Trooper Luther P. Daniel
End of Watch: Friday, December 5, 1941

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Police Memorial Month hits home
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Key West resident Bill Daniel was 9 years old and living in South Miami when he awoke to find two Florida Highway Patrol troopers speaking to his mother, who was crying.

It was Dec. 5, 1941 -- two days before the attacks on Pearl Harbor -- when Daniel learned his father had been killed while conducting a traffic stop.

Trooper Luther Paul Daniel was 32 and had been on the force only six months when he was shot in the head just north of Homestead. He was the first Florida trooper to die in the line of duty.

The senior Daniel had stopped a Georgia prison escapee who had been speeding in a stolen car. The man later was convicted of murder and sentenced to death, Bill Daniel said.

"It didn't take a long time like it does these days," Daniel said. "It was only a few months."

Luther Daniel had worked as a motorcycle cop with the Key West Police Department before becoming a state trooper. His wife, Florence, a Key West native, moved back to the Southernmost City after her husband's death. And it was here that son Bill has lived most of his 78 years.

"I didn't understand," Bill Daniel said of the tragic news he'd received that December morning. "It was close to Christmas and I was very young. But I remember when I woke up on Christmas, I had more presents under the tree than other kids in town. All those presents were from other troopers."

On Monday morning, nearly seven decades later, Bill Daniel joined a group of state troopers and other law enforcement officers at his parents' grave site in the Key West Cemetery.

There, they planted flags and placed a small plaque on Luther Daniel's grave in observance of National Police Memorial Month.

"[Luther Daniel] was the first and, unfortunately, he won't be the last," to die while on duty, Cpl. Gary Dunick said after the ceremony.

Bill Daniel, who is retired from the Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority, said he has always been grateful to troopers who have not forgotten his father. He said troopers have visited him over the years at his house on Josephine Street, offering help whenever he's needed it. Their assistance has been a constant reminder of his father, he said.

In 1970, the Highway Patrol station on South Roosevelt Boulevard near Key West International Airport was named the Luther P. Daniel Station, and there have been other memorials on the mainland.

"The Highway Patrol has always been there for me," Daniel said.