

## Investigation into Death of 'Yogi' Baird Continues

By Guy Leonard  
Staff Writer

Officials with the Maryland State Police say the investigation into a state trooper who drove into and killed an 87-year-old pedestrian in Hollywood last week could take weeks, but once completed it will be turned over to the state's attorney's office to see whether charges are merited against Wesley Goldston, 33, assigned to the Automobile Safety Enforcement Division.

Greg Shipley, spokesman for the agency, said that speed still does not appear to be a factor in the collision that killed Buhrman K. "Yogi" Baird the night of Jan. 19 as he was walking along Mervell Dean Road with his lawn mower.

In the aftermath of the tragic death of the man many community residents came to see as a local fixture, they have both privately and openly questioned the nature of what transpired that night.

A state police report states that Baird was struck while he was walking south in the southbound travel lane of Mervell Dean Road.

But two witnesses, one who talked to investigators and another who talked to The County Times, said they saw Baird minutes before the collision on Beck Road, which is south of where he was struck.

Others in the community have also questioned why police say Baird was in the travel portion of the road when he was known to be cautious in using the shoulder on his many walks from his home on Old Hollywood Road to destinations as far away as California.

They also have questions about the trooper's exact speed that night.

Police stated that Goldston tried to swerve to avoid hitting Baird but was unable to. Citizens questioning the crash details question whether the damage to the vehicle and scars left on the asphalt jibe with what police have said about the collision.

"I personally question how appropriate it is for the State Police to investigate an accident involving one of their own," said David Ryan of Hollywood, an acquaintance of Baird.

Ryan said many who knew Baird are questioning the preliminary official report released by police the night of the collision.

"A visit to the accident scene will clearly show the roadway is ramrod straight for over a quarter of a mile and is probably the best lighted section of roadway in St. Mary's County due to the five pole-mounted lights on private property on the northbound side," Ryan said in a letter to The County Times. "The scars in

the asphalt, probably made by the lawnmower wedged under the vehicle, show the point of impact and where the vehicle came to a stop. Those marks are not in the middle of the road and the distance, over 200 feet, seems much longer than the possible stopping distance in a 40 mph speed zone."

In response to lingering questions from the community about the exact details of the crash, Shipley told The County Times: "All of those issues are being examined ... I understand the concerns of residents and we're cognizant of them."

"No one feels worse than the trooper involved," he added.

Baird was often seen walking during the daylight hours but Lt. Mike Thompson, commander of the Leonardtown barrack said that information investigators gathered showed that Baird had changed his pattern in the last six to eight weeks before his death, walking later during the day and returning at night, though why he did so was unknown.

Thompson also said that the lack of skid marks from the collision was attributable to the anti-lock brakes on the Jeep Laredo Goldston drove that night.

Thompson also said that crash investigators did not mark off the path of the vehicle using paint on the roadway, as is common in some investigations, because state police used advanced global positioning system software to mark the route.

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Photos by Sean Rice

Deep scars in the asphalt on Mervell Dean Road mark the area where Baird was struck. Below is the damage done to the striking vehicle.



## Yogi Remembered As a War Hero, Pillar of Community

By Sean Rice  
Editor

Buhrman K. Baird, also known as Jim, or Yogi, or even as Sneezy by some, is remembered by countless local residents as the old man who walked up and down Route 235 and other roads pushing a lawnmower with a milk crate attached to the top.

But those who knew Baird personally say he was not the eccentric "lawnmower man", but a fiercely independent, big-hearted man with his-

tory in St. Mary's County going back nearly 70 years.

Baird, of Hollywood, was killed last Wednesday when he was stuck while walking on Mervell Dean Road by an off-duty Maryland State Police Officer driving a state-owned Jeep.

Baird has no surviving relatives, was never married and never had children, according to the executor of his estate and a long-time friend Connie Tiger of St. Inigoes.

"I was his only family ... We had a special bond together," Tiger said.

Tiger met Baird when she worked at Burchmart in Hollywood, in the days when Baird, for transportation, would drive his Bobcat skid loader on the shoulder of local roads. (Eventually police ticketed Baird for driving the Bobcat and he stopped.)

Tiger said she began driving Baird to doctor appointments and to other errands he needed. Baird spent Christmas at Tiger's home about 5 years ago.

"He was my best friend. I was like a daughter to him," Tiger said. "He loved people. He loved telling stories."

Baird liked to tell stories about his experiences in the military and construction jobs he took part in through the years, and "would gladly speak to anyone who would spare him a minute and listen," said Dave Ryan of Hollywood. "Anyone who took a minute to speak with him knew him as a fiercely independent and patriotic soul who liked people."

Rick Greer of Hollywood has been a friend

of Baird's for more than 10 years, and he last spoke with him two weeks ago when he convinced Baird to visit the Charlotte Hall Veteran's Home, where Greer was trying to persuade him to move to.

"He was an expert welder, a really good mechanic, and not only did he help build buildings on Base, but also the Lexington Park fire department," Greer said.

A few years ago, Baird gave Greer a cache of personal papers, including newspaper clippings, personal notes and official documents he accumulated during his life. Greer is working on a written biography of Baird, which he plans to read at his memorial service at 6 p.m. Friday at Mattingley-Gardiner Funeral Home in Leonardtown.

According to Greer's documents, Baird was in the U.S. Army, stationed at Patuxent River when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. His time with the Army, and later with the Army National Guard, took him to Europe during World War II with the 121st Engineer Battalion, B Company. He also served during the Korean War and the Cuban Conflict. He was severely injured in WWII, which resulted in several surgeries and left him with permanently slurred speech.

Baird volunteered with the Lexington Park Volunteer Fire Department, starting in the 1950s, and served as department president, vice president and chief engineers, according to his papers. He also maintained ambulances for the Lexington Park Volunteer Rescue Squad.

Baird was a member of the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 77. He once

worked as a night watchman for Aldridge Ford, and obtained a special chauffeurs license.

In his final years, Baird lived in a small camper he had permission to park on land on Old Hollywood Road. In the past he lived in a small trailer parked on Greer's land for about a year, and later on Greer's neighbor's land.

Bay District Volunteer Fire Department



Public Information Officer Douglas Medley remembered Baird in a eulogy published on the department's Web site ([www.bdvfd.org](http://www.bdvfd.org)).

"So we bury him in our hearts and just know that the good Lord has wrapped his arms around him to welcome him into the kingdom of heaven," Medley wrote. "His long walk is over. You can rest now 'Yogi.'"

