

The Forgotten Cop

"This is dedicated to all Correctional Workers past, present and future that place their lives in harms way to ensure that society remains safe from those that seek to violate it. The article below was written by a New York State Correctional Officer but I believe that it speaks for most. I salute him and all others for their courage and dedication to make America a safer place.

By Donald E. Premo Jr., New York State Correctional Officer

What would the average citizen say if it were proposed that police officers be assigned to a neighborhood which was inhabited by no one but criminals and those officers would be unarmed, patrol on foot and be heavily outnumbered? I wager that the overwhelming public response would be that the officers would have to be crazy to accept such an assignment. However, as you read this, such a scenario is being played out in all areas of the country. I am a New York State Corrections Officer, not a guard (who is a person that watches school crossings). I work at a maximum security correctional facility. I am empowered by the state of New York to enforce its penal laws and the rules and regulations of the Department of Correctional Services. In short, I am a policeman.

My beat is totally inhabited by convicted felons who, by definition, are people who tend to break laws, rules and regulations. I am outnumbered by as much as 20, 30, or 40 to 1 at various times during my workday, and, contrary to popular belief, I work without a sidearm. In short, my neck is on the line every minute of every day. A correctional facility is a very misunderstood environment. The average person has little knowledge of its workings. Society sends its criminals to correctional facilities and as time passes, each criminal's crime fades from our memory until collective prison population becomes a vision of hordes of bad people being warehoused away from decent society in a place where they can cause no further harm. There is also the notion that prison inmates cease to be a problem when they are incarcerated. Correctional facilities are full of violence perpetrated by the prison population against each other and the facility staff. Felonies are committed daily but they are called "unusual incidents" and rarely result in public prosecution. Discipline is handled internally and, as a rule, the public is never informed of these crimes.

In the course of maintaining order in these facilities, many officers have endured the humiliation of being spat upon and having urine and feces thrown at them. Uncounted Corrections Officers have been punched and kicked, bitten, stabbed and slashed with homemade weapons, taken hostage and even murdered in the line of duty, all the while being legally mandated to maintain their professional composure and refraining from any retaliation which could be the basis for dismissal from service. In addition to these obvious dangers, Corrections Officers face dangers in the form of AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Courts are now imposing longer sentences and the prison population is increasing far beyond the system's designed capacity. As the public demands more police on the street, governments everywhere are cutting police in prisons where violence reigns supreme, jeopardizing all those still working behind prison walls. Although you will never see me in "Rescue 911" or "Top Cops", I am a law enforcement professional.

I am the Forgotten Cop, hidden from public view, doing dangerous, thankless duty on the world's most dangerous beat. Hoping someday to receive the respect and approval from the public whom I silently serve,