

LASD's airborne active shooter response

By Jack Ewell



LASD Air Rescue 5 during a patrol flight over Los Angeles.



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On January 30th, 2007, robbery suspects were speeding through the freeways of Los Angeles County with Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) deputies in pursuit. An LASD patrol helicopter followed overhead and called the pursuit. The incident was routine until one of the patrol cars reported that the suspects were actively shooting from the vehicle.

This change in events initiated the response of an LASD Air Rescue helicopter to the area to monitor the pursuit. The helicopter is staffed

by special weapons-trained deputies who are paramedics. The pursuit ended with a collision on a crowded street as the LASD Air Rescue helicopter landed nearby. Special weapons-trained paramedic deputies joined on-scene patrol deputies in chasing a suspect into a crowded business. The suspect grabbed several hostages, but quickly released them when confronted by the pursuing deputies, who took him into custody. The paramedic deputies moved the hostages to safety and assessed them for injuries, ending a successful utilization

of the LASD's airborne active shooter response.

Developed to counter the active shooter threat on school grounds and other public areas, this capability has been successfully utilized on numerous occasions, including suppressing an active shooter who had mortally wounded an LASD deputy and pinning down several federal agents with gunfire.

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port a 20-person special weapons team with full gear. They have hoist, rappel and fast rope capabilities, and have a maximum response speed of 166 miles per hour. They have an unrefueled range of 500 miles. The helicopters are certified advanced life support air ambulances. They are equipped with an interoperable com-

munications system that allows the crew to communicate with all LASD stations, fire department personnel, other local and federal law enforcement agencies, the L.A. County Medical Alert Center and all L.A. County trauma hospitals.

The Sheriff's Air Rescue 5 program requires that one air rescue helicopter be staffed by a five-person crew on five-minute alert seven days a week. The on-duty air rescue helicopter stands by at a federal facility located near the center of Los Angeles County to facilitate a rapid response to any location in the county.

The five-person crew consists of a pilot, a co-pilot and three crew members. The pilots and co-pilots are LASD deputy sheriffs. They all have prior patrol station experience, prior patrol helicopter experience, commercial pilot licenses and extensive flight experience.

The non-pilot crew consists of LASD Special Enforcement Bureau Emergency Services Detail (SEB/ESD) deputies and sergeants. They are special weapons-trained paramedics and rescue specialists who are armed with scoped automatic weapons.

The program is designed to provide a rapid rescue helicopter response to a variety of rescue or tactical incidents including active shooter situations, quickly enough to assist responding patrol deputies in stopping the shooter and mitigating injury to victims, bystanders and responding public safety personnel. En route to an incident, rescue helicopter personnel will pick up additional special weapons team members who are readily available for transport. Active shooter incidents are usually over very quickly, often within 5 to 10 minutes, therefore, the rescue

helicopter can respond directly to the incident if needed. If no landing zone is available, personnel can be inserted via fast rope, rappel or hoist. They will supplement first responder patrol personnel by providing automatic weapon capabilities and paramedic support.

In addition to assisting in searching for and stopping the active shooter, the ESD air rescue crew is capable of providing advanced life support under fire. If the incident turns into a barricade or hostage situation, ESD air crew personnel will remain on scene to coordinate ground activities, provide EMS, crisis entry team support, intelligence gathering and/or limited long-rifle capability pending the arrival of a full special weapons team. Additional special weapons team members may be picked up and deployed via the rescue aircraft to reduce the response time. In the event of multiple injuries, the air rescue crew can coordinate with the Los Angeles County Medical Alert Center and direct responding EMS personnel to transport injured victims to pre-designated trauma hospitals. The air rescue helicopter is capable of transporting multiple patients and can extract patients via hoist if no landing zone is available.

In summary, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department airborne active shooter response capability is a versatile tool that may be utilized with the combined resources of several units within the Department to aggressively address the active shooter problem that has confronted departments across the nation. It is integrated into school response plans throughout the county and has proven its worth on several occasions since its inception. ◀

About the author

Jack Ewell is a sergeant and paramedic diver with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. He has been assigned to the Special Enforcement Bureau for approximately 21 years and has held the positions of team leader and Emergency Services Detail supervisor.



Top - LASD Air Rescue 5 conducting injured officer rescue training in East Los Angeles.

Bottom - LASD Air Rescue 5 in a demonstration of an officer-down rescue at the International Chiefs of Police Law Enforcement Education and Technology exposition.