

Trooper James B. Crooks
End of Watch: Tuesday, May 19, 1998



FHP Trooper Crooks Remembered 17 Years Later
Published on Saturday, June 13, 2015, in the New Tampa and Wesley Chapel
Neighborhood News

You've probably driven past the signs more times than you can count and not given much thought to them. While we might worry about getting pulled over for speeding and other minor traffic infractions, it's easy to forget that members of local law enforcement agencies put their lives on the line each time they conduct a traffic stop.

The "normal" traffic enforcement practice that we all dread can turn tragic in just seconds — as it did in Wesley Chapel 17 years ago — which is why the one-mile strip of C.R. 54 on either side of I-75 was named the Trooper James "Brad" Crooks Highway in 1999.

Just before we went to press with this issue (on May 19), the Pasco County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) posted a reminder of the dangers of traffic stops on their Facebook page with a photo honoring the memory of the late Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) trooper James "Brad" Crooks, 23, who was killed during a traffic stop on I-75 in Wesley Chapel near the S.R. 54 exit on May 19, 1998.

"We are thankful for the sacrifices each of our deputies and other law enforcement officers make daily and honor those who have lost their lives while protecting the citizens of Pasco County," the PCSO post read. "We are forever grateful for your service."

According to PCSO and published reports from that day 17 years ago, Crooks and Tampa Police Department (TPD) detectives Ricky Childers and Randy Bell were victims of a shooting rampage — which stretched across three counties — by convicted felon Hank Earl Carr.

Carr reportedly had killed his girlfriend (Bernice Bowen)'s four-year-old son Joey at their Seminole Heights apartment and driven him and Bowen to Tampa Fire Station Number 7 (located at Nebraska Ave. and Hanna Ave. in Seminole Heights). At the station, the boy was

pronounced dead. Carr fled, but was picked up by Childers and Bell, who happened to be driving past the station. Carr posed as Bowen's husband, who had no criminal record, was detained in handcuffs and ordered to explain what had happened.

Published reports state that, after Carr explained that Joey's death was an accident (saying the boy was dragging an assault rifle that was in the home that went off when Carr tried to take it from him), the detectives took Carr back to the apartment so he could show them what happened. After confiscating the weapon, on the way back downtown, Carr slipped out of his handcuffs using a universal handcuff key (that he wore around his neck) and shot the detectives with their own weapons. He then carjacked an auto parts truck and headed north on I-275. Carr reportedly took the assault rifle with him. After the carjacking was reported, an alert was put out about the truck.

Trooper Crooks pulled Carr over in the truck on the I-75 exit ramp for S.R. 54 around 2:30 p.m., reports state. Gunfire erupted and Crooks was fatally shot in the head. It was his eighth month on the job.

PCSO deputies then pursued Carr into Hernando County while exchanging gunfire. Carr eventually was struck by a bullet and pulled into a Hess gas station on S.R. 50 and barricaded himself inside with the station attendant, Stephanie Kramer. He held the hostage until just before 7:30 p.m., after which he killed himself inside the station.

The deaths of Crooks, Childers and Bell reportedly prompted change within TPD, requiring prisoners to be transported with hands handcuffed behind their backs. Prisoners also are now forbidden from being transported in vehicles without separators between the front and back seats.

A year after the tragic events of that day, the Florida Legislature dedicated one mile of C.R. 54 on either side of I-75 to the memory of Trooper Crooks. Also named for him was a PCSO substation in Land O'Lakes on S.R. 52, the same area in which Crooks worked regularly out of FHP's Land O'Lakes office.

A deadly day, ten years later

Published on Monday, May 19, 2008, on Tampa Bay News 9

On May 19, 1998, Hank Earl Carr killed two Tampa detectives and a Florida Highway Patrolman.

The series of tragic events began when Carr killed his girlfriend's 4-year-old son Joey Bennett and ended that evening when Carr took his own life while barricaded in a Hernando County gas station.

About 10 a.m. on May 19, 1998, Bennett was shot and killed with a rifle in Carr and Bowen's Tampa apartment. [More Information](#)

A few hours later on the way to the police station, Carr used a key to escape his handcuffs and shot and killed Tampa detectives Rick Childers and Randy Bell, who were investigating the toddler's death. Carr contended the child's death was an accident.

Carr escaped the police cruiser he killed the detectives in, carjacked a truck and headed north on Interstate 75. A short time later, he ambushed and killed state trooper James Crooks in Pasco County during a traffic stop.

He continued on, eventually being forced off the road near State Road 50 in Hernando County. After holing up in a Shell station along the interstate for almost five hours, Carr took his own life.

Hank Earl Carr, seen shortly after the death of his girlfriend's son on May 19, 1998.

Many lives were changed that day, including Bernice Bowen, Carr's girlfriend. She is serving time in prison for her role in the crimes. She won't be eligible for parole until 2017.

Bowen's mother, Connie told Bay News 9's partner newspaper, The St. Petersburg Times she still doesn't understand how the crimes happened 10 years later.

"I still don't know why he did it," Connie Bowen said from her home in Ohio. "And how anybody can take a little baby's life like that and innocent people's lives to destroy families like that I don't know."

Connie Bowen is raising her granddaughter Kayla, who was five when her brother Joey was killed. Kayla, who has been through therapy said she hopes her mother will be released soon.

Shooting Rampage Leaves Decade Of Pain Published on Monday, May 19, 2008, in the Tampa Tribune

There's a place in Tampa where George McNamara won't go.

A career law enforcement officer who has risen to the rank of major with the Tampa Police Department, McNamara never pulls off Interstate 275 at the Floribraska Avenue ramp.

"I won't. I just can't do it," he said.

It's been this way since 10 years ago Monday.

That's when McNamara walked along the ramp toward an unmarked police car, a green Ford sedan with a Miami Dolphins license plate, and saw two detectives shot to death inside. Ricky Childers and Randy Bell had worked for him.

The men were victims of a shooting rampage that spanned the Bay area and only ended when the gunman, Hank Earl Carr, killed himself after holding a woman hostage for hours. Carr also killed two others -- his girlfriend's 4-year-old son, Joey Bennett, and Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James B. Crooks.

Five were dead by the time darkness fell. But the people who would suffer the pain of that day -- May 19, 1998 -- numbered in the hundreds, even thousands, counting those who lined the funeral routes clutching American flags.

Greg Stout felt it more than others. He sat that morning at police headquarters with Carr and remembers him as affable and calm. Stout, a detective, came close to riding with Childers in the green sedan on a trip with Carr to where the boy was shot. Bell went instead. On the way back, Carr killed the detectives with Childers' gun.

"Everyone lost some innocence that day," Stout says today. "You honestly treat everybody differently now."

Carr's legacy includes changes in law and policy so officers can do a better job protecting themselves and others. Anyone carrying a concealed handcuff key, as Carr did, can be charged with a third-degree felony. The Tampa Police Department changed the way it transports prisoners.

But Ricky Joe Childers II, now 33, one of the detective's sons, still feels the pain.

"My children were cheated out of not seeing their grandfather," said Childers, of Lake Panasoffkee. "I have an hour's drive to work every day. I'll spend time thinking about what went wrong for that to happen."

Lives Converge Over Boy's Shooting

A convicted felon, Carr, 30, shared an apartment at 709 1/2 E. Crenshaw St. with his girlfriend, Bernice Bowen, and her two children, Joey and his sister, then 5. He kept several weapons including two SKS assault rifles.

That day, about 9:50 a.m., Carr and Bowen drove Joey to a Tampa fire station at Nebraska Avenue and Hanna Street. The boy had been shot in the head. Paramedics pronounced him dead and called police. A sergeant sent Childers and another detective to the scene.

Carr was wanted on a marijuana trafficking charge from Ohio, but at that moment, Tampa police didn't know who he was. He called himself Joseph Bennett, the name of the children's biological father, and he called Bowen his wife.

Bowen perpetuated that façade. "He told me to tell everybody his name was Joseph Bennett," she later said in a transcript related to the case.

May 19 was supposed to have been the last day Childers and Bell worked together for a while. Bell, 44, had been transferred to Internal Affairs. Childers, 46, and his wife had a vacation in Key West planned.

"I can still close my eyes and picture it," said Vickie Metzler, who was Childers' wife. "I was cleaning up some breakfast things, and he kissed me on the cheek. We said, 'I love you.'"

Bell was excited about his new assignment and about finding "a treasure trove of Beanie Babies" at a card store near police headquarters, Stout said. One of Bell's daughters collected the toys, and he bought a bunch that morning.

Missing A Date With Death

At the fire station, Carr ran once he heard the toddler was dead. He darted across the street right in front of the green sedan as Childers pulled up. Childers brought him to headquarters in handcuffs. He seated Carr next to Stout's desk and went to the men's room.

Carr was "very friendly, very talkative," Stout said. He spoke about running to check on his "daughter" and said the shooting of his "son" was an accident.

"I don't think anybody anticipated what he was capable of doing," Stout said.

McNamara said Carr's duplicity fooled them. "Here's a guy who says, 'I didn't shoot my son.' We're thinking we're dealing with a grieving father, and we're dealing with the Devil."

Stout said Childers asked him to join the interview with Carr, but he declined because he had another one scheduled. So Bell took part instead.

