





United States Marshals Service: *Historical Perspective*

David Turk, U.S. Marshals Service Historian | [Historical Records Assistance](#)

U.S. Marshals Celebrate 215 Years of Legendary Service [Read More](#)

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Even after the creation of more than 50 specialized federal law enforcement agencies during the 20th century, the Marshals retained the broadest jurisdiction and authority. For over 200 years now, U.S. Marshals and their Deputies have served as the instruments of civil authority used by all three branches of government. Marshals have been involved in most of the major historical episodes in America's past.

The history of the Marshals is, quite simply, the story of how the American people govern themselves.



This section of the web site not only portrays, in words and pictures, the modern Marshals Service, but it also recounts many of the highlights from the history of the U.S. Marshals; a span of history that is unique in American law enforcement.

The Marshals Service looks back on a proud heritage - a tradition spanning two centuries of service to the Nation and dedication to the principles of our Constitution and the rule of law.

As our young nation expanded westward, U.S. Marshals embodied the civilian power of the Federal Government to bring law and justice to the frontier. For every new territory, marshals were appointed to impose the law on the untamed wilderness. And, at virtually every significant point over the years where Constitutional principles or the force of law have been challenged, the marshals were there - and they prevailed.

The challenges faced today by Marshals and their Deputies are no less demanding than those of the past. In fact, the skills, devotion and determination required to carry out our contemporary responsibilities make the modern Marshals Service a unique and elite cadre of law enforcement professionals. And so, in looking back over our history, we would hope the you recognize and take pride in the fact that this agency is an intimate part of the continuum of the

1789



[On September 24, President George Washington appointed the first 13 U.S. Marshals](#) following the passage of [the first Judiciary Act.](#)

[Oldest Federal Law Enforcement Agency](#)

1790

The U.S. Marshal has been historically assigned the task of conducting the [death sentences](#) on those condemned by federal courts.

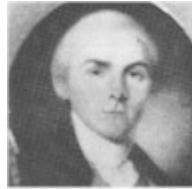
1778-1865

Until the creation of the Secret Service in 1865, [Marshals were frequently called upon to pursue counterfeiters.](#)

1790-1870

U.S. Marshals were required by Congress to take the national census every ten years.

1794



[U.S. Marshal Robert Forsyth was murdered while serving civil process on two Allen brothers.](#)

1794

August 4 - Supreme Court Justice James Wilson certified that the Whiskey Rebels were "too powerful to be suppressed by the powers vested in the Marshal of that district". Washington called out the state militias.

September 7 - The state militias marched against the Whiskey Rebels. U.S. Marshal David Lenox rode with them and marched under the command of President Washington, the only time in American history a president has taken the field at the head of his army.

1798

July 13 - Congress passed the Sedition Act punishing unlawful combinations against the government or publishing "false, scandalous, and malicious writing" about the government. U.S. Marshals and Attorneys enforced the infamous law.

1850-1861

September 18 - Congress approved the Fugitive slave Law. [U.S. Marshals enforced the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850](#) by arresting fugitive slaves and returning them to their southern masters. Marshals were required to enforce the law. Any negligence in doing so exposed Marshals and deputies to severe financial penalties.

1857

Nov. 14 - William Walker launched a military expedition against Nicaragua. Although arrested by U.S. Marshal William Wagner (E/LA), Walker posted bail. The expedition failed in the face of poor weather, poor organization, and British ships.

grand American experiment in self-government.


Other historical information:

U.S. Marshals Museum

With the forthcoming United States Marshals Museum in Fort Smith, Arkansas, there have been many questions as to what might be included as exhibits. In determining this, [see a composite of photographs from our previous exhibit](#), which highlight some of the artifacts and case work. The place and time of each photograph varies, but all were taken between late 1988, when the tour began, through early 2003. [Read and See More.](#)

General

[Identify](#)



[Yourself!](#)

U.S. Marshals and their deputies have excelled for over 200 years, but a common object over time is the identifying instrument and documentation presented while conducting agency business.



