

DEADLY DANGERS FOR POLICE PATROLLING OUR WATERWAYS

by Craig W. Floyd

The names were solemnly read one-by-one in order of the state in which they served. "From the State of Alabama, Loyd C. Hays, Frank Stewart Jr., Walter E. Sawyer . . . from the State of Wyoming, Clifford Dean Stevens, Kirk D. Inberg."

It was the 50th anniversary conference of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). To commemorate this special anniversary, about

250 boating law administrators and their spouses assembled in Honolulu, Hawaii. As part of their opening ceremonies, they wanted to memorialize the 128 natural resources officers and U.S. Coast Guardsmen who had been killed in law enforcement service during their 50-year existence.

I had accompanied my wife, Veronica, Chair of the National Safe Boating Council, on the trip to the conference. For me, it was a vacation, but I very much wanted to be a part of the memorial



service to this special group of fallen American heroes. John Johnson, NASBLA's Executive Director, graciously arranged for me to speak before the honor roll of fallen officers was read.

Given that it was September 11, 2010, I opened my remarks with a special tribute to the 72 law enforcement officers who were killed in the terrorist attacks of 9-11 – the deadliest day in law enforcement history.

I told them about a friend of mine, Scott Williamson, a New York City police officer, who had lost many friends on that fateful day. When I visited with Scott at ground zero one week after the attacks, he said, "There is one thought that gives me comfort at this difficult time."

"Those officers were right where they wanted to be, doing exactly what they wanted to be doing. They lived for that moment when they could help innocent people in need, regardless of the dangers involved," he added. Certainly, the same could be said about the 128 natural resources officers and U.S. Coast Guardsmen who had given their lives in the name of public safety.

Just the day before the memorial service, my wife and I had visited Pearl Harbor, where some 2,400 members of our military were killed

when Japanese planes attacked on the morning of December 7, 1941. We took a short boat ride out to the USS Arizona Memorial, which honors the 1,177 lives that were lost when the battleship was sunk by Japanese bombers.

It is a powerful memorial, especially knowing that the remains of those who died that day are still entombed in the ship's bowels directly below the monument. Oil from the ship still leaks to the surface some 70 years later, and the memorial

the words inscribed on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., "In valor, there is hope."

Those words certainly rang out when I heard the name of a fallen California harbor patrol officer read. Paul Korber was a strong swimmer and a dedicated law enforcement officer. He worked for the Ventura, California, Harbor Patrol. On March 15, 1998, Officer Korber received a call for help. Two young boys and their mother had been caught in an ocean riptide and were struggling for their lives.

When efforts to reach the family by boat failed due to rough seas, Officer Korber dove in to make the rescue. He reached the family and managed to keep them afloat long

enough for lifeguards to get them to safety. But Officer Korber was not so lucky. Tossed into a jetty by the six-foot waves, he became disoriented and drowned. Paul Korber, an 11-year veteran of the department, saved three lives that day . . . and in doing so, he gave up his own.

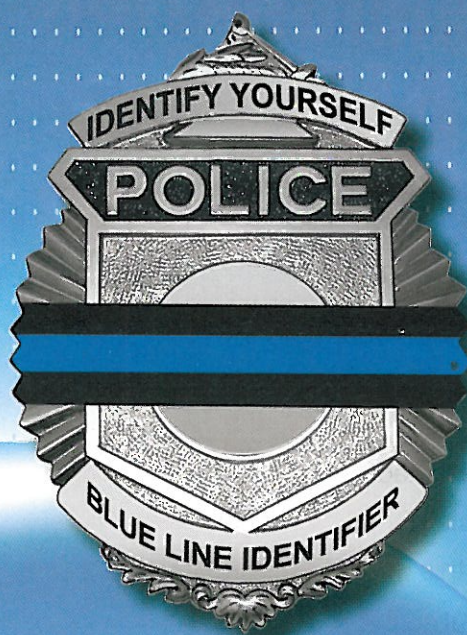
Similar stories could be told about any one of the other 128 officers honored by NASBLA for making the supreme sacrifice. Kentucky Conservation Officer Denver Tabor drowned in 1973

The conduct and service of those who serve in the military and law enforcement define the words inscribed on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., "In valor there is hope."

includes all of the names of each of those who perished.

The visit reminded me that there really is no difference between the sacrifices made by our sailors and soldiers, and the sacrifices made by our law enforcement professionals.

