

## **NYC's DOC 'Hard Hat Deputy Warden' -- John J. Walker Jr.**



From left: White Street Jail, DW Walker's White St. Jail hard hat, DW John J. Walker's framed photo, the splash-down launch of VCBC.

### **9-11 NYPD Detective Salutes His Dep. Warden Dad - We Salute Both**

JULY 30, 2019 -- Aware through NYC DOC friends that many in the Department hope that the new Academy being planned will include some museum space, retired NYPD Detective John J. Walker III donated photos and other memorabilia from the 23+ year career of his late father, retired Deputy Warden John J. Walker Jr. In donating the artifacts, including his dad's "DW Hard Hat," Det. Walker asked that someday they be displayed in a future Academy exhibit spotlighting his father's service as DOC's uniformed liaison and transition team leader on two historic capital projects:

- the Tombs' White Street Jail (aka North Tower of the Manhattan Detention Complex) and
- the Vernon C. Bain Center (aka VCBC or the barge jail).

Deputy Warden John J. Walker Jr. retired Sept. 2, 1996 and passed away Sept. 3, 2010. For the record, his son is the third generation John J. Walker to work in NYC law enforcement. The first, Walker Senior, a WWII veteran, served 27 years as an electrician with NYPD, retiring in the 1960s.

Retired Detective Walker "worked" 9-11 Ground Zero from Day 1 and witnessed Building 7 come down. His "work" involved searching for bodies and body parts, establishing identifications, and providing site security. He retired May 30, 2017, with 3/4<sup>th</sup> disability due to 9-11 related health issues for which he has been undergoing therapy.

In accepting the memorabilia, Correction Commissioner Cynthia Brann expressed the Department's gratitude and appreciation both for the service of Deputy Warden Walker and for the thoughtful generosity of the Walker family: "We thank Det. Walker and his family for entrusting these treasured artifacts to the agency for preservation and future historical display honoring Deputy Warden Walker's service."

Although funding for the future new Academy has been specified in the city's capital budget, considerable time will elapse before actual construction begins. At this writing, the new Correction training school project is still in the site-selection and planning stage. Even

assuming some space will be provided for historical displays in the eventual structure, wherever and whenever, considerable time will elapse before any exhibition is mounted there after completion of construction.



Whether Deputy Warden Walker would have worn his White Street Jail Transition Team Hard Hat, or a new one for the barge jail construction project in New Orleans, he easily may have been among the hard-hat men photographed conversing in this Avondale Industries shipyard scene during the building of the Vernon C. Bain Center. His work as uniformed liaison/transition team leader on the White Street Jail project led to his becoming the uniformed liaison/transition team leader for VCBC. The photo is from the artifacts collection donated by his son.

Consequently, Commissioner Brann directed her staff to prepare a more immediate DOC display of Walker memorabilia. Initially, her office reception area at Bulova Corporate Center is exhibiting some of the artifacts, even as search continues for a larger setting more accessible to DOCers.

Among the Deputy Warden Walker artifacts displayed, his white hard hat perhaps serves best to symbolize his significant role in two historic developments for DOC: the construction and start-up operation of the White St. Jail in Lower Manhattan and the VCBC barge jail in the East River at Hunt's Point, the Bronx.

Detective Walker noted, "It was dad's work on the White Street project that led to his designation as DOC uniform liaison on the floating jail's construction in New

Orleans." The son recalls asking his father what his duties were as liaison and start-up operations team leader. He remembers his dad's answer: "My job is to see everybody plays nicely in the sandbox."

Det. Walker understood that Deputy Warden Walker's cryptic reply meant his mission was to expedite the project by helping the various parties involved – contractors, unions, workers, supervisors, inspectors, municipal agency representatives, *et al* -- to communicate and collaborate to resolve problems inevitably encountered in any major construction.

A Rice High School grad, he entered the National Guard at 19 in 1969 and later continued service in the Army Reserves, achieving Staff Sergeant rank before retiring from it in 1975. Before joining DOC, Walker worked for a stock brokerage firm researching and preparing data reported to the SEC. After April 1973 Correction Academy graduation, he

was assigned first to the adolescents' facility. There the 23-year-old, 200+ lb., 6 foot 1 rookie started with a squad of youthful, brawny officers, dubbed the "Gladiators" by fellow staffers and the "goons" by inmates. They were the first-responders to disturbances in an era when their "only protective shields were mattresses" they held in front of them, the son recalls his dad telling him. While a C.O. at the teenagers jail, Walker enrolled at NY Institute of Technology, eventually amassing approximately 80 credits over a three-year span (1975-1977). Although the university has a campus near Columbus Circle, Manhattan, Walker attended many of his classes at the campus in Old Westbury, L.I., more accessible by parkway and expressway from Rikers Island and with easier parking.

