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Alive!



LAPD WHEN EVERY SECOND COUNTS

The LAPD's Bomb Squad handles some of the City's most perilous situations.
SEE PAGE 20

From left: Capt. John Incontro, Club Member, Commanding Officer, and Lt. Rick Smith, Commander of the LAPD Bomb Squad, in the unit's headquarters east of downtown.

Alive! photo by Sammy Lann



City Employees Club of Los Angeles
120 West 2nd Street
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LAPD



WHEN EVERY SECOND COUNTS

The LAPD's Bomb Squad handles some of the City's most perilous situations.

LAPD BOMB SQUAD



The Bomb Squad's Andros robot is operated by remote control. Here, Oscar Iturralde, Logistics Officer, 20 years of City service, pilots the apparatus out of and back into its transport vehicle.

Alive! Feature

PART 2 OF 3

This month's feature on the LAPD Bomb Squad is part two of our series covering the three elements of the department's Emergency Services Division – the Bomb Detection K9 Unit, the Bomb Squad, and the Hazardous Materials Unit. *Alive!* featured the K9 Division in November 2009, with Officer III Tom DeLuca, Club Member, on our cover. We'll finish with part three on the Hazmat team in the future.

PART 1- NOV. 2009



Information courtesy the LAPD. Photos by Summy Lam, Club Director of Marketing; John Burnes, *Alive!* editor; John Hawkins, Club CEO; and Glenn Grossman, Retired, LAPD



A display of some of the explosive device types the Bomb Squad is prepared to handle.

The primary mission of the Bomb Squad is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the members of the City's diverse communities as well as the safety of all public safety personnel who may be first responders to an explosive-related incident.

The Bomb Squad is one part of the force's Emergency Services Division. The other two parts are the Bomb Detection K9 Section and the Hazardous Materials Unit (Hazmat).

The Bomb Squad has been serving the residents of Los Angeles since 1950. The squad is comprised of 27 highly trained bomb technicians and one explosive detection canine. The Bomb Squad has responded to approximately 600 calls for service per year for the past two years. These officers are responsible for the handling, transportation and rendering safe of all explosive items located within the City.

If a suspicious item is found, the public is asked to call 9-1-1 immediately to request assistance and clear the area. They are told not to attempt to move or open the suspected item under any circumstances.

History

1950: In 1950, Officer DeWayne Wolfer, assigned to the Department's Scientific Investigation Division (SID), was probably the first officer the Department recognized as an explosive expert. He responded to calls from officers in the field when a possible explosive device was found. Eventually, 12 officers were assigned to the Firearms and Explosives Section of SID.

1973: In 1973, officers began receiving formal explosives training at the newly established FBI Hazardous Devices School at Redstone Army Arsenal in Huntsville, Ala.

1988: On May 4, 1988, the Bomb Squad received the Police Meritorious Unit Citation for assisting SWAT in an explosive breach that resulted in the successful rescue of a hostage from a barricaded suspect.

1990: In October 1990, the Bomb Squad rendered safe the largest vehicle bomb in US history at that time. The vehicle was parked in front of the IRS building in West Los Angeles.

1991: In 1991, the Bomb Squad was separated from the Firearms Section and became a full-time Bomb Squad.

2003: Since May 2003, the Bomb Squad has been working under Emergency Services Division's Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau.

Lost in the Line of Duty

On Feb. 8, 1986, Det. Arleigh McCree and Officer Ronald Ball, Bomb Squad, responded to a bomb call in North Hollywood Division. While attempting to dismantle a pipe bomb, an explosion occurred, fatally injuring both bomb technicians. These two officers were expert bomb technicians who had contributed extensively to the research and development of numerous techniques for dealing with bombs that are still being used throughout the world today.

After the untimely deaths of their husbands, Edie McCree and Ann Ball established a nonprofit memorial fund in honor of Arleigh and Ron. The Memorial Fund supplements the LAPD's efforts in providing equipment and assisting in research and training for personnel assigned to the LAPD Bomb Squad.

If you are interested in donating to this nonprofit Memorial Fund, please call the Los Angeles Police Foundation at (213) 489-4636. Contributions could be tax deductible; contact your tax adviser.

Public Safety

The Bomb Squad has maintained an aggressive Research and Development Program to develop new tools, equipment and procedures to render explosive devices safe. The tools and procedures developed by the Bomb Squad are used by civilian and military Bomb Squads throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, Russia and Australia. These equipment and technology have saved the lives of several bomb technicians while they worked on explosive devices.

