

LAFD

Stories and photos courtesy Los Angeles Fire Dept. Foundation.

LA's Bravest



Fire Dept. honors 39 for their heroism.

On Sept. 26, the LAFD, in conjunction with the Los Angeles Fire Department Foundation, honored 39 members of the LAFD at an awards luncheon. This ceremony, at the Ray Dolby Ballroom in Hollywood, highlighted their distinguished acts of bravery and courage. The following awards were presented:

Medal of Valor is awarded to a sworn member of the Department who has demonstrated bravery at great personal risk to his or her own life, beyond a doubt and clearly above the call of duty, whether on or off duty.

Medal of Merit is awarded to a sworn member, distinguished by performing an act where if not taken, would have resulted in serious injury or present imminent danger to life. The member must have demonstrated a conspicuous act of bravery with calculated personal risk to his or her own life.

Letter of Special Commendation is awarded to any department member who has performed an act during emergency or non-emergency conditions requiring initiative and/or ability worthy of recognition.

Lifetime Achievement Award is given to a retired sworn member of the department who exemplifies the true spirit of service to the community through his or her actions while on active duty and as a retired member.

Each award was based on an extraordinary and brave story. Those stories follow.

Congratulations to each outstanding LAFD member awarded. The Club thanks you for your acts of bravery and courage.

MEDAL OF VALOR

Structure Fire/Life Saved



Firefighter David Mack



Firefighter Casey Glynn
(Medal of Merit)

Firefighters David Mack and Casey Glynn were on a rescue ambulance, dispatched to a structure fire in a single-family home on 55th Street. Rescue 866 was the first and only fire department resource on scene. A fire was showing from the living room. Firefighters Mack and Glynn were informed by the dispatcher that an occupant was on the phone, trapped inside the house in a bedroom closet.

Firefighter Glynn put on his protective equipment and attempted forcible entry on the rear door. Firefighter Mack forced entry on the front door, and encountered heavy smoke and fire in the living room. He grabbed a garden hose from the yard and began to extinguish the fire in the living room. After the main body of the fire was partially extinguished, Firefighter Mack entered and initiated a search of the structure.

He crawled past the fire room. He began to search the bedroom, including the closet. After failing to find anyone, he crawled toward the rear of the house and located another bedroom, which he searched. He opened the closet door and found the trapped occupant, who had lost consciousness. Firefighter Mack removed his mask and provided air to the downed occupant. He lifted and carried her out of the house to safety with the assistance of Firefighter Glynn, who had gained entry from the rear of the house.

As they exited the house, additional personnel arrived on the scene. The rescued victim was taken to the hospital and survived this near-tragic event. If it were not for the persistent and courageous actions of Firefighter David Mack and the prompt response and teamwork of both firefighters, this victim might not have survived.

MEDAL OF VALOR

Metrolink Train Derailment



Firefighter Jesse Franco



Firefighter Kendal Koneval

On Sept. 12, 2008 a freight train crashed head-on with a Metrolink train in Chatsworth, causing derailment, fire, deaths and injuries. [This crash killed beloved Club Employee Howard Pempel. – Ed.]

When Task Force 87 arrived at the accident site, there were more than 1,000 gallons of fuel and oil on the ground and burning. While others handled extrication of passengers, Firefighters Koneval and Franco were assigned to fire attack.

Firefighters Koneval and Franco advanced a hose line to the freight locomotive, which was engulfed in fire. While fighting the fire, they heard pounding from inside the locomotive. Firefighter Koneval saw that there were people in the locomotive and attempted to remove them. He used his axe, attempting to remove the windshield from the overturned locomotive. He was able to open a softball-sized hole in the windshield. This hole showed acrid pressurized smoke. Firefighter Koneval obtained a rotary saw to cut away further at the windshield. Firefighter Franco stepped in to continue the work of removing the windshield. Both firefighters opened the window and told the train engineer to "kick like your life depends on it."

With this effort, the engineer was able to kick open the window and get out. He reported that his associate was still in the locomotive and needed to be rescued. Without hesitation, Firefighters Koneval and Franco entered the locomotive through the hole they had just cut. It was too small to get through with breathing bottles on, so they both removed the protection of their air bottles, and entered the burning locomotive. The smoke was acrid and banked down inside the train. They traveled 15 feet in search of the other engineer, found him, and pulled him to safety. If not for the actions of these firefighters, the engineers surely would have perished.

