

# Three soldiers, one Marine honored during Carolina Celebration of Liberty

*36th-annual pre-Independence Day event attended by Gov. Henry McMaster and U.S. Congressman Joe Wilson*

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, USA, July 7, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Four SPECIAL HONOREES were recognized for their “distinguished military service” during the 36th annual Carolina Celebration of Liberty held at Columbia’s First Baptist Church, Sunday, June 25. The honorees included two S.C. Army National Guard general-officers; a Richland County Sheriff’s Department (RCSD) captain who also serves in the Army Reserve; and a former U.S. Marine rifle-squad leader who later became one of the nation’s top counterterrorism experts.

With bands playing, choirs and soloists singing, flags waving, indoor pyrotechnics (fireworks), and nearly 6,000 cheering spectators total in two performances, the Carolina Celebration of Liberty was billed as the state’s premier kick-off event for Independence Day and Independence Week celebrations across South Carolina. Led by the Rev. Steve Phillips, First Baptist’s minister of music, the musical production and special recognitions were identically choreographed in two shows – one at 3:00 p.m., the second at 6:30 p.m. – which later aired on SCETV.

The first honoree to be recognized was Colonel W. Thomas Smith Jr., a retired S.C. Military Department officer and formerly deployed U.S. Marine rifle-squad (Infantry) leader. Smith is a New York Times bestselling editor and one of the nation’s premier military technical consultants and counterterrorism experts.



Pictured (clockwise from top left) are Maj. Gen. Van McCarty, Maj. Gen. Jeff Jones, Col. W. Thomas Smith Jr., and 1st Sergeant (RCSD Captain) Danny Brown

The second honoree was U.S. Army Reserve 1st Sergeant Danny Brown, best known as Captain Danny Brown of the Richland County (S.C.) Sheriff's Department and star of A&E's hit television series LIVE PD, which aired from 2016 until 2020; and Reelz' currently airing series ON PATROL: LIVE.

The third honoree was Major General Jeff Jones, a two-star general-officer in the S.C. Army National Guard and the deputy adjutant general of South Carolina.



The fourth honoree was Maj. Gen. Van McCarty, the 29th adjutant general of South Carolina. As the state's adjutant general and as commanding general of the S.C. Military Department, McCarty administers the affairs of the S.C. Army National Guard, the S.C. Air National Guard, the S.C. Emergency Management Division, the S.C. State Guard, and the Youth Challenge Academy.

WLTX-TV (CBS) anchor J.R. Berry served as master of ceremonies and emcee reading the four narrative biographical sketches chronicling the military careers of each honoree.

For instance, a portion of Berry's narration of Smith's career reads: OUR FIRST HONOREE served in the 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, as a rifle-squad leader. he was also a counterterrorism instructor, military parachutist, and bayonet instructor. he developed and directed shipboard training and tactics for nuclear security, close-quarters combat, and counterterrorism. Deploying around the world as a Marine Infantry leader, he also served briefly with Marine Corps Intelligence. later serving on a SWAT team in the nuclear industry, he was twice-named 'honorman' during tactical training evolutions. Commissioned into the S.C. military department, Smith directed the department's first Counterterrorism Advisory Team. As a war correspondent he traveled to Bosnia, the Middle east, and twice to Iraq during the war. Today, he's a senior officer with the National Security Task Force, S.C. Floodwater Commission; a professional writer, a special deputy with the Richland County Sheriff's Department, and a New York Times bestselling editor. Ladies and gentlemen, Colonel W. Thomas Smith Jr."

Attending the second show was Col. (Ret.) Steve Vitali, U.S. Marine Corps, who was incidentally born on the 4th of July, 1954.

"This is the show of all shows and the perfect first for 4th of July celebrations, performances, and fireworks displays which will begin in earnest in less than a week," said Vitali. "What Steve Phillips and his team have done with this production is nothing short of phenomenal. And the fact that a

fellow Marine and one of my best friends [Col. Smith] was recognized brings it all home to me personally.”

Following an address by the Governor and remarks by Congressman Wilson, the first production launched into an hour-long celebration of America with patriotic music, dancing, performances by actors dressed as signers of the Declaration of Independence, a recognition of the four honorees, and throngs of flag-waving children culminating with a carefully orchestrated indoor fireworks display.

From its website, First Baptist Church thanked both its sponsors and “the thousands who attended the 36th Carolina Celebration of Liberty. We were once again reminded that this country was founded upon Godly principles. It was also a wonderful opportunity to thank those who have given so much to preserve and protect our freedom. Thank you to everyone who participated and helped in so many ways and thank you for attending.”

The Carolina Celebration of Liberty aired on SCETV throughout Independence Week. For more information, visit <https://fbccola.com/celebrationofliberty/>.

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