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**Texas Ranger Joe Haralson
Speech**

Presented at the 2007 Texas Ranger Reunion

*On May 15, 2007, Ranger Joe Haralson delivered this speech at the Galveston County Law Enforcement Center during the National Police Week Memorial Ceremony. The Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum is grateful to Breck Porter and the **Police News** for granting us permission to reprint.*

In 1962, the 87th Congress of the United States, issued a joint resolution, authorizing then President, John F. Kennedy to proclaim the week of May 15th of each year NATIONAL POLICE WEEK and May 15th each year POLICE OFFICERS MEMORIAL DAY, in recognition of the men and women who, night and day, stand guard in our midst to protect us through enforcement of our laws.

And it is for that purpose we have assembled. We are here to memorialize those police officers, who have made the ultimate sacrifice, to honor and say thanks to those police officers who have served honorably and retired, and to those who continue to serve.

The National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington DC has chiseled into it, the names of over 17000 police officers killed in the line of duty. In the last 10 years, there have been 1649 police officers killed in the line of duty in the United States. 145 officers were killed in the year 2006. The average number of officers killed each year for the last 10 years is 165.

While the number of police officers killed each year is up and down, the number of felonious assaults against police officers continues to rise. There were 16, 072 assaults of police officers which resulted in injury to the officer in 2006. The increased availability and use of body armor and improved trauma care keeps the number of deaths from being much higher.

The duties and responsibilities of a police officer are many and varied. A police officer may issue a traffic citation to a good citizen, deliver a death message to the parents of a child killed in a traffic accident, testify in court, listen to a citizen complain his stolen property has not been recovered, and get into a life or death struggle in a single shift. Police frequently use

terms such as, routine patrol, routine call, and routine traffic stop. Those routine duties took the lives of 145 officers in 2006.

Since the first police department was created in Boston in the 1700's, policing has changed. Equipment has changed, philosophy has changed, and tactics have changed - but the Mission remains the same. Many agencies have issued Mission Statements, and they all differ somewhat, but the Mission of every police officer and police agency is or should be, by all lawful means, to Protect the citizen they serve and their property, to defend the defenseless, and arrest those who would take advantage of law abiding citizens.

And something else that has not changed, a life and death struggle between a police officer doing his sworn duty and a criminal intent upon killing him is the same today as it ever was. I have read that there is no more toxic environment than face to face combat. When we speak of combat, we usually think of soldiers, God Bless Them. This was recently made real to us when Specialist Eddie Tamez, one of the Island's own, was killed in Iraq while serving with the United States Army ; but if you go forth daily, as a police officer does, and put yourself between peaceful citizens and those who would do them harm and not respect their rights, the possibility of a face to face, life or death struggle, is a reality. A recent article in the Strafford, Virginia newspaper referred to Police Officers as Soldiers in a War That Never Ends and I believe that is a good analogy.

Knowing this, men and women continue to join the ranks of police officers, serve their community, and put themselves in harms way. On September 11, 2001, 2726 Americans were killed in the World Trade Center. Of those killed were 77 police officers and over 300 firemen. There are stories of heroic actions of citizens who survived the attack and of those who did not survive, but those citizens were in the World Trade Center that day as a matter of routine, they worked there and went there every day. Those 77 police officers, as were the firemen, were not there as a matter of routine. They, borrowing a line from a dispatch General Custer sent from the battlefield at the Little Big Horn, rode to the sound of the musketry. And they did so willingly, not because of the adventure or the big money, but because of a sense of duty.

There are currently over 800,000 police officers in the United States, and across this country, on an almost daily basis, police officers are involved in life or death struggles that make the OK Corral pale in comparison. The OK Corral was a different day and time and police may have been looked at differently. CNN did not cover the OK Corral, but everyone knows about it and know who the Earps and the Clantons were. The FBI shootout in Miami and the North Hollywood Bank Robbery was front page for a

couple of days and was forgotten. I would be surprised if anyone here recognizes the names Gerald Dove, Benjamin Grogan, William Matix, Michael Platt, Larry Eugene Phillips or Emil Matasareanu.

This is reality, and if you think I have painted a picture of gloom, that was not my intention. Police Officers do what they do, they choose their station in life and few would trade places with someone else.

In days of old, when Knights roamed the earth, and there really were Knights. I am sure some of them were thugs, but Knights were known for their chivalry and honor. Each morning they got up, donned armor, picked up a shield that bore the authority by which they acted, and with a weapon on their side, went forth to do good deeds and protect the citizens they served. The Chinese invented gun powder, and gun powder defeated armor, and Knights disappeared from the earth. Today, across this country, police officers get up in the morning, don armor, pin a shield upon their left breast that displays the authority by which they act, and with a weapon on their hip, go forth to do good deeds and protect the citizens they serve. These men and women are Knights in every sense of the word.

These modern day Knights, these Paladins, deserve the support and gratitude of the citizens of this country. And you police officers, there is no greater responsibility or higher calling than that of a police officer, you have a sacred, solemn duty to live worthy and to conduct yourself with honor and chivalry as did those knights of old.

God bless you.

