

Above and Beyond

Police Dept.'s annual event honors 14 heroes with Medals of Valor and Purple Heart medals.



Stories and photos courtesy LAPD

On May 10, the LAPD hosted its important annual Medal of Valor awards ceremony, honoring its officers who have demonstrated the highest level of courage and bravery in protecting the City.

The event was held at the Hollywood and Highland complex in Hollywood.

This year's event was titled "Above and Beyond" because it contained the awarding of not just Medals of Valor, but also Purple Heart medals. Purple Hearts have been distributed only twice in the history of the event.

This year's honorees:

Medal of Valor:

- Officer II Kevin Cotter
- Det. I Craig Marquez
- Officer II Fernando Sanchez
- Officer II Alejandro Valencia

Purple Heart:

- Policeman Oscar Joel Bryant (posthumous)
- Det. Lovie Nettles
- Det. II Norman Eckles (posthumous)
- Sgt. II Michael Flanagan
- Sgt. I Stacy Lim
- Officer II Franck Peter
- Officer III+I James Veenstra

- Officer Felix Vera (retired)
- Officer Joseph Ortega (posthumous)
- Officer Jack Storey (posthumous)

The Purple Heart recognizes officers who have sustained grievous physical injury during a tactical situation and posthumously to the next of kin of those officers who did not survive their injuries. Today's ceremony marks only the second occasion the Purple Heart has been awarded.

The Medal of Valor is awarded to officers who distinguish themselves by conspicuous bravery or heroism above and beyond the normal demands of police ser-

vice. To be awarded the Medal of Valor, an officer shall have performed an act displaying extreme courage while consciously facing imminent peril.

The medals are awarded by the Board of Police Commissioners and presented by the Chief of Police in the name of the Department at the annual ceremony. The award consists of a medal, ribbon, and citation. The Medal of Valor was first presented in 1925, and the awards ceremony is made possible thanks to the generosity of the Los Angeles Police Foundation.

The stories of their bravery follow.



MEDAL OF VALOR



Officer II Alejandro Valencia



Officer II Fernando Sanchez

■ Traffic Stop Shootout

During the evening shift on July 10, 2010, Officers Alejandro Valencia and Fernando Sanchez were on patrol in the Foothill Division.

The officers pulled up to an intersection where they saw a driver throw what appeared to be a beer can out the car's window. Believing the driver was under the influence of alcohol or narcotics and posed a threat to himself and the community, Officers Valencia and Sanchez initiated a traffic stop. However, the driver failed to stop and sped away from the officers, who immediately requested backup and air support while they pursued the fleeing suspect.

Officers Valencia and Sanchez continued their pursuit until the suspect suddenly stopped.

Without warning and before the officers could even come to a stop, the suspect exited the car and fired his semi-automatic handgun at them. The bullets ripped through the police car,

pierced the front windshield and struck Officer Valencia in his right arm.

Relying on his training and instincts, Officer Valencia flung open his door and returned fire.

With a barrage of bullets flying everywhere and shards of glass exploding from the passenger-side window, Officer Sanchez exited the black and white and took a few steps back to unholster and return fire. He lost his footing on the shards of broken glass and fell to the ground, breaking his wrist in the process.

Officer Valencia saw his partner fall to the ground and thought he had been shot by the suspect. Putting his partner's well-being before his own, Officer Valencia continued to engage the suspect with his wounded arm and began to broadcast "officer down" calls on the radio with his left hand.

At that time, Officer Sanchez rose to his feet

and began firing to provide cover for his partner. Officer Valencia continued engaging the suspect until he felt he was no longer a threat and made his way to the rear of the police car to aid his partner.

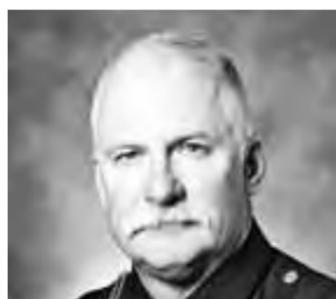
As Officer Valencia took cover behind their car to broadcast their location and request help once again, Officer Sanchez saw the suspect making movements. Believing he was still a threat, Officer Sanchez re-engaged the suspect until he was rendered immobile. Other officers arrived and took the suspect into custody.

