Officer Ben Herrera

End of Watch: March 31st, 1962

On March 31st, 1962, Farmington Police Officer Ben Herrera was slain in the line of duty while investigating a family altercation.

On March 31, 1962 at approximately 2000 hours, Officers Ben Herrera and Eddie Herrington were dispatched to the 7-2-11 convenience store located on East Main Street to meet with Mrs. Wallace McCroskey. Ms. McCroskey informed officers her husband, drunk and armed with a .308 rifle, had threatened to kill his family. She advised them if her husband was not at home, he would be at the residence of a friend at the Peace Acres Mobile Home Park on Gold Avenue.

Officers Herrera and Herrington, along with Animal Control Officer Harmon Gravlee drove to the McCroskey residence, but found it to be unoccupied. Around 2020 hours, they located McCroskey's vehicle parked near two mobile homes in Peace Acres. Officers Herrera and Herrington approached the trailers while Gravlee remained in his vehicle. McCroskey, a former mental patient, surprised the officers when he stepped out from an opposing trailer with a rifle in hand. He then shouted, "Put `em up and drop them guns or I'll blow your heads off!"

Officer Herrington, noting that McCroskey did not have his rifle pointed directly at either officer, darted behind one of the trailers looking for a position of tactical advantage. Once he was in a location to survey the scene, McCroskey had repositioned himself behind Officer Herrera. Officer Herrington did not have a clear line of fire in order to neutralize McCroskey.

McCroskey instructed Officer Herrera to "Tell your buddy to come back here or I will blow your head off." Upon Hearing this, Officer Herrington stepped from cover and positioned himself alongside Officer Herrera. Upon being startled by an unrelated noise, Officers Herrera and Herrington charged McCroskey in an attempt to disarm him. As Officer Herrington grabbed the rifle, McCroskey un-holstered Officer Herrera's sidearm and shot him in the chest. Believing the shot had been fired from McCroskey's rifle, Officer Herrington continued to try and wrestle it free from his grasp. Officer Herrington was subsequently shot in the left shoulder, left hip and once more in the left leg. Hearing the commotion and gunshots, Animal Control Officer Gravlee used his police radio to call for assistance. Gravlee then ran to the scene and dragged a struggling McCroskey off of Officer Herrington, who was now seriously wounded. Gravlee quickly gathered up a clothesline rope and used it to bind McCroskey's hands until backup officers arrived.

Officer Herrera was pronounced deceased upon arrival at San Juan Hospital. Officer Herrington, 27, was shot a total of three times and ultimately survived his wounds. Wallace McCroskey was initially committed to the State Hospital at Las Vegas, New Mexico and would ultimately plead guilty to second degree murder and attempted murder of a peace officer on April 12, 1967. He was sentenced to three years to life in prison on the former charge and one to ten years on the latter.

Officer Ben Herrera, 38, a teacher of education, began his law enforcement career working for the Farmington Police Department during the summer of 1961. He returned to the Blanco School System as principal in the fall of the same year, but later resigned to become a full time police officer in January of 1962. Officer Herrera was a veteran of World War II.

Officer Herrera's memory is honored through the Ben Herrera Distinguished Service Award, which is issued to those employees who diligently perform a law enforcement duty that exceeds the normal service requirements.

Officer Ben Herrera, sadly, became the first Farmington Police Officer to fall in the line of duty. He was survived by his wife and six children.