The Bomb Squad continually strives to improve the quality of its contacts with the community, as well as with police and fire department personnel at the scene of an explosives-related call. The Explosives Section is dedicated to enhancing public safety at the scene of any incident involving explosives. A recent increase of high-profile cases, involving explosive devices, has generated an increase in public awareness and the need for quality equipment and training to match these new threats. The Bomb Squad has set specific goals designed to promote not only the safety of police personnel but of the public at large in dealing with explosive devices and bombings.

The Bomb Squad also maintains an active weekly training program for Department personnel in the form of roll-call training. The Bomb Squad also conducts explosive recognition and evacuation procedures seminars for community groups, private industry, and the school system.

Calls For Service

The Bomb Squad has 27 full-time Bomb Technicians who respond to all explosive-related incidents throughout the City. The Bomb Squad maintains an on-call team to respond to calls 24 hours a day. Each Bomb Technician carries essential equipment including the bomb suit, x-ray, bomb blanket and other special tools. This equipment is required to handle the variety of explosive-related incidents.

The Bomb Squad responded to 600 calls for service in 2012.

For more information, or to learn what you should do if you happen upon something that appears to be explosive, see the Bomb Squad Website:

www.lapdonline.org/emergency_services_division/content_basic_view/6527



Bomb Squad support staff includes, from left: Irene Garcia, Clerk Typist, 30 years of City service; and Teresita "Ressie" Herrera, Secretary, Emergency Services Division, 11 years of City service.



Above: Lt. Rick Smith shows Club CEO John Hawkins a model of a type of bomb used against the LAPD in a domestic terrorist attack in LA in the 1970s.



Det. Jack Blanchard, Bomb Technician, explains the block house testing area, where Bomb Techs explode small devices to research how they work.



Officer Steve Hennigan, Bomb Tech and former U.S. Marine, 26 years of City service, stands in front of his desk. "Everything on my desk has been confiscated in the City," he says.



Det. Jack Blanchard, Bomb Technician, 24 years of City service, explains the Bomb Squad Lab Electronics Room to *Alive!* editor John Burnes (center) and Club CEO John Hawkins (right). In the lab, Bomb Techs build different types of explosives to research how they work and their destructive force.

LAPD BOMB SQUAD

CONTINUED PAGE 22

LAPD

THE *ALIVE!* INTERVIEW



Capt. III John Incontro

Being Ahead of the Criminals

On March 28, *Alive!* editor John Burnes interviewed Capt. III John Incontro, Commanding Officer of the LAPD's Emergency Services Division, Club Member, 35 years of City service. The Emergency Services Division includes the Bomb Squad, the Bomb Detection K9 Section, and Hazardous Materials Unit. The interview took place at the Bomb Squad's headquarters near downtown.

After that, I make sure that we think about what are we going to need two, three and five years down the road. What are we doing toward personnel selection and expansion? Are there things that we can do and serve the community and the department better, reminding our folks that we are a support entity.

And then leadership means making sure that my folks enjoy coming to work and that they're motivated, and that we're doing the right things for the right reasons. It's a great job. I'd never had any experience in any of the areas served in Emergency Services, well, some with K9 through Metro, but it's still a very interesting place.

Where is the Bomb Squad service going? Is it becoming ever more intense and challenging?

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: We have to make sure first of all that we know what possible threats are going to come our way, and we have outstanding relationships with our federal and military partners, along with the other agencies in the area and state levels.

As for five years down the road, we have to think about whether we have enough people, are we training the people to do their job, and are they doing the job that is going to benefit the department and the City. You can look at that in a couple of different ways. Are we able to detect potential explosive devices? Are we able to render a device safely? And are we able to understand how a device is used, how it's built, and how it was going to be used so that we can successfully prosecute the offender. Five years down the road, are we using the best available technology and is technology more efficient than adding more people to the command?

I also have to think about how expensive it is to run this place. Financial resources in the City are limited and require us to make sure that we are using the funds available to us in the best possible way and that I'm not wasting money. Understanding the use of technology and the human side of operations so we can be very efficient in how we do our job. I have to make sure that we are at the leading edge of understanding of what could be used for destructive devices. How are we working with our partners in this region, for example, the relationship that we have with the FBI, is unbelievable, really outstanding. There's no comparison with any other major law enforcement agency in a major city, it's really tremendous.