The LAPD honors these two brave and courageous officers for their willingness to put themselves in extreme danger to protect their fellow citizens and each other. For their courage in action, the Medal of Valor is awarded to Officer Fernando Sanchez and Officer Alejandro Valencia.

MEDAL OF VALOR



Det. I Craig Marquez



Officer II Kevin Cotter

■ Hollywood Gunfire

Despondent over the recent breakup with his girlfriend, a man armed himself with a handgun and a knife and walked to the area of Sunset and Vine. Once he arrived at the iconic intersection, he began firing indiscriminately at unsuspecting pedestrians and passing vehicles.

Residents and other passersby initially believed they were witnessing part of a movie that was being filmed nearby. The reality of the situation began to set in when onlookers heard the sound of bullets piercing vehicles and shattering windows. A flood of frantic calls soon flowed into the 911 system to report a man firing a gun in the area of Vine Street.

Det. Craig Marquez, a plainclothes officer assigned to Hollywood Area Detectives, was told by a transient that he heard gun shots a few blocks down. As he was getting into his patrol car, he saw people running by and cars speeding past him. Det. Marquez heard additional gunfire and immediately responded to the area

of the shooting. Officer Kevin Cotter was nearby working off-duty at a filming site when a person ran up to him screaming that there was a man shooting at people down the street. Officer Cotter immediately ran toward the direction of the suspect.

Responding from separate locations, Det. Marquez and Officer Cotter reached the intersection of Sunset and Vine at the exact same time and immediately recognized each other. The two officers have known each other for 14 years and had worked together before.

Det. Marquez and Officer Cotter immediately formed a tactical plan based on each other's police training and experience and utilized available cover on the sidewalk to approach the suspect.

From their location, they observed the suspect as he stood in the street waving his gun in the air and screaming. As pedestrians scrambled for cover, Det. Marquez and Officer Cotter

remained courageous and calm in the face of danger. With total disregard for their safety, both officers confronted the suspect and ordered him to drop the knife in his hand and the gun in his waistband and submit to arrest. The suspect refused to comply with the officers' commands and ran toward them with his knife. Both officers fired their weapons, striking the suspect and causing him to fall to the ground.

Det. Marquez and Officer Cotter fearlessly brought the horrific event to an end and rendered the scene safe. Had it not been for the decisive action by both Det. Marquez and Officer Cotter, more innocent lives would undoubtedly have been lost.

The courageous and selfless actions of Det. Marquez and Officer Cotter reflect the highest standards of the Los Angeles Police Department and the City of Los Angeles. The Medal of Valor is bestowed upon Det. Craig Marquez and Officer Kevin Cotter.



Det. Lovie Nettles



Det. II Norman Eckles

PURPLE HEART

■ *Capturing a Drug Suspect*

In November 1983, Det. Lovie Nettles and his partner, Det. Norman Eckles, were investigating a drug dealer in South Los Angeles. This dealer was allegedly supplying large amounts of PCP to a notorious street gang. After an exhaustive investigation, Dets. Nettles and Eckles obtained a search warrant for the drug dealer's apartment. The detectives requested the assistance of SWAT officers and other narcotics detectives to serve the search warrant because the apartment was heavily fortified with steel bars.

The detectives devised a plan to allow the entry team a safe means into the apartment. Det. Nettles approached and knocked on the front door of the apartment, and Det. Eckles created a diversion by breaking a side window after the knock and notice had been given. Chaos erupted.

A loud shot rang out from inside the apartment, and Det. Eckles was struck in his spine and immediately went down. The support officers fired into the apartment. A "good Samaritan" living nearby pulled Det. Eckles into his apartment to keep him safe from the barrage of gunfire.

