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Remarks of Maine Attorney General Janet T. Mills at the 2017 Maine Law Enforcement Fallen Officers Memorial Ceremony

Janet T. Mills

Office of the Maine Attorney General

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Remarks of Maine Attorney General Janet T. Mills
at the
2017 Maine Law Enforcement Fallen Officers Memorial Ceremony
Thursday, May 18, 2017

Thank you for joining us on this hot day in May as we pause our busy schedules to honor those who gave their lives in the line of duty while in service to the safety of the citizens of Maine. We called them law enforcement officers. For these people the law was not some dusty book sitting on a shelf. It was not a lot of highfalutin words enshrined on a plaque. It was not something their mothers or fathers or their grammar school teachers made them memorize. The law, to them and to us, is how we treat each other, the rules we abide by for the peace and security and freedom of our communities. The rule of law was what these individuals lived by, what they kept in their hearts, what they died for. They lived and died for the safety and freedoms of others.

These individuals served during world wars and national conflicts, during recessions, depressions and rebellions, during civil unrest and times of peace, during good weather and good times and bad. They served with loyalty and compassion for their communities, before we had "Officer Friendly," before Community Policing was dictated by some federal grant, before Narcan became part of your first aid kit, before tasers and pepper spray got fixed to your equipment belt, and, yes, even before Sgt. Cotton invented Bangor's "Duck of Justice."

Good domestic soldiers, they defended our right to peace and safety in our homes, in our streets, in our woods and lakes and streams. Now we see them, hear them, pray for them through the prism of hindsight. We take lessons from their untimely deaths, as we take inspiration from their lives and their service. Lest they remain mere names on a wall of stone, let us ask, Who were they? Why did they lose their lives. What did we learn from their demise?

Many of those lost in the line of duty, from the very beginning, were game wardens, who served their state in the wilds of Maine from Aroostook to York, Washington to Oxford, from Aziscohos and Parmacheenee to Grand Lake Stream and the Atlantic Ocean. Fifteen wardens died in the line of duty, the most of any department, and these include the most recent death

– Daryl Ray Gordon, Game Warden Pilot, age 60, who died when his plane crashed into Clear Lake in Piscataquis County in 2011.

Ten State Police Officers have also given their lives in the line of duty, as well as officers from Madawaska, Portland, Rockland, Lebanon, Bangor, Bath and Berwick, among others.

One highly publicized event was the “great Limerick shootout” of May 14, 1959, – a crazed battle that started, as many standoffs do, with an act of domestic violence. 51-year old furniture maker Gordon Hamlin shot and killed his wife Rose on the porch of a house across the street from their home. State Trooper Willard Parker arrived at the scene, then officers from Kittery, Scarborough, Sanford, Westbrook, Portland and the warden service. As gunfire raged, young Westbrook Police Chief Pierre Harnois rushed the house with a tear gas grenade in his hand. Hamlin caught him at point blank range and killed him with one blast of his shotgun. After exchanging gunfire for five hours with nearly 100 officers, and after killing the Chief and wounding State Troopers Stephen Regina and Willard Parker, in a scene described as reminiscent of a wartime street battle, Mr. Hamlin shot and killed himself. This the only on duty fatality reported within the ranks of the Westbrook Police Department. Chief Harnois was a former FBI agent and Westbrook's first full-time police chief.

The absence of a bull-horn at this scene created serious communication and chain of command problems, and the absence of gas masks made capturing suspect more difficult. The Sheriff, technically in charge of the operation, was only a part-time law enforcement officer, as were his deputies, with little or no formal police training. As a result of this incident, bullet proof vests are now standard equipment for law enforcement. And now local and state Tactical Units, highly trained in crisis negotiation, respond routinely to the kind of incident that resulted in Chief Harnois' death, with professionalism and patience, often without further incident or loss of limb or life. To them we owe a special thanks today. The Limerick incident demonstrates that more officers are placed in harm's way during domestic violence calls than nearly any other kind of investigation.

That's how our own State Police Detective Giles Landry was killed, after we sent him out to interview woman whose child had been assaulted by her boyfriend. One bullet through the heart took Giles from us forever.