We're coming up to the first anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombing. Did that incident change anything?

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: Yes. It gave us a better understanding of an incident like that. We learned from it, we trained for it, we worked toward new ways to handle it, but it opened the eyes of a lot of people. And also it reminded us of technology. The device that was used with -- the pressure cooker -- is not unknown to our military personnel. Promptly the following day our bomb techs here worked on things like that, similar devices, to try and see how they work and how to defeat them. Our research involved the whole division.

We exchanged information with Boston and the agencies involved. We have that ability because we're the Los Angeles Police Department. We have great relationships in the EOD community so we were able to pick up the phone and send some folks to Boston to understand things a little bit better.

Beyond the human tragedy, of course, of the Boston Marathon bombings, the surprising thing to me as an outsider was the identity of the people who allegedly perpetrated it. So much of the media was saying, "This clearly shows the marks of a terrorist" and it ended up being no one in any known group, although the trial is still to come. The threats can be a lot different than some might think.

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: One of the problems is that we have a short news cycle. It's not like the old days when I grew up where you waited for the evening paper or you waited for Walter Cronkite to come on to tell you what happened during the day. With this incident, some were waiting for Al-Qaeda or the Taliban or someone like that to claim responsibility for this thing and that didn't happen. What did happen is that we lost people. The important thing is to make sure that the Bomb Squad and the whole police department does our job right and makes sure that we find who's responsible and do the investigation properly so we can successfully prosecute these people. You get a lot of people making statements or opinions, but we have to sit back and look at the evidence and do our investigation to make sure that we do everything right and follow the law.

That's the nature of the Bomb Squad -- every once in awhile you might be quite visible, but when you're not, you're still very active.

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: Right. It's important to understand that people may not see us very often or that we only show up when things are really bad, but we're always here, investigating, learning, training.

We are also available to the community to provide someone to talk to a community group about what we do and how to be safe if they should encounter a device or suspicious package.

This is a great place, and the officers here are just amazing. With their technical skills, they're some of the best in the world. We're very, very fortunate to have the skill level of these men and women, and this department is fortunate to have people of their caliber. More importantly, we have to thank the department and the City for allowing us to be this good. Without their support, whether it's just moral support or budget support, we couldn't do our job right and provide the service. The City has been very good to this department.

Thank you.

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: You're welcome.

***Alive!*: Thank you for welcoming us. But before we begin our interview, let me just say -- we were here for the first time last week, and I think just two days later the Bomb Squad was called to a major incident where there were allegedly three pipe bombs found in the back of a car, and your bomb techs rendered them safe. There I am watching it on TV and I thought, "We were just interviewing those people defusing that bomb." It was pretty amazing. Lt. Rick Smith had just explained to us what the Bomb Squad is trained to do, and then, there it is on television.**

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: Right. We have officers and detectives who are bomb technicians, and they go through quite a bit of schooling through the FBI and other agencies and groups. They're the ones responsible when there is a call involving a potential explosive device. And they respond and they render it safe, they also are part of the investigation team with Criminal Conspiracy Section, Major Crimes Division that does the actual filing and follow-up and interviews, the traditional detective work. My bomb techs are able to discuss in court through their expertise, explaining how the device was made and what the potential damage and/or the potential of loss of life, things like that that.

What I saw on television, the real dramatic stuff, is only just a small portion of the important things that the Bomb Squad does.

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: Exactly. There's quite a bit of work that's done outside of the spotlight. The techs are constantly trying to be ahead of the terrorists and criminals.

You're doing your training and preparation, and all of a sudden you get that one call, and your day can really change in a hurry.

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: These guys are outstanding. I am very proud to work here with them to see what they do every day. They're always ready for anything.

Well anyway, we're getting a little ahead of ourselves. Tell me a little bit about what your responsibilities are as the captain over Emergency Services Division. Your vision necessarily has to be further ahead, and broader.

CAPT. JOHN INCONTRO: Well, the role of the captain is to make sure, first of all, that my officers are doing their job properly, that we're all following the rules and working toward the goals of the department. In this case I make sure that we're safe from terrorism and that we reduce crime, and then make sure that my folks are trained; that's a really important component in this place. We have mandates from the federal, state and local levels, making sure that we meet all of those and that the materials we use are handled safely. We have a process for all of that. When you realize that we work with high explosives and other materials, we have to make sure they're safe, and when we take things into custody we have to make sure they're safe. That's a big part of the management responsibility.



