



LOS ANGELES COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Special Enforcement Bureau celebrates 60 years



BY JOHN MONTENEGRO

What humbly began in March 1958 as a highly mobile unit capable of immediate response to natural or man-made disasters, saturation patrol in high-crime areas or other unusual situations, has developed into one of the most tactically diverse units in law enforcement. It began as the Special Enforcement Detail, with one lieutenant, three sergeants, 10 deputies and one stenographer in order to, as then-Sheriff Eugene Biscailluz put it, “reinforce local sheriff’s stations in emergencies or when more men are needed in times of stress.”

In 1966, at the very onset of the SWAT concept, the detail began to configure anti-sniper teams, increasing in size and mission capability to become the Special Enforcement

Bureau (SEB) in February 1967. Over the past 60 years, the Special Enforcement Bureau has grown, adapted, merged and created new concepts to continually provide cutting-edge service to the citizens of Los Angeles County. The history of SEB’s first 50 years was captured exceptionally well in the two-volume book “Rulers of the Night” by John Kolman, founder of the NTOA.

Today’s SEB is much larger and far more capable than in its early beginnings. Now in its sixth decade, SEB is comprised of five unique details with over 100 sworn personnel assigned to confront some of today’s most complex law enforcement problems. Each detail has its own specific mission, equipment needs, training

cycles and applicant requirements; however, it is the innovative culture and integration between the details that truly sets SEB apart from other tactical units.

SPECIAL ENFORCEMENT DETAIL (SED), 1958

SED is the 48-person, full-time, special weapons team tasked with high-risk warrant service, barricaded suspect resolution, hostage rescue, dignitary protection and maritime operations. SED on average handles 220 to 260 tactical operations per year for the department’s 42 contract cities, unincorporated county areas and mutual aid requests from other agencies. Additionally, SED conducts



training for other LASD members, personnel from a wide array of outside law enforcement agencies and military personnel. When not actively deployed on a tactical operation, SED members continuously train on a variety of core SWAT skills that include maritime interdiction and tactical explosive breaching.

EMERGENCY SERVICES DETAIL (ESD), 1966

Initially conceived as a full-time search and rescue unit, the Emergency Services Detail (ESD) quickly morphed into one of the most unique assignments within law enforcement. ESD members were the first in the country to achieve certified paramedic rating for full-time law enforcement officers, and that practice continues today to include ESD supervisors.

ESD personnel provide Tactical Emergency Medical Support to SEB Special Weapons Teams and to outside agencies upon request. Addition-

ally, they conduct mountain search-and-rescue operations, underwater search and recovery, and swift water rescue operations for the Sheriff's Department. ESD paramedics and crew chiefs staff the department's Air Rescue 5 Super Puma helicopters.

The ESD members on AIR-5 can provide rapid deployment of tactically trained and equipped personnel to active shooter/hostile events and other emergency incidents throughout Los Angeles County and beyond. The ability to traverse the highly congested 4,000-square-mile county of Los Angeles through the air provides a tactical response that would otherwise be significantly delayed by ground transport.

CANINE SERVICES DETAIL (CSD), 1980

In 1980, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department began a pilot program with police service dogs. Since that time, Canine Service Detail members and their part-

ners have developed and proved invaluable in not only providing assistance on high-risk searches for patrol operations but also as completely integrated members on the Special Weapons Team.

CSD members complete approximately 400 searches per year and respond to all Special Weapons Team activations. All CSD K9s are single-purpose apprehension dogs with one exception. CSD has the only tactically certified bloodhound program in California. The tactical bloodhound program allows for the search for high-risk suspects who may have escaped containment and are deemed too dangerous for a normal bloodhound team.

CSD hosts a 30-hour Canine/SWAT integration course twice a year. Participants come from a multitude of law enforcement agencies and U.S. military units. CSD teams are capable of rapid response with other SEB details during active shooter or other emergency scenarios and

possess the ability to fast rope and/or rappel with their K9 partners.