- [U.S. Marshals Seal](#)
- [U.S. Marshals Cards](#)
- [Marshals Badges](#)

- [Frontier Marshal: the Sculpture](#)
- [National Marshals Museum](#)
- [School Projects involving the U.S. Marshals](#)



1800's

- [Duplessis, an unsung Hero](#)
- [Last of the Frontier Marshals](#)
- [Gentleman farmer, county representative, Indian agent, and senator](#)

1900's

- [The U.S. Marshals and the Integration of the University of Mississippi: 40 years ago and the present](#)
- [A Man, His Scrapbook, and the Marshals Service](#)
- [Ronald Reagan: Honorary Marshal](#)
- [Wayne B. Colburn](#)
- [Seizure of Revolutionary War-era shipwrecks](#)
- [Boxer...Deputy...Poet](#)
- [Coal Mine Violence 1989](#)

1861-1864

During the Civil War, U.S. Marshals confiscated property used to support the confederacy and helped root out Confederate spies.

- [Lincoln and His Deputy](#)
- [The Undefeated Rebel](#)



1860-1940



U.S. Marshals Served the consular courts in China

1865-1900

U.S. Marshals were instrumental in keeping law and order in the "Old West" era and involved in [apprehending desperadoes such as the Dalton Gang, Bill Doolin, and Ned Christie](#). See also:

- [Line of duty deaths prevalent in Old West](#)
- [How much does it cost to find Billy the Kid?](#)

1870

On July 1, 1870, Congress created the Department of Justice and gave it supervision over U.S. Marshals and Attorneys.

1872

[U.S. Marshals, assisted Internal Revenue agents \(who had no arrest powers\) in enforcing the whiskey tax laws.](#)

1880

[Prisoner Custody in the 1880's](#)

1881

Oct. 26 - Tombstone, Arizona - Marshal Virgil Earp and his deputies, brothers Wyatt and Morgan Earp, and Doctor John H. Holiday, gunned down Frank and Tom McLaury, and Billy Clanton in a vacant lot just down the street from the O.K. Corral.

1890



Supreme Court held that the President has power, through the Attorney General, to direct a United States Marshal to accompany and protect federal judges from a threatened assault: [Judicial Protection: Cunningham vs Neagle 135 U.S. 1 \(1890\)](#) ; See also [In the matter of David Neagle, Deputy U.S. Marshal](#)

1894

During the Pullman strike, U.S. Marshals were ordered by the federal courts and the Cleveland administration to keep the trains rolling.

1896

July 1 - The fee system of paying Marshals was abolished. The Marshals were put on annual salary.

1910

Nov. 20 - Francisco Madero launched from U.S. soil his revolution against Mexican President Porfirio Diaz. The subsequent turmoil in Mexico compelled the U.S. Marshals to protect the Mexican-American border.

1917

[Marshals and World War I](#): While American troops fought in the trenches of Europe, United States Marshals protected the home front against enemy aliens, spies, saboteurs, and slackers.

1919

Oct. 27 - The Volstead Act animated the 18th Amendment's prohibition on liquor. During Prohibition, U.S. Marshals arrested bootleggers and seized all of their equipment - cars, trucks, breweries, and warehouses.

1920

The 18th Amendment was ratified, prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating beverages. [U.S. Marshals were the principal enforcing](#)

- [U.S. Marshals Take Possession of North Carolina's Copy of the Bill of Rights](#)

Fugitive Operations

FIST Operations [Fugitive Investigation Strike Team \(FIST operations\)](#) were conceived and utilized in the 1980's to operate as a multi-agency taskforce to apprehend federal, state, and local fugitives



Creative Stings Although most arrests are made through good, hard, traditional investigations, U.S. Marshals strike teams also devised creative "stings" to trick some of the fugitives

- ◀ ["Mr. Zip"](#)
- ◀ ["No such thing as a free lunch"](#)
- ◀ ["Puño Airlines"](#)

Operation FALCON



Operation **FALCON** is a nationwide fugitive apprehension operation coordinated by the United States Marshals Service (USMS). The resources of federal, state, city and county law enforcement agencies are combined to locate and apprehend criminals wanted for crimes of violence.

Operation FALCON represents a continuing series of historically successful national fugitive apprehension missions, which have resulted in the collective capture of more than 30,000 dangerous fugitive felons during three total weeks.

