

Border Patrol unveils Murrieta memorial for two agents slain in 1967

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MURRIETA - Forty years ago today, two Border Patrol agents were found shot dead by drug smugglers, handcuffed to a stove in an abandoned mountain shack near Anza.

On Monday, dozens of Border Patrol agents and the families of the slain men gathered at the new Border Patrol station in Murrieta to unveil a memorial to Theodore L. Newton Jr. and George F. Azrak.

The plaque, which hangs by the front entrance, includes pictures of the men and an account of their deaths.



The Newton/Azrak award is named in honor of slain agents Theodore L. Newton Jr. and George F. Azrak.

Today's Border Patrol agents know the story too well.

Over the years, Newton and Azrak have been honored many times. The Border Patrol's highest award for bravery was named for them. And there is a memorial to them at the site of the Oak Grove checkpoint along Highway 79 where Newton and Azrak were working when they were abducted the morning of June 17, 1967.

Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Vista, has introduced a bill to name the Murrieta station after the slain agents. About 130 employees work out of the new station on Madison Avenue, which opened last year and serves a 3,400-square-mile area from northern San Diego County to Interstate 10, said Special Operations Supervisor Walter Davenport.

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Margaret Newton-Day, second from left, daughter of slain agent Theodore L. Newton Jr., presents former agent Elizabeth Ebisuzaki an award for courage. Also shown are Ted Newton, Margaret's brother, and Harold J. Newton, brother of the Border Patrol agent.

At Monday's memorial, T.J. Bonner, president of the National Border Patrol Council, the agents' labor union, said more than 100 employees have died in the line of duty since the Border Patrol was formed in 1924, but none shook the agency more deeply than the deaths of Newton and Azrak.

"This was the single most difficult loss this agency has ever experienced," Bonner said. "The word that comes to mind ... is 'senseless.' "



Newton and Azrak were working the graveyard shift at a remote checkpoint when they stopped a military ambulance, only to discover that it was carrying two smugglers and more than 800 pounds of marijuana. Two other armed men pulled up behind the ambulance and the four smugglers overpowered the agents. They shot both agents in the head after driving them to a mountain cabin several miles away.

Newton, 25, who was married and had two young children, had been an agent for a little more than a year. Azrak, 21, had less than two months on the job and hadn't even begun training in the academy for Border Patrol agents.

Margaret Newton-Day, who was 2 when her father was killed, traveled from her home in West Virginia to attend the Monday service.

"Part of our job is not only to keep their memory alive," she said, "but to keep (their killers) behind bars."

All four smugglers were convicted in the killings. Florencio Mationg, now in his early 70s, is still in federal prison. The Border Patrol and family members launch letter-writing campaigns whenever he comes up for parole.

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