

Wade: Crash 'could happen to anyone' . . .

By LORETTA PENDERGRAST
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Charles Wade of Clinton recalled "how close it hit home" when he watched a Marine jet misjudge the USS Nimitz runway May 26 and crash on the flight deck, killing 14 men and wounding 48 others.

He said then that "it could happen to anyone."

Wade died Tuesday in the crash of a Navy plane in the Mediterranean Sea about a mile from the mammoth carrier.

Wade, the 20-year-old operator of sensory equipment on the S-3A Viking jet that crashed, aspired for a career in the Navy.

"He came to me about it before he graduated from high school," said his father, Bryan Wade. In speaking about his eldest son's career intentions, Wade said, "He wanted me to go talk with a recruiter about it."

"He did the same exact job that I did," said Chuck Chapman, a Clinton High School friend who also joined the Navy after high school. "He was highly patriotic. He loved his country and he loved his job."

Howard Cohen, Wade's band director for four years at Clinton High, said he knew Wade was of leadership stock. Aside from trumpet duties with the band, during which he was named outstanding musician one year, Wade also played on the high school golf and tennis teams.

When his family lived in Indianola prior to 1975, Wade took leading roles in dramatic productions in the schools.

He also sang with Morrison Heights Baptist Church chorale in Clinton.

"He was a grandstander," Cohen said. "He liked to play before people. He would badger me for hours to let him play solo before 5,000 people during a game."

After graduating from Clinton High in 1979 and signing on with the Navy, Wade's instructors at the Naval Training Center in Orlando, Fla., chose him as the outstanding recruit in his 80-person class.

From training school, Wade breezed through sonar school

and through air crew flight school at the Pensacola, Fla., Naval Air Station. He next completed anti-submarine warfare school in San Diego before his assignment to the Nimitz last February.

Shortly after he joined the Nimitz crew, he saw the carrier crash in the Atlantic Ocean in which 14 men were killed.

"He was on deck when that crash happened," Chapman said. "He said something about how close it hit home, how it could happen to anyone."

As an acoustical sensory operator — the crewman in charge of tracking submarines — Wade was "overwhelmed with what he was doing," Cohen said.

The Rev. Kermit McGregor, pastor of Morrison Heights Baptist Church, which Wade and his family attended, said the young man "was tremendously excited about flying. His father shared with me that Charles was really doing what he wanted to do. He was extremely happy."

Wade had even laid plans for the continuance of a military career. In February 1982, he was to enroll in the Navy's officer candidate school.

"I'd just written a letter of recommendation for him," Cohen said. "This kind of knocked me off my feet. He's all I've been thinking about. He was a very, very fine, upstanding young man. He was very ambitious."

"I really loved it (the Navy). But he loved it more," Chapman said.

Funeral arrangements for Wade are incomplete but will be handled by Wright & Ferguson Funeral Home.

He is survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bryan Wade of Clinton; two sisters, Sandra Leigh Wade and Amy Lynn Wade of Clinton; a brother, James Bryan Wade of Clinton; his maternal grandmother, Mrs. Edrie Coates Wade of Memphis, Tenn; and his paternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles D. Riley of Memphis.

The family requests that memorials be made to the Clinton High School Band Booster's Scholarship Fund.