[The original FALCON I](#) proved the efficacy of the cooperative law enforcement model, which seeks to multiply the positive impact of law enforcement at all jurisdictional levels. The emphasis centered on gang related crimes, homicides, crimes involving use of a weapon, crimes against children and the elderly, crimes involving sexual assaults, organized crime and drug related fugitives, and other crimes of violence.

[FALCON II](#) reaffirmed and built upon the success of the initial FALCON effort, achieving a

agents.

1920-1960

The twentieth century era of specialization left the U.S. Marshals performing as bailiffs to the courts.

1937

Oct. 13 - U.S. Marshals were requested to run background checks on deputies.

1956

Dec. 17 - The Executive Office of U.S. Marshals was created.

1960-1965



U.S. Marshals provided security to enforce federal laws and orders to ensure civil rights. After riots erupted over [James Meredith's enrollment at Ole Miss in 1962](#), teams of deputies protected him 24 hours a day for an entire year. In a similar circumstance, [Ruby Bridges was also provided U.S. Marshals protection](#) when she was one of the first students to integrate the New Orleans public

schools. See also:

[U.S. Marshals and the Pentagon Riot of October 21, 1967](#)

1969

The U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) was established as a headquarters organization, overseeing the district U.S. Marshals. [Former agency leaders](#)

1971

The [Witness Security Program](#) was established as a division within the USMS after the passage of the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970.

The Special Operations Group (SOG) was established to provide a well trained, self-sufficient, mobile group of Deputies capable of responding anywhere within the United States and its territories within a few hours of receiving an activation order.

1973

[Marshals and FBI agents contained the uprising at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.](#)

1979

The USMS assumed the responsibility for the apprehension of federal fugitives. [The capture of Christopher Boyce](#) was the first major fugitive arrested by the Marshals after their fugitive responsibilities were expanded to include escapees from federal prison facilities.

1981

The first of the [Fugitive Investigation Strike Team \(FIST operations\)](#) was established to operate as a multi-agency taskforce to apprehend federal, state, and local fugitives.

1982

[The Closing of the Panama Canal Zone Marshals Service Office](#)

In cooperation with Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, established the [Court Security Officer Program](#).

1984

Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984

1985

U.S. Marshals assumed the responsibility for managing and disposing of properties seized and forfeited by federal law enforcement agencies and U.S. Attorneys nationwide.



comparable level of total arrests, while covering only one-half the geographic area of the first nationwide operation. Moreover, FALCON II focused on combating a particular category of fugitive offender. The results of this innovation speak for themselves, as FALCON II investigators successfully removed more than 1,100 dangerous sex offenders from America's streets.

FALCON III continued to advance these important efforts, and focused heavily on the danger posed by fugitive felons who fail to register as sex offenders, as well as those with gang affiliations. FALCON III covered the eastern half of the United States, with 48 federal districts in 24 states participating. FALCON III resulted in the apprehension of 10,733 fugitive felons, ensuring the continuing safety of America's communities.

FALCON 2007 focused on gang members and gang activity in targeted urban areas. Consistent with the Department of Justice goals and objectives, the success of these localized operations resulted in the U.S. Marshals Service conducting several additional operations targeting various offender groups in selected States, districts, areas, and cities. The initiatives took place at varying times, and targeted violent fugitive felons, sexual offenders, and individuals associated with gang activity.

FALCON 2008 - In June 2008, the U.S. Marshals teamed with its partners from federal, state, and local law enforcement to engage in the record-breaking Operation FALCON 2008 (Federal And Local Cops Organized Nationally). This initiative represented the fifth effort in a continuing series of historically successful national fugitive apprehension missions, which have resulted in the collective capture of more than **55,800** dangerous fugitive felons.



Safe Surrender

Fugitive Safe Surrender is a unique, creative, and highly successful initiative that encourages persons wanted for non-violent felony or misdemeanor crimes to voluntarily surrender to the law in a faith-based or other neutral setting. Managed by the United States Marshals Service as a community re-entry program for wanted non-violent offenders, Fugitive Safe Surrender offers individuals with felony and misdemeanor warrants the ability to turn themselves in to law enforcement and have their cases adjudicated in a safe and non-violent environment. The goal of Fugitive Safe Surrender is to reduce the risk to law



Marshals Service acquired its first Boeing 727 used for [prisoner transportation](#).

