

Eulogy for Robert J. Cooney
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By Captain William Swiderski

Lieutenant Robert J. Cooney – Commander Mobile Reserve/Canine and Hostage Rescue Team. Bob was sure proud of that title and white shirt and he should have been he earned it. Anyone who met Bob knew that is where he wanted to be.

Bob walked through the doors of the Police Academy on August 29, 1988. He served the citizens of St. Louis for 19 years while being assigned to, Districts 4 and 9, the Area II Detective Bureau, the Intelligence Division and Mobile Reserve/Hostage Rescue Team. He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant on May 20, 1998 and then to the rank of Lieutenant on February 21, 2007.

Bob loved his profession and applied his talents well. Because of his devotion and dedication to his profession and the citizens of St. Louis he received recognition; Officer of the Month awards, Chief's Letters of Commendation and Meritorious Service Citations. But Bob was not concerned about the personal accolades. He wanted to personally be the best of the best and that is what he wanted and expected from his officers as he moved up the ranks.

Bob was a proud and passionate man. One of his greatest passions was the Hostage Rescue Team. The team was established in 1978 and operated in an entirely different way than it does today. Many people played a role in its transformation but none of them any more than Bob.

Bob joined the team in 1993. I was already a member of the team when Bob was selected for it and this is where our paths first crossed. Although I didn't remain with the team I was there long enough, thankfully, to develop a friendship with Bob. It was in this time frame 1993 to present that the Hostage Team began its transformation toward a full time unit. Following one of the training sessions I remember Capt. Leman Dobbins, who was the Commander of the unit at the

time, making the statement “Tell me what you guys need to make this a better unit and I will get it for you”.

That was the wrong thing to say to Bob. Bob knew about all the equipment and training that was necessary to take the team to the next level. Bob and his co-conspirator Sgt. Jerome “Jay” Klipfel inundated Capt. Dobbins with ideas and requests. I’m certain that Capt. Dobbins at some point thought to himself, “What have I gotten myself into.” Bob was an idea guy. But he was not like others who had the idea and then asked someone else to execute it. If he placed something on the table he followed it through to the end.

Bob spent the better part of 15 years with the Hostage Team; as a patrolman; a sergeant and then ultimately as the commander. He was instrumental in getting much of the equipment the Bear, and the specially equipped vehicles which you have seen today; and most importantly top of the line training. He also played an integral part in developing the standards by which members are selected to be on the team; standards were set high because Bob only wanted the best of the best officers. He would attend training and absorb it like a sponge; but what separated him from the pack is that he would analyze it, tweak it, make it fit our team and our city. He spent countless hours reading, researching and designing and developing training programs. He would critique every entry the team made with his men even if all went well. He wanted to see if there was something they could have done better. Why did he do all this? For two reasons; he wanted to ensure that the citizens were safe and he wanted every officer to go home safe at the end of the day. It was truly his passion. All of his work has made the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department’s Hostage Rescue Team one of the top teams not just in the region but in the country.

I mentioned Sgt. Jay Klipfel earlier. I believe Bob would want me to speak about their special relationship. The bond they shared as best of friends. This is hard because I truly can not do it justice or put it into words. Every officer with any time on the Department knows of the friendship between them. During any discussion by anyone about Mobile Reserve and the Hostage Unit you would hear the participants say Bob and Jay..... Jay and Bob...Their names are synonymous with those units and each other. Very few people during the course of their life are lucky enough to experience the kind of friendship they developed that went well beyond the workplace.

Bob was also the commander of the Canine Unit. This unit was much more established having been formed in 1958. Bob developed the same passion for this unit and worked tirelessly to take it to the next level of excellence. One day I was standing in Sergeant Ken Hornak's office, the supervisor who oversees the K-9 unit, talking with him when Bob walked in. During the course of the conversation I noticed Sgt. Hornak's calendar. It is a calendar like many others that displays pictures on the top portion. I said to Bob what do you make of a K-9 supervisor that has a calendar that has pictures of kittens on it. Bob didn't say a word but walked over to the calendar turned the page and lo and behold another kitten. Bob looked at me and said Captain you know that new computer program Ken requested to better track the training and equipment used by K-9? I said yes. He said do you remember the name of it? I replied no I remember it had some acronym like everything does these days. Bob said that's right it's called KATS; maybe I have the wrong man for the job. Bob loved Ken and knew he could count on him to get the job done. Bob led the K-9 unit with pride and was proud of every Canine officer and their work ethics.

Bob was known in law enforcement circles as a "Policemen's Policeman". What does that mean? Like everything else you can ask 10 different police officers and get 10 different responses but I will define what it means to me.

It means caring about other officers more than your self.

If you are fortunate enough to move up the ranks; remembering what it was like to be a uniformed officer on patrol; knowing that it is better to take corrective action than to be overly critical because you probably made some of the same mistakes.

Supporting your fellow officers whether it's a work related or personal matter.

Remembering that the words man and woman are in the word policeman and policewoman. Bob had all of these attributes and always treated the officers as grown men and women. With respect.

The greatest passion Bob had was for his family. Mr. and Mrs. Cooney you have a fine family. You should be proud of all of them. Lt. Robert J. Cooney was an excellent officer, the best of the best. Bob the person was a great man.

To Cindy, Sarah and Sean I would like to say this. I know Bob loved you. He talked about all of you constantly. Your pictures are proudly displayed in his office. The citizens of St. Louis the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department are feeling your loss. Bob you wanted to be the best. I'm here to tell you; you were.