

**Commissioner Glenn S. Goord's remarks
Memorial Service & Awards Ceremony
June 5, 2003
Albany Training Academy**

Thank you, Lucien.

For Governor Pataki who could not be with us today, I welcome all of you gathering today to honor our medal recipients, their families and the families of our 34 fallen heroes.

Together, we offer our congratulations to Officers Jim Whitehead and Mark Pietrzak. Both of you share the best of what the family of corrections is all about: professionalism, dedication and a commitment to your colleagues and to all the people of New York state.

I especially want to thank Senator Dale Volker and Assemblyman Ron Canestrari for joining us and speaking today. You have always been faithful partners in helping this Department move forward.

Three years ago we inaugurated this memorial. We promised that it would be a living tribute to our fallen heroes. That we would gather here each year to honor their memory and sacrifice.

This agency's history goes back to the first state appropriation to build a prison – in 1795.

It is reliably reported that Senator Volker led the debate in support of the bill.

When you recognize the age – of this Department – it is not surprising that some of its history has been lost to antiquity.

In 2000, we promised we would review the circumstances of on-duty deaths brought to our attention to determine if they were inmate-related. If so, we would add them to our first 32 heroes enshrined that year in the memorial room of the Academy.

In 2001, we added a 33rd name. Shop foreman Joseph Weitekamp died in 1922 while fighting a fire inside Clinton.

This year, we must add a 34th name.

In 1877, Harry A. Casler held the title of Keeper – now called Officer – at Auburn.

He was overseeing the work of a crew of six inmates cleaning the outside walks near the north gate on the afternoon of February first. That's when an inmate struck him down from behind with a blow to the left side of the head with a shovel.

Keeper Casler died almost immediately. The inmate tried to escape. He was caught before he reached the end of the wall on State Street.

Keeper Casler's memory is now enshrined forever here at our Academy.

Keeper Casler is not the only other employee we recognize for prior service today.

In addition, we are adding to the official roll of our medals recipients.

We learned that Acting Commissioner Richard Hongisto presented two special awards in 1978: for conduct during the recapture of killer Robert Garrow, who had escaped that September 11 from Fishkill.

One Correction Officer from Green Haven was shot in the leg during the pursuit that led to Garrow's death in a firefight with law enforcement.

That Green Haven Officer was awarded the Medal of Valor in October 1978.

Even though he retired in 1996, he joins us here today.

Would retired CO Dominic Arena please stand and be recognized?

An eagle-eyed member of Fishkill's CERT unit discovered Garrow's transistor radio during the search. That helped to focus the search that led to finding Garrow.

Receiving a Medal for Meritorious Service in 1978 was Correction Officer Frank Lago. Despite our efforts, we have been unable to locate Officer Lago, who left the Department in 1982.

The remainder of our medals have been awarded since the inception of the current Medal of Honor and Medal of Merit program in 1984.

We add these three names this afternoon because each one of them is as important today as they were then – and will be in the future.

Our medal recipients remind us of the bravery, valor and dedication of today's employees.

And we cannot afford to forget the fallen heroes of corrections.

They are men and women who came to work each day to perform the duties assigned to them.

But in their cases, they paid the ultimate sacrifice in the performance of those duties for the people of New York state.

We cannot forget their sacrifice, or that of their survivors.

The granite monument behind me and this ceremony are the physical expression of our commitment to honoring and remembering them.

We come together to remember them each May 15th – when we gather at Green Haven to remember Correction Officer Donna Payant who was murdered in 1981.

We remember them each September 13th at Attica – to recall the 11 employees who died there in 1971.

Those ceremonies, like this one, remind us that Correctional employees perform the most difficult – and sometimes the most under-appreciated – jobs in state service.

Newspaper accounts reported in 1877 that Keeper Casler – and I quote – “commands the respect of his fellow officers.”

Today, I believe every Correctional employee should command the respect – and the thanks – of all New Yorkers.

Not only for the jobs performed with distinction each day by the 32,000 uniformed and civilian employees working inside the 71 facilities we operate.

But for the efforts thousands of you put into your duties at home and abroad as “citizen soldiers,” serving in the National Guard and the Army Reserves.

Also for the special duty performed by hundreds of you in the past 18 months in homeland security assignments here in Albany and along the New York City watershed.

The mission of this Department is to serve and protect the people of New York state.

It is only fitting that we gather to recognize the work performed by the best among us.

And it is our obligation to remember ... to honor .. and to learn from our fallen heroes.

Thank you all again for joining us today.