On tape, Carr told the detectives Joey had been dragging an assault rifle by the barrel and the gun fired when Carr grabbed it to take it away. The detectives decided to drive Carr back to the apartment where the family lived and have him walk them through the chain of events.

"That was the last time I saw them alive," Stout said.

Carnage In A Green Sedan

Documents from the case state that the blood spatter in the apartment wasn't consistent with Carr's story. "They started calling me a liar," Carr would say later in a live radio interview aired while he held his hostage.

Childers and Bell confiscated one of the SKS rifles and placed Carr, his hands cuffed in front of him, into the back of the green sedan for the ride back to headquarters. They didn't know he wore a handcuff key on a chain around his neck, or that he often said he would rather die than return to prison.

Childers was driving. Using the key, Carr slipped out of the handcuffs, reached up front and shot the detective with his own 9mm handgun. Then he shot Bell. "I shot them both in the face," Carr said in the radio interview. "I had to shoot one twice because I shot him and he was still trying to get the gun so I shot him again."

The sedan stopped on the Floribraska exit ramp. There, the gunman carjacked an auto-parts truck and, with the rifle, headed north.

Stout, out of the office, heard on police radio that two people had been shot in a carjacking. He was the first Tampa police detective to arrive at the scene. When he saw the sedan, he recalled, "I thought, 'Rick Childers beat me to this.'"

Metzler, Childers' wife, was working as information systems manager at the Tampa Police Department and remembered supervisors calling her upstairs about 2 p.m.

"Something didn't feel right," she said. "They said Ricky was out on an investigation and he's been shot and he didn't make it. Suddenly, the bottom dropped out."

Scrambling To Stop The Killing

With emotions swirling, detectives swung into high gear. Stout interviewed the carjacked man and put out an alert about the truck.

Others focused on Bowen, the girlfriend.

Unable to find booking photos of Bennett, police wanted any names the gunman might use. Police and court records related to the case say Bowen continued to say her boyfriend's name was Joseph Bennett.

Shortly before 2:30 p.m., a Florida Highway Patrol trooper stopped at Floribraska Avenue to report other troopers had spotted the truck on Interstate 75 in Pasco County.

Crooks, 23, a trooper on the job just eight months, pulled up in traffic behind Carr on the exit ramp for State Road 54.

Timothy Bain, now 30 and living in Sarasota, was a University of South Florida student driving to a job at the Saddlebrook Resort that afternoon. Bain said he saw Carr pop out of the truck and raise a gun.

"I ducked down," Bain recalled. "I was just praying I wasn't going to get shot."

Bain said he heard gunfire, then glass shattering. He peeked over the dashboard to see another motorist try to run over Carr. Carr climbed back into the truck and drove away.

The trooper's car began rolling down the exit ramp. Bain said he ran after it, reaching inside to apply the brake. The trooper had been shot in the head.

"It was obvious he was beyond saving," Bain said.

An Audience Before Dying

Speeding through Pasco County, Carr exchanged gunfire with Pasco deputies and shot a truck driver in the shoulder. He barreled into Hernando County and fired through a floorboard of a sheriff's helicopter before being wounded in the buttocks.

About 3 p.m., Carr pulled into a gas station just off Interstate 75 on State Road 50 and scrambled inside for refuge. He took 27-year-old clerk Stephanie Kramer hostage.

"You know what he's done already," said Hernando County Sheriff Richard Nugent, who at the time supervised the negotiators at the scene. "We're not going to let him leave."

Tactical officers and snipers surrounded the station. So did officers from Tampa, Pasco and the highway patrol, along with news crews from the Bay Area and Orlando.

"We had the news helicopters overhead with our helicopter," Nugent recalled. "We had to call down to the TV stations to quit showing our SWAT team live."

The negotiators had no mobile command post and set up at a nearby hotel, Nugent said. As they worked with the phone company to limit Carr's phone access, WFLA, 970 AM, dialed into the gas station for an on-air interview.

The station's news director asked Carr to describe what had happened and urged him to release Kramer. "Not until I hear from my wife," Carr said in a transcript.

Police flew Bowen in a helicopter to speak to Carr -- a gamble Nugent said they had to take. "You don't know what they're going to say, but our options were limited."

Carr released Kramer unharmed at 7:20 p.m. Before sending her out, he gave her the handcuff key to give to Bowen, along with letters for his mother and the children.

Then he shot himself in the head.

Dealing With A Decade Of Pain

Detectives Childers and Bell are buried in Myrtle Hill Cemetery. The year after they died, Tampa police issued a policy requiring all prisoners to be handcuffed behind their backs and to be transported in a patrol car with a screen separating the front and back seats or with an officer beside them.

"Hopefully, that will prevent this from happening again," said Metzler, who in 2006 married a retired Tampa police officer.

Bell's widow also remarried and moved out of state. The detectives' children are rearing children of their own.

"I don't cry often because I think he's in a better place," said Demetra Jones, 33, of Fort Myers, one of Bell's daughters. "He was doing what he loved to do, and he died a hero."

Bowen is housed in the Homestead Correctional Facility in Florida City, serving a 21-year sentence for being an accessory. She is scheduled for release in 2017.

Stout is president of the union representing Tampa police. Bain, who stopped the slain trooper's car, has become a Sarasota police K9 officer.

"It was so horrible, so inhuman, the events that took place," Bain said. "I felt so helpless at the time, and I never wanted to feel that way again."

Some of those who lived through that day will cope today by remembering the lives lost.

McNamara planned to take the day off to visit the cemetery. Metzler said she and her husband will, too. They will bring fresh flowers.

"My advice to people is, live today like it's your last, and treasure moments. It's not the material things that matter," she said. "In my heart, I treasure moments."

**Former Pasco County deputy recalls chasing killer
Published on Sunday, May 18, 2008, in the St. Petersburg Times**

The cop killer raced his white pickup north on Interstate 75, fleeing the carnage he'd created but unafraid to inflict more.

A Pasco County Sheriff's deputy jumped into the chase.

Flying up the highway at 100 miles per hour, the killer turned and leveled an angry, scary, teeth-clenched stare out his back window, then raised his right fist and shot a bird at his pursuer.

The deputy shot one back.

"That was my introduction," recalled Jim Campbell, "to Hank Earl Carr."

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Their encounter took place 10 years ago tomorrow.

The events of May 19, 1998, left an indelible mark on law enforcement throughout Tampa Bay. Three law enforcement officers were killed that day, along with a young boy. In the aftermath, police policies would change and weapons would be upgraded. Officers everywhere were reminded of their constant vulnerability.

Campbell, who found himself in the thick of the rampage, says he wasn't personally changed by that extraordinary day. He was already a veteran cop by then, and he knew what to do.

"I was glad it was me chasing him and not a rookie deputy," Campbell said, "because he would have been right up on his bumper and he would have been killed."

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On May 18, the day before Carr's treachery, Campbell had stopped for breakfast at the Denny's at State Road 54 and I-75. Walking in, he saw a familiar face. It was Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James "Brad" Crooks. Campbell and Crooks had worked several accident scenes together. Crooks was a 23-year-old rookie.

The next day, both would work the interstate, and both would encounter Hank Earl Carr.

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Crooks was first.

He spotted Carr farther south on the interstate and pulled him over on the SR 54 exit ramp. Carr bolted out of the pickup and shot Crooks dead.

Minutes later, unaware of what had happened to Crooks, Campbell picked up the chase.

The pickup barreled on, passing cars in the median and on the shoulder.

"I saw him fire a couple shots into civilian cars," Campbell said.

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Campbell is retired now. He left the Sheriff's Office in 2006 with 31 years in and an engraved gold watch.

He and his wife, Zaida, live in a tidy waterfront house in Land O'Lakes. He takes his motor home to NASCAR races and is a longtime Bucs season ticket holder.

Campbell, 61, is still a quintessential cop, a smoker with an unsentimental speaking style who dresses impeccably, even in retirement.

His memory of May 19, 1998, is vivid but imperfect. He remembered Carr driving a Chevy S-10. It was a Ford. Campbell thought the first call went out about 1:15. It was nearly 3 p.m.

He doesn't get emotional recalling his close encounter. He saw worse as an Army Ranger in Vietnam.

"It never entered my mind to stop and I wasn't trying to be a hero or anything like that," he said. "It was just the training that I had that I was chasing a wanton killer."

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Campbell stayed at a tight but safe distance from the truck's bumper. But then Carr turned and fired a bullet that tore through Campbell's windshield, past his right ear and into the safety cage behind him.

"I knew what it would take to do that," Campbell said.

He had thought Carr was armed with a handgun. But a handgun couldn't cause that kind of damage to his car.

In fact, Carr had an SKS assault rifle. That morning, authorities believe, he used it to kill his girlfriend's son, 4-year-old Joey Bennett. Two Tampa detectives investigating that crime confiscated the weapon and put it in their trunk as they took Carr into custody.

They never noticed the handcuff key around his neck. Sitting in the back of the detectives' car, Carr used the key to get loose, reached over the seat and grabbed one officer's gun.

Then he killed Randy Bell and Ricky Childers, veteran homicide detectives whom Campbell had known and respected.

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On most days, Campbell would stop by the station at the beginning of his shift and check out an assault rifle to have in the car for extra fire power. But first thing on the morning of May 19, he was told to catch up on a backlog of calls and didn't get a chance.

After Carr shot at him, Campbell got on the radio and alerted other officers about Carr's firepower.