1989

[U.S. Marshals celebrated its 200 years of service to the United States.](#)



[Official U.S. Law Enforcement entity in Antarctica](#)

1996

U.S. Marshals assumed the responsibility for the Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation System (JPATS), which merged the air fleets of the USMS and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)

As a result of the bombings and threats against abortion clinics, U.S. Marshals were responsible for protecting the clinics and doctors.

1997

U.S. Marshals provided security for the Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols trials, convicted of bombing the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

1998

U.S. Marshals established a foreign investigative presence in the U.S. Embassy, Mexico City, Mexico.

1999

USMS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Customs, giving the USMS responsibility to investigate the majority of their fugitive warrants.

2005



U.S. Marshals completed the largest fugitive apprehension operation in American history. Through [Operation FALCON \("Federal And Local Cops Organized Nationally"\)](#), which was conducted April 4-10,

2005, Deputy U.S. Marshals and their law enforcement partners arrested a total of 10,340 fugitives and cleared more than 13,800 felony warrants.

2006



[Operation FALCON II April 17- 23, 2006](#) - U.S. Marshals coordinated with federal, state, city and county law enforcement agencies in a massive fugitive dragnet. [Read More](#)



[Operation FALCON III](#) - Federal and Local Cops Organized Nationally - A massive fugitive operation took place the week of October 22- 28, 2006 and [covered the eastern half of the United States](#). As a cooperative effort, Operation FALCON III removed some of the country's most dangerous sex offenders and gang members from the streets, making America's communities safer.

enforcement officers who pursue fugitives, to the neighborhoods in which they hide, and to the fugitives themselves. Authorized by Congress in July 2006, Fugitive Safe Surrender is believed to be the first program of its kind in the nation.

Remembrance: [Ronald Van Raalte](#)

Recommended Reading —

My Brother J-Boy

By Hilda Hall

Amerikan Press, 2008 (Children's Biography of James Meredith)

The U.S. Marshals Service

By Connie Colwell Miller

Capstone Press, 2008 (Children's Book)

Henry E. Hudson, *Quest for Justice* (Loft Press, Incorporated, September 2007)

Art T. Burton, *Black Gun, Silver Star: The Life and Legend of Frontier Marshal Bass Reeves* (University of Nebraska Press, 2006)

James H. Chenoweth, *Down Darkness Wide: U.S. Marshals and the Last Frontier* (Publish America, 2004)

Rae Anna Victor, *George Washington's Revolutionary Marshals* (Infinity Publishing, 2004)

Charles E. Burrows, *Differing Opinions: Memories of a United States Marshal* (1998)

Frederick S. Calhoun, *The Lawmen: United States Marshals and Their Deputies, 1789-1989*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. Penguin, 1991.

Robert Ernst with George Stumpf, *Deadly Affrays: Violent Deaths of the United States Marshals Service 1789-2004*. Scarlet Mask Enterprises, 2006.

2006



Fugitive Safe Surrender was authorized by Congress in July 2006. Fugitive Safe Surrender is believed to be the first program of its kind in the nation. A unique, creative, and highly successful initiative that encourages persons wanted for **non-violent felony** or **misdemeanor** crimes to voluntarily surrender to the law in a faith-based or other neutral setting.

2007



America's Star in Space Again!

[Read More](#)
06-20-07



[FALCON 2007](#) focused on gang members and gang activity in targeted urban areas.

2008

[FALCON 2008](#) - In June 2008, the U.S. Marshals teamed with its partners from federal, state, and local law enforcement to engage in the record-breaking Operation FALCON 2008 (Federal And Local Cops Organized Nationally). This initiative represented the fifth effort in a continuing series of historically successful national fugitive apprehension missions, which have resulted in the collective capture of more than **55,800** dangerous fugitive felons.

[A Visit to Chief Deputy U.S. Marshal Helen Crawford, Retired](#) - At age 100, Helen Crawford still prides her long career with the U.S. Marshals. On July 14, 2008, from the sitting room at an assisted living facility, Bonner Place in Jacksonville, Texas, she related the most exciting of times.

