

Georgia Ranger Added to Law Enforcement Memorial

• *By Lt. Judd Smith, Georgia Department of Natural Resources*

For years I had heard over and over again that Georgia had lost only one ranger in the line of duty, and all the other rangers I worked with over the years believed this to be the case as well. This was Cpl. Rocky Wainwright. Rocky was killed in 1999 in an ATV accident while searching for a missing little girl. I had never given much thought to this subject until Sgt. Stan Elrod and I became involved with the Police Unity Tour, which is a 250-mile bicycle ride that raises money for the National Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial in Washington, D.C.

This changed for me as I was talking to Sgt. Wade Law one day. You see, Sgt. Law works in southwest Georgia and his father was a trooper with the Georgia State Patrol back in the 1960's. He had always told Wade that he knew of at least one other ranger, William Hobbs, who had died in the line of duty in Blakely, Georgia. He said he knew about it because he was there when it happened. When Wade told me about this, it sparked my interest and I looked to see if Hobbs' name had ever been added to either the Memorial in D.C. or the one in Forsyth at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center. It had not. I had to know more about what had happened to Ranger Hobbs, so Sgt. Law was able to locate Ranger Hobb's son Hal,



WILLIAM EARL HOBBS
Ranger
Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources
Social Circle, GA
Date of Death: 07/21/1967

now in his 60's. I also located a copy of a news article from July 10th, 1967, telling of the incident.

I called Hal one day and after introducing myself, told him I had heard about his father and that I would like to know the story if he cared to tell me.

This is how it went.

On July 9th, 1967 Ranger Hobbs was getting ready to go to work, when a woman who lived on the Hobbs farm as a renter, came to his house. She told Hobbs that Aaron Bankston, who lived with her, had gone crazy and had run everyone out of the house. The woman wanted Hobbs to go down to the house and see if he could do something with him. Hobbs told her to call the sheriff's office because he had dealt with Bankston too many times in the past. The sheriff was called and Hobbs left to go to town to do his reports and mail them. It seems that Hobbs ended up in Blakely at the sheriff's office and was asked by one of the deputies to go back down to the Bankston house to help him with the unruly Aaron. Hobbs agreed to go.



County Ranger William Hobbs and son Hal, in a 1956 photo



Lt. Judd Smith, at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington





Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue with the Hobbs family taken at the Georgia Public Safety Memorial

When Hobbs and the deputy arrived, Aaron Bankston was on the front porch of the house. The officers asked him to come down and talk to him, but Bankston retreated into the house. The officers went up onto the porch and Bankston shot them through the screen door with the only shotgun shell in the house. Hobbs was hit in the face and fell back into the yard. The deputy was also hit but fled on foot. At this point, Hobbs was laying in the yard, blinded by bird shot. Bankston came out and shot Hobbs several more times, with his own revolver.

The deputy made it back to Blakely to the sheriff's office and told them what had happened. As it was, Sgt. Law's father was there and went out to the house with several deputies, where Bankston was killed in a short stand off with the

officers. The officers were then able to get to Hobbs and he was taken to the hospital where he died ten days later from his injuries.

After hearing the story of what had happened to Ranger Hobbs from his son, I was able to gather enough information to submit his name and he was added to both memorials. During the ceremony in Georgia, I was privileged to meet Hobbs' family and to see just how much it meant to them to have their father's memory forever etched in granite as one of Georgia's many fallen heroes.

If you have ever heard of one of these stories, you can search for fallen officers on the Memorial from the website at www.nleomf.org. We owe it to these fallen men and women to insure that they are never forgotten. ☪



Team Blue Thunder, our team for the Police Unity Tour, comprised of officers from GA DNR, GA and NC State Patrol, Indiana State Police and Doraville, GA Police Department—our team alone raised \$44,000 for the DC memorial this year.