

Shots Fired

"SHOTS FIRED!! OFFICER DOWN" WHEN OUR WORLD FALLS APART
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You have no idea what it's like. Our friends we had lunch with are now fighting for their lives on a greasy street or dark alley. Acquaintances that we care about are face-down with life-threatening injuries. People that we spent time with on fishing trips or around a barbeque in our backyards cannot respond to our frantic radio calls. We rush to find them, to help them.

Seconds become hours when nobody is there to stop their bleeding or give them shelter from those who hurt them in the first place. Chances are they didn't even know their assailants before the incident started. If they had known them, they would have called more of us to help. Nobody would face such savage animals alone.

We're not there to hurt anyone; our goal is to help. Sometime you ask us to put your safety before our own. Unhesitant, we do so. If our training works and our split-second judgments are correct, we can escape an encounter with no injuries to ourselves and little or no injuries to our prisoners. Even though that is what you expect of us, you rarely give us praise. Often the results are not optimal. We survive a deadly encounter to find ourselves crucified in the newspaper and television. We get administrative time off to "help our healing process" but you suspect its because we're lunatic killers behind a badge. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

We deliberately put ourselves into harm's way like no other public servants. Firefighters, paramedics, and public service employees can analyze their opponents and take time to implement measures to enhance their safety. We're never quite sure what to expect and usually don't have time to make every safety requirement possible. Often, we're alone and the danger becomes real in an instant. When the moment of truth comes, we can never be too prepared. Law enforcement has been called hours of sheer boredom punctuated by seconds of sheer terror. How very true it is.

For the next couple of days, we will wear black ribbons around our badges as a public sign of mourning. We will hear the bittersweet sounds of Scottish bagpipes at the memorial service and tears will crowd our vision. But we'll be back for our next shift, dealing with all the uncertainties again. We are your protectors. You'll see us and not know what to say. Some of you will offer that you're sorry but most will try to ignore the issue and tell us to have a nice day. Nice days are for fishing trips with our friends and backyard barbeques with our acquaintances. Not for walking on a greasy street and down a dark alley. Tell us something that really matters for us. Tell us to have a "safe shift." And give us the respect that we're due.

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