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In the Line of Duty

**181 OFFICERS MADE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE IN 2007
by Craig W. Floyd**

Mellie McDaniel was on her way home from the grocery store, talking with her husband, Jackson County (FL) Sheriff John P. McDaniel, on her mobile phone. It was a little before 5 p.m. on January 30, 2007. As she pulled into her driveway, she suddenly became concerned; another car had pulled in behind her. She reported this suspicious activity to her husband, and then she let out a long scream.

Sheriff McDaniel immediately radioed for officers in the area to respond to the scene. Within two minutes Deputy Harold Michael "Mike" Altman, 42, arrived at the Sheriff's residence. He called in a Michigan license plate to the dispatcher and then was heard to say over the radio, "Get off me!" There was no further radio communication. Two minutes later Sheriff McDaniel arrived, along with Captain Joey Rabon and Corporal Billy Dozier. They were confronted by two men, one of them wearing camouflage clothing, who stepped out from behind the home and started shooting at the Sheriff. In the ensuing gun battle the two assailants were killed.

When the gunfire had ended, Sheriff McDaniel and his two colleagues made a grisly discovery. In the driveway, lying next to one another, were the bodies of Mrs. McDaniel and Deputy Altman. They had both been shot and killed execution-style in the horrifying few minutes following Mrs. McDaniel's scream for help. One of the assailants was suspected in the unsolved murder of his wife in 2001, and the Jackson County Sheriff's Office had been investigating the case. Some have speculated that the attack may have been related to the murder investigation, and the recent dismissal of a life insurance claim, but the deaths of the two assailants left their motives uncertain.

Mike Altman was one of 181 federal, state and local law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty last year, one of the highest fatality figures in recent memory. The total is 30 more than the 151 officers who made the supreme sacrifice in 2006, and is the highest since 2001, when 240 officers were killed, including 72 during the terrorist attacks on September 11. All of their names will be officially added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., at the 20th annual Memorial candlelight vigil on May 13. When those names are added, along with 177 newly discovered line-of-duty deaths from earlier years, there will be 18,274 names inscribed on the Memorial walls

For the 10th straight year, traffic-related incidents claimed the lives of more officers (83) than any other cause of death. In fact, there were more officers killed in traffic-related incidents in 2007 than during any other year in our nation's history. Sixty of those officers died in automobile crashes, 14 were struck and killed by vehicles and

nine died in motorcycle crashes. Among that latter group was Rio Rancho (NM) Police Officer Germaine F. Casey, who was killed in a motorcycle crash on August 27 while escorting President Bush's motorcade to Kirtland Air Force Base.

The death of Gary (IN) Patrolman Benjamin Wilcher, Jr., illustrates the tremendous dangers an officer faces every time they chase down a fleeing felon or respond to an emergency call. On August 11, he was responding to an assault and carjacking call when Officer Wilcher's patrol car collided with another officer's vehicle at an intersection. He died the next day.

The number of officers shot and killed during 2007 was 68, which was a 31 percent increase over the 52 officers killed by gunfire during 2006. One of the main reasons for this increase was the high number of multiple-death shooting incidents in 2007. Six times last year more than one officer was fatally gunned down in the same incident. One of those multiple-death incidents occurred last April in Charlotte (NC) when Police Officers Sean Clark and Jeffrey Shelton were shot and killed during a domestic disturbance call.

Among the other causes of death, 13 died of job-related illnesses, five were killed in terrorist attacks, four drowned, three died in aircraft accidents, three fell to their death, one died in a boating accident, and one was struck by a falling object.

On average, the officers who sacrificed their lives were 39 years old and had served for 11 years. The youngest of the officers to die last year was 19-year-old Eugene Marshalik, a New York City auxiliary police officer. On March 14, Auxiliary Police Officers Marshalik and Nicholas T. Pekearo were shot and killed while pursuing a suspect who had murdered two people in a downtown Greenwich Village pizza shop.

The oldest officer to die in 2007 was Paul Rein, a deputy sheriff with the Broward County (FL) Sheriff's Office. On November 7, 2007, Deputy Rein was shot and killed by a prisoner he was transporting to court. He was 76 years old. Deputy Rein was one of 16 Florida officers to make the ultimate sacrifice last year, which was the second highest total among the states. Only Texas, with 22 fatalities in 2007, had more. Seventeen officers serving with federal and military law enforcement agencies were killed in the line of duty in 2007, compared to five in 2006.

Five correctional officers were killed in the line of duty in 2007. They included: Cecil A. Smith, Sr. of the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety; Macon County (MO) Deputy sheriff David L. Gwin; Utah Corrections Officer Stephen R. Anderson; Susan Canfield of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice; and Alabama Corrections Officer Elizabeth G. Franklin. Correctional Officers Canfield and Franklin were two of six female law enforcement professionals killed in the line of duty in 2007.

Freak acts of nature claimed the lives of two officers in 2007. In May, Macksville (KS) Patrol Officer Robert T. Buckman was killed when a tornado lifted his squad car off

the ground and flung it down 300 yards away into a field. The following month, Saint Tammany Parish (LA) Sergeant Linden A. “Beau” Raimer was killed when a pine tree that was toppled by strong winds from a storm fell on his patrol car. In a tragic twist of fate, Sergeant Raimer was struck by the tree while riding in a funeral procession for another officer from his department and close friend, Deputy First Class Hilery Mayo, Jr., who had been killed in the line of duty four days earlier.

FBI Special Agent Barry Bush became the 54th member of his agency to be killed in the line of duty. His shooting death occurred on April 5 while attempting to arrest a gang of serial bank robbers in Readington, New Jersey. Recently, his wife, Karen, said she found a National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial brochure in one of his coat pockets. She recalled that he made a special point of visiting the Memorial while he was in the area for training. “I just remember his phone call telling me how beautiful it was and he was glad he finally located it,” she said. “So it’s sort of bittersweet, actually, that he’ll be added this year. It’s an honor.”

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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.

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