"It could cook through our cars like Swiss cheese," he remembers saying.

Carr kept shooting. Campbell had to keep a good distance between them and could not get off a clean shot in return. Then a fragment from one of Carr's bullets caught Campbell in the neck. He pulled over briefly, realized he wasn't badly hurt and pressed on.

Dozens of law enforcement vehicles had joined the pursuit. A sharpshooter tried to take out Carr from an overpass. Hernando deputies sprayed the truck with bullets.

Carr never let up, even shooting at a police helicopter.

With a bullet in his buttock and driving with a flat tire, Carr coasted into a gas station just across the Pasco-Hernando county line. Campbell pulled off behind him and unloaded five or six rounds from his shotgun at the pickup.

But it was empty. Carr had run into the convenience store and taken a clerk hostage. Campbell stayed at the scene for about 45 minutes until his body suddenly shut down.

"I had lost enough blood and my adrenaline was crashing," he said. He woke up in an ambulance, with the siege at the convenience store still on.

He watched from an emergency room TV as a smoky flash from SWAT team explosives lifted the roof off the convenience store. He and his wife both remember how the monitors beeped loudly as Campbell's heart rate slowed when the news came: Carr had shot himself dead.

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Campbell cried when he learned of Crooks' death. He attended Bell and Childers' massive, public funeral in Tampa with his arm, embedded with broken glass from the chase, in a sling.

He took about a week off from work, then returned to a desk job overseeing deputies' off-duty assignments. He hated it.

For a time he worked in the agriculture unit, then went back into road patrol before retiring.

Campbell received the sheriff's medal of valor for his work on May 19, 1998. And that's exactly how he regards his actions: work.

"I wasn't going to stop chasing him," he said. "That's what I was paid to do, and I was going to earn my money that day."

So why did he reciprocate Carr's hand gesture?

"I really don't know," Campbell said. "Just to show him I was as pissed off as he was."

**Hank Earl Carr's rampage started with the killing of a child, then escalated.
Published on Saturday, May 17, 2008, in the St. Petersburg Times**

The worst day for police in Tampa Bay history happened 10 years ago. It began in an old apartment with no telephone, as the rising sun warmed Sulphur Springs, when a fugitive with a fake name shot his girlfriend's son in the face.

The boy was Joey Bennett, 4 years old. The fugitive said his death was an accident.

"I swear I'll never touch another gun again," he told the detectives.

They didn't know he was lying, or that his real name was Hank Earl Carr, or that he was wanted in four states, or that he had once bitten off half a man's ear, or that he had been accused of stomping a puppy to death.

Nor did they know of his 133 IQ, his expertise in martial arts, his vow never to return to prison, his handcuff key on a hidden gold chain.

Tricked by false information that was corroborated by his girlfriend, the detectives mistook him for a man with no criminal record. And so they put him in the back seat of an unmarked Ford Taurus with no protective screen.

Tampa police detectives Rick Childers, 46, and Randy Bell, 44, were driving Carr from the apartment to police headquarters just before 2 p.m. when Carr used the key to free his hands. Then he grabbed the gun from Childers' shoulder holster.

Childers was a formidable homicide detective and one of the agency's most beloved officers. Bell had received an award of valor for leading a woman from a burning house. Carr shot them both to death.

A man in a delivery truck saw the struggle and pulled over. Carr ran to him and ordered him out. Armed with a rifle from the trunk of the Taurus, he sped away in the truck to his mother's house in Seminole Heights, where he changed his shirt and washed the blood from his hands.

"Kiss me," he told her. "You'll never see my face alive again."

He got back in the truck and drove north on Interstate 75, hoping to see his daughter in Ohio one last time. By then a description of the truck had gone out on the radio.

One man who heard it was Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James "Brad" Crooks, 23, son of a cattle farmer, engaged to be married later that year. When he saw Carr, there were 27 minutes left in his shift.

Crooks chased Carr into a thicket of traffic at the State Road 54 exit in central Pasco County. When both vehicles stopped, Carr got out of the truck, ran to the cruiser and killed Crooks with a rifle shot to the head. Then he got back on the interstate.

Next came a 22-mile car chase of exceptional speed and danger: Carr sprayed gunfire in all directions as he rocketed north at nearly 100 mph. Shards of glass hit a deputy in the chest and face. One round pierced the hull of a helicopter above. Another broke the arm of a truck driver. An officer's .40-caliber bullet lodged near Carr's spine. He drove on.

Finally, at State Road 50 in Hernando County, deputies forced Carr off the interstate by laying spikes in his path. When they shot out one of the tires, the truck rolled into the parking lot of a Shell station. Carr tore inside and made a hostage of the clerk, 27-year-old Stephanie Kramer. The standoff lasted almost five hours.

Nearly 170 police officers surrounded the gas station. Snipers tried in vain to line up a clean shot. Carr spoke by phone to two reporters, a hostage negotiator and his girlfriend, Bernice Bowen, who would later go to prison for being an accessory to his crimes.

"When you close your eyes at night," Carr told her, "think of all the good things about me. Don't think of the bad stuff and the fights. Please, think of how happy we were today, think of how we were going to go swimming."

He set the hostage free just after 7:30 p.m. Then police fired tear gas and used explosive charges to blow holes in the building. Carr shot himself in the head. Officers stormed through the wreckage and found him near the cash register, behind a wall of bulletproof plastic, his body covered in dust.

Those killed by Hank Earl Carr on May 19, 1998

Joey Bennett, 4, the boy Hank Earl Carr called his son, shot in the face and killed with an SKS semi-automatic rifle. Carr said he did it by accident; Joey's 5-year-old sister, Kayla, said at the time that it looked intentional.

Tampa Police Detective Rick Childers, 46, also known as "Chilly." Had a wife and two sons. Officer of the Year in 1990 for diving into a creek, breaking a window with his flashlight and rescuing a 17-year-old girl from a submerged car. Shot to death with his own gun as he drove Carr from the apartment to police headquarters.

Tampa Police Detective Randy Bell, 44, received more than 30 letters of commendation in a 20-year career with the department. Had a wife, three daughters, a stepson, a stepdaughter and a grandson. Riding in the front seat with Childers when Carr took Childers' gun. Tried to intervene but couldn't. Shot to death.

Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James Crooks, 23, native of Clewiston, lost 75 pounds to meet the agency's fitness standards. Planned to marry his sweetheart, a schoolteacher, the following November. Ambushed by Carr on an exit ramp in Pasco County; killed before he could draw his gun.

**Lawmen's Loved Ones Preserve The Memory Of Fallen Heroes
Published on Wednesday, May 3, 2006, in the Tampa Bay Online**

Jackie Floyd has suffered since the day her uncle was gunned down on duty three years ago.

But at the second annual Pasco County Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Service, she took solace in knowing Pasco sheriff's Capt. Charles "Bo" Harrison won't be forgotten.

"I think it's really great they recognize everyone and they continue to honor them," Floyd said before the Tuesday evening observance outside the historic Pasco County Courthouse. "This helps me to cope with the loss."

Dozens of family members, friends and other well-wishers paid their respects to the six Pasco officers killed in the line of duty since the county was established in 1887. Dozens of uniformed law enforcement officers from agencies throughout the county, state and nation participated.

The five other fallen lawmen are county Constable Arthur "Fleece" Crenshaw; U.S. Department of Justice Prohibition Agent John Van Waters; sheriff's deputies William "Henry" O'Berry and John Herbert McCabe; and Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James Bradford Crooks.

Relatives of all the men except Crooks placed a red rose at the base of a lighted plaque bearing the officers' likenesses. A trooper presented the rose on Crooks' behalf.

The officers were honored with a three-volley rifle salute, preceded by the playing of taps while a riderless horse walked through the crowd.

Crenshaw and Van Waters were the first lawmen whose deaths on duty were documented. They reportedly were ambushed and shot on Oct. 4, 1922, while searching for stolen goods near Dade City.

The next was O'Berry, who was shot and killed on New Year's Day 1926 while trying to arrest a man in south Hernando County. His death was forgotten by the Pasco County Sheriff's Office for years until agency officials rediscovered him a few weeks ago.

McCabe died June 26, 1948, when a truck smashed into his car on U.S. 41.

It was 40 years before another officer was killed. On May 19, 1998, Hank Earl Carr shot Crooks in his patrol car on the State Road 54 exit ramp off Interstate 75.

Harrison was Pasco's most recent officer to die on duty. He was fatally shot June 1, 2003, while conducting surveillance from his cruiser outside a Lacochee nightclub.

Pasco Sheriff Bob White asked the crowd not to mourn the men's passing but to celebrate their lives.

"We're tempted at times like this to reflect just on how they died, but that would be a disservice to them, their families and their agencies," the sheriff said. "May God bless the good memory of these men, law enforcement heroes all."

For one family, honor is a heartache

Published on Friday, April 28, 2006, in the St. Petersburg Times

Six law officers have died in the line of duty in Pasco County since 1922. Law enforcement tradition demands each man's memory be kept alive.

"It's our history; it's our heritage," said Pasco sheriff's Lt. Mike Schreck. "It's important that we always remember these folks."

For one family, constant reminders have become too much.

Michael and Vivian Crooks won't attend Tuesday night's ceremony at the Historic County Courthouse honoring their son. Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James "Brad" Crooks was the fifth officer killed in the line of duty in Pasco.

