Trooper Ernest E. Eichhorn was struck by an impaired driver while conducting traffic control at the Puyallup Fairgrounds on Sept. 13, 1958 and died three days later on September 16. The beloved husband, father, and decorated WWII veteran was the 15th of 30 Washington State Patrol personnel to die in the line of duty during the agency’s first century of operations. He left behind a grieving widow, four young children, a heartbroken extended family, a group of honored colleagues in law enforcement, and a grateful state of Washington. He was 33 years old.
Washington State Patrol Trooper Ernest Edward Eichhorn lived a life centered on service and family.

Born Aug. 25, 1925 in Drake, North Dakota, to Frank P. Eichhorn and Bertha Maesner, he was raised alongside sisters Dorothy Ann, Geraldine, and Carolyn, in North Dakota before the family moved to Puyallup, Wash., in 1942. Eichhorn graduated from Puyallup High School in 1943 and began working for the Boeing Company.

He enlisted in the United States Army on Sept. 13, 1944, during World War II. His two-year tour included time in Japan and he received the Bronze Star for his service.

During his years of service, the young private met the love of his life, Marion Ruth Dorn, and the two wed on February 9, 1945. Eichhorn shipped off for duty the next day and his first-born son, Jimmy, would arrive later that same year.

With his military service concluded, Eichhorn sought ways to continue to serve his country and community, while also building his family. He joined the Washington State Patrol on Sept. 26, 1946, as a clerk based in Tacoma before joining the 14E Cadet Class.

Eichhorn received his commission on Nov. 8, 1948, under the leadership of Chief H. W. Algeo and was assigned to Yakima. He resigned his commission on April 18, 1949, only to return to the patrol the next year. He then transferred to Puyallup in September 1953.

As Trooper Eichhorn’s experience as a trooper grew, so did his young family. The couple welcomed three daughters: Jannie in 1950, Jill in 1954, and Julie Ann in 1957.

On Saturday evening, Sept. 13, 1958, Trooper Eichhorn was directing traffic in front of the Puyallup Fairgrounds during the Western Washington Fair when an impaired driver struck and threw him some 30 feet. The driver had reportedly been drinking throughout the afternoon and evening with a blood-alcohol level more than twice the legal limit at the time of the collision. He later told authorities he “just didn’t see” Trooper Eichhorn though Eichhorn was holding a red traffic light. The driver, taken into custody, faced negligent homicide charges.

The gravely injured trooper was taken to Tacoma General Hospital but tragically, never regained consciousness. He succumbed to his injuries three days later on Tuesday, September 16, 1958. His widow, Marion, was at his bedside when he passed. “I’ve got four children to take care of now,” she told the Seattle Times. “That’s my job on this earth.”
For his service and sacrifice, Trooper Eichhorn was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor by the law enforcement Medal of Honor Committee in May 1988.

The Washington State Patrol will always remember Trooper Ernest Eichhorn. In this, our 100th year of service to the state of Washington, we remember him as a good and decent man, a devoted father, a loving husband, a decorated soldier, and a fine servant of the public. With that memory, we will soon begin a second century of vigilance in the fight against impaired driving so that every father, mother, husband, wife, daughter and son can get home safely.

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