The suspect had taken a prostrate position on the floor of the apartment and was able to avoid being hit by incoming fire. Within seconds, a second shot blew through the front door and hit Det. Nettles in the head. He immediately collapsed. The support officers continued to return gunfire into the apartment until they were able to make entry and take the suspect into custody.

Det. Nettles was rushed to a nearby hospital, where doctors were able to save his life. Due to a persistent medi-

cal condition caused by the wound, Det. Nettles reluctantly retired from the Department after an accomplished 20 years of service.

Det. Eckles was paralyzed and relegated to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Sadly, the trauma of the gunshot wound took its toll on Det. Eckles. He passed from complications of his wound on April 19, 1989.

Both Det. Nettles and Eckles served the Los Angeles Police Department with professionalism and honor. Though one has passed on and the other has been retired for many years, they still serve as role models for all Los Angeles police officers. For their selfless courage and bravery, the Purple Heart is awarded to Ret. Det. Lovie Nettles and Det. Norman Eckles.



LAPD MEDAL OF VALOR AND PURPLE HEARTS



Sgt. II Michael Flanagan

PURPLE HEART

■ *Surviving an Ambush*

In the early morning hours of July 10, 1989, Sgt. Michael Flanagan and his partner were on patrol in the Jordan Downs Housing Development in South Los Angeles.

Sgt. Flanagan parked their squad car in front of a parking lot next to a narcotics location that he had closed down the week before. He was looking for evidence of it possibly being reopened to deal narcotics.

Sgt. Flanagan and his partner were unaware that they drove right into a planned ambush by four members of the Grape Street Watts Crip Gang. As Sgt. Flanagan and his partner began to drive away, a gang member came out of hiding armed with a 12-gauge shotgun. From six feet away, he fired two rounds into the patrol car.

Sgt. Flanagan and his partner immediately knew they were being ambushed. The first round struck Sgt. Flanagan in his left arm and hand. The second round struck Sgt. Flanagan in his right hand, knocking his hand off the steering wheel and onto his

lap. Unable to move either hand, Sgt. Flanagan threw himself onto his partner to protect him from being struck by gunfire.

Regardless of how difficult it was to maneuver the steering wheel with two injured hands, Sgt. Flanagan knew he needed to drive out of the kill zone. He made a wide right turn and jumped the curb onto the sidewalk. Unbeknownst to the officers, waiting around the corner was a second gang member who began firing numerous rounds from a high-powered assault weapon. Sgt. Flanagan used the crease of his wrist to force the steering wheel to turn to get back on the street. Down the street, a third gang member began firing rounds from a handgun. Using the crease of his wrists to maneuver the steering wheel down the street, Sgt. Flanagan was able to avoid a fourth gang member armed with a high-powered rifle who was hiding in the bushes. Once out of danger, Sgt. Flanagan told his partner to sit up and broadcast a help call.

Every vein in Sgt. Flanagan's wrists was damaged, causing him to lose a large amount of blood and pass out while entering an intersection at high speed. His partner yelled at Sgt. Flanagan to stop the vehicle, forcing him to regain consciousness and apply the brakes to stop the car. His partner then proceeded to quickly take him to a nearby hospital for medical treatment.

Because of Sgt. Flanagan's actions, his partner was not injured. However, due to the life-threatening nature of this incident, his police partner resigned shortly after the incident and moved back east to his hometown. Sgt. Flanagan continues to utilize this incident during roll call training regarding officer survival and ambushes.

Sgt. Flanagan demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice his own safety to save the life of his partner. For his display of bravery and courage that was far above and beyond the call of duty, the Purple Heart is awarded to Sgt. Michael Flanagan.



Officer III+I James Veenstra

PURPLE HEART

■ *SWAT Confrontation*

On Feb. 6, 2008, patrol officers from the West Valley Division responded to a "911" radio call in Winnetka. When they arrived at the home, the officers tried to contact the people inside and quickly realized they were dealing with a very dangerous situation. One of the men inside had shot several of his family members. Officers repeatedly tried to contact the suspect to get him to peacefully resolve the situation.