MEDAL OF MERIT

Air Operations/Life Saved



Pilot Scott Bowman



Firefighter Dan Childs



Firefighter/Paramedic
Robert Steinbacher



Firefighter/Paramedic
Joe St. Georges

On Jan. 22, 2010 the weather in Los Angeles was dismal – rainy and cloudy. A 911 call indicated that a dog was in distress in the Los Angeles River, and that a member of the community was attempting to rescue the dog. The Incident Commander requested a "hoist" rescue operation to retrieve the animal from the swift-moving water in the channel.

The rescue was performed by Pilot Scott Bowman, Firefighter Dan Childs, Firefighter/Paramedic Robert Steinbacher and Firefighter/Paramedic Joe St. Georges. The crew was dispatched to the Los Angeles River near 20th Street, where they found a large dog in distress, unable to find its way out of the water channel. The Department's Swift Water Rescue Team had been unable to reach the animal for a rescue attempt.

In addition to the terrible weather conditions, the team encountered high-power electrical lines in close proximity to the helicopter's rotor system, which added to the difficulty and stress of the rescue attempt. Considerations in this rescue included the bad weather, rising water, increased water speed, animal fatigue and the potential involvement of a civilian. The Incident Commander wanted to rescue the dog and to keep the civilian safe.

Firefighter/Paramedic St. Georges was secured to the hoist. When safety checks were completed, Firefighter Childs began lowering St. Georges from Fire 4, while Firefighter/Paramedic Steinbacher maintained situational awareness in and around the aircraft, continually communicating information to Pilot Bowman.

After the hoist cable had been extended approximately 20 feet below the aircraft, the crew members advised Pilot Bowman that the dog had moved to the left side of the channel, requiring the helicopter to reposition to a less favorable area of the channel, closer to the high power electrical wires and tower. FF/PM St. Georges was retracted back into the helicopter, and it was moved to the left side of the channel.

Then a second rescue attempt was initiated. With a rising water level and increasing water speed, FF/PM St. Georges was again lowered. He knew he would have only one attempt at the rescue. He quickly approached the dog and applied the capture strap. The dog attempted to defend itself and started aggressively biting FF/PM St. Georges' left hand. Even with the dog defending itself, sustaining an acute traumatic injury and in extreme pain, St. Georges did not release the animal, but finished applying the capture strap, securing the dog for rescue.

Firefighter Child retracted St. Georges and the dog from the water channel, and Pilot Bowman "short hauled" the pair to awaiting LAFD personnel on the 20th Street Bridge. While they were being lifted, another element of danger was added. The normal position for rescuer and victim attached to the hoist and capture strap is at a vertical attitude, with a ground tether line to prevent the rescuer and victim from spinning. In this case, due to the dynamics of the capture, St. Georges was forced to maintain a horizontal position, with no tether line, during the hoist retraction. Thus, he and the dog spun in a 360-degree uncontrolled rotation until they were grounded on the bridge.

Once the dog was handed off to LAFD personnel, FF/PM St. Georges' injury was evaluated, and he was taken for medical treatment.

Watching a dog drown or leaving the rescue in the hands of an untrained civilian are not options to those who are sworn to save lives. The crew of Fire 4 placed themselves in a dangerous situation to save the life of a family dog named Vernon.

MEDAL OF MERIT

Structure Fire Rescue



Engineer Wolfe Jantz

On Jan. 7, 2008 members of Fire Station 78 were dispatched to a structure fire in North Hollywood. The building was a two-story nightclub.

Engineer Wolfe Jantz was working on Engine 78. His crew was assigned to fire attack. He worked with water supplies, hooking up to the building sprinklers and replacing a broken firefighting line from another company. He laddered the building from the outside, as the fire was burning dangerously on the second floor.

Engineer Jantz climbed up one of the ladders he had previously thrown to the windows and broke out windows, achieving horizontal ventilation. He was unaware of the drama that was occurring inside the burning building. A firefighter inside had become disoriented and lost, and couldn't find his way out of the building. Because of the window Engineer Jantz had broken, light entered the smoke-filled building. The lost firefighter saw this as his chance to escape. He was in desperate need of rescue because he was running out of air.

Engineer Jantz saw a firefighting helmet come flying out the window, a universal sign that a firefighter needs help.

Engineer Jantz again climbed the ladder to the window and reached into the smoke. The trapped firefighter had collapsed below the window ledge. When Engineer Jantz reached into the smoke, he felt the back of the downed firefighter. He pulled him from the back of his coat up toward the window. The trapped firefighter came out of the window headfirst. Engineer Jantz was able to get him positioned correctly on the ladder and brought him to safety.

