Memorial rites honor Smothers

By CURT EYSINK
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Slain city police Cpl. Betty Smothers was remembered at her former district substation on Friday, the first anniversary of her death.

As the brief memorial service began, a cold front swept in, dropping the temperature at least five degrees over 10 minutes and bringing with it a steady rain.

Smothers' mother, Willie Wheeler, huddled under a large umbrella with five of Smothers' six children, the Rev. T.J. Jemison and the mayor's assistant chief administrative officer, Greg Brown.

They and two rows of the late corporal's former colleagues stood around the flagpole at the First District Substation on Plank Road as an officer raised the U.S. flag and the national police memorial flag—a red rose laid across a blue shield on a white background—to half staff.

Cpl. Mavis Johnson sang and a police bugler played Taps.

Baton Rougeans were stunned last Jan. 7 when gunmen shot and killed Smothers during an ambush at a Jefferson Highway bank's night deposit box.

The 36-year-old Smothers, a single mother, died instantly. A passenger in her police car, the night manager of a Piggly Wiggly store whom Smothers was accompanying to the bank, survived gunshot wounds.

Nothing "could bring more meaning to today than the faces of these officers," Baton Rouge Union of Police Local 237 President Joan Dipaola said, referring to the police in attendance.

"There was a tremendous sacrifice made, not only in serving but in the giving of life," said Mayor Tom Ed McHugh, who also attended.

Jemison adapted a part of the Beatitudes from the Bible in a brief address.

"Blessed are the officers who die in the service of mankind," he said.

"If it were not for the officers, we might have a more dangerous world than we have."

Smothers was one of four police officers killed in Louisiana last year, and one of 151 killed around the country in the line of duty. Of that number, only nine others...
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were women, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund and Concerns of Police Survivors, two Washington-based groups.

Smothers' name and those of the 150 other officers killed in 1993 will be added during a candlelight service on May 13 to the 13,256 other names already inscribed on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.

A national memorial service sponsored by the Fraternal Order of Police and the FOP Auxiliary is planned for May 15, National Peace Officers Memorial Day, to remember police who died in the line of duty during 1993.