



Trooper Gary W. Snodgrass

Badge #732
EOW ... February 21, 1970

I had recently been discharged from the U.S. Army after spending the last year in Vietnam. I was lucky in the fact that I was accepted for the Patrol recruit class of June 1, 1969, on my first try. Back then, the Academy was located in an old Navy hospital in Rolla, MO. Our class started on June 1, and we were only allowed to leave the facility on two weekends between that first day and graduation day. Because of the “24/7” status, we were in training from early morning until late night. Saturdays were not much different. Sundays were better ... we were allowed to either go to church in the morning or go down the street to a laundry mat and do laundry, eat out, etc. Sunday afternoons were reserved for “organized sports” or cleaning the Academy and the Academy grounds.

My first recollection of Gary Snodgrass was at the dining hall. The first day (we had to report in by noon) was being assigned to a “barracks” room and being shown how to take care of our quarters, how to make our beds, how to prepare our rooms, and how to arrange our uniforms. Our “uniforms” were exactly that—they were Army khaki shirts and pants, black tie tucked in military/Patrol style, black, plain tipped, leather shoes (not patent leather), black socks, and a black, leather belt. The shirts were long sleeved and were actually the same as we had worn in the U.S. Army at that time. The

leather items issued (holster, belt, ammo pouch, holster, etc.) were real leather and ALL leather had to be “spit-shined” ... just like the military.

It was so hectic showing the guys who had never been in the military or at a law enforcement agency how to get dressed, how to “tighten” the bunk blankets, stow their clothes, arrange their stuff in the lockers, and how to get “squared away” for pre-chow (supper) inspection, that no one really had time to meet anyone until we sat down at our assigned seats in the chow hall. We were assigned a table and a specific place at that table. The tables sat eight to nine men (with one at the “head of the table”) in more or less alphabetical order. It was Army/Marine basic training all over again.

Our first meal was fine. I’m sure, because the Academy cook staff was great! The food was better than any restaurant, but we were so nervous I challenge anyone to remember what the meal was. Gary Snodgrass sat at my table. Later, because of his winning personality and the way he made friends, we let him sit at the head of the table. I do not know of any member of our class who did not like Gary. He was hard-working at whatever he did or whatever he was assigned to do.

One of my memories of Gary was that he could eat like two men. He would let us slip him our “leftovers, ” especially deserts. He never gained a pound. Had I done that or eaten the amount of food he did, I would have gained so much weight that I couldn’t have gotten into my uniforms! He could be serious at a moment’s notice, and then later, when appropriate, he would get that



Tpr. Gary Snodgrass was a member of the 38th Recruit Class, shown here on graduation day September 5, 1969. Tpr. Snodgrass is in the second row, the second to last officer on the right.

“sparkle” in his eyes, give you that “Gary smile,” and say or do something to relieve the stress and make you laugh. We all knew he would have no problem getting along with his zone mates or the motoring public.

During training, Gary was always there to help guys who were having trouble understanding or mastering the techniques we were being taught. Gary seemed to grasp training easily and did well in all aspects of it. He was a “natural.” Being a trooper was his dream and he would talk about it when we were “off-duty” shining our leather, cleaning our “barracks room”, or studying for an upcoming test. I got the impression being a trooper was about the most important thing he had ever wanted. He knew of officers from different agencies “back home,” but the troopers were his heroes. His enthusiasm tended to “rub off” on the rest of us who came in contact with him. There was never any doubt that Gary Snodgrass was going to be one of Missouri’s finest. I believe he was.

The winter of ‘69 and ‘70 was bitter cold, with lots of snow and ice. I had gotten the flu and was bedridden at home when I got the news that Gary had been killed in a patrol car crash. No one could tell me (us) what had happened. His car left the road and he was killed on impact. To this day, I do not think anyone knows if he was chasing someone, going to an incident, or what. Back then, we would get some of our “calls,” or assignments, by telephone from citizens. They would call us at home or at places we ate or drank coffee, and we would just go. The radio/communication systems back then were not so good.

Unlike today, with great electronic communications, back then it was a matter of finding a “high spot” where your radio worked and every trooper knew exactly where in his zone troop headquarters could be reached by radio to give reports or take assignments. We only had two channels—one for talking to troop, and one for talking “car-to-car.” It is my understanding Gary

didn't radio troop, and as usual, there was no other trooper to "talk" to by radio. There was certainly no other enforcement agency to "call" and give information or from whom to request assistance. I suppose we will never really know the circumstances surrounding Gary's tragic and very premature death.

Gary Snodgrass was a good man and a good trooper as far as I am concerned. My class has "lost" more than its share of men. Only God knows why and all the circumstances. We can only speculate and reflect. Sometimes, when I am thinking back upon my career, I can "see" Gary sitting at the table, eating a piece of mincemeat pie, and smiling. His death was a loss to his family, to the Patrol, and to the citizens of Missouri.

(Ret. Sgt. Eddie L. "Lee" Porter wrote this article in 2005.)

Gary was assigned to Troop I, Rolla, Zone 1, after graduating from the Patrol Academy. His classmate, Trooper Glen Ford, was also assigned to that zone. Trooper Dennis Herndon was Gary's FTO and I was assigned FTO for Tpr. Ford.

Trooper Snodgrass was a rather quiet young man, who took his job seriously and tried hard to apply any knowledge he received. He was eager to learn and strived to do his best.

Gary was married to Ellen (Coffman) whose parents lived just West of Steelville, MO. Gary and Ellen had one son, Anthony. Gary's father was a minister and had earlier served at a church in Steelville. Gary was not a total stranger to the area. Even though I spent time with Gary, I have no real knowledge of his earlier years.

On the day of Gary's accident, I was assigned to Maries County, and Gary was assigned to Dent County. He called me before our 4 p.m. shift and asked if I would assist him in holding a spotcheck on Highway O, south of Rolla, before we went to our as-

signments. We held our spotcheck, then I went north and Gary went south. I was the last Patrol officer to see him alive. When we were notified of Gary's death, Lieutenant Gene Tinnin, Trooper Dennis Herndon and his wife, Marilyn, my wife, Rosella, and myself had the heartbreaking task of notifying his wife, Ellen. She was visiting at her parents home west of Steelville. Needless to say this was a very difficult time for all of us.

(Ret. Sgt. W.E. "Woody" Aytes wrote these articles in 2005.)

Trooper Gary W. Snodgrass, 732, was killed in the line of duty in an automobile accident on February 21, 1970. The crash occurred on Missouri Highway 32, seven miles east of Salem, MO. At the time of his death, Tpr. Snodgrass was assigned to Troop I, Rolla. He was survived by his wife, Ellen; son, Anthony; and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest G. Snodgrass. Prior to joining the Patrol, Tpr. Snodgrass was a member of the St. Charles and Owensville police departments. He also served as a military policeman in the U.S. Army. Tpr. Snodgrass, 24, was the ninth trooper to die in the line of duty.