



# California statewide

**D**ubbed “Golden Guardian/Port Protector,” more than 3,000 California state and local first responders participated in a large-scale homeland security exercise. Combining the state exercise “Golden Guardian” and the federal exercise “Port Protector,” this was a full-scale training which included instruction at the nation’s various port complexes. In California it took place in Oakland/San Francisco, Los Angeles/Long Beach and San Diego. The training event was overseen by the Department of Homeland Security. The goal of the event was to see how well various local, state and federal agencies could work together to respond to simulated terrorist attacks at the nation’s port complexes. The Los Angeles/

Long Beach Port complex is the nation’s largest and a vital center for the nation’s commerce. Due to the importance of the Los Angeles/Long Beach Port complex it is also a high-profile terrorist target.

Some of the agencies that participated were United States Coast Guard, Long Beach Police, Customs and Border Protection, Long Beach Fire, Los Angeles City Fire, Los Angeles Police Department, California Highway Patrol, Los Angeles Port Police, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Port of Los Angeles, Port of Long Beach, members of private industry and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department.

A portion of the exercise involved a group of role-playing terrorists who con-

ducted a realistic Mumbai-style attack in downtown Long Beach. Long Beach Police Department SWAT officers responded in force, evacuated residents in danger and quickly repelled the attack. A small element of terrorists fled the downtown Long Beach area via a small boat, through the Long Beach Port complex. Due to the nature of the attack, various agencies were notified immediately and elements of the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department (LASD) were placed on standby, including Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB), Aero Bureau, Emergency Operations Bureau (EOB) and Marina Del Rey Station boat unit. Because the attack and pursuit of the terrorists involved the port complex, the U.S. Coast





# counterterrorist exercise

*By Steve Doucette*

Guard was notified and a command post was established at its LA/Long Beach sector headquarters in San Pedro.

As the event continued to unfold, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department units repositioned to better intervene if needed. EOB personnel established a command post at the Coast Guard base along with the following SEB elements: Ocean Rescue 1 (OR1) (45-foot Fast-Response Boat) with one tactical team; AIR-5 (H-3 Sea King) with one tactical team; AIR-4 (Eurocopter ASTAR) with one long rifle team; at the nearby Los Angeles Port Police dock, there were Ocean Rescue II (ORII) (55-foot fast response boat) with two tactical teams and two Marina Del Rey Station boats (MDRI and

MDRII) each with SEB long rifle teams; and at the Sheriff's Department's Aero Bureau in Long Beach, an AIR-5A (H-3 Sea King) with one SEB long rifle team and one command and control aircraft.

As Los Angeles Sheriff's Department units waited on standby, the escaping terrorists met up with a larger ship anchored just outside of the port complex. In response to this intelligence, AIR-4 launched for a flyover and confirmed the location of the smaller terrorist boat alongside a large (approximately 300-foot) ship, in between the Los Angeles and Long Beach Port complexes. With this information Los Angeles Sheriff's Department surface assets (Ocean Rescue I and II, MDR I and II) and Coast

Guard vessels quickly responded to contain the terrorist vessels.

The large terrorist ship used in the training exercise is known as the "ATLS" (Advanced/Aerial Training Live-Fire Ship). This vessel is 265 feet long and 26 feet wide, complete with super-structure, bridge, engine room/aft-steering, open middle deck for fast rope/rappel insertions and a forward two-story shipping container steel structure with an above and below deck shoothouse. The ATLS provides for low free board assaults and 22-foot hook points for ladder climbing. The ATLS is a commercially owned ship that was specifically built for maritime exercises conducted by military and law enforcement units. The ATLS is staffed by



a civilian crew trained in the use of Simunitions®, and with their intimate knowledge of the ship, they made a formidable opposing force of would-be terrorists.

With a unified command established at the Coast Guard base, it was decided that LASD and a U.S. Coast Guard tactical team (MSST, or Maritime Safety Security Team) would be the joint lead tactical elements to deal with the two terrorist vessels. With the two terrorist vessels contained, LASD tactical teams began to plan for an assault. The smaller vessel that had originally fled from the Long Beach attack was assigned to a U.S. Coast Guard tactical team.

