



Pueblo County Sheriff's Office

Kirk M. Taylor Sheriff
J.R. Hall Undersheriff

Mark A. Mears
Bureau Chief
Emergency Services

David J. Lucero
Bureau Chief
Law Enforcement

Jeffrey S. Teschner
Bureau Chief
Detention

News Release

For Immediate Release
Contact: Gayle Perez 719 924 5471
Date: May 7, 2020

Former Sheriff McKee to be Recognized for Line of Duty Death 100 Years Later *McKee's Name to be Added to National Law Enforcement Memorial*

Pueblo, CO: Former Pueblo County Sheriff John M. McKee was known throughout the state as being an exceptional lawman who proudly served his community. So, it was no surprise that when McKee died in 1918 from health complications brought on by an assault, more than 1,000 people attended his funeral service.

McKee was nearing the end of his second term as sheriff when he tragically died after suffering a stroke that was attributed to a head injury he received while arresting a man months earlier.

Although it's been more than 100 years since his death, McKee's bravery, dedication to duty and devotion to service has not been forgotten. McKee, who served as Pueblo County Sheriff from 1914-1918, will forever be honored as a law enforcement officer who paid the ultimate price and died in the line of duty after Pueblo County Sheriff Kirk M. Taylor successfully petition to have his name added to the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D.C. McKee's name will be unveiled on the memorial in May as a historical line of duty death. Representatives from the Pueblo County Sheriff's Office will attend the unveiling ceremony in Washington, D.C.

McKee, 67, died on April 19, 1918, as a result of the head injury he sustained 10 months earlier while he and Undersheriff Sam Thomas were arresting an armed suspect. The suspect, Samuel H. Vertrees, was combative and while McKee and Thomas were attempting to handcuff him, he kicked McKee in the head. Despite the crushing blow McKee endured, he was able to hold Vertrees down while Thomas got him into the handcuffs.

The trauma to McKee's head from the kick was so damaging it caused a blood vessel to rupture, which rendered him blind in one eye. McKee would undergo surgery, but it provided no relief and his health continued to decline leading to the stroke that resulted in his unfortunate death.

McKee, a veteran of the Spanish-American war, moved to Pueblo in 1890 from his native Pennsylvania. He worked as a machinist for several years before he decided to get into politics. He first was elected as County Treasurer in 1900 and held the office for seven years. In 1914, he ran for sheriff and was elected to a two-year term. He was re-elected in 1916 and served until his death. He is buried in Roselawn Cemetery.

909 Court Street • Pueblo, CO 81003 • E-mail sheriff@pueblocounty.us

Law Enforcement 719.583.6125 • Detention 719.583.6135 • Emergency Services 719.583.6200



McKee was married to J.M. McKee and the couple had no children. His wife reportedly moved from Pueblo after her husband's death. The Pueblo County Sheriff's Office is attempting to locate family of McKee. Anyone with information on the whereabouts of any family members is asked to contact Lt. Dave Clements at (719) 583-6435.

McKee's name was added recently to the Colorado Fallen Officer Memorial in Golden. His name, along with another former Pueblo County Sheriff, Joe E. Tucker's name will be unveiled on the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D.C. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the unveiling will be done via a virtual candlelight vigil May 13 at 6 p.m. The vigil will be livestreamed at <https://nleomf.org/>. McKee and Tucker, who served from 1948-1950, will be honored as historical line-of-duty deaths.

"When we realized that Sheriff McKee and Sheriff Tucker had never been recognized for their line of duty deaths, we made a commitment to ensure that they both are appropriately and respectfully honored," said Sheriff Kirk M. Taylor. "It's never too late to honor someone who provided service to our community and died in the line of duty."

The National Memorial dedication is scheduled as part of National Police Week (May 10-16, 2020). In 1962, President John F. Kennedy declared May 15 to be known as National Peace Officer Memorial Day. Out of that declaration evolved National Police Week, which is designed to pay special recognition to law enforcement officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty for the safety and protection of others.

McKee and Tucker become the fourth and fifth law enforcement officers from the Pueblo County Sheriff's Office to have their names placed on the memorial. Tucker was killed May 2, 1950, after the plane he was piloting crash while he was transporting a woman home after her husband was sentenced to prison.

Others whose names appear on the memorial are Deputy W.W. Green, added in 2012 as a historical line of duty death; Captain Leide DeFusco unveiled in 2013 and Inspector Warren Watts in 2016.

Green was shot and killed in 1918 by an inmate who obtained a gun from his girlfriend who brought it into the jail in a picnic basket. DeFusco was killed in a plane crash on August 31, 2012, while searching for a marijuana field in the San Isabel Forest. Watts died June 16, 2012, of a heart attack following a routine daily run. In 2015, his death was deemed in the line of duty after it was determined he suffered three separate cardiac arrests, two of which occurred while he was on duty.

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