Capt. John Incontro, Commander of the LAPD's Emergency Services Division, with *Alive!* editor John Burnes.

LAPD BOMB SQUAD

On March 12, Club CEO John Hawkins and *Alive!* Editor John Burnes sat down with Lt. Rick Smith, 33 years of City service, Bomb Squad Commander and Officer in Charge of the LAPD's Hazardous Devices and Materials Section, to talk about the Bomb Squad. The interview took place at the Bomb Squad's headquarters near downtown.

Alive!: Lt. Smith, tell us the path of how you got to your position.

LT. RICK SMITH: During my career, I've been fortunate to hold a variety of positions, many of which involved specialized units. Immediately prior to the Bomb Squad, I was assigned to Air Support Division for approximately ten years.

You're a pilot?

LT. RICK SMITH: Yes, and in addition to my time at Air Support, I've worked narcotics, vice, and uniformed patrol at Wilshire, 77th, Rampart and Central. During my years in patrol, I was assigned as a training officer, a sergeant, and a watch commander.

How often does the Bomb Squad get called out?

LT. RICK SMITH: It can vary widely. In a busy year, we'll handle close to a thousand calls, many of which involve suspicious packages. Others include explosives, military ordnance, ammunition, precursor chemicals for homemade explosives, and illegal fireworks. In addition, with assistance from the Bomb Detection K-9 Section, we do a fair number of bomb sweeps in support of the United States Secret Service and the State Department for visiting dignitaries and heads of state. Our bomb sweeps also include a number of the special events that routinely occur in the City such as the Academy Awards, the Grammy Awards, etc. Our call load is often affected by events occurring throughout the nation and the world. For example, in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings last year, we saw an increase in calls for service and sweeps. The Department implemented additional security measures at significant events throughout the City, and there was a rise in calls for service from members of the public.



Lt. Rick Smith with Club CEO John Hawkins.

Give us an overview of what the unit does in general.

LT. RICK SMITH: The calls to which the Bomb Squad routinely responds include improvised explosive devices, suspicious packages, military ordnance, commercial and homemade explosives, ammunition, black or smokeless powder, and fireworks. We conduct bomb sweeps for visiting dignitaries and special events. At Los Angeles International Airport, bomb technicians are on duty seven days a week and available to respond immediately to the central terminal and the aircraft operations areas for any calls for service.

So physically there are Bomb Techs there?

LT. RICK SMITH: Yes. Our technicians at LAX partner with Bomb Detection K-9 Section provide high-visibility patrol and protective sweeps throughout the airport on a regular basis. We also work closely with personnel from the LAX Police Department, FBI and the Transportation Security Administration to enhance security at the airport. Here at the Metropolitan Bomb Squad Facility, our primary partner is the Hazardous Materials Unit (HMU). Officers assigned to HMU are primarily tasked with identifying, classifying, mitigating and safely removing any hazardous materials within the City of Los Angeles associated with criminal activity. Whether it is chemical, biological or radiological, our Hazmat Techs focus primarily on criminal activity—suspicious letters and packages, illegal dumping, unsafe transportation, unpermitted activity, unregulated sources and those kinds of things. Each member of HMU is a certified hazardous materials technician.

The Bomb Squad is a stressful job.

LT. RICK SMITH: It has its moments. Law enforcement is a risky profession, and it can be a stressful job. Look no further than the loss of Nick Lee last week [March 7], a great patrol officer who was responding to a routine call for service and was killed in the line of duty. Working the Bomb Squad comes with associated risks, as does flying for Air Support, working undercover in vice or narcotics, and patrolling the City streets. Each of us who puts on the badge understands the dangers associated with the job. Fortunately our technicians are experienced and well trained. They also have access to a significant amount of sophisticated equipment that provides an added margin of safety. Through the years, the Bomb Squad's remote and robotic capability has increased substantially, and this has significantly reduced technician time on target.

What are some of the remote advances that have been made?