If Engineer Jantz had not completed this successful rescue, a firefighter would have been perished.

SPECIAL COMMENDATION

Saving a Colleague's Life



Firefighter Joseph Luna



Firefighter/Paramedic Ivan Covin

The members of Fire Station 61, "C" Platoon, were returning to quarters. Capt. Andre Raya was on Truck 61, when he became unresponsive and subsequently suffered cardiac arrest. The crew on Truck 61 realized that he needed immediate assistance, removed him from the cab of the truck and began resuscitation measures by administering CPR and applying the automatic external defibrillator.

Rescue Ambulance 61 responded and began assisting the members of Truck 61 by initiating advanced life support to Capt. Raya. He regained a pulse and spontaneous respiration. While en route to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, he regained consciousness and although in critical condition, was able to talk to his rescuers.

The quick and professional response that Capt. Raya's crew provided is why he is alive today. Doctors at Cedars stated that without such quick intervention and treatment, his favorable prognosis could have been tragic.



Apparatus Operator Ricardo Garcia



Engineer Christopher Aguirre



Firefighter Raice Wicklas



Firefighter/Paramedic Stanley Miner

SPECIAL COMMENDATION

Metrolink Train Derailment

On Sept. 12, 2008, Task Force, Squad and Rescue 87 responded to a train derailment. There was a head-on collision between a Metrolink commuter train and a Union Pacific freight train. The freight train was engulfed in fire and was impinging on the commuter train. The commuter train's locomotive engine was pushed back through a passenger car, killing and trapping several victims. Heavy equipment was required for extrication. The commuter train containing trapped and dying victims was lying precariously on its side, and was surrounded by more than one thousand gallons of spilled diesel fuel and motor oil.

All members of 87s were assigned to the Extrication Group, tasked with extricating trapped victims and delivering them to the Medical Group for triage treatment and transportation. Without regard for their own personal safety, they entered the unsecured commuter train and began the arduous task of freeing the trapped victims. Despite the physical demands and mental stress, they worked tirelessly for several hours to save every possible victim.

The members worked in confined spaces in tragic conditions. The split passenger car was lying partway on its side and needed to be shored. Fire was burning in the engine of the freight train. Many lives were saved during this operation.

The conspicuous actions taken by these members in rendering aid during life-saving situations, under circumstances that posed calculated risk to all members involved is in keeping with the highest traditions of the Los Angeles Fire Department.



Firefighter Angel Arellano



Firefighter/Paramedic Jeffrey Bader



Capt. William Bugg



Firefighter Adam Chitrea



Engineer Steven Domanski



Apparatus Operator Robert Garcia



Engineer Michael Gibson



Firefighter/Paramedic Mario Gonzalez



Capt. Denise Jones



Capt. Thomas Moore



Firefighter Fernando Pattison



Firefighter Peter Pulido



Apparatus Operator Eddie Tapia



Firefighter/Paramedic Victor Villa

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SPECIAL COMMENDATION

Metrolink Train Derailment

Light Force 28 was the second Truck Company on scene at the train derailment in Chatsworth. There was considerable smoke showing and more than 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel and motor oil on the ground where they were working (south side of the crash).

The members of Light Force 28 saved at least one life and removed several bodies from the commuter train. During the extrication effort they were exposed to smoke and the potential for rekindling of the fire. The passenger car was split in half and lying halfway on its side. It wasn't stabilized for nearly two hours, during which the members laddered the passenger car and lowered themselves into the car so they could remove patients and bodies.

The actions taken by these members in rendering aid during life-saving situations, under circumstances that posed calculated risk to all members involved, is in keeping with the highest traditions of the Los Angeles Fire Department.



Capt. Scott Cooper



Firefighter
Bennie Orrantia



Firefighter
James Bizzini



Firefighter
Oscar Cespedes



Firefighter
Michael Sandoval

SPECIAL COMMENDATION

Off-Duty Vehicle Accident



Capt. Kristin Crowley



Apparatus Operator
Hollyn Bullock

On the morning of June 9, 2010, LAFD Division 2 responded to a three-vehicle accident on the northbound 405 at National Boulevard.

First on-scene LAFD members were off-duty A/O Hollyn Bullock and Capt. Kristin Crowley. They were driving north on the 405 and pulled over to assist the injured civilians and CHP Motorcycle Officer Ortiz, who was in traumatic full arrest.

