In Memory and Honor of Pilot Mel Nading

Born: August 27, 1957
End of Watch: March 30, 2013
Melvin “Mel” Conrad Nading was born on August 27, 1957 in Manchester, Iowa to Celia “Sam” Proctor and Kenneth Nading. Mel married his wife of 31 years, Denise Maly, on December 19, 1981.

Mel joined the U.S. Army on Sept. 25, 1975 and served as a helicopter mechanic in Germany. After separating from the Army in September 1978, he went to work for Duncan Aviation in Lincoln, Nebraska as a lead mechanic. This is where he met his wife, Denise. They married on December 19, 1981. Mel moved to Alaska, where he started a family, became a flight instructor for Gordon Aviation, and worked on the North Slope for Camco Alaska. He joined the Alaska Air National Guard and graduated from flight school in 1985. The Nading family then moved to Texas for a short time where Mel flew mail via fixed-wing aircraft between Dallas and Galveston for Northwestern Air Cargo. Still living in Texas, Mel also worked as a pilot for Petroleum Helicopters Incorporated. Missing Alaska, Mel moved with his family back to Alaska in 1988 and started working for Trans-Alaska Helicopters as Chief Pilot and Director of Operations. He was with Trans Alaska for 12 years.

Mel was hired in December 2000 to be the primary pilot for the Alaska Department of Public Safety’s Helo-1 in support of various missions. During Mel’s more than 12 years with the Department, he was the primary search and rescue pilot for the department, and provided helicopter support to Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Wildlife Troopers for law enforcement missions to include the Special Emergency Reaction Team when needed. Additionally, Mel was an instructor pilot for both the department’s A-Star and R-44 helicopters and routinely certified department pilots on both aircraft.

Because of his experience and flying skills, Mel was admired and well-respected among the search and rescue community. He was known for his attention to safety and his extraordinary skills as a pilot. He was named the Chief Rescue Pilot of the Year in 2004 by the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group for “successfully flying members day and night under adverse conditions to rescue those in need.” In 2008, he was the recipient of the Governor’s Denali Peak Performance and a Commendation for Meritorious Service for saving the life of a kayaker caught in a bore tide on July 29, 2007. Due to Mel’s phenomenal flying skills, he was able to hold the helicopter steady and close to the waters as Sgt. Bryan Barlow leaned out and pulled the kayaker from Turnagain Arm, saving the man’s life. This is just one of the countless rescues Mel can be credited with.

As much as Mel was known for his piloting skills, he was even more of a dedicated family man. Mel is survived by his parents Sam Proctor and Kenneth Nading; wife, Denise Nading; siblings Kenny Nading, Billy Nading, Kathy Cynova and Gail Isham; daughters Nichole Chatfield, Ashley Gordon and Kelly Nading; sons-in-laws Jeramie Chatfield and Seth Gordan; and granddaughters Emily, Melanie, Alison, Amy, and Megan.