



Sergeant David C. May

Badge #873
EOW ... May 17, 1999

Monday, May 17, 1999, started just as any other day for me at Troop E. I came on around 8 a.m. hours and went to Troop E Headquarters to meet with the Marijuana Eradication Team. Sergeant David C. May, my supervisor and only “zone mate,” had come “41” much earlier in the morning on an assigned photo flight mission for the Missouri Special Olympics. He was piloting helicopter 77MP with photographer Ricky Gunnels Jr. Our fixed wing airplane, 93MP, was out of service, and I went to work on the ground with the Eradication Team.

Early in the afternoon, we had finished our assignment south of Poplar Bluff and started for the troop headquarters. As we drove up Missouri 53, I noticed a dark cloud and fierce storm approaching. My thoughts turned to David. I made a radio call and learned that 77MP was airborne from Dexter and attempting to make the short 20-mile trip west to Poplar Bluff. My conversation with Sgt. May continued as we both made our way to Poplar Bluff. As we arrived, David decided to turn around and head southeast to avoid the severe storm.

He told me, “When I get to Malden and get on the ground, I’ll call you.”

Shortly after I arrived at the troop headquarters, David called me. We talked on the phone at length about the weather. After much discussion, David decided that it was safe for him to fly back to Poplar Bluff. He

told me to keep him posted on changes in the weather and he would see me in a little while. That was my last conversation with my boss ... my co-worker ... my friend. He left Malden en route home, yet he didn’t arrive.

In the days and weeks immediately following the crash of 77MP, I have experienced many emotions. I initially felt lots of guilt. How come it was David and not me; or at least, why not both of us? We often flew together. I was angry for a time. After a few days into the investigation, when we learned a tentative cause of the crash, I became somewhat relieved. I was proud to know that David May was, in fact, the pilot that I always knew he was. There’s always a fear that pilot error may have led to a crash. It is quite apparent from being on the scene, pilot error had nothing to do with this crash. In fact, pilot skill is what kept the loss of life and property damage contained. Sgt. May, in his last effort to protect life and property, guided his crippled helicopter to an area secluded from pedestrian and vehicular traffic at a time of day when that task was seemingly impossible. His skill saved lives.

I’ve had time to think about the memories I have of David. My first contact with him was when he was a trooper assigned to Stoddard County in 1987. I was 18, and about to leave for college at Memphis State.

David was a six-year trooper working the late shift. When he stopped me in my dad’s Nissan Pulsar for driving “quite a bit” over the speed limit, he was professional and polite; just what you’d expect from the Missouri State Highway Patrol. Little did I know at the time that wasn’t just the Highway Pa-



Sgt. Dave May during Operation Cash Crop in 1999.

notably has influenced my life. Pilots often wish each other to have “as many landings as you do take-offs.” Policemen always wish for each other to have as many EOWs as they do 10-41s.

Unfortunately, I cannot give Sgt. May a safe landing in place of the one that claimed his life. I can however, with his permission, bring a close to his tour of duty on May 17, 1999:

“873, Poplar Bluff, EOW, 873.”

“873, at 1608, KAA-270.”

(This article by Sgt. John A. “Jay” Sampietro Jr. first appeared in the July 1999 Patrol News. Unfortunately, Jay Sampietro was killed in the line of duty on August 17, 2005.)

trol’s way — that was David May’s way.

As he wrote me the only ticket I’ve ever had, we talked about my career goals. He told me how to pay the fine and wished me luck in my endeavors. He and I have laughed about that story many times. Who would have guessed that I would not only fulfill my goals, but that David would be my boss and my mentor?

Since I’ve started flying for the Patrol, David and I have spent a lot of time by ourselves in various aircraft. People talk quite a bit during those times ... at least, we did. We knew more about each other than either of us probably wanted. That’s what makes people friends. David coached me along as I made the transition from a “just for fun” pilot into a trained police professional. If you knew David just a little, it was easy to tell that he was always laid back, polite, funny, and took tremendous pride in his job. I think the both of us could provide endless material for Jeff Foxworthy’s “You Might Be a Redneck Pilot.” But when it came time to fly, the cutting up and the humor usually came to an end. It was time to work. He took his job seriously, he did it well, and he was justifiably proud.

I will miss David May. He has helped my career, influenced my flying, and most

Occasionally, I had the opportunity to work assignments in the Troop E area with Dave. Being with Dave on these assignments, I could see the genuine article he truly was. He greeted people with warm salutations, establishing a rapport, which instantly placed people at ease. Dave was, as referenced during his funeral service, always seeking to be of service to folks surrounding him. He was never too busy or so concerned about the tasks, which required his attention that he neglected to first find ways to serve his friends or strangers. Dave had a sincere Christian conviction, and he lived this conviction in his everyday life.

The reality of this great loss was driven home while attending the visitation for Dave in the church of which he was such a part. People from all walks of life stood quietly and somberly in a long line waiting to pay their respects and offer condolences to

Dave's gracious wife, Lynda, and his two daughters. It was obvious Dave's 41 years in the Troop E community had touched positively many, many lives.

