

\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\*

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## **Eugene “Gene” A. Bolstad**

**Commissioned - March 29, 1956**

**End of Watch - September 3, 1957**



On September 3, 1957, Washington State Patrol Trooper Eugene Allen Bolstad valiantly lost his life while trying to save two teenaged boys from drowning off the shores of Long Beach. He was able to save one boy but despite the Trooper's efforts and experience as a seasoned swimmer and lifeguard, both he and the other boy perished.

Trooper Gene Bolstad was 30 years old and had served in the Washington State Patrol for 2½ years at the time of his passing. He was the 14<sup>th</sup> of 30 members of the Washington State Patrol to die in the line of duty since its inception in 1921. He left behind a loving wife, devoted friends, one life rescued as well as many more assisted, and a grateful state of Washington.

## BIO

Trooper Bolstad, known to friends and family as "Gene," was born on July 16, 1927 in Bend, Oregon to Mange B. Bolstad and Ruth Fransis Innis. He was raised with two half siblings, Bettie Lee and Charles J., in the Tacoma area. The children attended elementary school in University Place and junior high in Tacoma. The basketball player and champion swimmer graduated from Stadium High School in Tacoma in 1946, and continued his higher education at the College of Puget Sound.

While attending school, Trooper Bolstad worked at the Cliff Sign Company, as well as a copy boy.



His passion for police work began in 1950 with the Tacoma Police Department where he served alongside his half-brother Charles. The men worked the streets side by side and were often found visiting a downtown department store where Trooper Bolstad's future wife, Barbara, worked as a model. The couple married in September 1951, and were featured on the front page of the Tacoma News Tribune's society section.

After Charles lost his leg on duty in a motorcycle crash, Trooper Bolstad decided to leave the force and the newlyweds moved to Spokane where he worked with the State Fisheries Department. It was not long before the desire to serve in law enforcement began to reemerge. On Jan. 1, 1955, Trooper Bolstad joined the Washington State Patrol as a dispatcher while waiting for the 23<sup>rd</sup> cadet class to begin the following month.

Trooper Bolstad was commissioned on March 29, 1956, under the leadership of Chief James A. Pryde. He and Barbara transferred to Ocean Park one month after his commission. The couple purchased a home and a pair of beach cottages; Barbara would tend to tourist tenants during the high travel seasons while Trooper Bolstad was working the road.

## END OF WATCH

Trooper Bolstad gave his life in the line of duty on Tuesday, Sept. 3, 1957, responding to an emergency drowning call. Two teenaged boys, Alvin Wiese and Bob Leppaluoto, were swimming about 50 feet from shore when Wiese's muscles began to cramp. Unable to get to shore on his own, several onlookers attempted to swim to his rescue but were unsuccessful. Trooper Bolstad arrived on scene and jumped into the ocean wearing his full uniform.

The former swimming champion was able to assist Leppaluoto, but tragically succumbed to an undertow when he returned to retrieve Wiese. Both Bolstad and the young man he was trying to save drowned. The pair were two of four drownings in the area that week.

His widow, Barbara offered one of many honors to his selflessness and heroism when she asked the community to donate funds to provide more rescue equipment to deter any future heartbreaks. Stung by the tragedy herself, she has only returned to the ocean twice in the years since Trooper Bolstad's loss.



The street and beach approach where Trooper Bolstad made his final sacrifice for others [was renamed in his honor](#) a year after his death. (Special appreciation to the Chinook Observer for the above link to Natalie St John's story and the use of photos by Damian Mulinix.)

The Washington State Patrol will always remember Trooper Gene Bolstad. Honored to count him as a member of our agency's history, in this 100<sup>th</sup> year of organizational service, we will offer tribute to his unpretentious courage and selfless sacrifice by continuing a century-long tradition of service with humility.

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