Both groups of patriots stand ready to risk their own lives for the safety and security of their nation. The conduct and service of those who serve in the military and law enforcement define

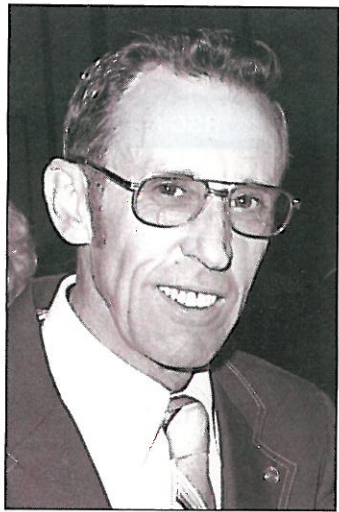


Still the Original

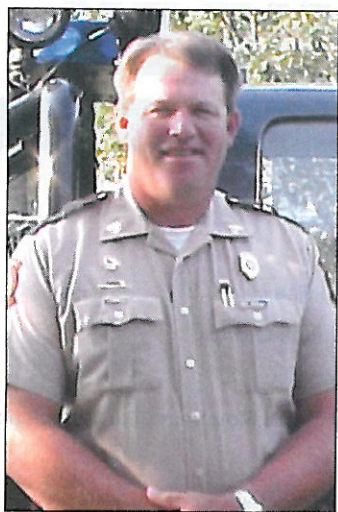
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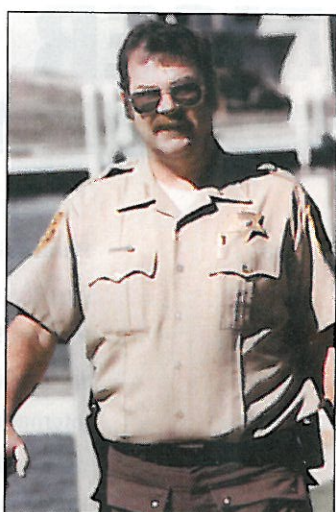
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Clifford Dean Stevens



Darrell Carmikle



Lieutenant Donald Bezenah



Justin Hurst



Sergeant Karl Kelley

while trying to save a young boy who fell overboard from a boat. Sergeant Karl Kelley of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources suffered the same tragic fate in 1998 while trying to rescue two of his colleagues who had fallen into swirling waters during a dangerous training exercise. In 2007, Texas Game Warden Justin Hurst responded to back up a colleague who was pursuing an illegal hunting suspect.

A dangerous chase took place through two counties at speeds exceeding 100 miles per hour before the suspect engaged the officers in a fierce gun battle that claimed the life of Game Warden Hurst.

Like so many of their law enforcement colleagues, natural resources and boating safety police are often the victims of senseless attacks. Just ask the officers serving with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

They can tell you the story of Wildlife Officer Dewey McCall who, in 1971, was shot to death after issuing a man a citation for an undersized fish. Or, let the deputies in St. Clair County (MI) tell you what happened in 1990 to Lieutenant Donald Bezenah when he tried to arrest a drunken boater. Instead of stopping, the drunken man rammed his boat into Lieutenant Bezenah's, killing the 51-year-old law enforcement veteran.

No law enforcement assignment can ever be considered routine, but that is especially true when working on our nation's waterways. In 1966, Maryland Natural Resources Police

Officer George T. Mullikin suffered a fatal heart attack while scuba diving on the job. In 1990, Texas Game Wardens Franklin Hill and William Decker drowned when their patrol boat struck a submerged tree stump. In January 1951, Inspector Otis J. Whan of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Police was supervising a commercial fishing expedition on the Mississippi River.

The river was frozen, so instead of using boats, the fishermen drove their cars and trucks out on the thick ice and fished with nets. When they were returning to shore, the vehicle Inspector Whan was in drove over an air pocket with only two inches of ice.

His vehicle plunged into the icy river and he died along with two other occupants.

Among the names read at the NASBLA memorial service was that of Darrell Carmikle, the most recent natural resources police officer to have their name added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.

He served with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

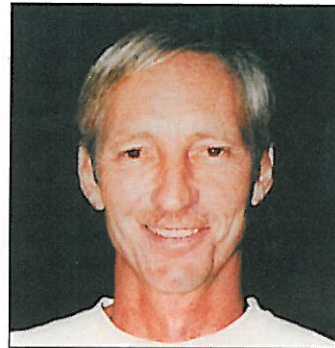
On November 16, 2008, he was patrolling in a helicopter in an attempt to spot nighttime hunting violators who were shining lights at deer to freeze them in their tracks.

When the suspects were spotted, the helicopter moved in closer and crash landed, killing Officer Carmikle.

One of Officer Carmikle's colleagues commented on his death, saying, "Being a

wildlife officer is a very dangerous job. We're trained for just about everything, but in this instance it was out of the officer's control," he said.


Craig W. Floyd is Chairman of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. Visit www.nleomf.com for more information about law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty.



Paul Korber

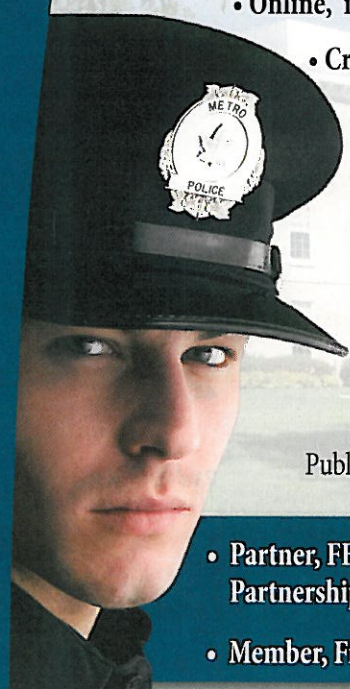


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