

IN MEMORIAM

Former ACA President Norm Carlson ends 'his journey on earth'

By *Floyd Nelson Jr.*



You could say, as The New York Times reported, that Norman Albert Carlson began his professional journey in the late 1950s when an inmate advised the 24-year-old corrections officer to leave his job with the Iowa State Penitentiary and get a better one with the U.S. government. Apparently, it was good advice, because Mr. Carlson followed it and began working for the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). His first position was with the U.S. Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. Later, he worked for the Federal Correctional Institute in Ashland, Kentucky.

Norm Carlson

Aug. 10, 1933 – Aug. 9, 2020

In 1960, continuing what eventually would be a long and successful career with the government, Mr. Carlson began serving in various positions in BOP's Central Office. Ten years later, in 1970, he had ascended to the top to become BOP's fourth "Director of the Bureau" where he served under 11 attorney generals and four U.S. presidents — Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan — until his retirement in 1987. But retirement proved more of a waystation for Mr. Carlson than an ending point. Armed with his master's degree in criminology from the University of Iowa, Mr. Carlson joined the University of Minnesota's

Department of Sociology and served as an adjunct professor until 1998. He also served as a director of the Wackenhut Corrections Corporation and its successor, The GEO Group, from 1994 until 2016.

Often described as a "very thoughtful, intelligent man who firmly believed inmates should be treated humanely and given opportunities to change while in custody," one of the outstanding policies Mr. Carlson established was one that called for "zero tolerance for prisoner abuse."

"In response to increased judicial involvement in the matters related to conditions of confinement at the local, state and federal levels," the



"One of the words that comes to mind when you hear the name Norm Carlson is, 'character.' Norm Carlson was a no-nonsense man with strength, integrity, and honor. Quiet and humble, his tall stature and crew cut made him a living embodiment of the true corrections professional. His smile was warm and reassuring. He was a mentor to the ACA leadership. Norm Carlson will live on in the history of the Association."

— Charles J. Kehoe, ACSW, CCE,
Chief Operating Officer, Kehoe Correctional Consulting, LLC,

BOP wrote, “the Bureau created the Administrative Remedy Process to address inmate concerns and grievances. Many state and international corrections systems would later adopt the Bureau’s Administrative Remedy Process.”

From 1978-1980, our organization, ACA, was proud and honored to have Mr. Carlson serve as president. In 1981, he received the prestigious E.R. Cass Award. The Presidential Rank Award as Meritorious Executive in the Senior Executive Service, the Arthur S. Flemming Award, and the Attorney General’s Award for Exceptional Service were just some of Mr. Carlson’s other awards and honors.

Harley Lappin, a former BOP director (2003-2011) and also an E.R. Cass Award recipient (2010), said Mr. Carlson was a pillar of the industry and an all-around great representative.

“He was a mentor and a support for me as director.” Mr. Lappin said. “He was such an important role and I learned a great deal from him. I encountered many challenges and he was always there.”

Mr. Carlson died in Phoenix on Aug. 9.

“A day before his 87th birthday, my father passed away at Mayo Hospital in Phoenix, with my brother Gary and me at his side,” wrote his daughter, Cindy Gustafson. “It was comforting to know that Dad didn’t suffer and was his strong and calm self as he faced the end of his journey on earth.”

Floyd Nelson Jr. is the director of Communications and Publications for the American Correctional Association.

The Wall of Honor

A dedication to the corrections professionals who gave their last full measure.



When the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic struck, lives were upended everywhere. Some lives were lost and, unfortunately, the loss of life continues to rise daily. Most of us know that it is the “first responders” to whom we owe an unpayable debt. And among those brave individuals, standing front and center, are the proud men and women of corrections. It is with heavy hearts that we join grief-stricken families and loved ones to express our heartfelt sympathies for those who have died because of this insidious virus.

Visit www.aca.org to view the most current list of names of the corrections professionals who gave their last full measure.

Visit www.aca.org and click on the “Wall of Honor” spotlight link.