In fact, since 2003, the family has asked law enforcement not to contact them whatsoever.

"Their request, which we respect, was that they wanted to move on," said Col. Christopher Knight, the FHP's top commander. "The situation of Brad's passing kept coming up by continuous tributes by law enforcement in praise to him.

"Their request was very polite. They are an excellent family ... but they didn't feel they could move on when there was constant memorials and services in the years (since) Brad (was) killed in the line of duty."

Their son, just 23, was not even a trooper for a year when he was gunned down on the Interstate 75 exit ramp of State Road 54 on May 19, 1998.

He was the last slain in a murderous three-county rampage that also left two Tampa police detectives and a 4-year-old boy dead. Their killer, Hank Earl Carr, was finally cornered inside an east Hernando gas station. He took his own life as armored deputies stormed inside.

For years after Crooks' death, the family and his then-fiancee, Nadine LaMonte, attended the many services honoring him in Washington, Tallahassee, Tampa and Land O'Lakes.

Tuesday, though, Crooks will be the only fallen officer not represented by family, or LaMonte, who is also trying to move on.

LaMonte had met Crooks at the University of South Florida. Back then she was a teacher at Deltona Elementary School in Spring Hill, whose second-graders knew "Trooper Brad" because he was always helping out. Her wedding dress had been fitted when he was slain.

Now 33, she married Jason Lambert in 2000. The couple live in Pasco, where they've started a family. She declined to comment Thursday, but told the Sheriff's Office she is in constant contact with the Crooks. They don't want to attend, she said, and didn't even want invitations mailed. The Crooks could not be reached for comment Thursday.

In 1999, at a dedication ceremony renaming the FHP's Land O'Lakes substation and a stretch of State Road 54 after Crooks, Lambert told the St. Petersburg Times that after 11/2 years of mourning, she knew eventually she had to move on.

"There does come a time when closure has to happen," she said.

Knight remembers the last time he spoke to Michael Crooks. He called the family to invite them to a February 2003 ceremony dedicating a memorial to the 40 fallen troopers at the FHP academy. But the father of the 38th trooper to die in the line of duty told Knight the family just couldn't do it anymore.

"The simple request from the father was, 'We want to move past this,'" the colonel said. "We appreciate the way the patrol has handled this, but as a family we want to move on after Brad's passing.' And we respect that."

Knight calls the families of each trooper on the anniversary of their deaths. At the Crooks' request, he no longer calls them each May 19.

Crooks left Clewiston to pursue his dream of becoming a police officer. Joining the patrol was a struggle for him. He was known as a tenacious recruit at the FHP academy because he had to shed weight to earn his badge, and he did.

His body was returned to Clewiston for a funeral so large it was held in the John Boy Auditorium.

Crooks and his family will always be a part of the FHP family, Knight said, even if from afar.

"We're always here for them should they want to reach out to us," he said, "and they know that."

Peddling toward relief for families of fallen officers

Published on Thursday, December 8, 2005, in the Miami Herald

Dozens of police officers from around the state took off Monday for the five-day Tour de Force bicycle ride to raise funds for the families of fallen officers.

North Miami Beach police chief Linda Loizzo said the gifts go to help children left motherless or fatherless. So far this year, the tour has raised \$10,000 for the families of six officers who died in the line of duty.

Money came from T-shirt sales, corporate sponsorships, a series of \$10-a-plate luncheons at Outback Steakhouse, and a raffle on Monday that raised \$3,000.

"As a survivor myself, the wife of a slain officer, I can tell you this means a lot to the families," Loizzo said. In 1980, her husband Carl Mertes was shot while chasing a car thief in North Miami, leaving her with three small children.

The tour started in 1997, with the help of North Miami Beach Det. Mike DeMarcus, to help the family of Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Robert Smith, a father of 4-year-old twins who was killed on Interstate 95 in Broward when a drunk driver rear-ended his cruiser. Since then the tour has raised more than \$75,000.

As the riders headed out from North Miami Beach, dignitaries read letter of appreciation from survivors and the "honor roll" of those who died this year in Florida. They included Fort Lauderdale patrolman Jose Diaz, who died in a fall Oct. 8.

One letter of appreciation came from a couple who adopted Tucker, the son of Andy Brown, a Florida Highway Patrol sergeant killed in a car accident while chasing a suspect in Columbia County last year. The family received \$2,000, which they said they'll put aside for Tucker's college fund.

"He's got a lot of sadness, but we can't help but think that these acts of kindness along the way have lifted his spirits," the letter states.

Three officers were killed by gunfire, one by vehicular assault and one suffered a work-related illness.

Riders will pedal 54 miles a day through 42 police jurisdictions to reach Daytona Beach Shores on Friday.

To donate, call North Miami Beach police at 305-949-5500 and ask for Yvette Darden. For more information on officers killed in the line of duty, see the Officer Down Memorial Page at <http://www.odmp.org/>.

Another chance to say goodbye

Published on Thursday, May 20, 1999, in the Tampa Tribune

Ricky Childers II stood on an embankment overlooking the road where his father was murdered and hammered three homemade crosses into the sandy earth.

After placing two wreaths Wednesday, Florida Highway Patrol troopers pay their respects to slain Detectives Ricky Childers and Randy Bell at the Tampa Police Memorial on Franklin Street. Among the broken glass and stray soda cans near Interstate 275, Childers, his mother, Giselle Childers, and his grandmother, Jean Turner, said a prayer.

Wednesday was the first anniversary of the murder of Tampa police Detectives Ricky Childers and Randy Bell and state Trooper James Crooks by Hank Earl Carr. Carr killed the men during his escape after being questioned in the shooting death of his girlfriend's 4-year-old son.

A year after one of the bloodiest days in Tampa history, the law enforcement officers were not forgotten.

“When I hammered in the last cross, I said goodbye,” Ricky Childers II said.

Turner said it was her first visit to Elmore Avenue near the Floribraska Avenue intersection.

“It was the last place where my son took his last breath,” she said. “I knew I had to see it. Sometimes I think this was all a dream.”

Law enforcement officers and citizens began arriving Wednesday morning at the Tampa Police Memorial on Franklin Street. Florida Highway Patrol troopers laid two blue wreaths in honor of Bell and Childers about 10 a.m.

Bell's widow, Donna, arrived minutes later, leaving a wreath with a note: “I love you and miss you everyday.”

Troopers held their own vigil Wednesday night to honor Crooks and 36 other troopers who have fallen in the line of duty since the highway patrol began in 1939.

In attendance was Nadine La Monte, who was Crooks' fiancée.

“I'm lonely,” she said after the service. “I miss Brad every day.”

She said she copes with her loss by “talking about him a lot” and compiling photos of him and putting them in scrapbooks.

“He's the man I love,” she said.

The ceremony was in front of the FHP Troop C headquarters on Malcolm McKinley Drive just south of Fowler Avenue, at the future site of a granite, bronze and stainless steel monument that will pay tribute to troopers killed in the line of duty.

A Deadly Day: One Year Later

Published on Wednesday, May 19, 1999, in the Tampa Tribune

Gun trader Hank Earl Carr had a foot in prison.

He hated prison. It reminded him of beatings and made him feel powerless.

But that day, May 19, 1998, blood spilled in a garage apartment on Crenshaw Street in Tampa. Carr shot and killed 4-year-old Joey Bennett, his girlfriend's baby boy, and told everyone it was an accident.

The bleeding didn't stop until five were dead, including Carr.

“Good day to die. Sunny day,” he called it.

At first, he blamed Joey. Detectives doubted him, with reason. That day, he lied about his own name, assuming the identity of girlfriend Bernice Bowen's ex-husband, Joseph Lee Bennett, father to Joey and 5-year-old Kayla.

The day ended with suicide in Hernando County, but not before Carr executed two veteran Tampa detectives - Randy Bell and Ricky Childers - and a fresh-faced state trooper named James Bradford Crooks.

Fate delivered them to a man who hated cops, a felon who carried a handcuff key, plotting escape before he was even caught.

Prosecutors plan to put the girlfriend on trial next week. They allege she helped Carr elude police by misleading them about his identity.

Today, the Tribune retells a rampage, in the words of those who lived it, extracted from the files of prosecutors and police and from the memories of widows.

Day like no other

Published on Wednesday, May 19, 1999, in the Tampa Tribune

Whether they came face-to-face with Hank Earl Carr or saw the carnage caused by his deadly rampage one year ago, law enforcement officers in Pasco and Hernando counties say it changed their lives. Four of them who encountered Carr or faced the aftermath of his killing spree spoke recently about what happened that day and how it affected them.

Here are their stories:

Dade City

On a normal day, Pasco sheriff's Cpl. David Hink, now 32, would have been driving his patrol car, investigating burglaries. He wouldn't have been anywhere near the intersection of Pasco Road and State Road 54. But luckily for Christopher Espinosa of Brooksville, Hink's car had broken down just hours before Hank Earl Carr began heading north on Interstate 75.

Hink heard a dispatcher issue the warning about Carr, who already had killed his girlfriend's 4-year-old son and two Tampa homicide detectives. Hink grabbed the nearest vehicle - a Dodge four-wheel drive - and headed toward the interstate.

"I was at the light at Pasco Road when I saw Carr go across 54 and back up on the interstate. I tried to head that way," he said. "But the truck wouldn't go that fast, it had a [speed regulator] on it. So, basically I just watched him pull away from me."