Believing the suspect was armed, the SWAT team was called in. To provide immediate medical aid and rescue to the people inside the home, SWAT personnel determined that the situation required emergency deployment into the house to rescue at least one downed victim.

Fully aware of the extreme danger involved from their years of experi-

ence confronting armed and violent suspects, Officers James Veenstra and Randal Simmons quickly and decisively formulated a tactical rescue plan. They would use SWAT officers to rescue the victims inside the home while West Valley officers maintained containment of the residence.

As Officer Veenstra went through the front door, the SWAT officers were met with an onslaught of gunfire from the suspect. SWAT officers returned fire and drove the suspect further into the residence, giving the team a chance to rescue one of the victims.

As the suspect fired on the SWAT Team, Officers Veenstra and Simmons exposed themselves to immediate peril and were struck by the suspect's gunfire.

Engaged in a fierce gun battle and fighting for their lives, SWAT offi-

cers chased the suspect further into the home, providing cover so that SWAT officers could move the two wounded officers out of the house and to safety.

Officer Veenstra and his injured partner were rushed to a nearby hospital. Tragically, Officer Veenstra's partner, Officer Randal Simmons, did not survive his wounds.

Officer Veenstra demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice his own safety to bring down an armed criminal who had complete disregard for the community. Officer Veenstra displayed bravery and courage that was above and beyond the call of duty.

For his heroic actions the Purple Heart is awarded to Retired Officer James Veenstra.

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Sgt. I Stacy Lim

PURPLE HEART

■ *Battling Carjackers*

On June 9, 1990, Sgt. Stacy Lim enjoyed a day off with friends. After stopping at the Northeast Station to look at her work assignment for the next evening, she headed home. Unbeknownst to Sgt. Lim, she was followed for 35 miles on the freeway by four gang members who allegedly intended to carjack her truck. The gang members allegedly had spent the entire evening looking for a victim to carjack, and they thought Sgt. Lim was an easy target since she was a lone female driver.

Sgt. Lim parked in front of her house. Feeling as though she had been followed, she readied her 9-m.m. service weapon. As she got out of her truck, the first thing she saw was the barrel of a .357 Magnum gun. Instead of firing her service weapon at the advancing gang member, Sgt. Lim attempted to avoid deadly force by saying, "Police officer, drop the gun." As she said this, the gang member

shot her in the chest from five feet away.

The impact of the bullet knocked Sgt. Lim back. The bullet fragmented and nicked every organ in her upper body. It damaged her stomach, intestines, liver, shattered her spleen and put a hole in the base of her heart before exiting through the center of her back.

Critically wounded, Sgt. Lim raised her gun and fired one round that struck the gang member. The gang member ran behind the truck, and Sgt. Lim chased after him. The gang member pointed his gun at her. She fired three more rounds, striking him in the chest and neck. As he collapsed, he fired all his rounds up in the air.

Sgt. Lim proceeded to the front of her vehicle where she dropped to one knee and prepared to engage additional suspects. After a short wait, Sgt. Lim walked toward the front door of her house and collapsed. Her two

roommates rushed out to her aide and called paramedics.

Sgt. Lim flat-lined on the driveway until paramedics revived her. She was taken to a nearby hospital where she underwent a two-hour surgery. While in intensive care, she flat-lined a second time. She underwent another surgery where doctors cracked open her chest again and massaged her heart for 90 minutes, as doctors prepared her family for her death. With her mother at her bedside paying her last respects, Sgt. Lim responded to her mother's touch. That encouraged doctors to continue their efforts.

Sgt. Lim came out of her coma one week later. Five days after that, she walked out of the hospital on her own and returned to patrol duty eight months later.

For her courage, bravery and will to survive, the Purple Heart is awarded to Sgt. Stacy Lim.



LAPD MEDAL OF VALOR AND PURPLE HEARTS



Officer II Franck Peter

PURPLE HEART

■ *Traffic Collision*

On Aug. 19, 2004, Officer Franck Peter, assigned to Southwest Division, was working patrol duty when he noticed a stolen car on a street curb. As he approached the car, he saw one suspect inside. He drove his patrol car in reverse and placed it in a safe tactical position. After requesting backup, he exited the patrol car and took a position of cover and concealment at the rear driver's side. Officer Peter closely monitored the suspect while waiting for additional units to respond.

