

SAINT PAUL POLICE BOMB DOGS AT RINGSIDE DURING THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

By Officer Mark Ficcadenti, SPPD Police Canine Unit

Who would have thought that bomb dog handlers would get a ringside seat to the biggest show in town? Well, that is exactly what the bomb dog handlers of the Saint Paul Police Canine Unit and their bomb tech brethren got at the Republican National Convention held in Saint Paul, Minnesota during the week of September 1-4, 2008. From assisting the bomb squad in disrupting a backpack deemed suspicious while throngs of demonstrators looked on, to members of our team getting caught up in a stampede of demonstrators looking to escape police action, it all proved to be an exciting week.

Long days and even longer nights were pretty much the order for the six explosive canine teams of the Saint Paul Police Canine Unit detailed to the Republican National Convention site. The responsibility of our dog teams was to support the Joint Hazardous Explosives Response Teams (J.H.E.R.T.) of which there were two, J.H.E.R.T. 1 and J.H.E.R.T. 2. Team one (J.H.E.R.T. 1) was located inside the secured pedestrian perimeter and partnered with two canine teams, SPPD Officers Jason Brodt and K9 Nitro and Brady Harrison with K9 Sully. Team 2 (J.H.E.R.T. 2) was responsible for all areas outside the secured perimeter and had four canine teams attached; SPPD Sgt. Paul Dunnom and K9 Sue, and SPPD Officers David Pavlak and K9 Chico, Nicole Rasmussen and K9 Chase, Mark Ficcadenti and K9 Shadow. J.H.E.R.T. teams were tasked with responding to all calls regarding unattended, suspicious packages or devices. These teams would determine the course of action by requesting Render Safe Procedure Teams (R.S.P) bomb squad personal, or would resolve the situation by on-scene investigation. After getting a dispatch from the Bomb Management Center (B.M.C.) our canine officers would escort the teams to the



locations quickly and in a safe manner. On-scene our canine teams would assist in establishing and maintaining safe zones while the unattended/suspicious items were assessed and action was taken. On more than one occasion that action involved the use of our canine teams.

Typically our bomb dog mission here in Saint Paul has been venue and motorcade sweeps. With regard to the convention,



Suspicious package located on bridge during protests.

our thoughts were that while keeping with our mission we wanted to make sure that our training objectives for this event were a bit narrower in some respects and wider in others. For example, our training strategy leading up to the convention was not to completely abandon our mission of venue and motorcade searches but we believed our biggest threat to be primarily backpacks, other packaged items and perhaps “McGyver” bombs. We narrowed our training by focusing less on motor vehicles and venues while concentrating more on the searching of backpacks, luggage and to a certain extent

packages; we even trained letter bombs. During training we did not exclude any explosive substances, we believed the make up of any item found would more than likely be powder based. While narrowing our training on one end, we expanded our scope of training on another. The other scope included the working of hedge lines, bushes and landscaped areas, flower pots and trash containers. We trained this scope on the Minnesota State Capitol grounds (where all demonstrators staged) and at the on-going Minnesota State Fair as well. Hindsight proved our intuition to be right on the money with regard to these objectives.

The bomb dog group here in the Saint Paul/Minneapolis area is large and well coordinated. With dog teams from the A.T.F., Ramsey and Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office, Bloomington Police Department and Minneapolis/Saint Paul International Airport, we were able as a group to bring and utilize different resources to assist one another in the training and preparation for this event. For example, the MSP Airport dog handlers supplied us with a large number of backpacks and suitcases to train with. The group also invited all dog teams to the airport to work vehicle hides with large amounts of explosives, one containing 230 pounds of C-4. Other hides included explosives hidden in a bicycle pack with the bike chained to a structure inside the concourse as well as explosives hidden in vehicles located in the

parking ramp or parked outside the terminal on a busy afternoon.

Federal Express welcomed all of our dog teams into their facility to train on packages and letter type bombs as well. We were given access to the complete facility including package cars loaded for next day deliveries. We certainly cannot forget the Metropolitan Transit Commission who allowed us to repeatedly use the bus garage as part of a regular training venue. The list is endless but these are just a few examples of the coordinated efforts of all the dog teams and businesses that helped prepare us and make our mission a success.

To provide a sense of what these days entailed I have listed below, chronologically, the activities of JHERT 1 and JHERT 2. These activities reported are based on the BMC/JHERT Incident Reporting Log supplied by the United States Secret Service. This is an account of all action involving these two teams only, beginning 1200 hours August 30, 2008 and ending 2400 hours Thursday, September 4. JHERT 1's area of responsibility was the inner perimeter. JHERT 2's area of responsibility included all geographical areas outside the inner perimeter extending into the north east metropolitan area of Saint Paul.

August 30, 2008 1200 hours:

Bomb Management Center (BMC) goes online.

The BMC was responsible for managing and dispatching all E.O.D. assets as they

relate to bomb threat incidences and potential devices.



Suspicious package in mailbox.

August 31 (Sunday)

-Unattended backpack reported... pack was placed upon a trash container on the perimeter of a park located in downtown Saint Paul. Large numbers of lunchtime pedestrian foot traffic in combination with an ongoing rally and concert.

Disposition: Package x-rayed and cleared.

-Report of a suspicious Package at Saint Paul College.

Disposition: Package x-rayed... suspicious bottle with liquid found. Tested with AHURA... substance unidentified.

-Suspicious unattended 7 foot dinosaur wearing headphones with a wire attached.

Disposition: Canine sweep... cleared.

-Report of a detonation of an explosive by the Minnesota State Capitol... gray smoke was seen.

Disposition: Accidental discharge of a flashbang by law enforcement.

-Report of 6 unattended black packages at in bus shelter in downtown Saint Paul.