Hink, frustrated with his vehicle, said he "could've made a sailor blush" with his remarks as he continued up the interstate.

A few miles away, Hink began seeing the carnage Carr had left behind. Cars with shattered windows littered the roadside. Florida Highway Patrol troopers were assisting the drivers.

Near exit 60 and Church Overpass Road, Hink spotted a man waving him toward a truck. Glass covered the ground. Hink said Carr had been shooting at tractor-trailers trying to tie up traffic to slow down police. Espinosa, 57, had been caught in the cross-fire.

“He was yelling about the driver being shot,” Hink said of the man who stopped him. “The driver [Espinosa] had a bullet hole in his arm; the bullet had gone into his chest.”

Hink and a trooper, who also had stopped, began examining Espinosa. Hink started first-aid using a kit from the trooper's car.

“I tried to keep him talking, keep him from going into shock,” he said about Espinosa. “I called for an ambulance and let dispatch know where we were. There was a lot of blood, probably an inch of blood pooled in the truck.”

Hink noticed the trooper who was helping Espinosa also needed assistance.

“The glass had been busted out of the trooper's car. When I asked him what happened he said he didn't know,” Hink said. “Then we found a bullet in his car and he really started wiggling out. He had just seen the other trooper who had been killed.”

It was a tense situation. As seconds passed, Hink waited for paramedics to arrive.

“I remember looking up, counting all of the police cruisers that went by,” he said. “I don't know why I did that, it just was something to do that kept me calm.”

After Espinosa was put into an ambulance - he survived - Hink headed to the command post and then went home.

Looking back, Hink said he believes Espinosa had fate on his side.

“I think God does certain things for certain reasons,” he said. “That's why my car broke down that day.”

Last month, Pasco Sheriff Lee Cannon gave Hink, an 11-year veteran of the department, the Life Saving Award.

Hink, who comes from four generations of police chiefs and officers, said he doesn't feel like a hero. He's not sure Espinosa knows his name, but he considers that an insignificant detail.

“That's what I get paid for, I guess,” he said, adding, “but it was something I'll never forget. I live near the area where it all ended with Carr. I pass by it every day. I never stop thinking about it.”

Brooksville

In his 27 years of law enforcement Hernando County's sheriff's Major Richard Nugent has never seen anything like the bloodbath initiated by Hank Earl Carr.

Nugent was the SWAT team commander in charge of the standoff that began outside a Shell gasoline station at Interstate 75 and State Road 50, where Carr holed up after his three-county run from police.

“It was a career-changing event that you never want to go through again,” he said. “It made us re-examine our training capabilities and how we handle prisoners. It reminded you to never become complacent.”

Earlier that day Carr was being questioned by Tampa police after his girlfriend's son was shot. On the way to the police station, he used a key to free himself from handcuffs fastened in front of his body. He grabbed a gun and killed Tampa detectives Ricky Childers and Randy Bell. Seconds later, he stole a truck that he used to lead police on the chase. Along the way he killed Trooper James B. Crooks.

Nugent now uses what happened that day to demonstrate the right and wrong ways to handle potentially violent suspects. The FBI has asked him to teach at Central Florida Community College and in Atlanta. In June, he will teach at the Florida Hostage Negotiators Association meeting in Orlando.

“One of the messages I give out is don't get complacent just because you're in a rural area or a suburban area,” he said. “It can happen anywhere, and all of these counties are changing rapidly because of growth.”

Once investigators realized Carr had taken the Shell station's clerk, Stephanie Kramer, as a hostage, Nugent said their main goal was getting her out alive and not allowing anyone else to get injured. But they didn't plan on members of the media interfering with their negotiations with Carr.

“We had never had somebody from the outside call and start talking to a hostage taker,” Nugent said, referring to calls made by a radio station news director and a newspaper reporter. “We have had to gain control of the telephone lines before but, in hindsight, we probably would have done something more drastic if we had known that could happen.”

The radio conversation allowed investigators to find out Carr's real name and run a background check that showed he was a violent felon, Nugent said.

“That was information that if we'd gotten much earlier could've saved some lives,” he said.

But the conversation also tied up telephone lines and prevented hostage negotiations, Nugent said. Under normal circumstances, Nugent said they could have hard-wired a telephone and thrown it through the window to communicate with Carr.

“But in this case, we'd already seen what he was capable of when he killed those two Tampa homicide detectives, the trooper and that little boy,” he said. “There were windows all around the gas station, but getting close enough to get a telephone inside would've meant possibly putting one of our guys in a deadly situation.”

Television news stations were broadcasting live video of the standoff, Nugent said. There was concern Carr might be watching television and seeing how police officers were positioned.

Once Kramer was freed, Nugent decided to have the Tampa police bomb squad use explosives to put two holes in the building.

“When we got inside, we found Carr dead,” Nugent said, adding it wasn't what they had hoped to find. “We would have preferred to keep everyone alive.”

The death of the three officers is a constant reminder of what can go wrong, Nugent said.

“Every time a cop dies, a piece of you dies,” he said. “It's an issue that never goes away. We talk about what things we can do differently daily. We're always in a training mode.”

Gowers Corner

Florida Highway Patrol Cpl. M.D. Hensley was driving home from an off-duty job at about 6 a.m. on May 19, 1998 when he heard about a traffic fatality that had closed Interstate 75. He decided to stop by the highway patrol's Pasco County office on State Road 52.

“Brad [Crooks] had come in early that day to work the fatality and I saw him in the office,” Hensley said. “About 11 a.m. we headed over to Dixie Boy truck stop to get some breakfast”.

Trooper James B. Crooks, called Brad by his friends, was nervous because he had missed a court date while dealing with the accident, Hensley said.

“We took advantage of the chance to give him a hard time about it,” he said. “We said the judge was going to find him in contempt of court, and he was getting pretty excited about it.”

After razzing Crooks for awhile, Hensley decided to head home. He normally would have seen his wife that morning, but by the time he made it home she had left for work.

“It was about 3:15 when my wife woke me up and said a trooper had been killed up on the interstate,” Hensley said. “She normally got off work and came home about 3:45, but that day she rushed home because she thought it was me who had been killed and couldn't reach me on the telephone.”

Because Crooks had started the day early, Hensley never suspected he might be the victim. But when he called the dispatcher to find out details, she told him about his friend.

“It was busy that afternoon and there were lots of wrecks so he had stayed for those,” Hensley said the dispatcher told him. “I asked her if anyone was out with him. She wasn't sure, so I got dressed and went to him.”

Hensley, 35, said it was his Marine Corps training that prompted him to want to do whatever he could to make sure his friend's body was cared for properly.

“I knew the transport guy from the medical examiner's office from working traffic fatalities with him,” he said. “When he saw me, he was glad it wasn't me. But he had seen Crooks that morning at the other traffic accident.”

Hensley convinced the man from the medical examiner's office to allow him to stay behind to help with Crooks.

“But when he came back from the car, he had this awful look on his face,” Hensley said. “It was like fear or something, a look I had never seen from him before. He told me I shouldn't go up there, so I stayed where I was.”

The next time he saw Crooks was at the funeral.

The trooper's death hit everyone hard, Hensley said. The toughest part was knowing how hard Crooks worked to become a trooper.

“He had an intestinal fortitude like I had never seen,” Hensley said. “I mean he had been working at IBM before going into the academy, and he could've made a lot more money doing that.”

“But he wanted to be a trooper,” he said. “He was the only one out of his class to start the academy, stop to go back and get his college degree, and then start back up and finish everything.”

Crooks was one of the most personable people he has known, Hensley said.

“I think he realized you could get killed on this job, but I don't think it ever crossed his mind that it actually could happen to him,” Hensley said.

Hensley said he and other troopers have learned from Crooks' death.

“About two weeks after that whole thing happened, there was a BOLO [be on the lookout] that came out about a man driving down the interstate shooting at cars,” he said. “The first thing we did was to get a shotgun out of the trunk and put it in the front seat with a round in it.”

Hensley, who has been a trooper since 1986, said he has gotten used to people not liking him simply because he's a law enforcement officer. That's why he was so impressed with what two people did the day Crooks was killed.

“What really surprised me that day was how much people came to help. There was one guy who came off the interstate and tried to stop Carr from shooting Brad. And the other guy, a young guy, tried to help Brad. He jumped inside the car and put it in park. And you wouldn't have expected that of a young person today. It's good to have a surprise like that, to really see that there is somebody out there who does care for us.”

Land O' Lakes

Pasco sheriff's Cpl. Jim Campbell didn't know it at the time, but Hank Earl Carr's rampage would lead to a career change. Campbell, who was a patrol deputy, is now part of the sheriff's agriculture unit.

One year ago he was working near Interstate 75 and State Road 54 when he hear Carr was headed his way. He thought he had 22 minutes to prepare.

“I was so intent on thinking about what I was going to do that I didn't notice what was going on around me,” he said. “Had I looked to my left, I probably would've seen Carr running back to his vehicle with the rifle in his hands because he had just shot the trooper and I didn't realize it.”

When Campbell did realize it was Carr, he began chasing him on the interstate.

“He was running people off the road. I remember seeing a delivery truck shake real violently and the driver pull off the road,” Campbell said, referring to the truck driven by Christopher Espinosa. “I didn't realize he had shot that driver.”

