



LASD Maritime Homeland Security Program

By Jack Ewell

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) Office of Homeland Security Division has been deeply involved in the planning and implementation of homeland security measures for the county of Los Angeles. The latest program to debut is the result of a two-year collaborative effort between the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) and Emergency Operations Bureau. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Ocean Rescue Boat program began service in August of this year and has already proven its worth as a program with very unique tactical capabilities.

The Ocean Rescue program is operated by the SEB's Emergency Services Detail. These deputies are all trained special weapon team members, divers and paramedics.

The program was designed to provide a maritime LASD homeland security presence covering the 80 miles of Los Angeles

County coast and the more than 800 square miles of open ocean within Los Angeles County, including the islands of Catalina and San Clemente. The homeland security boat is also capable of providing emergency medical services and conducting disaster, chemical/biological detection and mitigation and dive operations.

The boat was constructed from the ground up to suit LASD's homeland security requirements. It is a unique vessel, built to stringent United States Navy specifications. It was built with high-tech measures that make it flame- and projectile-resistant and is equipped with a crew-served weapon system. It is fitted with an air collar that functions as a bumper system for ship boarding operations and also serves as an emergency flotation system if the hull is

breached. The boat has a comprehensive communications system that allows the crew interoperable communications with the Los Angeles Police and Fire Departments along with all other police and fire departments that border the coastal areas of Los Angeles County. It has federal, state and military communications capability and can communicate with the Los Angeles County Medical Alert Center and all Los Angeles County-based trauma hospitals.

With a maximum cruising speed of 40 knots, the boat has a range of several hundred miles and has the capability of staying on scene at an incident for up to one week. It generates its own electricity and has cooking, fresh water and refrigeration facilities in addition to sleeping quarters. Another



unique aspect of the boat is that it is a Los Angeles County Department of Health Services-certified Advanced Life Support ambulance. As such, there is equipment available for the crew to provide medical treatment for issues ranging from minor injuries to severe cardiac and/or trauma injuries. The boat is equipped to transport injured persons in a climate-controlled environment.

The homeland security boat is designed as a dive platform, capable of supporting up to 15 divers. It has a large dive tank storage capacity and a hot and cold water decontamination system that can be used for divers or accident victims exiting contaminated waters. The boat supports surface-supplied hard hat diving and sonar scanning to help locate victims or objects under water.

Various intelligence agencies have indicated that the Los Angeles and Long Beach port area is a prime terrorist target. It is the largest port area in the United States and the surrounding vicinity is heavily popu-

lated. In addition to the human toll that a port incident could take, it is estimated that a terrorist incident occurring at the entrance to the port or in the port itself would cost the United States economy one billion dollars a day.

To counter this threat, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has combined efforts with the United States Coast Guard, Los Angeles Port Police and the Long Beach Police Department to implement a very robust, proactive port and coastal security program that includes searching high interest vessels before they enter the heavily populated ports.

U.S. Coast Guard and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department intelligence officers determine high interest vessels through the use of a threat matrix. This matrix uses ship origin, cargo, crew members, previous port calls and other indicators to designate high interest vessels, which are then identified for pre-port entry searches in county waters outside of the port.

A joint boarding team consisting of LASD Special Enforcement Bureau Emergency Services Detail, Arson/Explosive canine detail, HazMat detail and Coast Guard members are transported via the LASD Ocean Rescue boat. The high interest vessel is intercepted outside of the port in the area of the Los Angeles County ship anchorage area. The LASD boat crew notifies the high interest vessel via marine radio of their intent to board the ship.

The boarding team boards the vessel, detains the ship's crew and inspects passports and shipping documentation. Using sophisticated radiation detection equipment and trained explosive dogs, LASD personnel check the ship for conventional and dirty bombs. Detection equipment is carried in backpacks and is set up to detect two types of radiation: neutron and gamma. Neutron radiation is indicative of nuclear bomb-grade materials. Gamma rays are put out by a variety of isotopes. Dirty bombs use isotopes that disperse gamma radiation.

These packs are the same packs used by Department of Defense Special Operations personnel to search out and detect illicit radiation. The packs work well searching containers and large areas. They are sensitive enough to overcome the shielding of the metal containers.

Emergency Services Detail divers also periodically conduct hull searches. The ship is then cleared to continue into the port where additional security measures are in place and enforced by the U.S. Coast Guard, L.A. Port Police and Long Beach Police.

Additional missions being conducted by the Sheriff's Ocean Rescue crew include daily LAX flight path and coastline patrols, Catalina cruise ship and Catalina Express security checks and dives, coastal critical infrastructure patrols and dive accident investigations.

The addition of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department homeland security boat program, with its extremely unique capabilities, has greatly increased the port and coastal security of the County of Los Angeles for the residents of Los Angeles County and the entire region. ◀◀

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 20 years and held the positions of team leader and Emergency Services Detail supervisor.



(top) LASD Emergency Services Detail deputy climbing a rope ladder onto a cargo ship to conduct search.
(left) LASD boat alongside a cruise ship following a security inspection.