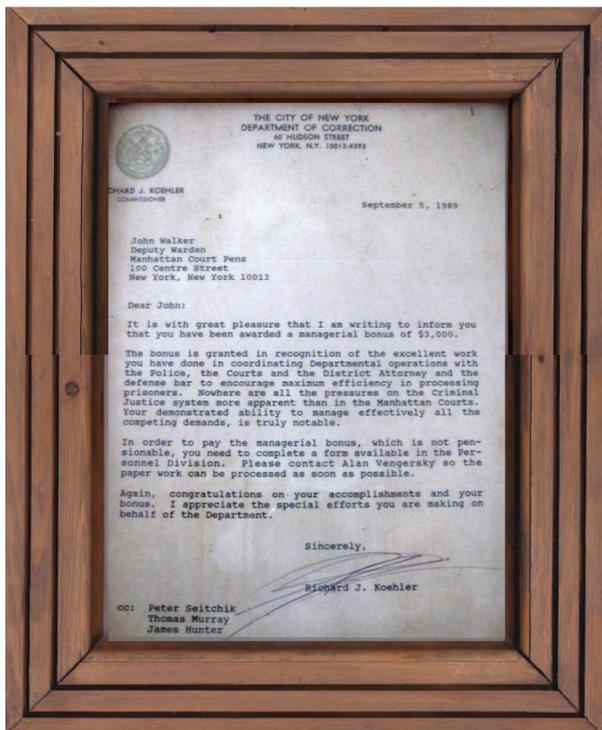


After about a decade at ARDC, Walker Jr. served from 10/1984 to 1990 at the Manhattan House or its Court Pens, except for about six months at the Queens House (12/1986 – 6/1987). During his ARDC service, he rose to the rank of Captain in 8/1980. He performed as a security hearings captain, oversaw intake operations and had rotating housing responsibilities. He was awarded a unit citation as a captain.

Three years after his 2/1983 promotion to ADW, Walker was assigned to the Manhattan House as tour commander. With advancement to Deputy Warden in 12/1986, he first served as Administration DW at the Queens House but in 6/1987 returned to MHDMD as Operations DW.

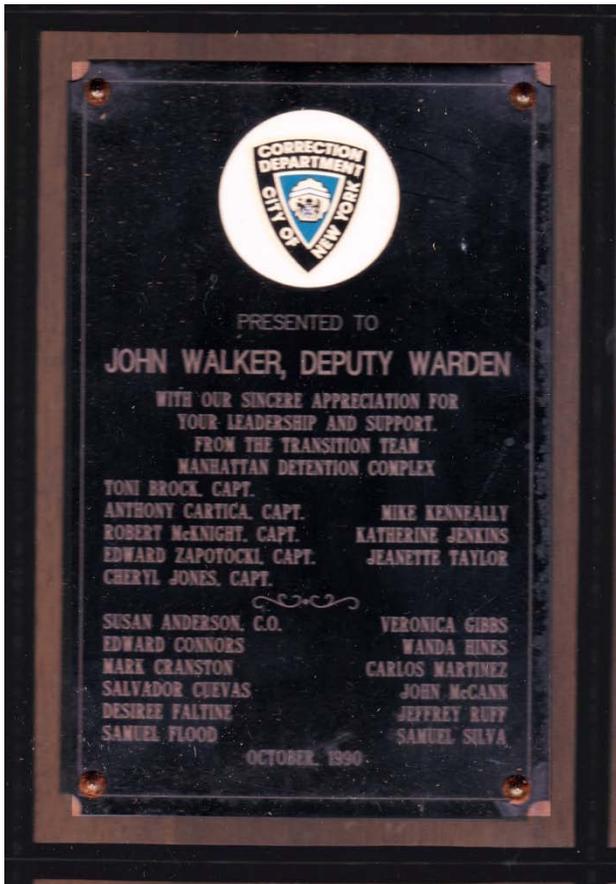
In 10/1988, Deputy Warden Walker was named Executive Officer of DOC's Manhattan Courthouse pens, managing an average daily inmate population of 1,200. In that role, he also served as the Department's liaison and coordinator with the courts and other criminal justice agencies on timely production of defendants for various court proceedings, beginning with arraignment after arrest.

Besides that day-to-day responsibility, Walker also helped develop the master plan (the White



Framed letter from Commissioner Koehler to Deputy Warden Walker announcing his being awarded \$3,000 "management bonus" for his "excellent work coordinating Department operations" with others agencies for "maximum efficiency in processing prisoners."

