

Two minutes with the Boss

By: Joseph Andalina

Never be too complacent: United States Border Agents Ramos and Compean

At the end of his presidential term, George W. Bush commuted the sentences of Ignacio Ramos and Jose Alonso Compean. The two US Border Patrol agents were serving 11 and 12 year sentences in a California prison. Ramos and Compean were convicted of shooting a Mexican drug smuggler and **lying** about it. (See our recent MAP Rap Sheet articles on the subject of lying.)

Our former president was convinced that these officers were guilty and that is why they received a commutation to be released from prison, and not a full pardon exonerating them from their acts.

The officers allegedly shot the drug smuggler in his rear end after firing over 14 rounds at him as he tried to smuggle a van over the border. The van the smuggler was driving was left at the scene as he escaped. It was full of marijuana.

They said he had a gun, but one was never found. The officers however, did not put this fact in their official reports and did not mention it to other agents who arrived at the scene. The officers are also accused of recovering cartridge cases and covering up the shooting.

When the smuggler was eventually apprehended, the officers were tried on various charges. The jury found the drug smuggler more credible than the officers and convicted them while a judge meted out their punishment.

Bound by trial guidelines, the officers were condemned to lengthy prison sentences. Almost everyone thought the sentences were too harsh, thus a political fight began over the way these officers were treated.

Overzealous prosecutors? An agency that did nothing in the way of standing by these officers? Activists who want to end all immigration from not only Mexico and other countries because of the belief that our country is being invaded jumped in to free the officers, harkening not only the behavior of the prosecution but that these officers were being victimized by politicians.

But many on the left and the right did believe that the punishment to Ramos and Compean was too harsh. Well, it was good for these officers that their case took on national proportions. Without it, these officers would surely still be in prison. I am glad they are not. The war on drugs is a horrible reality. As an ex-narcotics cop for three years, way back when, I can attest to that. It is an endless, sometimes harrowing and always frustrating way to make a living.

Being a border agent is probably, together with the double-edged sword of drugs and illegal immigrants, the worst of assignments.

But cops are imprisoned often these days. Most are charged with wrongful shootings, excessive force, and related offenses, and do not have the luxury of a national media on their side.

Sometimes local pressure can help, as witnessed by the Chicago officer (Mette) incident who was released from an Iowa prison last year by an Appellate Court who saw the travesty of his conviction in that state.

But most do not receive any support. The internet and legal defense groups abound with stories of officers in trouble. Unless a huge nerve is piqued, these officers will find little sympathy in their transgressions. Ramos and Compean were lucky in this regard.

So the point here is this. Don't become complacent. Complacency can not only kill you if you are not constantly alert to changes, it can rear up and cause you to lose your job, your home, your freedom, too. It is the complacency that I can do no wrong as a cop. I have carte blanche to do what needs to be done to protect society and make the city safe.

Not so, people. You have seen high speed squad pursuits die out. Warnings on excessive force beefs in our prison settings and on the streets have become training regimens. Shooting incidents can involve multiple investigations by local, state, and federal agencies. Everyone is looking.

Riot police in LA now can no longer wear riot helmets because it may offend rioters or those filming riots. The public on the whole apparently want these restrictions.

Unless it is of national importance, like Ramos and Compean, no one is going to come to your aid if **you** become overzealous or complacent and get involved in a similar type incident. There is good and bad here. The good is the oath we take should be paramount. Do only what is necessary to preserve the scene or make an arrest. Do not cover up. Do not lie. Do your best.

The bad is the perception that the public, the press and our own bosses have a tendency to not believe us anymore. That leads to the prosecution of officers who only acted in a reasonable manner, but the public, press, and political element just may, for the sake of expediency, go after you anyway. There is a larger political motive out there that must be engaged.

Let these officers' actions be a warning and a lesson. No matter how probable your cause, your efforts or your belief, your ending could be similar to that of Compean and Ramos. We can be the scapegoats. Stay safe.

Editor: A little longer than my usual blog, but something we felt needed to be reported.

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