LASD tactical teams then focused on the ATLS ship. To aid in gathering intelligence, information was relayed to the command post where another LASD tactical team was overseeing assault planning. AIR-4 was able to provide real-time high-definition downlink video to the command post which was shown on a large flat screen display. Additionally, each tactical team on the Ocean Rescue boats were equipped with a handheld smart device which allowed the same HD streaming downlink video to be seen.

Maritime assault is a mission for which LASD SEB plans and trains. This specialized mission is unlike any other and planning must account for such things as weather, sea states, specialized equipment, specialized personnel with expertise in explosives, IEDs and WMD. Resources must be available and on scene. Rules of engagement and contingency planning take on new meaning when dealing with terrorists and an opposed boarding of a vessel in the open ocean.

Sticking to the fundamentals of maritime assault, critical points were identified (bridge, engine room/aft steering). ORI was assigned the task of planning for, assaulting and gaining control of the engine room/aft steering of the ATLS. ORII was assigned the task of gaining control of the bridge. AIR-5, with one tactical team, was designated to fast-rope onto the ATLS with the responsibility of the forward steel container structure. AIR-5A and AIR-4 would



provide long rifle overwatch and continue to provide a video downlink of the operation. Each Ocean Rescue boat was staffed with an experienced coxswain specializing in boat handling for ship boardings/assaults, a rescue swimmer, M240B crew-served weapon, long rifle team and assault element with tactical medics. ORII carried two assault elements with one designated as a quick reaction team to support the bridge and engine room teams if they needed additional support. The additional team on ORII also was responsible for bringing any support gear (breaching tools, boarding/climbing gear, technology, etc.) to support the overall operation. Also on ORII were an SEB K9, EOB Hazmat and Arson/Explosive (bomb tech) elements available to help clear the remainder of the ship after the initial assault and to deal with any potential IEDs, booby traps or WMD.

Based on the available intelligence and what the teams were able to observe, a basic assault plan was devised. Each element was briefed on their responsibilities and objectives. The unified command was briefed on

the LASD assault plan. Rules of engagement were outlined, assault elements readied their specialized maritime assault gear (light-weight water helmets, tactical flotation, weapons, sensors, etc.), routes to objectives reviewed, radio frequencies established, assault element coordination reviewed, follow-on forces identified and staged, contingencies planned for and the overall sequence of the assault reviewed.

As the plan was being reviewed, the small terrorist vessel involved in the initial attack in Long Beach pulled away from the ATLS ship and began to head out to open sea at high speed. This contingency was planned for and the Coast Guard MSST team and AIR-4 moved to intercept. AIR-4 provided long rifle support and was able to eliminate any terrorists on the deck of the small boat as the MSST team made an approach and successful boarding. The MSST team quickly gained control of the boat and relayed that information. Additionally, the MSST team was able to interrogate some of the terrorists they captured and indicated the ATLS was going to be used as a weapon



and driven into the port to cause as much damage as possible and shut down port operations. The unified command, fearing the ATLS ship could be used for a ramming attack within the port complex, ordered LASD to initiate its assault. Additional Coast Guard vessels moved in to contain the terrorist ship.

The updated intelligence indicated there were six terrorists on board the ATLS; their location on board the ship was unknown. AIR-5 and AIR-5A were orbiting nearby after the small terrorist boat attempted to escape and responded to the target location. All of the air assets (AIR-5, AIR-5A, AIR-4 and a command and control airship) then moved into position over the ATLS to provide overwatch as the surface assault began. AIR-4 also continued to provide live streaming HD video to the command post. The most hazardous part of maritime assault was the actual boarding from boat to boat. At that critical point the assault teams were exposed and concentrating on moving

from the assault boats to the target. Two LASD SEB assault boats made contact on the rear port side and on the rear starboard side of the ATLS ship. Each assault element had to negotiate a small freeboard to get to the ATLS main deck at the stern. The air support elements providing overwatch support along with the long rifle teams on each of the boats were able to deny the exterior of the ATLS to the terrorists and thus allow the assault elements to successfully board the ATLS.