Street Jail project – *see image above right*) for the renovation of the Manhattan House’s physical plant to increase and improve its inmate housing capacity and delivery of jail services.



*image left*) carries the names of 20 DOC members who staffed that transition team for the White Street Jail *aka* the North Tower of the Tombs.

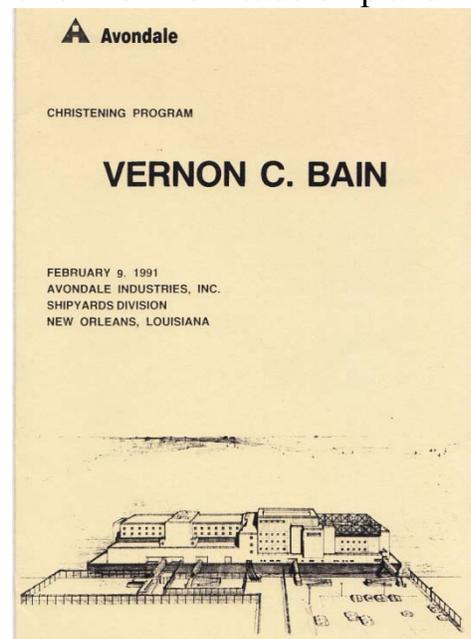
DW Walker’s year-long service (6/89 – 6/6/90) as commanding officer of the White Street Jail Transition Team entailed:

- Coordinating and managing development of the 500-bed detention facility’s operating plan, institutional orders and policies;
- Serving as coordinator and liaison with outside agencies and contractors as well as
- its program services deputy warden.

Just as his administrative, organizing, coordinating and planning performances at the

One of the Walker career artifacts donated to DOC by his son is a 9/5/1989 framed typed letter signed by (9/23/86 – 12/23/89) Correction Commissioner Richard Koehler informing the Manhattan House’s Court Pens DW that he had been awarded a “management bonus” of \$3,000. The letter cited his “excellent work in coordinating Department operations with police, the courts, the DA and defense bar to encourage maximum efficiency in processing prisoners.”

Another of the donated artifacts is a wood-mounted engraved plaque presented to him October 1990 from the Manhattan Detention Complex Transition Team to DW Walker in “sincere appreciation” of his “leadership and support” in heading up the team. The plaque (*see*



Above is DW Walker’s invitation to attend VCBC’s Feb. 9, 1991, river splash-down in New Orleans.

Manhattan Pens led to his liaison/executive role in MHDM's White Street Jail project, his performance in the latter capacity led to his selection for similar responsibilities with regard to the barge jail construction.

Both the Tombs' White Street Jail project and the 800-bed Vernon C. Bain Center construction were part of the city government's response addressing massive inmate population overcrowding resulting from increased drug trafficking and increased associated crimes, with their consequent inevitable corresponding increases in arrests by NYPD.

This same inmate overcrowding background led NYC to acquire retired British troop barges to house DOC inmates and to build upstate two jails which state correctional staffs operated as NYC inmates housing. Prisoner population pressures on city jail operations -- combined with political and legal pressures from inmate advocates, regulating monitors and the courts -- made particularly sensitive and significant the role played by Deputy Warden Walker in helping to bring on-line more than 1,300 inmate beds to relieve the system's historic overcrowding crisis.



One of the most colorful and entertaining donated artifacts from retired Deputy Warden John J. Walker Jr.'s memorabilia is his framed certificate of ownership of a VCBC "plank."

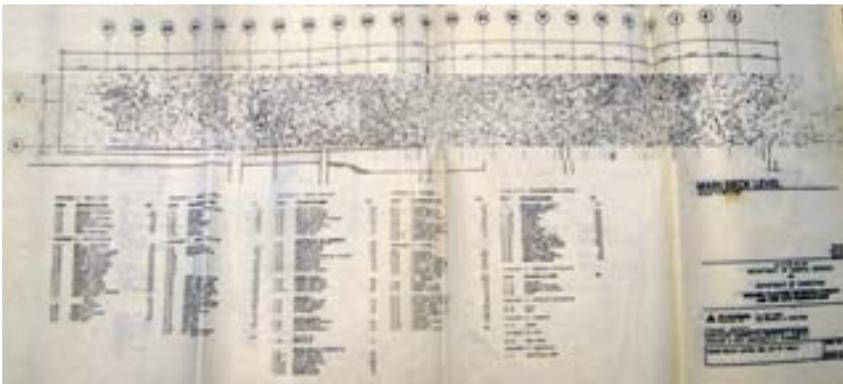
As his son, John J. Walker III, explains, the plank certificate is traditionally presented to the first persons aboard a newly-commissioned vessel. It confers and recognizes, tongue-in-cheek, their

bragging rights to "owning" the vessel's very planks, or at least one of them. The certificate proclaims to all "salts, sea lawyers, swabs, land-lubbers, square-knot admirals, gun-deckers, and all other assorted scavengers of the seven seas" that "DW John Walker" as "a member of the first and most illustrious crew of the Vernon C. Bain - MTF III Commissioned Jan. 22, 1992" is "a plank owner" of said craft.