ARSON-EXPLOSIVE DETAIL (AED), 1961/SEB 2015

What began as a single suspicious fire investigator in 1923 has grown to one of the most innovative and advanced Arson-Explosive Details in the nation. Each member is trained and holds expertise in arson investigation and also is certified as a hazardous device (bomb) technician. All AED members attend the six-week FBI Hazardous Device Technician School in Huntsville, Alabama. Additionally, all AED members are National Fire Academy-trained arson investigators. These personnel responded to more than 950 arson calls in 2017 alone. AED members also must graduate from the 80-hour CA POST-Certified Basic SWAT school hosted by SED.

In 1999, AED created the explosive K9 detection program. Eight handler teams provide daily responses to outside agencies, both federal and local, for dignitary protection and bomb sweeps. In 2017, AED participated in nearly 80 protection sweeps of various venues. AED also employs an accelerant detection K9 to assist AED or other public safety investigators in determining the origin and causes of fire.

In 2004, AED developed an Underwater Explosive Dive Team that combines public safety divers and bomb technicians as part of a Homeland Security mission that includes port security, hull searches of suspected vessels and explosive recovery. This unit is in joint cooperation with the LAPD and FBI.

AED members train as adjunct members of the Special Weapons Teams for highly dynamic, fast attack scenarios of booby trapped locations, hostage rescue and high-threat scenarios.

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DETAIL (HAZMAT), 2003

The HazMat Detail morphed from a Los Angeles County counterterrorism task force in 2003 after the 9/11 and Amerithrax attacks. As the national concern for weapons of mass destruction threats increased, so did the requests for law enforcement officers who could operate in a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) environment.

IN TIMES OF CRISIS, IT IS THE INTEGRATION BETWEEN THESE DETAILS THAT TRULY SETS SEB APART AS A SPECIAL UNIT, CAPABLE OF PROVIDING A VAST ARRAY OF CAPABILITIES IN ANY GIVEN SCENARIO.

The HazMat Detail is responsible for preventing and responding to criminal or terrorism incidents suspected of involving CBRN weapons. All HMD personnel are certified California State Training Institute (CSTI) Hazardous Materials Techni-

cian/Specialists (240 hours), Hazardous Materials Technical Reference Specialists (40 hours) and Assistant Safety Officers (24 hours).

The HazMat Detail conducts both prevention and response operations which entail different training and equipment. HMD daily prevention operations consist of CBRN sweeps and/or choke points at critical infrastructure and transportation venues as well as smuggling routes, including maritime operations. Additional prevention missions include special events, dignitary protection and radiation source security operations.

INTEGRATION AS A TEAM

As a standalone, each SEB detail has gained national recognition in their respective fields of expertise. They individually reflect the department-wide professionalism and capability of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. In times of crisis, it is the integration between these details that truly sets SEB apart as a special unit, capable of providing a vast array of capabilities in any given scenario. The ability to willingly share information, overlap responsibilities and have an open mind to other details' solutions can be rare in the tactical community. It takes courage and maturity to bridge the gaps between divergent interests and build operational trust in one another's skillset.

One of the Sheriff Department's greatest strengths is the continuous interaction with other agencies, from the academy recruit level, to regional in-service training, to massive joint operations involving mutual-aid

requests. The close relationships formed with outside law enforcement personnel attending one of SEB's schools, or during schools in which we are students, help build a level of cooperation that is critical in today's complex environment. I have personally reached out to members of LAPD's D-Platoon (SWAT), San Diego Sheriff's Department (SED), Oklahoma State Police and countless others with questions on tactics, equipment, training or incident debriefs. In return, the members of SEB regularly respond to inquiries

from various agencies regarding our own experiences. Rivalry between agencies is great for recruitment, on the softball field, or during a 120-mile relay race through the desert; however, our best chance of success at saving lives is through integration and cooperation.

Every detail at SEB is driven to improve, refine and develop new concepts to increase the probability of operational success. It is this willingness to "find a better way" and work in concert with others that keeps SEB on the cutting edge. SEB personnel

strive to provide an example for others through leadership, training, education and the highest standards of professionalism.

The unit has changed dramatically over the last 10 years since our 50th anniversary, and you can bet it will continue to change to meet the emerging threats of the next decade.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deputy John Montenegro has been with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department since 1994 and assigned to the Special Enforcement Bureau (SWAT) since 2010.

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