

Delaware State Police Recognize Trooper's Line-of-Duty Sacrifice

The Delaware State Police (DSP) honors the enduring sacrifice of Corporal Dennis F. Kelly by adding his name to several law enforcement memorials, recognizing a life and service that exemplified the highest ideals of our profession. His legacy continues to inspire those who serve today.

The DSP deeply values the commitment of Delaware's law enforcement officers, whose daily sacrifices embody the courage and dedication shared by law enforcement professionals nationwide. Their service forms the foundation of public safety in our state and beyond.

Corporal Dennis F. Kelly, originally from Wilmington, Delaware, served with the Delaware State Police for seven years. He was assigned to the Delaware State Police Aviation Section, where he demonstrated exceptional dedication to service and public safety.

On May 20, 1984, while conducting routine helicopter takeoff and landing exercises at Sussex County Municipal Airport in Georgetown, Cpl. Kelly and his partner, Cpl. Thomas W. Robbins, were involved in a crash. Their Bell Jet Ranger 206B helicopter made a hard landing and rolled over upon impact. While Cpl. Robbins sustained non-life-threatening injuries, Cpl. Kelly suffered a broken neck and spinal cord injury, resulting in quadriplegia.

Cpl. Kelly, known by his aviation call sign "Combat," never fully recovered from his injuries. He lived with the enduring effects of the crash for four decades with strength and resilience before succumbing to complications from those injuries on December 21, 2024, at age 69.

In May 2025, Cpl. Kelly's name will be formally added to both the Delaware State Police Memorial, located at DSP Headquarters in Dover, and the Delaware Law Enforcement Memorial on Legislative Mall. Currently, there are 23 troopers honored on the DSP Memorial. Cpl. Kelly will be the 24th trooper recognized for making the ultimate sacrifice. In May 2026, his name will also be added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C.

"Dennis felt privileged to be part of the Delaware State Police family," stated Mrs. Paula Kelly, wife of Cpl. Dennis Kelly. "A guy who never considered himself lucky thought he hit the lottery when he joined the Aviation Section—getting paid to do what he loved. I know he would be humbled and honored by this acknowledgment of his helicopter accident and the life he lived over the past 40 years."

"Corporal Kelly's resilience in the face of life-changing injuries and his decades-long struggle to live with honor reflect the very essence of what it means to wear this uniform," stated Colonel William D. Crotty, Superintendent of the Delaware State Police. "His name will now be etched alongside our fallen heroes, where it rightfully belongs."

"In the line of duty, our officers face not only the dangers of their daily work but also the unforeseen challenges that come with their training," stated Governor Matt Meyer. "The tragic loss of Corporal Kelly underscores the sacrifices made by those committed to community service. His dedication and spirit will remain in our memories. We stand united in honoring his legacy and supporting his family during this challenging time."

"I am deeply saddened to learn about the passing of Corporal Kelly," stated Joshua Bushweller, Secretary of the Delaware Department of Safety and Homeland Security. "His loss reminds us of the sacrifices made by those who protect and serve. His bravery and dedication will forever be remembered, and it is

fitting that his name will now be enshrined alongside those who gave their lives in the line of duty. My heartfelt condolences and thoughts go out to his family, friends, and colleagues who are grieving this tremendous loss. May we honor his memory by continuing to uphold the values for which he stood.”

The Delaware State Police extends its deepest sympathies to Cpl. Kelly’s family, friends, and fellow troopers. His memory and service will forever remain a part of our agency’s history. To learn more about Cpl. Kelly’s life and legacy, his family has created a tribute page at StoriesOfHisLife.com.

As we prepare for National Police Week in May, we invite the public to join us in honoring all fallen law enforcement officers. Whether attending events in person or reflecting quietly at home, we encourage Delawareans to pause and remember the women and men who gave their all in service to others. The Delaware Fraternal Order of Police will host the annual Delaware Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Service at 1200 hours on the Legislative Mall in Dover on May 7, 2025.