LT. RICK SMITH: We have robotic capability that ranges from the LRV, a Lightweight Reconnaissance Vehicle, which is a small, single-technician deployable robot that can remotely travel down range and examine a suspect package or vehicle, to

the 39,000-pound BatCat, which is a robotic, remote-controlled telehandler manufactured by Caterpillar. It has a telescoping boom with tremendous lifting capability and an assortment of attachments designed to complete a wide range of tasks that can vary from lifting and transporting a suspected vehicle bomb to assisting SWAT in breaching a structure and locating a barricaded suspect. If there's something big and heavy that we need to investigate or move, BatCat allows us to accomplish that task while the bomb techs and SWAT operators are a safe distance away.

Emerging Threats

What is the biggest danger today? Is it dirty bombs? Is it the IEDs?

LT. RICK SMITH: That's a good question. Both traditional improvised explosive devices and radiological dispersal devices or "dirty bombs" represent a continuing threat.

What is on the top of your mind? What are the emerging threats?

LT. RICK SMITH: Along with what you've mentioned, we also deal with threats associated with homemade explosives and devices made with low-explosive fillers such as black or smokeless powder, pyrotechnic mixtures, etc. In addition to what we see on bomb calls, our partners at Major Crimes Division support us with threat analysis and investigative support. Personnel assigned to MCD are responsible for the traditional detective work that follows the discovery of an explosive device or the completion of a post-blast investigation. For example, if the Bomb Squad responds to and renders safe a pipe bomb discovered in your driveway, investigators assigned to MCD are responsible for the investigative follow-up. If there is an explosion, our technicians will conduct an on-scene post-blast investigation, locate the evidence, reconstruct the device, and provide expert testimony during any criminal proceeding. MCD detectives will work to identify the suspect, serve any necessary search warrants, make the arrest and file the case with the District Attorney. We have a strong partnership with MCD, and they also keep us up to speed on emerging threats.

However, as significant and as wide ranging as these threats can be, what we frequently encounter are fairly simple devices—those that can be made with easily acquired low-explosive fillers or pyrotechnic mixtures similar to the Boston Marathon pressure cooker bombs. Those devices had a devastating impact and as we see in the media, the instructions on how to build them are readily available to anyone with an Internet connection. Terrorist groups routinely publish and post material encouraging others to build inexpensive explosive devices and target American citizens, and a person can accomplish this task in his or her kitchen or garage. It doesn't require high explosives, a dangerous radiological isotope, or a sophisticated circuit. To me, that is the greatest threat we face.

If I saw a pressure cooker on the sidewalk of Boston I'm not sure I would recognize that as a threat, at least not before the Marathon incident.

LT. RICK SMITH: I don't think any of us would prior to the Marathon bombings. But, as you can imagine, following the news coverage of the bombings and the details of the explosive devices, we received a number of calls related to pressure cookers and similar items. Fortunately, none of them contained any explosives or other energetic materials.

I'm assuming that the military in Iraq and Afghanistan, they've been dealing with IEDs constantly, of all forms and variations. Do they share their knowledge?

LT. RICK SMITH: They do. We have a very good working partnership with the military. For example, the Marines at Camp Pendleton often invite us to participate in training at their facility, and we have also hosted them in Los Angeles. Their EOD techs provide us with a wealth of information and insight into the threats and devices they encounter overseas.

Training

What does it take to become a Bomb Tech?

LT. RICK SMITH: The Department requires that an officer complete five years of sworn service before making application for the Bomb Squad. The initial selection process involves a written application and an interview. If a candidate is placed in the outstanding pool, a background investigation follows. Once a tentative selection is made, the candidate must successfully pass a practical exam in the bomb suit, which weighs approximately 80 pounds.

I saw it.

LT. RICK SMITH: In addition, all bomb technicians must pass a medical exam and qualify for a secret clearance. Following selection, the candidate must complete a number of training courses. These include a hazmat/weapons of mass destruction first responder course provided by the Center for Domestic Preparedness in Anniston, Ala. It involves the identification, classification and mitigation of hazardous materials, and also includes practical, hands-on problem-solving tasks where the trainee functions in various levels of personal protective equipment. The Hazardous Devices School follows at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Ala., and this leads to certification as a



Lt. Rick Smith

bomb technician. The HDS training involves classroom work, explosive demolition and a series of practical "locate and render safe" exercises and exams conducted in a series of unique settings built to replicate various rural and urban residential and commercial environments.

Our technicians also complete basic and advanced post-blast training coordinated by the FBI, and there are a host of other courses available involving advanced explosive destruction techniques, military ordnance, etc.

