



POLISHING THE BADGE

The Spawn Group, LLC

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Remembering Two Heroes

Fifty Years Later: Memories, Valor, and Honor

By: Chief/Ret. Mark A. Spawn

It's strange how certain events from your childhood can be indelibly impressed upon your memory. On September 14, 1969 my family was driving to church in Oneida, New York from our home in the Town of Lincoln (Canastota area). We were listening to a news station on the car radio. During the week, two police officers had been shot in the nearby city of Sherrill, New York. As I was too young to remember the Kennedy assassination, the news of the slaying of two local police officers was the most intense story that I had ever heard in my 9 years.

Shortly after 9:00 PM on September 8, 1969, a man robbed a gas station attendant in Canastota, New York, fleeing with the victim's wallet and the station's cash receipts. The suspect was described as driving east on Route 5 in a Ford convertible.¹ A radio alert was sent to police agencies in the region. According to court records, "Patrolman Robert Mumford and Police Chief Thomas P. Reilly of the Sherrill Police Department stopped the defendant's car as he was driving through Sherrill. While (the officers) were questioning the defendant, the (defendant) suddenly produced a pistol and shot both officers. Reilly was able to radio in that he had been shot and that the assailant's auto was heading east on Route 5; he also provided the defendant's last name and the car's license number."¹ The shooter fled to a trailer home in Munnsville¹, about five miles from

About the Author: The writer served as Chief of Police in the City of Fulton, New York. Born in Oneida, New York, and a graduate of Oneida High School, Mark Spawn was nine years old when Chief Reilly and Officer Mumford were killed in the line of duty. Spawn is a law enforcement consultant now, and CEO of The Spawn Group, LLC with his wife, Jeanna, in southern California. He has elected not to identify the killer by name within the text of this article.

the scene of the shooting. He abandoned his car and forced a woman and her children, ages 4 and 6³, at gunpoint to drive him in her car to Syracuse. The gunman told his hostage that he had shot two policemen and would kill her if she tried "any funny stuff." After she dropped him off in the vicinity of Kennedy and South Salina

Streets in Syracuse, she drove immediately to the police.¹



It was just after 8:00 A.M. on September 9, 1969 when police surrounded a house on Midland Avenue in the City of Syracuse. The suspect was found and taken into custody. Police also recovered a bank bag containing a handgun, six empty shell casings, and 27 live rounds. Officer Mumford tragically died that same day. Chief Reilly died four days later.¹

Less than a month later the defendant was indicted for the murders of Officer Mumford and Chief Reilly in Oneida County Court.¹

At the time of the conviction, the jury voted on the penalty of death for the defendant which was later overturned. The defendant was resentenced to a term of imprisonment of 50 years.²

I remember reading the newspapers during that time. And because my own grandfather had served as a New York State Trooper, the reality of this incident weighed heavily on me. Undoubtedly there was an arraignment, hearings and motions in the months following, many of those details are a blur to me. But I remember to this very day that it cast a pall on the whole community. It was one of those things that just didn't happen in a small town. These two officers were trying to protect our community, operating under a set of laws and rules, doing the right thing. But their adversary was doing the opposite – robbing, killing, kidnapping, terrorizing – the epitome of evil. And still, two police officers were dead and their families devastated.

It's been almost a half century since that tragedy. I think about those Sherrill police officers from time to time, especially during Police Officer Memorial ceremonies every May. There is a

Did You Know

Crime fighting has taken its toll. Since the first recorded police death in 1786, there have been over 21,000 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty. Currently, there are 21,910 names engraved on the walls of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.

A total of 1,582 law enforcement officers died in the line of duty during the past 10 years, an average of one death every 55 hours or 158 per year. There were 158 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in 2018.

According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report 2017 LEOKA report: There have been 60,211 assaults against law enforcement officers in 2017, resulting in 17,476 injuries.

Source: National Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial Fund

Did You Know

The 1920s were the deadliest decade in law enforcement history, when a total of 2,480 officers died, or an average of almost 248 each year. The deadliest year in law enforcement history was 1930, when 310 officers were killed. That figure dropped dramatically in the 1990s, to an average of 162 per year.

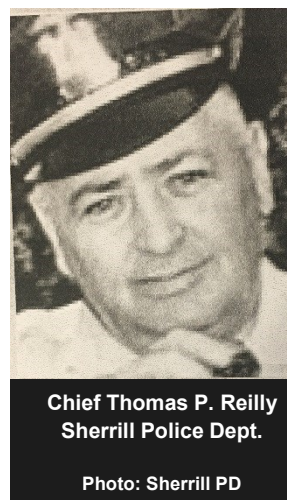
The deadliest day in law enforcement history was September 11, 2001, when 72 officers were killed while responding to the terrorist attacks on America.

There are 1,166 federal officers listed on the Memorial, as well as 713 correctional officers and 43 military law enforcement officers.

There are 348 female officers listed on the Memorial; eleven female officers were killed in 2018.

Source: National Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial Fund

community park in Sherrill now which commemorates the sacrifice of Officer Mumford and Chief Reilly but I fear that for a new generation, the memory of that fateful night in 1969 has faded, or at least not seen with the same gravity as it was for those who were around back then. I find some irony in the fact that, after I retired from the Fulton (NY) Police Department in 2008, I became the Director of Research and Training for the same organization of which Chief Reilly was once the President: the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police (NYSACOP). Reilly is listed on the rolls as serving as President for that organization during the 1968-1969 term. It was during my first year working for NYSACOP (2008) when the killer died in prison, 39 years after his crimes which devastated the areas I knew so well – Sherrill, Canastota, and Oneida.



For those of us in law enforcement, we understand that keeping a community safe is not an easy task. It requires vigilance, tenacity, and courage. In this world there are those who prey upon others - some who will scam you, others who will steal from you, and others willing to injure, kidnap and kill to get their way. Without guardians we are vulnerable. Without a doubt, Patrolman Mumford and Chief Reilly gave the same vigilance and protection throughout their careers to the residents of the City of Sherrill as they did on the fateful night of September 8, 1969. But it was that incident that memorialized their dedication, their bravery, and their legacy. These public servants were more than police officers – they were spouses, brothers, fathers, friends, colleagues, and neighbors—and we should always remember their sacrifice.

¹ People v. Fitzpatrick, 32 N.Y.2d 499 (1973)

² Officer Down Memorial Page; odmp.org; Retrieved May 2, 2019

³ New York Times Archives; *Jury Gives the Death Sentence*; Dec. 24, 1970; from <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/12/24/archives/jury-gives-the-death-sentence-first-in-the-state-in-seven-years.html>



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Who is The Spawn Group?

Hollywood Meets Law Enforcement

Jeanna Spawn is an Executive in Charge of Production in Hollywood. Mark Spawn is a former Chief of Police from upstate New York. Together, they are The Spawn Group. Their projects have included telling the stories of law enforcement—for the police community and for the public. They tell stories of bravery, courage, and compassion. Some of Jeanna's projects have included *Crisis Point*, *Moments of Impact*, and *Most Shocking*—television shows which have showcased inspirational and dramatic stories from real police officers. Mark spent 24 years in law enforcement, including service as a street cop, detective and police chief. He has been a consultant on projects ranging from general policing to sex offender management and harm reduction. Together, Jeanna and Mark have produced several audio and video productions about police officers, officer safety, public health, sex offender management, and more. They have both consulted on television and movie productions, lending their combined experiences for genuine portrayals of the men and women behind the badge. Learn more about them at spawngroup.com.

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