

# The National Tragedy of Fort Hood

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Today was a beautiful warm blue-make-you-happy-sky-day in Texas. I was scheduled to work a shift at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center at Fort Hood, Texas, the busiest emergency department in the Army, at a base with always more than 50 thousand soldiers. I have been a civilian contract emergency physician at Fort Hood since 2003. I teach Army Residents and students and mid-level practitioners emergency medical practice, working alongside the main group of remarkable and able Army Physician Faculty, who do what I do, and are regularly deployed “down range” to support the Army mission in the field. I was one of many physicians from the central Texas area who filled in during the hot war in Iraq, and I stayed on. I can’t think of a better job than caring for and thanking thousands of soldiers and their families and teaching some of the finest specimens of American youth extant—people who haven’t forgotten the virtues and the concepts of duty, honor and country and make their parents and families proud. Some days I am overcome by the good I see in these students and physicians in training. I am one lucky old doc.

Tragedy struck Fort Hood today, sudden, violent. I write of the best mass casualty drill that could be imagined, made so by extraordinary efforts in the face of a mountain of awful human carnage. Dozens of ambulances from everywhere, helicopters in the sky, soldiers and Army medics and paramedics working the scene with efficiency and competence and cooperation among area hospitals that allowed remarkable and effective evacuation, triage, use of resources and superlative resuscitation. I couldn’t help but note and admire their performance—and be happy they are my colleagues and friends in many cases. I was very concerned after the first wave that we would be overwhelmed, but the regional ambulance and hospital physician help and dispersal of cases to surrounding hospitals made it possible for our hospital to achieve great success along with the successes of those other groups and facilities—pitching in to care for more than

30 wounded. During the peak easily more than 100 physicians, nurses, techs, aids, clerks, housekeepers, security and so many soldiers and civilian workers worked feverishly at our hospital. They made a difference and saved lives.

Tonight I left that emergency department so proud of what I saw, so proud of the US Army and the people who kept their cool, worked hard, and saved lives the way their fellow soldiers and their grateful families would hope. Not a slacker to be seen today, a massive effort to save our precious people. Leadership and intelligent decision making that kept the work distributed. It was just the way they like to outline a mass casualty drill in the book—eye on the ball, manage resources, triage properly, focus on priorities for patient survival. It was good because there were so many there with battlefield experience and able. They were ready, they performed. So many great specialists came down to help. Along with nurses galore, one big patient care machine, humming along.

I know these people, and could name them, put them up for accolades and such, but they would do this if no one was watching—the true measure of greatness and virtue. My wife Patty, who was at home worrying and didn’t know what was happening, was like those other wonderful spouses of soldiers who sacrifice, and worry, silently when all hell breaks loose. We shall not forget them and we grieve with the families who have lost their precious treasure, how horrific. I wish I could be more eloquent describing what I do, why I love these people so much or why when I left the Department tonight I just had to write this in tribute to their effort today. I can say that what



I do is as close as I’ll get to working with angels and heroes as a physician. Today was the kind of terrible day that makes us hope there are angels and heroes, and be pleasantly surprised to be touched by one. Not one cross word, today, nothing but tenderness and concern and peddle to the metal effort. Once in a while an announcement would be made to keep the noise down, there were so many people doing so many things at once.

So I had to write tonight about the angels and heroes. I teach one of the ethics lectures for the residents and remind them that they define themselves as virtuous and extraordinary when they volunteer to put on the uniform. I saw the great green-suitors and their support group working today. I had to tell you, so you could know that in some parts of America and in some segments of our people, there is such wonderful goodness. If you had been there you would have cried for joy for how lucky we are as a people. I started this essay at 8:30 p.m. and its 10:00 p.m.--Taps just sounded for Fort Hood. RIP, departed heroes and heroines. Thanks for your effort today—you, the living heroes and heroines. ☺

*\*The writer is an emergency physician, resident of Brownwood, Texas. His opinions are his own and not attributable to the US Army or Department of Defense.*

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