

19th Annual Corrections Officer Wreath laying Ceremony and Honor Guard Competition

(Orange County's Hero, Mark Parker, is honored in the speech and highlighted on page 2)

Keynote Remarks

By Craig W. Floyd, Chairman, May 1, 2010

His name was Manuel “Manny” Gonzalez Jr. He was a correctional officer for the California Department of Corrections. On January 10, 2005, this 17-year law enforcement veteran was brutally murdered by an inmate inside the Chino Institution for Men. The killer, an East Coast street gang member, had been ordered to murder Corrections Officer Gonzales in an assassination plot hatched behind prison walls by other inmates. He stabbed Officer Gonzalez with a shank through the heart. Manny Gonzalez was just 43 years old. He left behind four children.

This past February, at the Corrections USA Conference in Las Vegas, I had the pleasure and honor of visiting with Manny Gonzalez’s brother, David. His story is both heartwarming and inspiring. Ten months after his brother’s death, David changed careers and became a correctional officer with the California Department of Corrections. He was assigned to the same Chino Institution for Men where his brother was murdered. David wanted to finish the job that Manny had started. He has continued to serve as a corrections professional ever since. When I asked David if he had any regrets about his career change, he said, “Only one—I should have done it 20 years ago.”

David also told me that two of his sons will soon become correctional officers. And, he said that Manny has a son who is a police officer with the El Monte (CA) Police Department. For the Gonzalez family, there is simply no greater tribute to their fallen brother, uncle and father than to follow in his footsteps of law enforcement service—carrying on his proud tradition of service and ensuring that his loss was not in vain.

Ladies and gentlemen ... good morning and welcome once again to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. This ceremony, commemorating National Correctional Officers and Employees Week, has become a wonderful tradition here at the Memorial. Today, it is my great honor and privilege to be with you again as we publicly salute our corrections professionals – in particular, those officers from this region who have made the ultimate sacrifice, as well as those who continue to serve today with such honor, bravery and distinction.

This Memorial was dedicated back in October 1991 as the nation’s monument to law enforcement service and sacrifice. Unlike so many other memorials to fallen heroes of wars fought long ago, this majestic monument grows in its reach and relevance as hundreds of new names are added each year.

From the very beginning, the Board of Directors of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund declared that correctional officers would be honored by this monument. While

all corrections professionals do not have peace officer status and the powers of arrest—key criteria for inclusion on this Memorial—we worked with the Bureau of Prisons, the American Correctional Association and others to ensure that special language was drafted to include all correctional officers. If you have responsibility for the custody and security of prisoners and you die in the performance of duty, your name will be inscribed on this monument.

While this Memorial honors all correctional officers who serve here in the United States, special tribute is given to those who sacrifice their life in the performance of duty. Today, the names of 565 corrections professionals grace these Memorial walls, appearing alongside the police officers, state troopers, special agents and other heroic members of America's law enforcement family.

One of those heroes is Mark Parker, a correctional officer with the Orange County, Florida, Sheriff's Office. On January 10th, 1984, Correctional Officer Parker came face-to-face with an armed criminal who had burst into the Orange County Courthouse intent on shooting a police officer who had given him a traffic ticket. The gunman had already exchanged gunfire inside a courtroom with Deputy Harry Dalton and Deputy Arnold Wilkerson, mortally wounding both men, and barely missing the judge.

After fleeing the courtroom, the assailant exchanged gunfire with Correctional Officer Parker, who, though unarmed, moved quickly and selflessly to shield some of the citizens who were in the corridor and in harm's way. A hearty, 240-pound weightlifter, Correctional Officer Parker took a bullet in the spine that paralyzed him from the shoulders down. He required round-the-clock care for the rest of his life.

Mark Parker was only 19 years old at the time of the shooting. He had been a corrections officer for only six months, and was following in the footsteps of his father, a chief deputy with the Orange County Sheriff's Office. As friends and colleagues often said, the shooting may have crippled the young corrections officer, but it never broke his spirit. He always kept his sense of humor, and he always attended annual memorial services for his fallen colleagues, Deputies Dalton and Wilkerson. In 1993 he was there to witness the execution of his assailant at the Florida State Prison.

