

## — PART 1 of 2 —

# There When You Need Them: A Detailed History of the City's Emergency Medical Services

## ■ LAFD provides an overview of its Emergency Medical Services.

*Editor's note: The following history was written by LAFD Captain II/Paramedic Bill Wells and distributed through the LAFD's Yahoo listserve. Alive! thanks the LAFD and Capt. Wells for this excellent communication service. Thanks also to the LAFD's Rick McClure, for the excellent photographs.*

Capt. Wells has more than 30 years' experience as an Ambulance Driver, Paramedic, EMS Supervisor and Paramedic Captain with the Los Angeles Fire Department. He also served as past president of United Paramedics of Los Angeles. For the past six years Captain Wells has worked at Fire Department Headquarters in the Planning Section overseeing the creation and implementation of the EMS Plan you will read about below.

Despite the large number of fires and rescues each day in Los Angeles, did you know that four out of five 9-1-1 calls to the Los Angeles Fire Department are requests for Emergency Medical Services (EMS)?

In talking with residents of Los Angeles, it has become apparent that most people think little has changed in the way we provide EMS. Let me assure you that is not the case!

Given the profound nature of these demanding emergencies, I thought I'd offer a historical perspective of local pre-hospital care written by LAFD's legendary Captain II/Paramedic Bill Wells.

### A Competent and Capable Agency

The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) is a full-spectrum life safety agency protecting approximately 4 million people who live, work and play in America's second largest City.



Firefighters move "victim" from simulated aircraft crash at LAX to a treatment area.

Well-Trained and Highly Dedicated Personnel

The LAFD's 3,376 uniformed personnel and 333 civilian support staff address multiple aspects of life safety, including fire prevention, firefighting, emergency medical care, technical rescue, hazardous materials mitigation, disaster response, public education and community service.

A professionally trained staff of 1,035 firefighters (including 199 paramedics) are on duty at all times at 103 neighborhood Fire Stations strategically located across the Department's 471-square-mile jurisdiction. The Los Angeles Fire Department has provid-



Paramedic Captains organize a multi-casualty incident.

ed emergency medical services (EMS) to the residents and visitors of the City of Los Angeles for decades.

### A Proud History of Providing EMS

The first Fire Department ambulance was implemented in 1927. By 1931, there were six Fire Department ambulances serving the Metropolitan and Harbor areas of the City. The City of Los Angeles has been providing a public sector emergency ambulance service since the early 1900s. The service originated as a program provided by the Los Angeles Police Department. In the mid 1930s, the service was transferred to the City's Receiving Hospital Department where it continued as the Police Ambulance Service, serving the metropolitan area of Los Angeles until July 1, 1970.

### The Growing Suburbia

Private ambulance companies, under City contract, provided emergency service in the San Fernando Valley until 1957, and in West Los Angeles until July 1973. The Fire Department introduced rescue ambulance service in the San Fernando Valley in 1955 by

Within 8 years, 37 paramedic ambulances were placed into service, each staffed with two single-function (non-firefighter) civilian paramedics.

In April 1973, the first Rescue Ambulance (RA) Drill Tower of civilian rescue ambulance personnel was held at Fire Station 40 on

Terminal Island with Captain Donald Anthony, now a retired Deputy Chief, as the drillmaster. There would be a total of 33 civilian recruit classes between 1973 and 1990.

From 1973 through 1992, virtually all LAFD rescue ambulances and paramedic positions were staffed with single-function civilian EMT-Is and paramedics.

### The Changing Face of EMS

In February 1978, Department history was made when the first three females were hired as paramedic trainees — Carlesta Johnson (Wells), Sally Byrne (Finney) and Suzanne Tousseau (Ibers). All three females graduated from the paramedic drill tower.

In July 1980, the City Council authorized the hiring of a chief paramedic, a senior paramedic assigned as the Department's EMS training officer, and 24-hour field supervision by Senior Paramedics to improve the management and supervision of the Department's EMS Program.

Nine senior paramedics, assigned to the three Division offices and working a platoon-duty schedule, responded to major EMS incidents and assisted the Division Commanders with managing EMS activities. The Chief Paramedic and all Senior Paramedics were single-function civilian paramedics.

### Accountability and Oversight

In December 1981, an emergency physician (Dr. Marshall Rockwell) was hired to assist with the management of EMS within the Department. The next medical adviser was Dr. Gregory Palmer. The current medical adviser is Dr. Marc Eckstein.

In December 1983, the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (BEMS) was established and the Chief Paramedic (Jon A. Fasana) became the Bureau Commander. The

Ambulance Liaison Officer (Senior Paramedic II Douglas E. Brown) and EMS Bureau Adjutant (Paramedic III William N. Wells) were also assigned.

### Growing Together for Greater Capabilities

In October 1992, the Fire Department consolidated the ranks of Firefighter and Paramedic into a single civil service class that would be responsible for extinguishing fires, accomplishing physical rescues and providing all pre-hospital emergency care. This consolidation was the solution for a number of growing problems, including: morale problems; limited workload balancing options; limitations on management flexibility; legal and employee relations difficulties; delays in fielding new resources; and delays in implementing new programs. A single class of Firefighter would lead to unity of command and organizational efficiency.

On October 18, 1992, the single-function EMS personnel ranks were consolidated with existing firefighter ranks. From 1992 to the present, all new LAFD employees would be Firefighter-EMT-Is, and have the opportunity to be trained as dual-function firefighter-paramedics.

### Unique Deployment, Consolidation and Efficiency

Over the next six years, 166 of the 360 single-function paramedics were cross-trained as firefighter-paramedics. In October 1996, the Department began deploying paramedic assessment engines at fire stations without paramedic ambulances to reduce paramedic response times in remote neighborhoods of the City.

On August 4, 1996, BEMS and the Bureau of Fire Suppression and Rescue (BFS&R) were consolidated into the Bureau of Emergency Services (BES).

On October 16, 2000, a new EMS assistant chief position was created to provide management expertise in the coordination and oversight of EMS field activities, policies and procedures. An administrative EMS Division was established within BES with a staff of four.

### Growing ... But Not Fast Enough

By July 2000, the LAFD operated 83 rescue ambulances (56 Advanced Life Support and 27 Basic Life Support), 97 Engine companies (27 ALS and 70 BLS), 48 Light Forces (truck and engine) (all BLS), and one paramedic air ambulance (helicopter).

However, of the 103 neighborhood fire stations, 44 did not have a paramedic ambulance assigned, 28 did not have any ambulance (ALS or BLS) assigned, and 17 did not have any paramedic resource assigned.

## — TO BE CONTINUED —

Look for Part 2 in the August issue of *Alive!*.



Firefighter/paramedics take care of an injured passenger of an automobile after it overturned on the freeway.