



Pueblo County Sheriff's Office

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News Release

For Immediate Release
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Name of Former Sheriff Killed in Plane Crash to be Added to National Memorial *Sheriff Tucker Died in 1950 Transporting Woman to Her Home in Minnesota*

Pueblo, CO: Former Pueblo County Sheriff Joe E. Tucker's devotion to duty, dedication to service and compassion for others was a trademark of his short tenure as Sheriff. Those traits also were factors that contributed to Tucker's unfortunate and untimely death 70 years ago.

Tucker died May 2, 1950, in the crash of a plane he was piloting after he agreed to transport a woman to her home in Minnesota after her husband was sentenced to prison. The plane went down in field near Greeley, Neb., in inclement weather.

Now, seven decades later, Tucker's decision to answer the call of duty that resulted in his death will be recognized after Pueblo County Sheriff Kirk M. Taylor successfully petitioned to have Tucker's name added as a historical line-of-duty death to the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D.C. Tucker's name will be unveiled on the memorial in May. Representatives from the Pueblo County Sheriff's Office will attend the unveiling ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Tucker, who turned 38 the day before his death, was elected sheriff in 1948 and was in the middle of his first term when he unselfishly agreed to take Barbara Z. Cook to her parents' home in Brainerd, Minnesota after her husband was found guilty in Pueblo of burglary and sentenced to prison. Tucker had recently bought his own plane, a 1947 Ryan Navion, agreed to fly Cook home himself.

Three hours after takeoff, the plane encountered heavy cloud cover with visibility at only 250 feet above the ground. A witness reported seeing and hearing the airplane flying at a low altitude as it passed over her home twice. The witness said on the second flyover, she saw the plane plummet toward the ground and disappear behind a hill. After hitting the ground, the plane tumbled for approximately 250 feet before coming to a stop. The plane had broken into pieces and both Tucker and Cook were pronounced dead at the scene.

An investigation into the crash revealed that Tucker possibly was low on fuel and preparing for an emergency landing but underestimated where the ground was and crashed. The area where the accident happened had many rolling hills. Weather and a lack of pilot experience in cross-

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country flights were noted as possible factors in the crash but an official cause was never determined.

Tucker, who was survived by his wife Ethel, is buried at Roselawn Cemetery. The couple had no children. The Pueblo County Sheriff's Office is attempting to locate family of Tucker. Anyone with information on the whereabouts of any family members is asked to contact Lt. Dave Clements at (719) 583-6435.

Tucker's name will be unveiled May 13 at the National Law Enforcement Memorial, along with another former Pueblo County Sheriff, John McKee, who served from 1914-1918. Both will be recognized as historical line-of-duty deaths. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the unveiling will be done via a virtual candlelight vigil at 6 p.m. (MT). The vigil will be livestreamed at <https://nleomf.org/>.

“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.

Tucker and McKee become the fourth and fifth law enforcement officers from the Pueblo County Sheriff's Office to have their names placed on the memorial. McKee died in 1918 from complications resulting from an injury he sustained in an assault while trying to arrest a Pueblo man.

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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