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Officer May remembered as good cop, loving father

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Friends and colleagues this afternoon remembered East Palo Alto police officer Richard May as a fun-loving prankster who always had a smile on his face and who enjoyed nothing more than to receive a phone call from his daughters about what their day was like.

Hundreds of police officers in dress uniform attended a memorial service at the HP Pavilion in San Jose following a procession from the East Palo Alto police headquarters that stretched for miles.

May, 38, was allegedly shot and killed by a gang member Saturday afternoon after May stopped to investigate a report of a fight at a taqueria.

Born and raised in San Luis Obispo, May was married and had three daughters.

"I'm outraged to see this tragic waste of a good and decent man," said an emotional Attorney General Bill Lockyer, who at one point stopped his remarks to compose himself.

Hillsborough Police Chief Matthew O'Connor said May, a former Marine, had spent his professional life helping those in need.

"When one of those heroes is taken from us, as Richard brutally was, we all feel the loss," said O'Connor, president of the San Mateo County Police Chiefs and Sheriffs Association.

Other speakers recalled May's compassion, smile and friendliness.

Lt. Tom Alipio, his first commander when May joined the East Palo Alto Police Department 18 months ago, said he came across in an interview as someone you'd tell your problems to, rather than a job candidate.

Bill Cody, a police academy classmate, said May couldn't keep a straight face for his Marine photo.

Passing on a request from Richard May Sr., Cody urged mourners to find a young person to help as the younger May had often done.

"Help that person become a good and productive adult and do it with a smile," Cody said.

The memorial concluded outside the arena with three shots fired in salute to May and helicopters with a "missing man" formation flyover.

Hours before the memorial, hundreds of people, mostly school children, lined University Avenue in East Palo Alto this morning to watch a solemn procession of police officers on their way to the memorial.

Colleagues from as far away as Petaluma and Lompoc, where May worked before coming to East Palo Alto, joined the procession. Some wiped away tears as they passed by hand-drawn banners held by school children saying such things as, "May you find peace. We will miss you and your smile."

One parent, who accompanied Costano School children, said she hoped the message today would be clear -- "Not to go out and do anything like this, because it's horrible," Sedric Miller said.

May was allegedly shot multiple times Saturday by gang member Alberto Alvarez, 22, half a block from the funeral route. The officer was responding to a fight at a local taqueria near the police headquarters when he recognized a man police have identified as Alvarez.

Today's funeral procession included four stretch limos carrying May's family. Applause broke out when East Palo Alto Police Chief Ron Davis drove by just behind the family.

It took 20 minutes for the full procession to pass under a huge U.S. flag, suspended over four-lane University Avenue by two cranes.

Two police officers armed with rifles stood with their backs to the procession, facing the dead-end of Sacramento Street where it intersects University Avenue. Alvarez is a member of the Sac Street gang and often hung out and was seen by neighbors selling drugs there. It is considered the most notorious street in East Palo Alto.

It took the procession of more than 200 police cars and motorcycles about 25 minutes to pass the entrance of the HP Pavilion. A troop of horse-mounted officers were positioned in front of the arena and a photo of May in his uniform was on the giant screens.

Mercury News staff writer Rodney Foo contributed to this report.

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