

## Montana Trooper

# Trooper Derek Werner Recognized as IACP/Motorola Trooper of the Year Finalist

By Sergeant Jeffrey W. Kent

**O**n March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Trooper Derek Werner was patrolling eastbound on U.S. Highway 2 between Wolf Point and Poplar when he came upon a crash at 1138 hours. Trooper Werner observed four vehicles that appeared to be involved, quickly notified MHP dispatch, and got out to check on the occupants. The weather conditions were extremely cold, snowy, and windy at the time. Visibility was almost non-existent, and temperatures were around -20 to -30 degrees Fahrenheit. The road conditions were icy with areas of drifting snow, and the vehicles involved were on and off the roadway and in between guardrails, which created an obvious hazard.

As Trooper Werner approached the scene and began to check on the occupants, he observed two additional vehicles that also appeared to be involved in the crash. As he began performing triage on the occupants, two more vehicles traveled into the scene and crashed, which caused further damage and injury to an already chaotic scene.

Trooper Werner continued to assess the occupants involved and gave direction to them. Trooper Werner quickly advised those who weren't trapped and were in a dangerous position to stand on the other side of the guardrail. Trooper Werner carried a small child and escorted people to the other side of the guardrail. While this was happening, another vehicle traveled into the scene and crashed.

As soon as Trooper Werner got everyone to the other side of the guard rail, a large commercial truck, pulling a trailer traveled into the scene and crashed into several of the disabled vehicles on the road and sent them in unpredictable directions. Had Trooper Werner not acted so quickly and unselfishly, there would have been severe injuries to those he helped get to the other side of the guardrail.

Trooper Werner hurried back to his patrol car to update dispatch of the severity of the scene. Trooper Werner also grabbed blankets and returned to a vehicle that still had people inside. In that vehicle were two infants and three adults. There was also a woman lying on the ground next to the vehicle with obvious injuries to her legs. Trooper Werner covered up the woman with a blanket and then carried one of the infants to his patrol car while another person carried the other. Trooper Werner advised one of the adults who wasn't trapped to come with him so he could stay with the infants in his car where it was warm.



The crash scene on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Additional officers began to arrive on scene and assist. Trooper Werner went back to the people standing on the other side of the guard rail and carried the small child back to his patrol car where it was warm. While waiting on an ambulance, Trooper Werner was worried about the female lying on the ground. Because of the dangerous wind chills, Trooper Werner decided she needed to be moved into a warm place, despite her obvious injuries. Trooper Werner located a vehicle that was not in a hazardous area and loaded the female into the back seat.

The ambulance arrived, and there was not enough room for everyone to be transported. Trooper Werner assisted in loading the most severely injured into the ambulance and then helped load other injured people into other officers' cars, who then transported them to the hospital.

All total, this incident involved 10 vehicles and 18 occupants. Trooper Werner reacted to the situation without regard for personal safety, which undoubtedly prevented further injuries and saved lives. Trooper Werner knowingly exposed himself to an obvious life threatening incident by conducting the above mentioned actions. His brave and unselfish determination to provide aid or rescue those involved in such a hazardous and intense situation was indescribable.

During the summer of 2011, Trooper Werner was off-duty when he received a call from the Poplar Police Chief, Doug Marottek. Chief Marottek notified Werner of two swimmers being washed away in the swift current of the Missouri River. Chief Marottek asked if Werner was available to assist. Werner is an avid outdoorsman and fisherman and quickly readied his boat and responded to help. Within minutes, Werner located the two men who were clinging to the tops

more ►

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The finalists, from left to right: *Trooper Derek A. Werner, Montana Highway Patrol; Trooper Dwayne M. Stanford, Tennessee Highway Patrol; Corporal D. Mark Hedrick, Missouri State Highway Patrol; Sergeant Adam R. Kosheba, Pennsylvania State Police.* PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPTAIN MARK W. STANFORD, TENNESSEE HIGHWAY PATROL.

of trees growing on a flooded sandbar. Werner was able to maneuver his boat and rescue the two men and bring them safely to shore.

Trooper Werner was selected as Montana's Trooper of the Year for exemplary performance in these two crises last year. Colonel Mike Tooley nominated Trooper Werner for the IACP/Motorola Trooper of the Year and in February of 2012, Trooper Werner was selected as the Mountain Pacific Trooper for 2011. This region consists of 14 western U.S. states and western Canada. Trooper Werner is the only Montanan to ever receive the designation.

Motorola sponsored the contest and brought the four regional finalists and one guest to the Washington, DC area to participate and also receive behind the scene tours of the White House and the Capitol. Trooper Werner and his wife Mary flew to Alexandria, VA to attend the banquet, which was held on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Trooper Werner's son Jacob and his parents, Darrell and Jean, also attended.

The four regional finalists who were honored at the banquet were:

- Corporal D. Mark Hedrick, Missouri State Highway Patrol
- Sergeant Adam R. Kosheba, Pennsylvania State Police
- Trooper Dwayne M. Stanford, Tennessee Highway Patrol
- Trooper Derek A. Werner, Montana Highway Patrol

The panel of judges was faced with four remarkable finalists who were involved in extreme situations during 2011. The stories of each of the four finalists at the Motorola Trooper of the Year site can be read by going to:

<http://www.theiacp.org/About/Awards/TrooperoftheYear/tabid/303/Default.aspx>

In the end, the judges selected Sergeant Kosheba of the Pennsylvania State Police as the top finalist.

Trooper Werner and his family enjoyed the trip immensely, and he described the banquet as "an experience of a lifetime." Trooper Werner is a valuable asset to his community, MHP, and the great state of Montana. His loyalty and dedication to serving others easily puts him in the best of the best category. □