The two retired British Bibby troop ships, modified for NYC jail purposes, were Maritime Facilities #1 and #2 (MTF I & II). Since MTF III did not arrive in East River waters until Jan. 26, 1992, the "commissioning" of the barge jail as river worthy occurred in Louisiana.

Between VCBC's Feb. 9, 1991 splash-down/ "christening" ceremonies and the vessel's commissioning about 11 months later, its construction completion work continued with the barge dockside. After its arrival at Hunts Point in late January, 1992, sundry connections and adjustments at the Bronx site had to be carefully undertaken to assure safe operation of the vessel for all aboard, inmates and staff. In-take began that fall. DW Walker had a leadership role in the transition period and early years of VCBC's operation until his retirement in September, 1996.

By the way, between his leadership roles in the planning and transition periods with Manhattan House Pens and White Street Jail and then VCBC, Deputy Warden Walker put in four months in charge of the nutritional services for the entire DOC jail system (6/1990 – 10/1990).



Among the donated Walker memorabilia items are six tissue-thin translucent engineering schematics (2 feet x 15 inches) of VCBC decks [main, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4<sup>th</sup> and lower], each dated March 8, 1989 (see composite left). The last named deck schematic is

particularly interesting because its original name in the schematic's print font was "inner bottom deck." But a broad pen line appears to have been drawn by hand across the "inner bottom" phrase and above the crossed-out words appears the replacement term "lower," hand-written in similar broad strokes.

Deputy Warden Walker was reluctant to retire but a coronary condition dedicated that he do so, Det. Walker noted. "Unfortunately, the timing of his retirement just missed out on the 3/4<sup>th</sup> pension benefit."

Walker III joined NYPD in April 1997 and was first assigned to the 48<sup>th</sup> Precinct, covering West Farms, East Tremont and Belmont in the Bronx. He later transferred to the Organized Crime Control Bureau (OCCB) where he worked in its Firearms Suppression Division.

A member of the OCCB team that took down the 15+ member "Concourse Hustle" gun-and-crack-dealing gang, he gained his detective shield that year (2008), in part, as recognition for his contribution to the success of the 12-month investigation. It involved undercover buys at the 1269 Grand Concourse apartment house. Regular tenants later explained they lived in fear of gang which brazenly conducted its illegal sales in the lobby and hallways.

Besides the three generations of John J. Walkers serving in NYC law-enforcement, two other members of the Walker family have worked for city agencies. Deputy Warden

Walker's widow, Christine, taught in the public schools for 20 years. His daughter, Lisa, a nurse, has worked in child protective services. His younger son, Joseph, is employed with a pharmaceutical company.

John and Christine Walker raised their two sons and daughter in Edgewater Park, a co-op community in the Throggs Neck section where the Bronx shore is washed by the waters of Long Island Sound. He served as president of Edgewater Park Owners Cooperative Board of Directors. At nearby St. Francis De Chantal Church, he served as lector and CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) teacher. At DOC, he was a member of the Emerald Society.

Possessed of a mind ever interested in learning more, Deputy Warden Walker would find time or seek and be granted time to take special training to expand and enhance his "on the job" performance. These included courses in institutional nutrition, "Interpersonal Communications for Institutional Personnel," legal research methodology, and firemanics. He saw where being able to notarize document signatures would be useful, given his various roles. So he underwent the appropriate training and became certified as a Commissioner of Deeds.

He once acknowledged that he saw himself as "results oriented." Undoubtedly, those up the chain of command at DOC saw him that way too. That's why he was selected to help expedite bringing on line, not just one, but two historic inmate housing projects – the Tombs' White Street Jail and VCBC -- during a period of intense pressure on the Department due to massive overcrowding. Their confidence in him proved well placed.

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Above Walker family snapshots made available to DOC include, l to r, Dep. Warden's retirement party, Walker Jr. & III & wives renew wedding vows, brother Joe at III's promotion to detective rank. Below more family photos relating to the detective promotion. Additionally, the below far left photo shows White Street Jail "A Piece of the 'Rock'" plaque presented to Dep. Warden Walker and now given to DOC care.