That's a lot.

LT. RICK SMITH: It's interesting stuff.

Incidents

Can you tell us a couple of stories of the Bomb Squad in action?

LT. RICK SMITH: We handled a call last month out in the San Fernando Valley, which originated with a vehicle stop conducted by uniformed patrol officers. While conversing with the driver, the officers observed a pipe bomb in the passenger compartment of the car. During the course of the Bomb Squad's investigation, a total of three pipe bombs were robotically recovered from the vehicle and remotely rendered safe. Two of the devices exploded during the render-safe process. Fortunately, the area had been evacuated and no one was injured. A search of the vehicle resulted in the recovery of methamphetamine, and the suspect was linked to the recent detonation of other destructive devices in the area. In addition to our Bomb Techs, personnel from Bomb Detection K-9 Section, Major Crimes Division, and the involved patrol division all played an important role in that investigation.

Another incident that comes to mind occurred a number of years ago when the Bomb Squad responded to a warehouse in Van Nuys where it was believed a large quantity of dynamite was present. Uniformed patrol officers had pursued a suspect to the location; the suspect initially barricaded himself inside. Following a six-hour standoff, the suspect surrendered, and approximately 50 pounds of unstable dynamite was discovered inside. Because the dynamite could not be safely removed, the best resolution was to burn it in place. With support from the Los Angeles Fire Department, the warehouse was set on fire. This event resulted in the closure of the 405 Freeway and the complete destruction of the building.

In 2003, we responded to Felix Chevrolet in downtown Los Angeles pursuant to an ongoing investigation of an elaborate extortion plot that included a fake bomb and a demand for money. The family of the dealership's general manager had been kidnapped, and the suspects forced him to wear a vest that he thought contained a bomb and a transmitting device that would broadcast his every word to the kidnappers. Our technicians were able to determine the vest contained a hoax device, and the family members were later found handcuffed in a restroom at a storage facility in the San Fernando Valley. Fortunately, nobody was hurt.

We also support SWAT with explosive breaching [using explosives to break through walls, doors, etc.], and those calls also offer unique challenges.

You blow things up, too?

LT. RICK SMITH: We do. In addition to countercharging energetic material and destructive devices, we provide explosive breaching support for SWAT. Our technicians partner with SWAT breachers to accomplish explosive entry as needed to facilitate the resolution of some tactical situations involving barricaded suspects.

You have some pretty special people working for you.

LT. RICK SMITH: Yes. The Bomb Squad has a group of experienced, well trained and very capable technicians. Some of our personnel have military backgrounds, which include extensive knowledge of military ordnance and explosive combat breaching experience. Other technicians have specialized unit experience in a variety of Department assignments.

This diversity serves us well as the Bomb Squad maintains a number of specialized cadres, including underwater dive, explosive breaching and electronic countermeasures.

Thanks for your time, Lieutenant.

LT. RICK SMITH: You're welcome. ■

FEATURE
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LAPD



Bomb Techs during a training exercise.



Examining aircraft is an important function of the Bomb Squad. In this training exercise, Bomb Techs examine a plane for explosive devices at LAX.

TRAINING



Sgt. Michael Salinaz, the Officer in Charge of the Bomb Squad, cuts through a panel truck's wall so the squad can insert a camera and examine the truck's contents.



During a training exercise, a Bomb Tech dons a bomb suit to investigate a suspicious device.

LAPD BOMB SQUAD



The Bomb Squad's famous BatCat, for heavy-duty explosive device handling.



Members of the Bomb Squad during a training exercise at Camp Pendleton. In the background is the BatCat.



The BatCat (right) and mobile apparatus were used to investigate reports of an explosive device being placed under an LAPD vehicle. In this actual case, nothing was reported found.

HERO

The Christmas Day Miracle

The Bomb Squad's Officer Don Thompson risked his life when he encountered a car on fire with a victim inside and then took action.

Last Christmas Day, Officer Don Thompson was driving south on the 405 on his way to work as part of the LAPD Bomb Squad at LAX when he saw a northbound car hit the middle rail and burst into flames.

He took quick action. "I saw the vehicle hit the retaining wall. It veered all the way across all the lanes of the freeway," he remembers. "As soon as it hit the concrete divider, it exploded into flames. I was saying to myself, 'Is this for real?'"

