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## Solemn farewell

### Thousands say goodbye to slain E. Palo Alto police officer Richard May

By Rebekah Gordon, STAFF WRITER  
Inside Bay Area

Unflinching protectors of city streets, staring danger directly in the face, they often seem immortal.

But on Thursday, thousands of them were reminded just how frail and mortal they are.

Members of law enforcement began arriving at Spangler Mortuary on Live Oak Drive in Menlo Park at 8 a.m., when the sky was clear and the air a crisp 42 degrees.

Pleasant Hill, Salinas, Lompoc, Oakland, Fremont, Belmont, San Carlos, Daly City, West Sacramento, South San Francisco, their motorcycle emblems read.

They exchanged greetings with old friends, sipped coffee and embraced in hugs of solace and grief, their badges striped with black mourning bands.

"And this," said family friend Rob Holder, "is just the start."

They gathered to pay tribute to a fallen comrade, East Palo Alto police officer Richard Allen May Jr., shot and killed in the line of duty Saturday. This was not only the day for police officers, government officials, family and the public to mourn, but to bring hope for peace to a crime-plagued city — and for a death not to have been in vain.

Inside the mortuary, about 60 people from May's family sat in front of his flag-draped casket. Holder read the 23rd Psalm as a clock quietly chimed nine.

As the casket was placed in the hearse in the mortuary's back parking lot, an East Palo Alto police officer's lip quivered as she began to cry.

And then, there was the rumble.

More than 100 police officers revved up their bikes, lights glistening in the morning sun, to lead off a motorcade to escort May's body to HP Pavilion in San Jose. Behind the hearse were five limousines with family members, additional family cars and the East Palo Alto Police Department.

The California Highway Patrol stopped traffic in all directions as the procession wound through Menlo Park, crossing Highway 101 at Marsh Road. They turned onto the Bayfront Expressway, lined with police cars ready to join the procession's tail end. In all, the motorcade would stretch four miles.

As the vehicles turned up University Avenue, hundreds of elementary school children and community members lined the street near the East Palo Alto Police Department, cheering for their fallen hero, or crying.

"Rest in peace, Officer May," a girl's hand-made sign read.

The procession followed Highway 101 southbound to Highway 87, empty and quiet as cars were held at on-ramps. Overpasses were lined with firetrucks and saluting firefighters. Construction workers at frontage buildings and at the Highway 85 interchange paused to watch.

The quiet reflection extended inside HP Pavilion. Every cough, snuffle and footstep echoed in the arena, as the navy dress uniforms of law enforcement officers blanketed the arena floor.

To bagpipes and drums, May's casket was wheeled in by his half-brother Mike Merrill, brother-in-law Brett McMillan, childhood friend Mike Nielsen, East Palo Alto police officer Shante Williams, Menlo Park police officer Jaime Romero and Lompoc police officer George Berrios.

As about 6,000 stood in salute, his family followed; a wife mourning her husband, three daughters mourning their father, a mother mourning her son.

The youngest daughter, 9-year-old Lauren, buried her head in her mother's bosom as they followed May's casket.

From the arena stage, East Palo Alto Mayor Ruben Abrica declared Jan. 12 a day of remembrance for May.

"On this day, and for generations to come, we will tell his story, mourn his death and celebrate his life," he said.

A police officer for 14 years in Lompoc and just 18 months in East Palo Alto, May spent his life helping those in need, especially at-risk children. He committed much of his time to the DARE program in Lompoc and founded the town's Police Activities League. In East Palo Alto, he helped with the Boy Scout Explorers and worked tirelessly to help a family whose son he had arrested for drug charges.

"To honor Rich, individually find one young person who needs help," said Bill Cody, who attended police academy at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria with May. "Spend your time with that youth. Help that person become a good and productive adult. And do it with a smile."

May filed his life with joy and humor, and anecdotes abounded. He was known for his vast storehouse of '80s trivia, the short-shorts he wore that showed off his pale legs, his wily teenage antics and his love for the Canadian rock band Rush.

Recounting memories of cabinets never closed and elaborate sound systems installed to watch "Terminator 2," May's sister, Tami McMillan, said his daughter Lauren had been sleeping in her Rush T-shirt since Sunday.

But this memorial also displayed a police force, a family and a state visibly shaken.

"My sense of outrage is great. I'm outraged to see this tragic waste of a good and decent man," said state Attorney General Bill Lockyer as he fought back tears. "We know that we can take some comfort in understanding that he was doing what he loved."

Pallbearer Williams, May's partner, made light of the long commutes May made to his home in Santa Maria, where he will be accorded similar honors today and Saturday before cremation.

"As much as Rich loved to serve the city and community of East Palo Alto, there was one thing he loved more than anything, and that was going home to see his family," Williams said.

"We've all lost a hero today," he said, facing May's wife and daughters as he cried. "He was an example, role model and hero. He will be greatly missed, and he'll never be forgotten."

The air of legacy hung heavy in the darkened arena.

"I promise you this: Rich did not die in vain," said East Palo Alto Police Chief Ron Davis. "His sacrifice will serve as the catalyst of change that in the end will make the city of East Palo Alto the safest in the nation."

Final honors were paid to May befitting a police hero; a last dispatch for Badge 2138, calling for his end of watch, reverberated in the pavilion.

"Amazing Grace" and officer salutes saw his casket escorted out. In the afternoon sun, the thousands of officers who came to pay their respects lined Autumn Street in formation.

Slowly, a riderless horse with boots backward in the stirrups made its way down the street, May's casket following behind.

Six officers carefully folded the flag draping the casket 13 times, handing it to Davis, who presented it to May's widow, Diana. Folded flags were also presented to May's mother, Clarice Merrill, and May's father, Richard May Sr.

A 21-gun salute sounded in the distance, and helicopters in the "missing man" formation flew overhead. His family watched tearfully as the pallbearers placed May's casket in the hearse, Diana May comforting her three daughters with her flag tucked under her arm.

And much like he had come, Richard May was escorted away by officers on motorcycles down Santa Clara Street, thousands still in deference.

And then they broke ranks, embracing each other, unmistakably human.

Staff writer Malaika Fraley contributed to this story.

Staff writer Rebekah Gordon can be reached at (650) 348-4331 or [rgordon@angnewspapers.com](mailto:rgordon@angnewspapers.com).

