammed into the other vehicle, ending up with his bumper in the other vehicle's back seat.

He described the utter humiliation he felt by having to ride to headquarters in the tow truck that was towing his demolished cruiser back the garage area.

Other misadventures during his career with the Department included slipping and falling on a porch during a drug raid with BCI and his first experience with radar.

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"I was driving a 1977 Plymouth with a 440 cubic inch engine," Marshall said. He and his Field Training Officer (FTO) were looking for speeders on Interstate 95.

They had sat there for only a few minutes when a car came zooming past them, he said. Excitedly, he gunned the big engine and took off in pursuit. As they raced down the interstate, Marshall said the FTO asked him if he'd ever driven a car with such a powerful engine.

When he said he had not, the man shook his head and calmly told him that he thought that was the case since he had passed the violator several miles down the road.

"Take the next exit ramp, turn off the engine and let's try this one more time," the FTO said.

"It was the violator's lucky day. I can only imagine the amazed expression on his face when we flew by him."

Marshall said he enjoyed helping people throughout his career. The new troopers will have people look at their badge and uniform and they will "look you in the eye and say a heartfelt 'thank you,' " when they are in trouble, he said.

The troopers also will see people at their worst and their best, he cautioned. "No matter what, it is important to treat

the public with respect and dignity."

He told them there were two things to keep in mind throughout their careers.

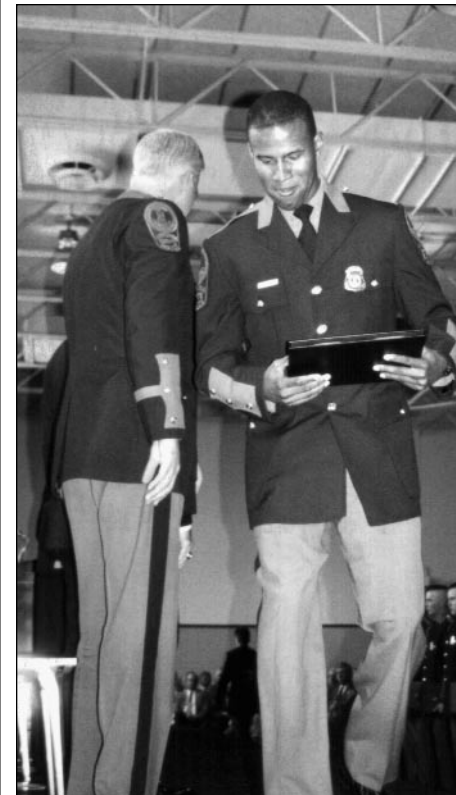
"One is to maintain your integrity. I can't express this enough ...," he said, especially when it comes to establishing their reputation in the courtroom.

The second thing, he said, is never forget the nature of the work and the potential that exists for danger. Marshall said he was reminded of this fact on a daily basis after his academy roommate, Ricky McCoy, was gunned down in 1986.

"Never let your guard down. Never become complacent."

He ended his remarks by telling the graduates that it takes a special person to be a police officer and a very special person to be a Virginia State Trooper, a position that represents courage, honor and pride.

"The future of the Virginia State Police is in your hands. It's a bright future," Marshall said. "This is your day." □



Trooper Cedric Christmas of Richmond smiles as he exits the stage after receiving his diploma from the 100th Basic Session.