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Trooper dies in fiery crash

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WAYNESVILLE - Sheriff Bobby Medford would have loved to have had Anthony Cogdill back in the Buncombe County Sheriff's Department.

The sheriff saw Cogdill a few months ago, and told him the invitation was open. But Cogdill told him he was building a house in Haywood County, and he loved his job with the State Highway Patrol.

"He was a real good officer," Medford said. "He just had a way about him. Everybody liked him."

Black bands on state troopers' badges commemorated Cogdill on Friday and his love of law enforcement.

Cogdill, 32, died when a tractor-trailer smashed into his patrol car, pulled over on Interstate 40 in Haywood County.

As Cogdill's fellow troopers grieved, they tried to answer the questions arising from the fiery crash. This much they knew as the sun went down:

Shortly after 3 p.m., Cogdill pulled over a gray Ford Ranger driven by Brandon Paul Landry, 22, of Jennings, La. He was stopped on eastbound I-40 near mile marker 26 west of Waynesville.

Landry, a Marine stationed at Camp LeJeune, was returning to the base from Jennings after a 10-day leave.

Cogdill got Landry's driver's license and returned to his car.

About the same time, emergency dispatchers started getting calls from drivers on I-40 about a tractor-trailer weaving erratically from lane to lane and randomly speeding up and slowing down.

The tractor-trailer, driven by Bradford Thomas Layton, 35, ran off the side of the road and skidded along the guardrails about 100 feet behind Cogdill's car.

The tractor-trailer rammed into the patrol car, which flipped and slid for about 100 yards.

In seconds, the patrol car was ablaze, the tractor-trailer was on its side and the back of the Ford Ranger was crushed.

Cogdill died in the twisted, charred mass of metal that had been his patrol car.

Landry was taken to a hospital where he was treated for scrapes, cuts and bruises, and released.

Layton, who works out of Roebuck, S.C., was taken to Haywood Regional Hospital, where troopers requested he submit to a blood test for alcohol and drugs.

By the end of the night, Layton had been charged with involuntary manslaughter, reckless driving and possession of drug paraphernalia, according to Highway Patrol Sgt. Pat Staggs.

Troopers had closed both sides of the interstate for several hours while investigating the accident.

Late Friday evening, traffic remained backed up for miles in both directions.

Cogdill left behind a wife, Heidi, and a 3-year-old son, Cody.

Cogdill's father-in-law, Larry Holloway, recalled the trooper's valiant career.

While working at the Buncombe County Sheriff's Department in 1995, Cogdill brushed with death during a traffic stop.

He was returning to his patrol car after talking with the driver.

A passenger had given him a false name, Medford said. The 33-year-old man was wanted for writing stolen checks.

A backup officer saw the man aim a gun at Cogdill. The two officers fired four rounds, killing the suspect.

After the shooting, Medford said the suspect told family members he "would not be taken alive."

Cogdill's actions were so by-the-book that a video of the stop was used in training, Holloway said.

District Attorney Ron Moore later commended the officers for their actions, saying they likely saved the lives of other passengers in the car.

Cogdill was named sheriff's department Officer of the Year for 1995. He joined the patrol in 1997.

Staff writer Tonya Maxwell contributed to this report.

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