



T E X A S ☆ T I M E S

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UNITED STATES SENATOR • TEXAS

## Remembering Fallen First Responders

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

“Remember the Alamo” was a rallying cry that led to Texas independence. It also signified the ongoing respect Texans have for the lessons of history.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001 may be a fading memory in some places, but the significance of that day has not been forgotten across Texas. Following a recent tragedy in West Texas, the outpouring of support for our first responders in the wake of 9/11 was renewed for many Texans.

Civic leaders in Odessa memorialize 9/11 with an annual Patriot Day observance in Memorial Gardens Park. This year’s ceremony was to have been a somber but simple event.

No speeches were planned. The public was invited to hear area musicians and reflect quietly on a tragedy that altered our history. Three thousand flags honoring the 9/11 victims were implanted on park grounds.

But on Sept. 8, three days before the memorial event, tragedy struck Odessa. A shotgun-wielding man accused of domestic abuse ambushed three Odessa Police Department corporals responding to an emergency call, killing two of them at the scene. The third officer died four days later in a Lubbock hospital.

The disaster was unprecedented in that West Texas community. Never before in the history of Odessa had a police officer been killed by gunfire in the line of duty.

As the Sept. 11 anniversary approached in Washington, D.C., news reports focused largely on an aspect of the national war on terrorism that was finally recognized after the 9/11 attacks. Gen. David Petraeus delivered a report to Congress that day, summarizing our progress in stabilizing Iraq and combating Islamic terrorists in that country.

But in West Texas, following the officers’ deaths, attention shifted quickly back to a different product of 9/11—our increased awareness, and appreciation for, the job done by our front line first responders.

The Odessa tragedy had nothing to do, of course, with international terrorism. But it reminds all of us that there are men and women, most of them in uniform, willing to put their lives on the line to keep the rest of us safe from harm. We are in their debt.

The ambush in Odessa killed Cpl. Arlie Jones, Cpl. John “Scott” Gardner and Cpl. Abel

Marquez. Although each man was unique in his background and experience, all three were dedicated and capable public servants. Each was born and raised in Odessa. Each could have been your neighbor.

The people of Odessa and neighbors from all over the Southwest have rallied behind these fallen peace officers. “It makes me proud to know I had a husband that was loved this much,” Mrs. Rhonda Jones, widow of Cpl. Jones, told a local TV station. She added: “I feel people praying for me. If it wasn’t for that, I don’t think I would be this calm.”

During funerals for the officers, 42 police, fire and sheriffs’ departments—from as far away as Houston, Dallas, Oklahoma and New Mexico—dispatched honor guards to Odessa. The Austin Police Department sent its pipe and drum corps.

Hundreds of citizens are contributing to a benevolence fund to help the families of the three slain officers.

The Odessa Patriot Day memorial service went on as scheduled at Memorial Gardens Park on Sept. 11. But the police deaths imbued the occasion with an entirely different perspective.

One local citizen, Gary Pipes, told the Odessa American: “A lot of people take our police officers, firefighters, and our military for granted. Sometimes it takes an event like the tragedy we had this week to get us all back to reality.”

There was one small, but significant alteration to the 3,000 American flags serving as the backdrop for Odessa’s 9/11 commemoration ceremony. Extra flags were added to the display, flown to honor the memory of three men who died protecting their community. We must always remember those who have fallen while keeping us safe and free.

*Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee’s Immigration, Border Security and Refugees subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee’s Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge. For Sen. Cornyn’s previous Texas Times columns: [www.cornyn.senate.gov/column](http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/column).*