

“Donde Esta?” – “Where is He?”

By Steven W. Hooper

Out in the Big Bend country of southwest Texas, U.S. Customs has always had a large law enforcement presence. As one of the most isolated and remote areas of the United States, law enforcement resources were few at all levels of government. Federal state and local agencies cooperated closely on all types of investigations and often patrolled the vast area together.

On a recent trip to the Big Bend area, I came across a poignant reminder of the many sacrifices these Big Bend area officers have made for their fellow citizens. On the campus of Sul Ross State University in Alpine, Texas stands a monument erected by The Big Bend Area Law Enforcement Officers Association honoring the officers who “paid the ultimate price so that the rest of us may live in peace and security.”

The sculpture atop the memorial is an unmounted hobbled horse. The sculpture is titled “Donde Esta?” or “Where is He?” A plaque explains that “The officer has hobbled his horse, drawn his rifle from its scabbard and gone forward to do his duty. The horse watches him go. Not knowing that he will never return.” The plaque further explained that “the horse represents all the family, friends, and coworkers who have been left behind as law enforcement officers go out to face danger and sometimes not return.”

On two sides of the monument are the names of the fallen Big Bend officers listed along with their agency and date of their death. The first U.S. Customs officer remembered on the memorial is Deputy Collector of Customs Richard W. (Dick) Wallace. He was killed in an ambush on November 29, 1899, 20 miles north of Presidio, Texas while transporting a prisoner and contraband goods to the customhouse. Wallace was a well-known black politician in Presidio County working at the Saluria District headquarters in Presidio.

May Deputy Collector Wallace and all the other officers honored on the memorial rest in peace knowing that brave men and women continue to step forward to protect our citizens and our nation’s borders.

Primary Sources

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