

For Immediate Release

Captain Neil Weaver
Government and Media Relations

Chris Loftis, Communications Director
Office (360) 596-4013
Cell (360) 485-3983
Chris.Loftis@wsp.wa.gov

October 5, 2020

James E. Saunders
Commissioned – December 20, 1991
End of Watch – October 7, 1999



Trooper James E. Saunders died on Thursday, October 7, 1999, off of Highway 395 in Pasco, WA. At approximately 9:00 p.m., he called in the license and description of green pick-up truck. Those words of professional precision were his last radio transmission. One minute later, Saunders' radio was used by a citizen to say the Trooper had been shot. Saunders was 31 years old.

At the time of his death, Saunders had been with the Washington State Patrol for 9 years. He was the product of a hard working Washington family and left behind a grieving widow, Billie, and a 2 ½ year old daughter, Megan. Billie was five months pregnant at the time of Saunders' death. She later gave birth to a little boy, named James Eric Saunders, Jr. after his father.

Saunders was well liked for his sense of humor and selfless nature, and left behind a heartbroken agency of friends and colleagues. He was the 26th of 30 WSP personnel to die in the line of duty in the agency's century of operations. Trooper James E. Saunders will be remembered every day for his service and sacrifice.

BIO

Washington State Patrol Trooper James E. Saunders lived life large, both in stature and in heart. Beloved by those who knew him for his sense of humor and selfless nature, the beloved husband and father was tragically killed while conducting a traffic stop in 1999.



Trooper Saunders by Grand Coulee Dam in 1994.

Saunders was born August 2, 1968, to John and Jan Saunders in Clarkston, Washington. The family moved to Leavenworth where he later graduated from Cascade High School in 1986. Saunders received an Associate of Arts Degree from Wenatchee Valley College in 1988 and a Bachelor of Arts degree in political sciences from Whitworth College in 1990.

His law enforcement career began on January 7, 1991, with the Washington State Patrol as a Trooper Cadet assigned to the Governor's Mansion Security detail. Saunders joined the 73rd Trooper Basic Training Class and was commissioned on December 20, 1991, then assigned to Grand Coulee in Grant County.

Saunders married the love of his life, Billie on June 19, 1993. Three years later, the young couple transferred to Kennewick and started their family. At the time of Saunders' death, he had a 2 ½ year old daughter named Megan and Billie was five months pregnant with their son.



END OF WATCH

The 9-year trooper conducted a traffic stop at around 9 p.m. on Oct. 7, 1999, on West Lewis Street just off Highway 395 in Pasco. Saunders stopped a green 1992 Mazda pickup whose driver investigators later learned was a convicted felon out on bail for a pending cocaine delivery charge.

Saunders called out his traffic stop, including the vehicle description and plate – the last words anyone heard him speak. A minute later, a citizen picked up Saunders' radio and told WSP Communications the trooper was shot and gravely injured. The pickup had fled the scene.

The fleeing driver was later found after an intensive 26-hour search. Investigators found the pickup truck and were able to locate the driver's and Saunders' fingerprints on the vehicle. The driver plead guilty to aggravated first-degree murder and is serving a life sentence at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla.



After his death, his young family remained close to the WSP with daughter Megan eventually beginning her own career in law enforcement as a communications specialist with the Washington State Patrol. Her drive, enthusiasm, and accomplishments made her a winning candidate for employment in a competitive industry. Megan currently works for the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission in Burien. Young Jim is a junior at the University of Washington as an Economics major. They are both thriving young adults and honor their father's memory with their accomplishments.

The Washington State Patrol will always remember Trooper James E. Saunders, his service, dedication and ultimate sacrifice. His sacrifice would be the 26th of 30 during the agency's first 100 years of service to the state of Washington.

Trooper James E. Saunders
Gone But Never Forgotten.

###