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Ridealong Teen Called 'Hero' In Fatal Officer Shooting

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EAST PALO ALTO -- A 16-year-old who was accompanying an East Palo Alto police officer on his beat was called a "hero" Monday for making the first call reporting that the officer had been fatally shot.

The teenager, who was part of a volunteer program that trains young people for possible careers in police work, was riding along with Officer Richard May when a 23-year-old parolee allegedly killed the officer, said East Palo Alto Police Lt. Rod Norris.

Police said Alberto Alvarez, of East Palo Alto, allegedly shot May, 38, while the officer was chasing him on foot. After attempting to flee, he allegedly returned to fire more shots at the downed officer, police said.

Alvarez was arrested Sunday about a block away from the scene of the shooting while hiding in the back of car that was passing through a police checkpoint, police said. He suffered a gunshot wound to the leg that investigators think was inflicted by May during the confrontation, said Lt. Tom Alipio.

The teen Explorer Scout, whom police refused to identify, was not harmed.

"The coward responsible for this heinous act has been taken into custody," East Palo Alto Police Chief Ronald Davis said, fighting back tears, at a news conference Sunday.

May and his young passenger were responding to a call of a disturbance at a restaurant Saturday afternoon when the officer spotted Alvarez leaving the scene, which was not far from police headquarters, police said.

May followed briefly in his car, then got out and chased the suspect on foot, police said. Alvarez allegedly then drew a gun and shot May before fleeing to the gated walkway of an apartment complex and then returning to fire again at the officer lying on the ground, police said.

After the shooting, police officers blocked off the neighborhood Saturday night to search for the suspect, who was described as a Hispanic male, wearing a black jacket, black shirt and blue jeans and armed with a semiautomatic pistol. In all, 250 officers from 25 agencies participated in the manhunt.

Alvarez was caught after officers at the checkpoint became suspicious when they stopped a Chrysler and saw someone -- later identified as Alvarez -- ducking in the back.

May, a father of three who fought in the military during Operation Desert Storm, had been on the East Palo Alto police force for 18 months, Norris said. He was the second officer killed in the line of duty in the department's history.

Alvarez, who was booked into San Mateo County Jail, was on parole after serving 16 months in prison on drug and weapons charges.

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