Last year, on March 19, 2009, Correctional Officer Mark Parker succumbed to the injuries he sustained back in 1984—the end of a courageous 25-year battle that was emblematic of the battle he waged that day inside a central Florida courthouse to protect the innocent from a crazed gunman. Two weeks ago, we engraved his name on Panel 36-West, Line 27, of this Memorial, where he proudly joins Deputies Dalton and Wilkerson . . . and hundreds of other corrections officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the safety and protection of others.

William Bullard, a Missouri corrections professional, is the first recorded death of a correctional officer on these Memorial walls. He was beaten to death during an escape attempt on June 14, 1841.

The youngest of all of America's fallen law enforcement heroes is a correctional officer named Charlie Batts. He was just 17 years old when he was struck and killed by lightning while on duty as a jailer with the Bastrop County (TX) Sheriff's Office in 1879.

There are 237 women honored on these Memorial walls. Twenty-three of them are correctional officers. The first female officer killed in the history of the United States is a correctional officer. Her name is Anna Hart, who worked as a jail matron with the Hamilton County (OH) Sheriff's Office. On July 24, 1916, Jail Matron Hart was beaten to death during an escape attempt.

The state with the highest number of correctional fatalities is Texas with 69, followed by New York with 49, California with 39, Illinois with 33 and Florida with 30. In a few moments, we will be reading the names of 11 fallen corrections professionals from the Commonwealth of Virginia, seven from the District of Columbia and three from the State of Maryland.

Of the 565 correctional officers who have their names inscribed on these marble walls, 176 were shot, 145 were stabbed, 87 were beaten to death, 44 were killed in automobile crashes, another 44 died from heart attacks and other job-related illnesses, and the remaining 69 died from a variety of other causes.

Correctional officers are highly trained and courageous professionals who work one of the toughest law enforcement beats of all. Every day, they are surrounded by some of society's most hardened criminals—always outnumbered—often by a ratio of 7:1 or more—and usually armed only with their instincts, intuition and interpersonal skills. And they are responsible for the custody, security and well-being of 2.3 million inmates nationwide, more than any other nation by far on the face of this Earth.

The problem is that too many Americans take our correctional officers for granted. Because they work primarily outside of the public view, most citizens simply never give much thought to the more than 500,000 men and women working so valiantly inside our prisons and jails—the incredible dangers they face, the sacrifices they endure, and the contributions they make to the safety of our communities and our nation.

But, I am pleased to announce here today that on October 14 of this year, we will begin the process of changing America's attitude toward law enforcement and our nation's correctional officers. That is the day we will break ground on the first-ever National Law Enforcement Museum.

Authorized by Congress and scheduled to open in late 2013, the Museum will be built right across the street from this Memorial. Through high-tech, interactive exhibitions, historical artifacts, and extensive educational and public programming, the story of corrections, and all other aspects of law enforcement's proud history, will be told to millions of visitors.

And just as corrections professionals have been part of this Memorial from the beginning, the corrections profession will be represented in the Museum on the day it opens. Thanks to a generous one million dollar donation from the California Correctional Peace Officers

Association, the Museum will feature an extensive and exciting exhibition area on the corrections profession. There, visitors will learn the history of corrections, experience the sights and sounds of a correctional facility, become inspired by the stories of men and women who made the supreme sacrifice for others, and hear firsthand accounts from the outstanding professionals who assume the risks and accept the challenges of working in correctional institutions across our nation.

I am confident that visitors will leave the National Law Enforcement Museum with a deeper understanding of the difficult and dangerous work of correctional officers, and a much better appreciation of the contributions these professionals make each and every day to our criminal justice system and to our society.

We have been working on this project for the past 10 years and the groundbreaking ceremony will, indeed, be a momentous moment. I hope all of our friends and partners in the corrections profession will join us for that historic occasion.

In the meantime, we will continue to honor America's corrections professionals here at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. So, thanks to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Corrections Chiefs Committee, we pause once again today, to remember all of the corrections officers from the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia who have made the ultimate sacrifice. And, of course, we remember and honor the families and loved ones they left behind.

Today, the words inscribed on this Memorial ring out, "In valor there is hope." As long as there are men and women among us willing to put their lives at risk for the safety and security of others, there is indeed great hope for the future of this nation, and the future of our children. May God bless all of our nation's corrections professionals for what they do each and every day to keep America safe.