As the chase reached Overpass Road, Campbell said he saw something unprecedented.

“It was almost like everybody on the road was listening to radio stations and knew I was chasing this guy,” he said. “They just parted the ways and it was just he and I.”

Carr began firing. The dispatchers had warned Carr had a pistol, but Campbell didn't realize Carr had a stolen a rifle after shooting two Tampa homicide detectives.

“He slid the rear sliding window open on the truck and actually jeered at me,” Campbell said of Carr. “I was about 120 yards behind him, doing 120 mph. The second time he came into the rear window, he lifted the rifle and fired.”

The bullet came through the windshield, passed Campbell's head and shattered the back window of his patrol car.

Carr fired again.

The second shot came through the windshield just as Campbell ducked behind the dashboard. But the third shot came too quickly.

“I could see the muzzle blast of the SKS. It came out in four different directions. I hesitated before ducking down,” Campbell said. “But that round went too high and hit my rearview mirror, it showered me with glass fragments and a bullet fragment hit my neck.”

Campbell has a three-inch scar, but said he feels lucky to be alive. He didn't realize he was seriously hurt.

Soon, a flood of police vehicles joined the chase. Campbell saw troopers pass him and realized they weren't aware Carr had a rifle.

“I knew they didn't understand the danger since they hadn't seen him firing at me,” he said. “I would intentionally speed my car up to weave in front of them so they could see my car blown apart.”

The chase continued with Campbell three vehicles behind Carr. When they reached the exit to State Road 50, Carr pulled into the Shell station. Campbell fired four rounds at the truck. But Carr already had jumped out and run inside.

“I got out of my car and stayed at the scene for 45 minutes before I collapsed from a loss of blood,” Campbell said. “They put me in an ambulance and took me to East Pasco Medical Center where they removed part of the bullet fragment. When I was laying in the emergency room, they had a television on.

“My wife was there, and we were watching it on the monitor,” he said. “When they threw the explosive charge we knew it was over.”

But it wasn't over for Campbell's new wife, Zaida. She wanted him to stop patrolling the roads.

“I kept telling her everything would be all right, but she wanted me to ask for a change,” he said. “I told Sheriff [Lee] Cannon what I was asking for was for her, not me.”

Campbell was assigned to the off-duty coordinator's position at the sheriff's Land O' Lakes substation. He stayed there about six months.

“But being tied to a desk isn't my cup of tea,” he said. “When the position in the agricultural environmental unit came open, I was asked if I would take it and I jumped at it. I've worked with horses and cows my entire life.”

Last month Cannon gave Campbell, a 25-year veteran of the department, the Medal of Valor.

“It was a tragic day in Tampa Bay and I don't think anyone will ever forget it,” he said. “And if they do, shame on them.”

Trooper's name could go on road
Published on Monday, June 1, 1998, in the Tampa Tribune

Pasco state legislators agree to push for part of State Road 54 being renamed for a slain Florida Highway Patrol trooper.

It's been two weeks since Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James B. Crooks was gunned down in his patrol car at State Road 54 and Interstate 75.

The pain and sadness surrounding his murder, and that of two Tampa police detectives and a small boy, are wounds that for many will last a lifetime.

But will Floridians remember the ultimate sacrifice Crooks gave in the line of duty?

Law enforcement officers and local business people have combined their efforts to keep Crooks' memory alive. They want to rename about two miles of State Road 54 in east Pasco the "Trooper J.B. Crooks Highway."

"We're doing this as a reminder to everyone," said organizer Frank Taylor, a former law enforcement officer who owns Wesley Chapel-based Lindhurst International, an information brokerage service for private investigators.

"Public safety is a dangerous business."

The idea surfaced about two weeks ago among Taylor and other members of the Rough Riders group in Tampa, along with local people in law enforcement.

Lt. James Richburg Jr., supervisor of the highway patrol station in Land O' Lakes where Crooks was based, was supportive of the effort.

"I think that's a nice idea," Richburg said.

The effort got a major boost Monday when state Rep. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, said he would sponsor a bill when the Legislature convenes next spring.

Fasano said fellow legislator Virginia Brown-Waite, R-Brooksville, has agreed to sponsor the bill in the Senate. She couldn't be reached for comment Monday.

Fasano said the renaming idea was tremendous, and that he saw no reason other state lawmakers wouldn't approve it.

"It would be an honor" to introduce the bill in the state House of Representatives, Fasano said. "We must never forget that brave trooper."

Just two years ago, Fasano helped push through a name change for about 20 miles of State Road 54. The Purple Heart Highway honors veterans wounded in combat.

Fasano said the Purple Heart designation would remain for much of that 20-mile stretch. The proposed "Trooper J.B. Crooks Highway" would cover a mile east and also west of Interstate 75.

Crooks was fatally shot on an interstate exit ramp at State Road 54 on May 19. Officials said Hank Earl Carr gunned down Crooks before he had time to draw his weapon. Carr was fleeing north on the interstate after police said he fatally shot his girlfriend's young son and the two Tampa detectives.

Florida Department of Transportation spokeswoman Marian Scorza said there were no set rules concerning highway names.

"Whatever the Legislature decides, we'll do," she said.

Supporters of the renaming plan are to meet with Pasco County legislators in the fall to iron out the details.

Witness: Trooper had no chance against gunman
Published on Friday, May 22, 1998, in the Tampa Tribune

Hank Earl Carr fired two quick shots, one point blank, looking eye to eye with the Florida Highway Patrol trooper.

The shooting of Highway Patrol Trooper James Crooks was over in an instant - the officer didn't have time to react, said a truck driver who saw the killing.

Paul Joiner's semitrailer truck was behind Crooks' cruiser on the Interstate 75 exit ramp at State Road 52 in north Pasco County.

“He never had a chance,” Joiner said.

Crooks had followed Hank Earl Carr's stolen Ford Ranger off the interstate where Carr stopped, the trooper right behind him, Joiner said.

In a second, Carr was out of the truck, aiming his assault rifle.

“He was out real quick. He knew what he was going to do. He knew he was going to shoot him,” Joiner said. “He jumped out and put a round through the window. Then he ran around to the driver's side and shot him. He was right up there looking at him eye to eye.”

Joiner, a driver for Allied Automotive, ran to the dead trooper's vehicle as soon as Carr sped away, joined by Tim Baine, a 20-year-old college student.

Baine managed to step on the cruiser's brake pedal to stop the rolling vehicle.

Crooks was killed so quickly he never had a chance to put the cruiser in park, Joiner said. Joiner reached in to use the radio, calling for help, saying that an officer had been shot.

“Right after that, I got my cell phone and called my wife and told her to lock the house, there was a crazy man out there,” said Joiner, who lives in Zephyrhills. “I had no idea where he was going to go. If he'd taken a right, he'd be heading toward my home.”

The impact of what he had seen didn't hit until later, Joiner said. “After it was over, I thought about it and thought, ‘Wow!’ There was no telling what this guy would do. He'd just lost it.”

Joiner, 35, said he saw the Ranger and trooper zip past him before reaching the exit ramp. Crooks did not have the cruiser's lights on. Carr drove off the exit ramp, at first looking like he would pull off to the left, but then stopped in the middle of the traffic-clogged pavement, Joiner said.

Crooks had been told not to try to pull Carr over by himself, said Ray Velboom, a Florida Department of Law Enforcement agent investigating the trooper's killing.

But Carr gave the trooper no choice by stopping.

“It was the first time I’ve ever seen anyone killed in cold blood,” Joiner said.

Trooper laid to rest

Published on Friday, May 22, 1998, in the Tampa Tribune

Friday's memorial service for Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James “Brad” Crooks stretched from the breadth of a community to the heart of his fiancée.

Nadine LaMonte, engaged to marry the 23-year-old trooper in November, bit her lip and wept when the symbolic last radio call for Crooks was broadcast.

LaMonte was not alone in her grief.

Some 2,500 people came to honor Crooks. On the force less than a year, he became the 37th Florida trooper to die in the line of duty.

His mother was handed a flag that had flown at the academy where Crooks earned the respect of fellow cadets with his hard work. Another flag was given to LaMonte before an honor guard loaded his casket into a hearse.

Crooks was but one of the victims in Tuesday's carnage that began with the shooting death of a 4-year-old boy, the son of Hank Earl Carr's girlfriend. Carr was taken into custody, but later grabbed a gun and killed two Tampa police detectives. Carr escaped in a stolen truck, later killing Crooks. He eventually killed himself in a gas station.

Friday, in this tiny - population 7,000 - sugar cane town about 90 miles from Miami, they came to say goodbye. They came in hats and church clothes. They came in jeans and running shoes. But mostly, they came in uniform. More than half of the crowd were members of Florida's vast law enforcement family.

In the white-and-orange John B. Boy Auditorium, the sweet scent of dozens of funeral sprays and bouquets mixed with the afternoon heat. Many in the auditorium's capacity crowd, especially pregnant women, had to momentarily step outside for the breeze.

Crooks was the first University of South Florida intern to “gut it out” through the intense Highway Patrol training, Col. Charles Hall told a packed civic auditorium.

Outside after the dust settled on an emotional farewell which included a 21-gun salute, Tampa Mayor Dick Greco said of the sea of officers: “Everyone in uniform was seeing their funeral re-created today.”