The accident scene presented them with significant challenges: a multi-patient, three-vehicle accident with a vehicle rollover and a patient (Officer Ortiz) ejected into the rear window of the front vehicle. With an active fuel spill, heavy traffic on the freeway and glass and debris throughout the scene, they extricated Officer Ortiz from underneath the debris in the front vehicle and initiated CPR and other measures, along with another off-duty private EMT.

When LAFD rescue vehicles arrived, A/O Bullock and Capt. Crowley made a seamless transfer of care so that Officer Ortiz could be taken to UCLA Medical Center.

Five days after the accident, Capt. Crowley and A/O Bullock visited the family and friends of Officer Ortiz at UCLA. They were moved by the outpouring of support and accolades they received for their valiant efforts. After spending time with Mrs. Ortiz, they were escorted into Officer Ortiz's hospital room, where they paid their respects and wishes for a full recovery.

Eight days later, Officer Ortiz passed away as a result of his injuries. While Officer Ortiz' death has weighed heavily on the minds of Capt. Crowley and A/O Bullock, it must be noted that their quick and decisive actions clearly gave him the best chance for survival.

SPECIAL COMMENDATION

Off-Duty Rescue



Apparatus Operator
Doak Smith

While off-duty, Apparatus Operator Doak Smith was leading a group of young hikers in the Santa Monica Mountains. Well into the hike, A/O Smith came upon a child who was a member of another group. The fifth-grade hiker went down with heat exhaustion or heat stroke. The hiker was not in good physical condition and had not hydrated properly. It was a hot day, probably more than 100 degrees, and the boy was overweight.

Doak made arrangements for his group to be supervised, while he administered aid, then carried the boy to the top of the trail. This was a hike of approximately two miles, mostly uphill. Observers say it was an incredible feat of strength, endurance and mental alertness.

The young hiker was taken in a waiting ambulance, and regained his health.

SPECIAL COMMENDATION

Off-Duty Life Saving



Engineer John Raskin

Engineer John Raskin was at an off-duty event for Cypress Elementary School in Ventura, when an eight-year-old boy unexpectedly went into full cardiac arrest while taking part in a run.

The off-duty LAFD member immediately jumped into action and performed CPR until relieved by Ventura County Fire Department Engine 24. After several shocks from the engine company's defibrillator, the child regained pulses.

The LAFD member was credited with making the difference in saving the boy's life.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Capt. James Finn (Retired)

James Finn joined the LAFD Feb. 10, 1968, as a Firefighter. He served at many stations and in various roles and was promoted to Captain in January 1978. He served an amazing 20 years at Fire Station 29. He retired from active duty Aug. 30, 2008.

Jim was a "go to" guy in the department, often a resource or mentor for younger members. His vast knowledge was obtained in part while working on special assignments and volunteer activities for the department. These numerous roles included serving on the 9-1-1 and Automatic Call Distribution Committees, working as a background investigator for new candidates and instructing others to become background investigators, nine years as a department advocate, serving on the Fallen Firefighter Memorial Committee and co-authoring the Fallen Firefighter Memorial Book.

Jim's honors include Wilshire Rotary Firefighter of the Year (2000) and LAFD Firefighter of the Year (2004). The latter is a great honor because it is awarded by the honoree's peers.

In 1998 Jim joined the newly formed LAFD Historical Society while he was still an active

member of the LAFD. This came from a deep commitment to preserving the history of the LAFD and to memorializing its fallen firefighters. Jim took on many volunteer roles, including

construction, maintenance and repairs, equipment restoration, fundraising and chairing events. From this involvement, he blossomed as a leader of the society.

In the years of Jim's participation, the LAFDHS has opened museums in old Fire Station 27 in Hollywood and in old Fire Station 36 in San Pedro, constructed a beautiful LAFD Fallen Firefighters Memorial, and is in the process of restoring old LAFD Fireboat No. 2, the *Ralph J. Scott*.

Jim has been elected to the Board of Directors of the LAFD Historical Society for seven consecutive two-year terms, has been elected as Vice President for eight consecutive terms, and to President for five consecutive terms. This is a testimony to his leadership and to the respect and affection he has earned from his colleagues at the society.

Jim has been married for 44 years to Jeannie, and they have one daughter, Jennifer. All three Finns are native-born Angelenos. Jim's brother Bill also retired as a Captain from LAFD after almost 45 years of service.



Capt. James Finn

Coming Next Month:
Alive! covers the
LAPD's annual "Above and Beyond"
ceremony, where the dept.
honors its bravest.