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**HEAD:**

**BEHIND THE EXHIBITS AT  
THE NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT MUSEUM:**

**SUBHEAD:**

*“Being an Officer,” “Reel to Reel,” and “Take the Case”*

**by Craig W. Floyd**

In a split second, law enforcement officers can change lives. But before they act, they learn: How to evaluate a situation, what’s safe and unsafe, when and how to use effectively the tools of their trade, and how to employ the latest technology as they investigate—and solve—crimes. That’s the purpose of the “Being an Officer,” and “Take the Case” exhibit areas. And then there’s what we see on TV, which is the subject of the “Reel to Reel” area, where visitors will see and hear first-hand comparisons between the everyday life in law enforcement and Hollywood’s portrayal. The hands-on environment in “Take the Case” will appeal to the investigator in all of us: This large, open area will have interactive stations arranged in a sequence where visitors can conduct their own hypothetical investigation.

These exhibit areas will focus on the broad aspects of law enforcement: From The Academy Classroom to Roll Call, from the Forensics Lab to The Lock-Up/Corrections, and through Real to Reel and Dial 911, visitors will experience the full range of a law enforcement officer’s career, discover what it takes to become a law enforcement officer, and participate in their daily activities.

The Academy Classroom exhibit explores the various tools taught to novice officers of different law enforcement agencies during their time at the academy. Topics include personal and public safety techniques, psychological tactics, and the decision-making skills officers need to effectively perform their duties. After visitors get their training, they’re ready to engage in realistic training exercises, including “Shoot/Don’t Shoot” scenarios, virtual high speed driver training, and simulated undercover narcotics operations.

These exercises will help citizens better understand the rigors of the job, the high level of training employed in law enforcement, and the serious risks associated with any and all assignments. To emphasize this important point, visitors will discover compelling stories like the death of FBI Special Agent James McAllister—which occurred while he was rappelling out of a helicopter during a training exercise.

During Roll Call, visitors will witness how officers transition from their private lives to their public persona—including developing the mental strength that is a critical part of the job. Visitors will see a mounted cop feeding his horse, beat cops saying goodbye to their families as they leave for their shifts, Customs officials donning Kevlar suits, and State Troopers getting briefed on their assignments.

After getting their assignments and hitting the streets, visitors can “Take the Case.” In this area, visitors will get the feel of different detective and investigative tools law enforcement officers use. A unique crime observation simulator will let visitors see different types of crimes committed and test their memory for specific details of the crimes. At the crime scene, visitors will be in charge, responsible for finding clues, interacting with witnesses and fellow law enforcement officers, the media, and others.

Entering the Forensics Lab, visitors will see how technological and scientific advancements have given law enforcement officers better tools to solve crimes. In this area, visitors may try their hand at several types of crime and evidence detection techniques, from fingerprinting to fiber analysis. They’ll also discover how skilled lab technicians uncover such things as drugs or poisons in the blood stream and get a complete look at DNA testing: What it is, how it’s done, and how this tool is redefining the nature of law enforcement, crime detection, and the legal process.

Once the crime is solved and the perpetrator identified and convicted, visitors are off to The Lock Up, where they’ll see and experience a realistic cell block. This area focuses not on individual criminals, but rather on corrections, including punishment, rehabilitation, incarceration, and the stark realities of life in a correctional facility. This exhibit will present a history of corrections, including the fact that more than 400 correctional officers have been killed in the line of duty.

The Attica Prison Riot of 1971, which resulted in the deaths of Edward Cunningham and six other correctional officers, will be discussed, along with other major events in the history of corrections. The cold-blooded murder of federal correctional officer Andrew Turner in 1916 by Robert Stroud (aka “The Birdman of Alcatraz”) will help to show how criminals sometimes have been glorified by the entertainment industry at the expense of the law officers they killed.

An underlying message will become clear for all museum visitors: An officer never knows when that life-threatening moment may come, but he or she knows that it could come on the very next call. We owe all of our officers a huge debt of gratitude for putting their lives on the line for our safety and protection. They deserve our trust and our support, including the best training and equipment possible so they can do their jobs effectively and safely.

*The next and final article in this series will discuss how you can get involved in helping to build the National Law Enforcement Museum.*