The bridge team from ORII quickly began moving to its objective via an exterior ladder that led directly to the bridge deck. Trailing elements picked up hatches that led to the various decks as the lead elements continued to the bridge. Once in position the bridge team was able to gain entry to the bridge and take down the lone terrorist there. The engine room team from ORI simultaneously gained access to the engine room and aft steering, via two deck hatches, located just forward of their boarding posi-

tion. The team quickly entered the engine room/aft steering section and secured them both. The bridge team established two long rifle elements on the bridge wings looking forward. The bridge team coordinated with the engine room team and cleared the super structure down to the main deck. The engine room team methodically cleared all possible hiding locations in the engine room without finding any other terrorists. The third assault element from ORII simultaneously secured the rear deck area and established a stronghold with additional assets (K9, bomb techs and Hazmat).

As the bridge and engine room were secured, AIR-5 maneuvered into position over the main deck of the ATLS and one team fast-roped onto the deck. This fourth team quickly moved to the steel container structure and held their position as AIR-5 moved out and took up its original overwatch position. With the element of surprise gone and the ATLS under LASD control and unable to be moved by the terrorists, time

was on the team's side to deal with the steel container structures. The container team called for additional support elements from the aft end of the ATLS including SEB's technology tools.

The steel container structure was viewed no differently than a house with several barricaded suspects. Intel to that point indicated there were no hostages on board. Although explosive devices, WMD, etc. had not been ruled out, none had been detonated since the assault had started. The fourth team decided to work the problem of clearing the steel container structures from the outside as much as possible. Hazmat deputies were able to use their advanced sensor equipment to test the atmosphere throughout the ship and prior to the teams entering the interior of the ship. Chemical agents were deployed, and the use of fiber optics/pole cameras/listening devices used to locate the remaining terrorists. The methodical covert movement style of LASD SEB frustrated the terrorists who seemed to be expecting the fast-moving military style of assault. The terrorists who refused to surrender left their hiding positions and in a futile attempt attempted to bring the attack to LASD SEB. One terrorist was eliminated by one of the long riflemen from the bridge deck who had a clear view deep into the steel container structure while the entry element was still outside. Some of the terrorists were overcome by chemical agents and

surrendered. The entry element cleared the two-story structure using well-established, proven clearing techniques and the use of K9s. The entry team methodically cleared the two-story structure, which was a vast interconnected 360-degree environment.

The top of the two-story structure had one additional container (third level) that was isolated from the remainder of the structure. The team decided to clear this top remaining area prior to continuing to the below deck portion. ORI moved along the port side of the ATLS and a specialized carbon fiber rigid assault ladder was offloaded. Two lead climbers placed the ladder and ascended the two-story steel container structure. Additional elements ascended and together cleared the isolated third level.

With the above deck portion of the container structure cleared, the team began its slow methodical clearing of the below deck portion. This section of the ATLS ship was a complete shoothouse environment with plywood walls that were moveable, allowing for different configurations. Additionally, there were no exterior light sources. Interior lighting had been disabled. The use of NVGs, IR pole cameras and K9s allowed the team to successfully clear the entire below deck section which covered approximately half of the ATLS. With the clearing operation finished, the ATLS ship and captured terrorists were turned over to follow-on elements.

Maritime assault is one of the most demanding of tactical missions for any tactical team. LASD SEB's use of proven tactics, integration of specialized assets (air support, K9, bomb techs, Hazmat), and innovative use of specialized gear/technology allowed the team to successfully gain control and subsequently clear a hostile ship with an experienced opposing force.

Protection of the ports, as well as the people and the environment, was a priority for all the agencies involved. By working closely together during the training exercise, agencies had the chance to use techniques that allowed for a maximum response with a minimum delay, and at the end of the day produce a successful outcome. «

### About the author

**Deputy Steve Doucette** is a former Marine and has been a Los Angeles Deputy Sheriff for 21 years. He has been assigned to the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) for 8 years. He is an SEB special weapons team member, tactical paramedic and public safety SCUBA diver. He is also a rescue flight crew member on LASD Sea King rescue helicopters.

**Deputy Doucette has also written an article on LASD's new tactical/medical vehicle which appears on page 56 of this issue.**

