



Montana Trooper

A Life Lived for Others

Three Forks, Montana Highway Patrol Say Goodbye to Fallen Trooper

*By Jodi Hausen of the Bozeman Daily Chronicle,
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Photos by Clarke Sutphin*

THREE FORKS – Montana Highway Patrol Trooper David DeLaittre's law enforcement career started when he was in second grade, his father told the crowd of about 2,500 who attended the 23 year old's memorial service.

The father and son were walking down the street and the then 7 year old pointed to a vehicle's license plate,

showing his dad, then a trooper himself, that its registration had expired, Dennis DeLaittre said.

Dennis DeLaittre, in a Three Forks police uniform, said he was sad he'd never be able to fulfill David's dream of rejoining the Highway Patrol to work side by side with his son.

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Procession in town.



Dennis DeLaittre speaking.



Rifle volley.



Gymnasium.





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continued



Bagpiper.



Colonel Tooley presents flag.

"But we don't always get what we want," he said more than once during his eulogy.

He finished with, "I love you and I miss you," to which the crowd stood and applauded.

More than 500 law enforcement officers from throughout Montana and as far away as Florida, New Jersey, Canada, and Arizona attended the funeral for the man who joined the Highway Patrol just two years ago. Prior to a memorial

service, a procession of hundreds of law enforcement vehicles from agencies across the state and the nation wound through the town.

DeLaittre was gunned down on December 1st, 2010, on Montana Highway 2 just southwest of Three Forks when he stopped to check on a pickup truck that was left running in the middle of the road. The driver exchanged gunfire with the trooper. He was found in his truck several hours later in Broadwater County, dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

A somber crowd filed into Three Forks High School gymnasium around 12:30 p.m. and within a half hour the bleachers, set aside for the general public, were filled nearly to capacity.

The bleacher throngs stood as a long line of officers filled the approximately 500 seats set up on the basketball court. A sea of green shirts of the Montana Highway Patrol filled seven of the rows.

Time and again during the ceremony, people spoke of DeLaittre's compassion. Photos showed David as a child nose to nose with a kitten and carrying a tub full of puppies. Another



Flag folding.



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Ashes.

photo, of David as an adult relaxing with a hand behind his head and a large bulldog sitting on his belly, elicited chuckles from the assembly.

Toward the end of the memorial service, thirteen Montana Highway Patrol troopers marched through the gym. One pressed a folded American flag to his chest; others carried rifles.

As the flag was unfurled and held up by four troopers, three shots were fired outside the gym. Afterwards, an

officer played taps on a silver trumpet as many in the crowd bowed their heads, while others held hands over their hearts.

After the flag was refolded, MHP Colonel Michael Tooley knelt before the family and presented it to them while uttering words only they could hear.

A lone bagpiper played "Amazing Grace," and as the drone of the bagpipes faded, a Montana trooper picked

up the wooden box containing David DeLaittre's ashes and carried them out.

In opening the service, Gallatin County Sheriff's Office Chaplain Warren Hiebert evoked the 23rd Psalm - appropriate not only for its sentiment, but because David "was 23, is 23," Hiebert said.

Gallatin Airport Authority Police Officer Bryan Adams' tenor voice floated over the throngs, singing "I Can Only Imagine" as a black-clad, white-gloved sign language interpreter's hands danced gracefully in front of her face.

Adams, a former Bozeman police officer and Montana Highway Patrol trooper, also spoke of knowing David from the beginning of his short life. He recalled David as smart, mechanically inclined and always there to help out.

Adams met Dennis DeLaittre 23 years ago when the elder DeLaittre was a dispatcher, Adams said. The two eventually ended up riding together on Highway Patrol.

"Dennis was there for me, always backing everybody up," Adams said. "And David did the same thing."

"He was the only kid I knew that was 7 or 8 years old who could go out and change a tire without any instructions and do it better than Dennis or I could."

David's former Three Forks high school teachers spoke fondly of the boy who gained National Honor Society status but who was also a mischievous prankster.

"It was fun to see that little smile start after he had said or done something that might get him into trouble," science teacher Sheryl Lehr said.

David was a leader with a strong work ethic bestowed upon him by his family, Lehr added.

"Having high standards was part of David's character," she said. "He was fun-loving. He was friendly, respectful, thoughtful, compassionate, self-sacrificing, and had very high moral principles. He touched many lives in his short time here on Earth, giving pieces of who he was to everyone. David is gone, but he is not forgotten."

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Elissa and Bryan Adams' song.



Teacher Steve Hamilton speaking.

Teacher Steve Hamilton said David's enthusiasm was contagious, and he "had a great sense of humor and was always glad to share it with all of us, even when it was at his own expense."

David, a fifth generation law enforcement agent, was also proud of his family.

"His dad inspired him, and his family gave him a wonderful sense of justice and the desire to make the world a better place," Hamilton said.

David once called Hamilton after a particularly difficult day working as a trooper.

"He continued to say that the most rewarding part of what I do is when

someone says thank you, and that doesn't happen very often," Hamilton said. "So now here we are saying thank you, David, and celebrating a life lived for others."

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A memorial fund has been established, and donations can be sent to:

David DeLaitre Memorial Fund
c/o First Security Bank
P.O. Box 588
Three Forks, MT 59752



Taps.



Chaplain Hiebert speaking.