Officer Peter soon heard sirens and saw the approaching police vehicle traveling at a fast speed. As he maintained his position, Officer Peter waved his hand to get the attention of the officers in the approaching police

vehicle. He noticed they were not slowing down. The driver of the fast approaching black and white applied the brakes to reduce speed and negotiate a right-hand turn.

The car began to skid, hit the curb and jumped onto the sidewalk, striking a steel pole with an attached stop sign. As the police car hit the steel pole, it bent and struck Officer Peter on the top of his head. This knocked him unconscious and caused him to bleed profusely from an eight-inch laceration that exposed his skull. The impact fractured his skull from the temple area to the back of his head.

Officer Peter was treated at the scene by his fellow officers to stop the rapid blood loss. He was immediately taken by ambulance to a nearby

hospital.

Officer Peter sustained significant and traumatic injury as a result of this traffic collision. After numerous medical and therapy treatments, he continued to suffer debilitating symptoms, including serious brain injury, memory loss, and difficulty with cognitive skills.

Finally, in January 2007, after three years of hard work and strong will, Officer Peter recovered well enough to return to duty as a police officer. Due to his continued dedication and passion to honor those who served, he unselfishly maintains contact with the families of fallen officers. For his courage, bravery and will to survive, the Purple Heart is awarded to Officer Franck Peter.



Policeman Oscar Joel Bryant

PURPLE HEART

■ *Dress Shop Shootout*

Officer Oscar Joel Bryant was assigned to LAPD's University Division. At approximately 3:40 p.m., May 13, 1968, Officer Bryant was approached by a citizen who told him that he had seen three males and one female enter a nearby dress shop and place a closed sign in the window shortly after entering.

Officer Bryant returned to his vehicle to request backup and proceeded

to draw his weapon and approach the dress shop. Officer Bryant observed the suspects inside and ordered them to come out. He lined the suspects up against a wall and was momentarily distracted when one of the suspects suddenly turned and fired several rounds at him. While Officer Bryant managed to return fire and wound two of the suspects, he sustained three gunshot wounds, one of which

was fatal. All four suspects were later arrested and prosecuted.

Officer Bryant demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice his own safety in order to bring down armed criminals. His selfless and heroic actions embody the highest traditions of the Los Angeles Police Department. The Purple Heart is awarded posthumously to Officer Oscar Joel Bryant.



Officer Felix Vera

PURPLE HEART

■ *Suspect Shootout*

On Jan. 25, 1949, at 3:30 a.m., Officers Joseph Ortega, Jack Storey and Felix Vera were working Central Area Vice, dressed in plain clothes and driving an unmarked vehicle. The three officers responded to a call in the Silver Lake area to look for a suspected child molester.

The officers located the suspect who, unbeknownst to Officers Ortega, Storey and Vera, was armed and dangerous and wanted in Napa for the shooting of two police officers. While attempting to detain the suspect, a gun battle ensued. The suspect, armed

with a gun in each hand, turned to the officers and told them to get out of his way or he would kill them.

The suspect fired both guns, shooting Officer Vera in his gun hand and Officer Storey in the leg before fleeing.

Within five minutes, more than 100 police officers converged on the area to search for the suspect, who was later found hiding in a shed in a nearby residential yard. When ordered to come out, he shot Officer Joe Ortega in the leg. Officers returned fire, striking and killing the suspect.

After long careers with the LAPD, Officers Jack Storey and Joseph Ortega retired in the 1950s before passing away. Officer Felix Vera continued an esteemed career with the Department until his retirement in 1967.

The heroism that these officers displayed exemplified the highest traditions of the Los Angeles Police Department. For their selfless courage and bravery, the Purple Heart is awarded to Retired Officer Felix Vera, and posthumously to Officers Joseph Ortega and Jack Storey.