Past tradition has ingrained certain ceremonies survivors perform to honor their departed friends and co-workers. One ceremony that was requested as a final salute to Dave was for a flight of Patrol aircraft to fly over the gravesite. This ceremonial flyby signifies that an airman has gone on to be with our Creator. It also represents the keen sense of loss everyone feels by the departing of one aircraft from the flight. It was an honor to have participated in this ceremony.

Sgt. Dave May, badge #873, Missouri State Highway Patrol, you are cleared to land.

(Sgt. Greg L. Word's article is an edited version of what appeared in the July 1999 Patrol News. He is now retired Lt. Greg Word.)

A Memory Of David May

David and I were in the 54th Recruit Class together in 1981. He drove from his home in Risco, MO, picked me up in New Hamburg, MO, and then we would meet Alan Tatum and Danny Joe Crain in Jackson, MO, for our Sunday night returns to the Academy. David had recently graduated from Murray State University in Kentucky, and had worked on their university police department. When he got accepted for the Patrol Academy, he moved back to his parents' home in Risco, where he had grown up. After graduation, he and Tatum were assigned to Hayti, where they rented a mobile home together, and I was sent to Malden in the adjoining zone. David was assigned to then-Trooper Terry Moore (retired captain) for field training. Terry drove Colonel Al



Sgt. Dave May talks with a group of elementary students.



The May family visited the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 2000.

Lubker's reassigned Buick patrol car. We envied David because the car had a factory eight track tape player. All Tatum and I had were AM radios in our FTO's cars.

David's folks, Cargene and Rosella May, lived in Risco and ran a service station. Risco was right on the zone line, and on occasion David and I would get together for a visit at the station and usually lunch at the local cafe with his dad. His folks were what is often referred to as the "salt of the Earth." If you needed anything, all you had to do was ask. If I needed to know something about someone in the area, usually David or his folks had an answer. If not, the "loafers" around May Oil Company did. While stationed in the Portageville zone, David started dating his future wife, Lynda. He also started taking flying lessons at Malden so he could be a troop backup pilot.

David transferred to the Dexter zone, then became the full-time pilot upon the

retirement of Sergeant Lester Enderle. This necessitated a move to Poplar Bluff. A humorous memory I have of that later time was David had flown to Jefferson City then turned in a lunch expense that exceeded the \$5 limit while he was on the assignment. He had eaten at a Steak 'n Shake and spent \$7 plus. The troop commander (later a lieutenant colonel) refused to approve it, telling David if he had wanted to eat a hamburger, he should have gone to McDonalds. David was probably the only one that didn't get a good laugh out of it.

David was a guy that liked the Patrol and loved his job. He would work hard, but also knew when to take a break. He had a very strong sense of patriotism, probably developed from his small town roots. He also had a strong sense of faith and served his church in many capacities. There was also the David May Rule around troop headquarters: "When you walk around the build-

ing, always have some papers in your hand. Everyone will think you are busy and won't give you something else to do."

The day David died I watched our classmate, then-Lieutenant George Ridens (captain of Troop E), struggle to tell Lynda the news. I was tasked with notifying David's father. A month to the day prior to David losing his life, his mother had passed away from cancer. Now, I had to tell Cargene his only child was gone, too.

George Ridens and I, along with David, had seen a friend and classmate buried in the line of duty in 1985 when Trooper Jimmie Linegar was gunned down by David Tate. Now George, Jay Sampietro (who was David's protege and one of his closest friends), and I helped bury David. Sadly, in 2005, we also had to see Jay buried, after his death in the line of duty.

On days like those and some others, you wonder if this job is really worth it. Then a total stranger will come up to you with three or four kids in tow and thank you for protecting them and their children, and tell you they pray for you every night. Yeah, I guess it is.

(Lieutenant Steve Niederkorn, Troop E, wrote this article in 2006. Lt. Niederkorn retired in 2014.)

Sergeant David C. May is survived by his wife, Lynda, their two daughters, Krista and Taralyn, and his father. Sgt. May (873), 41, died May 17, 1999, when the helicopter he was piloting crashed in Popular Bluff, MO. May was following the progress of the 1999 Law Enforcement Torch Run for Missouri Special Olympics at the time of the crash. A civilian photographer, Ricky Wayne Gunnels, 22, was also killed in the crash.

In March 2000, the Patrol News reported the Troop E Cessna 182 airplane would be

changed. Due to the efforts of Sgt. John A. "Jay" Sampietro, the Patrol honored Sgt. David C. May by changing the plane's registration number to include Sgt. May's badge number. The plane's registration number became N873MP. On September 29, 2011, a portion of U.S. Highway 67 in Butler County from County Road 422 to the U.S. Highway 60 East/67 South Bypass was dedicated as the "Missouri State Highway Patrol Sergeant David May Memorial Highway." Sergeant David C. May was the 19th member of the Patrol to make the Ultimate Sacrifice.