“It's not easy,” said a drawn-looking Maj. Morris Leggett, who was Crooks' commander.

Leggett led more than a dozen troopers in patrol vehicles to Clewiston, where schoolchildren lined the streets.

Patrolman R.L. Sheridan of the Tampa Police Department summed up the feelings of law officers around the state.

“All of Florida's law enforcement would be here today if it weren't for the totality of the situation,” he said. Funeral services for the two slain Tampa detectives are today.

Throughout the town, flags flew at half-staff. Standing in the front of the 15-man police department, Investigator Mike McVey said, “All line people are used to the danger of the job. When you get in that car, you better be prepared to say goodbye.”

At Clewiston High School where students were dismissed at 2:15 for the 3 p.m. service, Crooks was remembered as “fun loving” and as “a very nice kid.” He played clarinet in the band. He was editor of a computer class newsletter. But most of all, the 1993 graduate wanted to be a police officer.

It wasn't easy. Teacher Lonzo Griffith remembered how Crooks fretted over “his size being acceptable.” Griffith said after Crooks went to USF and became a security guard, “more and more Brad got in shape and began believing he could do it.” He eventually lost 75 pounds.

The teacher's fondest memory of Crooks was when the teen, decked out in a cowboy outfit, rode his horse to school for Spirit Week.

At the funeral home, fiancée LaMonte, flanked by Crooks' parents and grandmothers, bid farewell as the flag-draped casket was lifted into a hearse.

Bagpipes wailed two choruses of “Amazing Grace” before 11 police helicopters flew overhead.

Then came the haunting radio transmission that Trooper Crooks, I.D. 1777, was “10-7” - the police code for out of service.

The transmission implored, “We ask for a moment of silence. Unit 1777 is out of service.”

Slain trooper was motivated, honest, engaged
Published on Friday, May 22, 1998, in the Tampa Tribune

Fellow officers and friends remember slain Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James Crooks as generous, quiet and dedicated to his job.

As soon as he heard a fellow patrolman had been killed, Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Jeffrey Johnson knew he'd lost his buddy.

Johnson and James Crooks had sweated through the patrol's grueling academy training together, becoming close friends in the process.

Crooks was shot and killed in his patrol car Tuesday after he stopped Hank Carr, already fleeing down Interstate 75 after killing two Tampa police officers.

“I knew what shift he was on, and I knew what area he worked,” Johnson said Wednesday. “I just had this gut feeling that was who it was.”

The 23-year-old Crooks is the 37th trooper killed in the line of duty in Florida since 1941. The last one, Robert G. Smith, was struck from behind by a drunk motorist after a traffic stop on Interstate 95 South Florida last July.

Tuesday's death marked Lt. Michael Guzman's first news conference since he was named the patrol's public information officer.

"I hope I never have to hold another conference like this," Guzman told reporters Wednesday.

Guzman offered no details on the circumstances of Crooks' death, saying the Florida Department of Law Enforcement is investigating the shooting.

"Be patient," he asked reporters. "Help us get through this."

Patrol Maj. Ernie Leggett said Crooks will be remembered as a "quiet and friendly" man dedicated to his job.

A graduate of Clewiston High School and the University of South Florida, where he majored in criminology, Crooks' first obstacle during recruit training was the battle of the bulge.

"He lost 75 pounds to meet the patrol's weight policy," Leggett said. "That's just one indication of how motivated this young man was."

Engaged to be married, Crooks joined Troop C last August and was assigned to Pasco County.

Steve Babon, a classmate at USF, said Crooks was "obsessed" about becoming a police officer.

"That is what he wanted to do," Babon said.

The future patrolman also had old-fashioned values, he said.

"He was an honest, honest person," Babon said. "He had good-old-boy, respect-your-mother values. You never saw him cussing. He was a good guy."

Leggett said the patrol is setting up a trust fund for those who want to make donations in Crooks' memory.

He is survived by his parents, Michael and Vivian Crooks of Clewiston. Visitation will be from 4 to 7 p.m. today at Akin Davis Funeral Home in Clewiston, with services at 3 p.m. Friday at the John Boy Auditorium there. There will be no graveside services.

Johnson said his reaction to Crooks' death was "disbelief," but it won't change how he views his job.

"You can't really let it change you," he said. "You can't let those things in your mind [such as] 'Do I want to do this job or not?'"

“They teach us to approach every vehicle with caution, not to approach every vehicle being scared.”

Outpouring for slain officers knows no boundaries
Published on Thursday, May 21, 1998, in the Tampa Tribune

Officers from across the country and beyond will join those mourning the deaths of three Florida men in law enforcement.

Canadian Mountie Robert Holland didn't know Tampa Detectives Randy Bell and Ricky Childers, but that isn't keeping him from flying across two countries to a town he's never been to on his day off.

It's kinship that brings him, and likely hundreds of other police officers from across the nation, to Florida to pay their respects to Bell, Childers and Florida Highway Patrol Trooper James B. Crooks.

“I picked up the newspaper yesterday and I saw the pictures of the two slain officers leading the suspect out and was just horrified,” said Holland, who has been a constable - the equivalent of officer in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police - for three years.

“The night before, my partner and I had been in an altercation with a gentlemen, and it really dawned on me how easy what happened to those two officers can happen to me. If somebody is intent, they can snuff you out in an instant.”

The officers began arriving late Thursday for Crooks' funeral at 3 p.m. today at the John Boy Auditorium in Clewiston. The funeral, like Saturday's for Bell and Childers, is open to the public.

Ceremonies for Bell and Childers begin at 11 a.m. Saturday at the Tampa Convention Center. Local television stations plan live coverage.

The ceremonies will be steeped in police tradition: Honor guards from dozens of Florida police agencies will be present, the bagpipes will play and a 21-gun salute will be fired. Lt. Robert Pennington, who has organized police funerals for the department, said much of what will be seen was borrowed from military tradition.

But the newest tradition, the show of support from across North America, also will be strongly felt.

“We just got a phone call a couple of hours ago from some Illinois state troopers at the state line needing directions,” said FHP Lt. Tim Hines.

“It reminds you that there are people out there who do care. And that makes a difference.”

At Tampa Police headquarters, the grim preparations were exhausting to co-workers and friends still stunned by the slayings. Colleagues who sobbed at the scene of Tuesday's

shooting were being called on to write eulogies and were helping the detectives' families take care of details.

Pennington, who supervised Childers and Bell for three years in the homicide squad, held back tears as he discussed the arrangements and the dark task of adding the two names to the police memorial next week.

The names of fallen officers are engraved on even columns on each side of the black granite monument. But Pennington said the names of Childers and Bell will be listed together as no one wanted to separate them.

“It's just horrible. ... I never thought I'd have to add new names so soon,” he said. “They were partners in life; they'll be partners in death.”

Officials say they have no way of estimating how many people will turn out for the funeral: a notice was sent to every police station in the country. Given the outpouring of support from the general public, thousands could attend, officials said.

A two-lane procession will bring the officers' bodies to the convention center, their families and police brass riding up front, and then to the grave site. Pennington expects that people will line the streets to honor the slain officers.

“When you see local citizens lining up on the street with their hats off, their hands over their hearts, it makes you feel good,” he said.

FHP and Tampa police said the funerals will show the families how well loved the officers are, but also will be overwhelming. They will have their time to say their private goodbyes before the public event.

Debbie Geary, the president of a national support group for the widows and children of slain officers, said the funerals often become a blur to the families. Geary's husband, Metro-Dade Officer Dave Strzalowski, was shot to death with his partner, Richard Boles in 1988.

More than 3,000 people showed up for their funeral in Hollywood. Their assailant, Charlie Street, became a statewide symbol for Florida's inability to keep criminals behind bars.

“You are pretty much just going through the motions,” said Geary, who heads Concerns of Police Survivors and has since married another Metro-Dade officer.

“You are numb and in disbelief and in denial: all those things that come with grief. You don't want to be there.

“But seeing the support makes you feel good. You feel, ‘At least there are some good people out there.’ ”

Hundreds of officers from other departments are expected at the funerals, but just as many more have volunteered to fill in where they can so that more highway patrol troopers and Tampa police officers can attend their comrades' services.

In Tampa, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office has volunteered its deputies to handle traffic and parking around the convention center. Pasco sheriff's deputies will patrol the highways in Pasco during today's day shift, freeing up troopers.

Neighboring agencies have also stepped up to help Tampa police deal with the recent deluge of media attention. Hillsborough sheriff's spokeswoman Debbie Carter has staffed the telephones since a few hours after Bell and Childers were murdered.

Carter and Tampa FBI spokesman Brian Kensel have fielded media calls as well as hundreds of other phone calls flooding into the office since Tuesday.

Rookie trooper died living his dream

Published on Wednesday, May 20, 1998, in the Tampa Tribune

James B. Crooks saw his wish come true less than a year ago.

On Aug. 4, 1997, he joined Florida Highway Patrol Troop C in Pasco County. He returned to his alma mater a few weeks later to share his good fortune with friends.

"He was so happy," remembers Lisa Landis, faculty administrator for the University of South Florida's Criminology Department. "He came to see me when he got his uniform. Honestly, that's all he wanted to do."

Tuesday, Landis learned the young man she knew as "Brad" was dead.

Crooks, a 23-year-old rookie, was shot and killed about 2:30 p.m. Tuesday when he pulled over a stolen truck at Interstate 75 and State Road 54.

