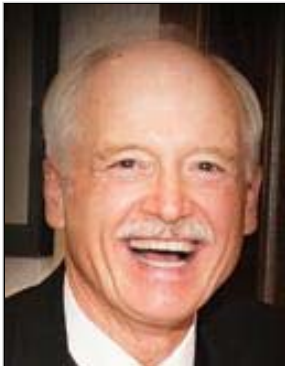

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Chief federal prosecutor dies



John Barksdale

By TOM MORTON
Star-Tribune staff writer

Tuesday, December 30, 2008 10:29 PM MST

The supervising federal prosecutor for Wyoming, who lived in Casper, died Monday from injuries suffered last week in a head-on collision in northern Colorado, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office said Tuesday.

"I am deeply saddened by the tragic and sudden loss of our dear friend and colleague John Barksdale," U.S. Attorney Kelly H. Rankin said.

"John was an exceptional public servant, who left behind an enormous footprint in this state, but he was an even better husband, father and son. Our focus now is doing everything we can for Sheryl, his children and his family through this very difficult time," Rankin said.

John "Jack" Barksdale, 62, suffered his fatal injuries Friday morning while driving north of Craig, Colo., when a southbound pickup tried to pass a tractor trailer and hit Barksdale's car head-on.

Barksdale's passing after 20 years with the U.S. attorney's office will be felt for a long time, Rankin said.

"All federal criminal prosecutions went through John," Rankin said. "He left an enormous footprint on the state."

Barksdale joined the U.S. attorney's office in January 1989 after working for three years in private practice in Casper with his brother-in-law Larry Clapp. Before that, he practiced law in Colorado after earning a bachelor's degree in business from the University of Colorado in 1969, and his law degree from the University of Wyoming in 1973, Rankin said.

While Barksdale supervised the federal prosecutors in Cheyenne and Casper, Rankin said, he also carried his own caseload of drug offenses, child pornography, white-collar crime, immigration, and especially wildlife issues.

"He was all over poaching cases," he said. "That was his niche."

Barksdale found that niche in the early 1990s when he prosecuted Casper-area rancher James "Buck" Allemand and his son Tom for conspiracy to violate the federal wildlife export law known as the Lacey Act, Rankin said.

While presenting the government's case, Barksdale displayed his evidence -- trophy deer heads -- in the first two rows of Judge Clarence Brimmer's courtroom in Cheyenne, Rankin said.

Other cases prosecuted or overseen by Barksdale included:

* Ronald J. Cestnik of Casper, for conspiracy to distribute marijuana, money laundering, and operating a continuing criminal enterprise that reportedly imported about 1.5 tons of marijuana from Mexico.

* Lindsey Reaves of Casper, found guilty of possession, distribution and transportation of child pornography through the Internet.

* John Vidakovich of Jackson, who defrauded a Pinedale couple of \$240,000.

Courtroom adversary and federal public defender Jim Barrett complimented Barksdale's ability to be professional and friendly. "Even though we may have disagreed in the courtroom, we never disagreed in the hall," Barrett said.

Public defender Dan Blythe agreed, calling Barksdale a man of integrity.

"He knew the difference between justice and the law," Blythe said.

Chief U.S. District Judge William Downes said Barksdale was proud of his work, did his job professionally, and exercised his authority appropriately.

"But his greatest joy was his family," Downes said.

Barksdale, he said, had a lifelong love affair with his wife, Sheryl, and talked constantly about his daughter, Jennifer, who is a physical therapist in Casper, and son Brian, a chief warrant officer with the U.S. Marine Corps.

"He was a loving husband, a devoted father, and a staunch patriot," Downes said.



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Les B wrote on Dec 31, 2008 11:40 AM:

" Very sad news and a terrible loss for the people of Casper and Wyoming. While John and I were on opposite sides of some very difficult and emotionally draining cases, I will always remember how he approached his work the same way he approached his life - with integrity and passion. If all of us could be the kind of parent John was, the world would be a much better place. "

Larry C wrote on Dec 31, 2008 12:57 PM:

" John loved his family dearly. He honored his parents. He loved his team mates and he respected the system and those who sat at opposing counsel table. He loved capturing life through the lense of a camera. He did what he said he would do. He never sought the spotlight. He appreciated his station in life and he did his duty. He was truly a wonderful person. "

wildflower wrote on Dec 31, 2008 2:20 PM:

" Another good man done way too soon. Farewell, John. "

Jerry E wrote on Jan 1, 2009 6:42 AM:

" Sadden to hear of Mr. Barkdale's death. He was extremely dedicated and always very professional. I know, as pervious Foremen of the Grand Jury, this sentiment was shared by all of us who had the opportunity to serve as jurors with him. "

Heidi Barksdale wrote on Jan 1, 2009 8:06 AM:

" Not only did Dad leave an enormous footprint in the state of Wyoming, but he left one in the hearts of all who loved him... especially his grandchildren! Far beyond his professional life, he was the role model of what every father & grandfather should be. He will be ever so dearly missed. We love you Dad/Grandpa! "

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