

**Trooper Claude H. Baker, Jr.**  
*End of Watch: Saturday, November 17, 1973*



\*\*\*\*\*

**Eagle Scout honors fallen trooper**  
**Published Saturday, October 16, 2010 in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune**

The more teenager Tab Brewer learned about Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Claude H. Baker Jr. and his death in the line of duty, the more he felt obligated to "right a wrong."

"Unless you tripped over his headstone at the cemetery, you wouldn't have known he had lived," said Brewer, 17, a junior at Suncoast Polytechnic High School in Sarasota. "He was the only trooper ever killed in the line of duty in Sarasota County, and yet he'd never been honored in the way that other troopers had been honored."

So Brewer, a Boy Scout, got busy. He helped restore and reprint what was a tattered, sun-faded photo of Baker hanging in the FHP office in Venice. He worked with the FHP to have a large plaque posted outside of the Venice station indicating that it is named after Baker. And Brewer worked with Ewing Funeral Home to restore Baker's headstone at Sarasota Memorial Cemetery.

But his most visible testament to Baker required working with state officials and leaders from three local governments to have a section of U.S. 41 named after Baker, who was shot to death while on duty in 1973 at the age of 32.

"It's an amazing thing that Tab has done," said FHP Major Carlos Vazquez of Brewer's efforts, undertaken as part of Brewer's Eagle Scout project. "It represents his commitment to his community, and he is to be commended for it. I'm proud of him, and I know his parents have to be proud of him, too."

The new "Claude H. Baker Jr. Memorial Highway" will include a section of U.S. 41 from Constitution Boulevard, near where Baker is buried, to the intersection with River Road, where Baker was shot to death by a fleeing criminal 37 years ago.

The highway section will be dedicated in a ceremony at 3 p.m. on Oct. 28 at Phillippi Estates, where a cross that will eventually mark the site of Baker's murder will be unveiled.

Baker was just minutes from going off-duty, and a few miles from his home, on Nov. 17, 1973, when he stopped a car driven by Henry Lorenzo Payne, an escaped prisoner.

Payne shot Baker twice and fled the scene, leaving Baker's body to be discovered by a passing driver. Investigators also discovered Payne's wallet, Brewer said, dropped during his scuffle with Baker.

A Charlotte County roadblock led to Payne's arrest later that day. Eventually, the escapee was convicted of not only first-degree murder, but also escape, robbery, rape and motor vehicle theft, and was sentenced to three life sentences plus 20 years in prison.

"No other agency in Florida has a higher percentage of officers killed than the FHP," said Mark Brewer, Tab's father and a former police officer and sheriff's deputy. "That's because FHP troopers do two of the most dangerous things that cops do: they drive all the time, and they are pulling cars over."

Baker was the first and only trooper to be killed in the line of duty in Sarasota County. He is among 43 FHP troopers to die on the job since the agency's founding in 1939, and among 16 that have been shot during traffic stops.

"You could honestly say," Mark Brewer said, "that Claude H. Baker is the only FHP officer to give his life for Sarasota County."

### Florida Highway Patrolmen Pay Tribute To Claude Baker

## Florida Highway Patrol Building Dedicated

# Promise Met For Slain Trooper's Family

By DOUG LASSWELL

Herald-Tribune Reporter

SOUTH VENICE — A 3-year-old promise to Connie and Sabrina Baker was fulfilled Thursday in ceremonies at the new Florida Highway Patrol station here.

That promise, made in the wake of the slaying of Connie's husband and Sabrina's father — Trooper Claude H. Baker — became a reality with the dedication of the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) and Division of Driver's License station as the Claude H. Baker Building.

"We recognize that a building cannot replace a man," the Rev. Felix Ziegler said in the invocation, "but

it can serve to help us remember."

And throughout the ceremonies — throughout the introductions of the many local and state dignitaries who attended memories of the night of Nov. 17, 1973, stirred.

On that night, just six miles south of where the new building stands, Trooper Claude Baker stopped a vehicle for a traffic violation.

Unaware the vehicle was stolen and the occupant was an escapee from a correctional institute north of Tampa, Baker was shot to death as he approached the car. His killer later was apprehended, convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

Shortly after Baker's death, FHP Cmdr. J. E. Beach pro-

mised the trooper's wife and daughter the proposed new highway patrol station would be dedicated in Baker's memory.

Former State Rep. Bob Johnson was on hand to make that vow a reality.

Noting that Baker was nominated as outstanding law officer in Sarasota County in 1973, Johnson said, "It is my privilege and very distinct honor to dedicate this building to the memory of Claude Baker."

Following that dedication Cmdr. Beach introduced the now Mrs. Connie Baker Brown.

Standing in the late morning chill and looking out over the audience, Mrs. Brown took deep breaths to maintain

her composure.

"There's a little girl out there who has more courage than anyone," she said, and her 9-year-old daughter, head bowed, walked from where she had been sitting to join her mother at the podium.

"This is the part of Claude Baker that is still living," Mrs. Brown said, "Sabrina."

Then, standing with her daughter, Mrs. Brown thanked the audience by reciting a poem she wrote two years ago.

The poem spoke of a man of compassion, dedication and love. "His spirit lives in the hearts of those who know and comprehend," she read. "His mortal absence only means his oath with God began."

"That is Claude Baker."