It was. "As soon as it came to rest, I managed to get my vehicle over to the carpool lane and activated my lights, and I ran to the vehicle. It was a pretty substantial collision.

"At that point, there were huge flames coming out of the rear of the car, 15 or 20 feet high. You could feel the radiant heat. I was having difficulty getting the door open because of the damage. But I got it open and found one person unconscious in the driver's seat. I had to get him out, because if I didn't, he wasn't going to live. The fire was increasing and moving toward the interior."

The scene quickly grew intense. "As I was struggling to release his seat belt, some fire came up and licked me right across the right arm and burned my hand. I retracted for a second. But I said, well, it's now or never, or else he's going to burn to death. I went back in, released the belt, grabbed him and pulled him out."

And at just that moment as he pulled the victim out, "the entire car totally went up in flames. It was a whole wall of fire, and I was amazed at the timing."

At that point, a couple of Good Samaritans had also stopped. "They stepped towards us, and they grabbed him from me and pulled him over the center divider. I was disoriented because

of the heat, and one of them pulled me over the divider, too. There's a period of a few seconds that I don't remember what happened."

One day a few months later, the victim, who survived, called Officer Thompson. "He said he had had a medical reaction to his medicine, and that he didn't remember any part of the incident at all."

Officer Thompson saved his life. "Yes. It's strange to think about it, but if I had been driving just a little bit faster or maybe 15 seconds earlier in my travels, I would have passed by, and there's no way I would have been able to get my truck over to the car pool lane. Either he would have been burned, or I would have been burned more than I was, or something very bad would have happened to me. The timing was unbelievable."

Timing ... and training ... and courage ... are what heroes are made of.

"People have said, 'You know, you're a hero,'" Officer Thompson continued. "But in my heart, I don't feel that I'm a hero. I did something good. I protected someone. Yes, I put my life in jeopardy, but just helping someone – everyone should do that. Everyone's okay, so I'm happy."

"Everyone should be more selfless," he believes. "It seems that people are becoming a bit more selfish, caring about what they can get for themselves, as opposed to doing what's best for people in general. I totally respect people for being selfless." ■



Officer III Don Thompson, LAPD Bomb Squad, 26 years of City service.



Members of the LAPD Emergency Services Division (ESD), from left:

- | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Lt. Raymond Garvin, Officer in Charge, Bomb Detection K9 Section | Officer Mark Richardson, Bomb Squad | Sgt. Randy Goens (behind Huerstel), Bomb K9 | Officer Craig Higa, Hazmat | Officer Oscar Iturralde, Logistics |
| Officer Eric Young, Bomb K9 | Officer Michael Wang, Bomb Squad | Officer Mark Sauvao, Bomb K9 | Officer Karen Pineda, Hazmat | Officer Stefanie Alcocer, Bomb Squad |
| Sgt. Mitchell Lambdin (behind Officer Young), Bomb K9 | Leticia Chaure, Clerk Typist, Bomb Squad | Sgt. Michael Salinaz, Officer in Charge, Bomb Squad | Officer Donald Thompson, Bomb Squad | Officer Leslie Salinas, Bomb K9 |
| Lt. Richard Smith, Officer in Charge, Hazardous Devices/Materials Section | Officer Kenneth Thatcher, Bomb K9 | Officer Donna Odle, Bomb K9 | Officer James Davis, Hazmat | Officer Edwin Dominguez, Bomb K9 |
| Det. Gary Borg, Bomb Squad | Irene Garcia, Clerk Typist, Bomb Squad | Capt. John Incontro, Commanding Officer, ESD | Officer Matthew Sieber, Hazmat | Officer Lauraine Harrington, Bomb K9 |
| Rozine Kalaidjian, Management Aide, ESD | Det. Jack Blanchard, Bomb Squad | Officer Thomas Davoren, Bomb Squad | Sgt. George Chen, Officer in Charge, Hazmat | Officer Alberto Franco, Bomb K9 |
| | Officer Jeffrey Ennis, Logistics | Officer John Long, Bomb K9 | Officer John Borquez, Bomb K9 | Officer Joseph Getherall, Bomb K9 |
| | Teresita Herrera, Secretary, ESD | | Officer Richard Nagatoshi, Logistics | Officer Christian Christensen, Bomb Squad, with his K9, Rocco. |
| | Officer Anthony Huerstel, Bomb Squad | | Officer Steven Kuranishi, Bomb Squad | |