Authorities said Hank Earl Carr, who was being chased after fatally shooting two police detectives in Tampa, got out of the truck and shot Crooks with an assault-type rifle.

Slain trooper James B. Crooks

Just 10 hours earlier at the same intersection, Crooks had worked the case of a 30-year-old Tampa man killed when he crashed and was ejected from his van.

Lt. Mike Guzman, a patrol spokesman, called Crooks a "fine trooper."

"This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do," Guzman said in a breaking voice as he confirmed his colleague's death.

Crooks' parents, Michael and Vivian, live in Clewiston. A patrol official said Crooks, who lived in the Brooksville area, was engaged. Landis said her friend was USF's first and only student to attend the FHP Academy in Tallahassee, completing his 16-week internship last summer.

"He was so excited that I had set up this internship," Landis said. "That's all he wanted. That was his lifetime goal, and he achieved it."

Trooper had been on job less than year

Published on Wednesday, May 20, 1998, in the St. Petersburg Times

James B. Crooks, a 23-year-old trooper who had been with the Florida Highway Patrol less than a year, was gunned down Tuesday afternoon on the Interstate 75 exit ramp at State Road 54 in Pasco County.

With details about the killing still sketchy, however, it was unclear whether his inexperience worked against him when he tried to apprehend 30-year-old Hank Earl Carr, who authorities say also killed two Tampa police detectives in a shooting rampage that spanned three counties.

"Apparently this guy (Carr) was a wild man," said highway patrol Maj. Ken Howes. "He'd already killed two veteran Tampa police detectives. So whether it was a rookie or a seasoned trooper, who knows if anything could have been done differently at this point."

Crooks, who was known as Brad, grew up on his family's cattle farm in rural Clewiston in South Florida. He was active in the 4-H Club and graduated from Clewiston High School.

A family friend said Crooks was happy to be assigned to Pasco County after he became a trooper and feared an assignment in Miami because of its danger.

Trooper Francis Vega, who roomed with Crooks at the academy and is stationed in South Florida, said his friend's death underscores the risk of police work.

"I don't think he made a mistake or did something wrong," Vega said. "It's just one of the things that happens. It's a sad thing that happens to the best of us."

Crooks' time at the academy wasn't easy, Vega said. As an overweight recruit, Crooks endured the scorn of FHP's drill instructors. But his persistence got him through, Vega said.

"People were on him constantly. But he said he was going to do it, and he went ahead and did it," Vega said.

Crooks' life ended just seven months after his crowning achievement -- graduation from the academy. He encountered a pickup truck driven by Carr, who had already shot two Tampa detectives and had fled north on I-75, authorities said.

It's unclear exactly what transpired between Crooks and Carr, but it ended with a young trooper's death.

Sgt. Bill Martinez said Crooks was based in Land O'Lakes and lived in Tampa. He was engaged to be married. Crooks is survived by his parents, Michael and Vivian Crooks of Clewiston.

A woman who answered the parents' phone Tuesday night declined comment.

Crooks is the 37th Florida Highway Patrol trooper slain in the line of duty since 1939, and the 17th to die by gunfire, Howes said.

"Every trooper in the state went through the same academy," Howes said, "so when we lose one of our own troopers, everyone hurts."

A child, 3 officers and gunman dead

Published on Wednesday, May 20, 1998 in the St. Petersburg Times

The killing started with a rifle shot at 10 a.m. that left a 4-year-old Tampa boy dead. Before the long, bloody day was done, two veteran Tampa police detectives and a rookie highway patrol trooper were murdered and the suspect in all four deaths, a habitual felon with a love of automatic weapons, would die by his own hand.

Hank Earl Carr, 30, apparently shot himself inside a Shell station in Hernando County just before 8 p.m., as 170 police officers from three counties surrounded him and SWAT teams prepared to move in.

A female employee at the station, whom Carr had held hostage, was released unharmed just moments before he died.

Tampa police Detectives Rick Childers, 46, and Randy Bell, 44, were killed by Carr about 2 p.m. as they drove him to the police station for questioning. During a subsequent chase, Carr killed highway patrol Trooper James Crooks, 23, and shot and wounded two unidentified truck drivers he encountered on the highway.

Tampa police Chief Bennie Holder called it the darkest day in his 25-year police career. It was the worst day for law enforcement deaths in bay area history.

The day started with a tragic, but perhaps accidental shooting, then escalated on wave after wave of violence and gunfire.

The first scene was in Tampa inside a wood-frame upstairs apartment at 709 E Crenshaw St., just north of where the Hillsborough River crosses Nebraska Avenue, near Sulphur Springs.

Neighbors knew Carr only as "Boo." His girlfriend, Bernice Bowen, 24, was known around the neighborhood as "Denise." They had lived in the apartment for about a year with Bowen's two children, Joey Bennett, 4, and Kayla Bennett, 5, neighbors said.

Alicia Webb, 15, lives with her mother in an apartment next door and sometimes babysat for Carr and Bowen. Tuesday morning, she was walking from the brick house adjacent to Carr's apartment when she heard a gunshot about 9:45 a.m.

"Denise came running downstairs crying. There was blood on her shoulder. She was shouting, 'Alicia, my baby! My baby! My baby! Please help me,' " Webb said.

There was no telephone in the apartment, so Carr and Bowen took the wounded boy, Joey, to fire station No. 7 on Hanna Avenue, a few blocks away. Webb saw Joey with a bloody wound at the back of his head.

Then Webb talked to their daughter, Kayla, who was left behind.

"Kayla told me, 'Daddy shot him,' " Webb recalled.

Joey Bennett was pronounced dead at the fire station by paramedics. Carr left the fire station, over the objections of police and paramedics.

Police officers went to Carr's apartment to investigate. When they tried to talk to Carr he ran to a neighbor's house a block away, but police captured him and took him into custody between 10:30 and 10:45 a.m., said Tampa police spokesman Steve Cole. He was brought to police headquarters and interviewed for about two hours by homicide detectives Childers and Bell.

While he had originally told police the child had been killed while playing with the gun, he changed his story, saying the gun went off as he took it from the boy.

Childers and Bell returned with Carr to the apartment about 1:10 p.m. to perform a "walk-through" to re-create what happened when the 4-year-old boy was shot.

Twenty minutes later, detectives placed Carr in the back seat of their unmarked car. The weapon that killed the boy, an SKS semiautomatic rifle, was placed in the trunk of the car. Childers drove the car, Bell sat in the passenger seat. Carr sat in the back seat of the Ford Taurus with his hands cuffed in front of him.

When they left Carr's home, it is believed the detectives traveled south on Nebraska and west on Sligh to get onto the interstate traveling south. They exited the interstate at Floribraska Avenue and a struggle ensued on Elmore Street, which runs parallel to the interstate. The detectives were shot and killed in the car on Elmore Street, just north of Floribraska.

Police are unsure what happened, but in a chilling account told to a local radio station, Carr said he had managed to slip one hand free of the cuffs and grab Childers' gun. He said that he shot Childers and killed him and that Bell was killed after he jumped into the back seat to try to restrain Carr.

Carr then unlocked the trunk and grabbed his rifle and ran. Moments later, he carjacked a 1997 white Ford Ranger on Floribraska and headed north on the interstate.

Police officials at the scene said they believed Childers was shot in the head and Bell was shot in the chest, but Cole would say only that they were both shot in the upper body.

In a wild chase north on Interstate 75, troopers and deputies sniped at Carr from overpasses, and Carr fired his rifle at law enforcement officers and motorists who got in his way.

Trooper James B. Crooks, 23, started pursuing Bennett on I-75 near the northbound exit ramp of State Road 54. Minutes later, the call came that Crooks had been shot, said Lt. Mike Guzman, the highway patrol's public information officer. It is unclear whether Crooks had pulled Bennett over or whether he was shot while in pursuit.

Brooksville resident Mike Bedwell, 36, pulled into a Shell station near the State Road 50 exit ramp about 2:45 p.m. Minutes later, Carr came down the I-75 off-ramp because officers had blocked the interstate.

Bedwell heard officers fire several shots at the suspect's white pickup, blowing out his tires. Carr later told radio stations he was wounded by the shots.

The white pickup continued across a grass median on State Road 50. "He was still going pretty fast," Bedwell said. The suspect's pickup passed within inches of Bedwell's truck and nearly smashed into the gas pumps.

As the pickup kept rolling forward, the suspect jumped out. "He fired at least three shots at the officers -- POW POW POW -- and then ran into the station," Bedwell said.

More than 75 marked police cars descended on the intersection. Eventually more than 170 law enforcement officers were on the scene.

Inside the station, Carr took a hostage, 27-year-old clerk Stephanie Kramer.

The suspect asked to talk to his wife, whom officers brought from Tampa. After arriving she talked to her husband on the phone several times, said Hernando County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Deanna Dammer.

The four-hour standoff ended just before 8 p.m. when Kramer was released.

The Tampa police bomb squad set off a charge that blew a hole in the rear of the concrete block building. When police entered, they found Carr dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

At 9 p.m., a dozen people gathered outside police headquarters before a memorial to Tampa officers slain in the line of duty. Two dozen bouquets lay at the base of the memorial.

Officer Gina Bennett stood nearby in street clothes, holding a candle.

"Hurts to be an officer," she said. Just then, wind blew out the flame.