

Remarks by Attorney General Janet Reno
Eulogy for Special Agents
Andrews Air Force Base--Maryland
September 3, 1994
(Edited by Yvonne E. Campos)

Thank you for being here this afternoon to honor Special Agents Frank S. Wallace, Jr., Meredith Thompson, Jay W. Seale, Juan C. (Carlos) Vars, and Frank Fernandez, Jr. These DEA Special Agents tragically lost their lives a week ago in a plane crash in the Andes Mountains of Peru, while bravely serving their country. At the time of their deaths, these young agents were engaged in our country's battle against drug trafficking through DEA's Operation Snowcap, an important international effort aimed at stopping the production of cocaine at its source.

We gather here on this very difficult day to honor these Special Agents, express our grief, and share our love and thoughts with their relatives and friends.

A tragedy of this magnitude is hard for the mind to comprehend--and even harder for the heart to bear. The loss of these five young Special Agents has been a devastating blow to their families, the men and women of the Drug Enforcement Administration and the entire Federal law enforcement community. To their families, I would like to say that we share your pain and loss.

Why were these five remarkable lives taken from us at this particular time and under these tragic circumstances?

I don't have an answer to these questions. I can only say that I do believe that we are all part of something larger than ourselves and that we will remember Meredith, Carlos, Jay, Frank Wallace and Frank Fernandez and the difference they made in our lives.

Over half a century ago, the American author Thornton Wilder struggled with similar questions about the sudden loss of life when he wrote his book **The Bridge of San Luis Rey**. The story revolves around a tragedy of five people who fall to their deaths in Peru when a rope bridge they are crossing suddenly breaks.

The author knows, as we do, that "there are a hundred ways of wondering at circumstance" when death strikes unexpectedly. After examining the lives of these five people, Mr. Wilder concludes that they lived lives that gave back to the world--that their love and accomplishments would live on after them--that there was indeed great meaning and purpose to those five lives that were lost that fateful day in Peru.

In the last line of the book, the author writes. "There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning."

It is to the celebration of the lives of our young Special Agents that I now turn to. By choosing this profession--and volunteering for Snowcap--one of DEA's toughest and most dangerous assignments, Special Agents Wallace, Thompson, Seale, Vars and Fernandez had already found a life of service to an ideal that was larger than themselves.

Because of the kind of people they were--- committed, hardworking, selfless---these DEA Special Agents chose a professional purpose they believed in, one they knew offered the toughest challenges. They made a commitment to DEA's mission. They believed they could contribute to a better world by eliminating the evils of drugs and by combatting those who traffick in them. I believe they left a better world for us.

As Americans, our history has taught us that freedom is not without a price--whether it's the individual freedoms that our forefathers fought to preserve--or DEA's fight for a drug-free future for

our country. These five young drug fighters paid the ultimate price in the service of our country.

They have given their lives to stop the flood of cocaine into America, the crime, violence and wasted lives that come from drug use and drug trafficking. They have given their lives so that you and I--and all who come after us--can live in a safer and better world.

As we receive these young Special Agents back home today, let me say to the families that we share your grief and thank you for your sacrifice. Your loved ones made a difference in this world. They made a difference in the war on drugs, and they have made a difference in the lives of all who knew them as co-workers and friends. The love and laughter and friendships of these five that touched our lives will never be forgotten.

Their courage and sacrifice renews our determination to continue the struggle to make America safer and drug-free.

Over the difficult days ahead, may the love of friends give you comfort. May the love of God grant you peace.