And on the afternoon of December 29, 1978, Paris Police Officer Timothy Willard was on routine patrol when he got a call about a man getting into a vehicle at a local factory. The suspect, Norman Day, was getting into his ex-wife's car in the parking lot of where she was working, manufacturing drug testing kits for law enforcement. Officer Willard confirmed that a warrant had issued earlier that day for Mr. Day's arrest for criminal threatening with a dangerous weapon against his ex-wife. Officer Willard approached the car for an identification check when Day turned suddenly and fired on the young officer with a .38 caliber snub-nose revolver before Willard could reach for his gun. Critically wounded, Officer Willard picked up his radio and tried to call for help. Dr. Robert Carroll, owner of the factory, ran and got his own gun and returned fire, killing Mr. Day in self-defense. Officer Willard died on the scene from bullet wounds to the chest, left arm and neck.

Norman Day had threatened and harassed his ex-wife for months before this shootout and had been treated at a mental hospital. He had bought the gun at a sporting goods store on his way to the factory, determined to kill his ex-wife. No laws at that time prevented him from having a gun. Timothy Willard was 22 years old, a probationary officer who had worked for the Paris Police Department less than four months. He gave his life so that one woman could live.

A year later the Maine Legislature debated the enactment of Protection from Abuse Orders, and for 37 years these self-help measures, which we now take for granted, have saved the lives of thousands of victims of domestic violence and, consequently, the lives of police officers who protect them.

The first and only fatality by a park ranger in Baxter State Park since its creation in 1931 was the tragic death of Chimney Pond Ranger Ralph Heath on October 28, 1963. It was exactly 53 years ago this week, in May of 1964, that searchers finally located the bodies of Ranger Heath and a lost hiker, Mrs. Margaret Ivusic, on the high ledge, still encased in ice and snow and 400 feet away from each other. They had lain there seven months since the unsuccessful rescue attempt.

Two women had set out on a warm and sunny day in late October to summit Katahdin by way of Cathedral Trail. After reaching Baxter Peak and crossing the Knife Edge, Mrs. Ivusic decided to take what she thought was

a “short cut,” while her companion stayed on the trail. Mrs. Ivusic got stranded on a rock wall but was able to yell back and forth with people at Chimney Pond campground through the evening, including with her companion who had descended safely. Ranger Heath, concerned about a change in the weather, set out to rescue Mrs. Ivusic alone at 11:00 at night but returned to the campground at 4 in the morning without her. Only two hours later, in icy rain and a blowing wind, Ranger Heath set out again alone, with a longer rope, heading up the mountain to the high ravine where Mrs. Ivusic was stranded.

That was the last anyone saw of Ranger Ralph Heath. By the end of that day, 16 inches of snow had accumulated and visibility was greatly reduced. The following days brought hurricane winds of gale force and deep drifting snow with zero visibility. Airplane rescue was impossible. A week later, on Monday, November 4th, the search was finally called off.

Governor John Reed quickly organized a “Tragedy Board of Review” to examine the causes and solutions for this tragic loss of life. The Report of Proceedings, conducted jointly by the Baxter State Park Authority and the Department of Inland Fisheries and Game, recommended that gate houses be established at major entrances to the Park and that all who intend to hike in the winter register with Park authorities. As a result of this review, the Park and the IF&W trained a team of wardens and rangers in the skills of mountain climbing, especially in techniques of ropes and alpine equipment; they made changes in the safety rules and regulations; they added first aid and rescue equipment to the Park's inventory and gate houses at entrances to the Park. Ranger Heath was 37 years old, a native of Sherman Mills and veteran of both World War II and the Korean conflict.

Extraordinary and violent conflicts are often the most memorable. But it is a fact that the most dangerous position for a police officer is behind the wheel of a car – either operating in pursuit of another vehicle, or being hit by another vehicle, or being hit at a roadblock.

Traffic accidents are the number one cause of death while on duty. Boating accidents and drownings are another cause of many officers' demise.

We remember today, for instance, Auburn Police Officer Rodney Bonney, who drowned in April of 1981, trying to save a boy who had fallen into the

Androscoggin River, and Androscoggin Sheriff's Deputy David Rancourt, who died during a dive team operation.

Tragedy strikes everywhere. No department and no community is immune. It sometimes takes tragedy to bring about change.

But we live in a state full of thoughtful and kind people, including the 84 men whose names are on this stone.

Let us remember to be kind, to stay healthy, to be caring for one another, on and off duty, in their memory, remembering always our own humanity.

And may peace envelope you today and encompass the memories of these 84 souls whose lives were abbreviated by fate, lost to duty, circumstance, misfortune and intention, their lives dedicated to the rule of law, men whose world we share still in an unbroken compact born of sacrifice and solemnity, a commitment to be the best individuals we can be, the most protective, the most unselfish, the most civil in our common humanity and the most caring of our human community.

God bless these departed souls. And God bless all of you.

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