Disposition: Parties identified bags as their own.

-Responded to downtown Minneapolis on a report of an abandoned backpack found on a MTC bus.

Disposition: Powder later identified as Farina Wheat Flour.

September 1 (Monday)

-Report of a suspicious vehicle with wires hanging out of it... vehicle parked outside a known anarchist's residence.

Disposition: Canine alert. Awaiting ambulance before RSP member goes downrange and x-rays suspicious leather case stuck behind rear bumper. (Unknown resolution of search.)

-0300 hour Canine sweep of demonstration route... Minnesota State Capitol to inner perimeter fence line.

-Unattended burlap sack found in the downtown Skyway system.



RNC training. Hennepin County EDD team



RNC training. Sgt. Paul Dunnom & K9 Sue.

Disposition: Cleared by canine... computer keyboard found in bag.

- Suspicious package found in shopping cart outside inner perimeter fence line.

Disposition: Protesters “wheeled” off cart before JHERT response.

- Unattended backpack lying in intersection near State Capitol.

Disposition: Cleared by canine... backpack was bicyclist first aid kit.

-Suspicious package located at an intersection in downtown Saint Paul.

Disposition: Suspicious packages were sandbags.

- Suspicious back pack located in the doorway of a downtown Jeweler.

Disposition: Cleared by canine... clothing found. Further investigation revealed backpack was used to transport “hammers” to smash out squad car and storefront windows.

- Unattended backpack left in a trash can next to a stage used to rally demonstrators.

Disposition: Backpack x-rayed... no explosive components found.

- Report of an abandoned yellow bag left on a delegate bus outside Check Point B.

Disposition: Bag on bus cleared by United States Secret Service.

- Budget rental van parked outside inner perimeter fence line had in plain view baggies containing white powder with a pungent odor of ammonia about the vehicle.

Disposition: Canine search... no detected odor of fertilizer. Name and number of lessee found in cab.

- Report of an unattended item appearing to be a folded up tent outside of the inner perimeter.

Disposition: Robot deployed... item inside package positively identified as a tent.

- Report of a suspicious package placed inside a United States Post Box.

Disposition: Box “scoped”... found nothing suspicious. Box opened and then visually cleared.

- Unattended package... left in a city park in the heart of downtown Saint Paul.

Disposition: Cleared by canine. Hand searched... found wigs and medication.



Search of abandon package following sweep by explosives detection K-9.

September 2 (Tuesday)

- Lone Federal Express package lying on the sidewalk during mid-day in the heart of downtown.

Disposition: Federal Express claimed package.

- Unattended backpack found in a trash can in downtown Saint Paul.

Disposition: Backpack x-rayed and no explosive components were found.

- Inside the venue (Xcel Center)... unattended brief case.

Disposition: X-rayed and found out to be computer equipment with paper.

- Unattended backpack outside the front entrance of a downtown hospital.

Disposition: X-rayed... package contained hood, mask and empty beer can.

- Inside the inner perimeter next to a rest room, latex gloves with a suspicious liquid on them are found.

Disposition: Discarded electrician’s gloves.

- Unattended truck trailer left in the lot of a major department store.

Disposition: Owner identified.

- Intelligence revealed anarchists are planning to throw Molotov cocktail bombs at law enforcement vehicles. SWAT executes a warrant

Disposition: Eight Molotov Cocktails are found in raid.

- Multiple explosions are heard in the heart of downtown Saint Paul... white imprints the size of a volleyball are found on the sidewalk.

Disposition: Two individuals arrested after tossing impact devices from the rooftops of downtown buildings. ATF collects evidence.

- Suspicious vehicle... vehicle stopped by officers and rubber balls believed to contain black powder and "steelies" are found.

Disposition: Balls contained one ounce of smokeless powder.

September 3 (Wednesday)

- Unattended backpack reported outside Check Point A.

Disposition: A hand search revealed pack filled with picture frames.

September 4 (Thursday)

-Unattended package on the steps of the Capitol.

Disposition: Hand search revealed baggies of liquid color.

- Unattended backpack on a major highway overpass. Package is between the police and large group of demonstrators.

Disposition: Backpack x-rayed... contents are not identifiable. Robot deployed to carry package into alley way for disruption. Package is disrupted... contents are not identifiable.

-Suspicious item reported to be located amongst mass of demonstrators... wires attached to a video camera in the bush line adjacent to demonstrators.

Disposition: Unfounded.

- Abandoned backpack with light bulbs containing an unknown, colored fluid.

Disposition: Light bulbs filled with red paint... recovered and destroyed.

- Unattended backpack left on sidewalk in entertainment district.

Disposition: Owner arrived to pickup package.

Thursday September 4, 2008 2400 hours:

Bomb Management Center goes off-line.

Five SPPD canine teams detailed to the RNC are German shepherd dogs, cross trained in explosives detection. Sue, a two year old Belgian Malinois handled by Sergeant Paul Dunnom is the unit's only single purpose detector dog. Most of the above described incidents were high profile incidents in the respect that, when utilizing the German shepherd dogs, extreme care had to be taken

that their presence did not project their role as an intimidation factor used to control the crowd of demonstrators. There were for example instances where our route to a suspicious or unattended package was obstructed by large groups of demonstrators and we were forced to abandon our squad cars and move into the area on foot. We left the dogs in the car as to not incite the crowd with the presence of German shepherd dogs moving through the demonstrators. On some occasions, Mobil Field Forces cleared a path through large groups of demonstrators so we did not have to abandon our vehicles and move through the crowds on foot. Uniformed officers moving on foot through the throngs of demonstrators or on the perimeter had to be in a heightened state of awareness at all times because intelligence reports received throughout the week stated that groups were planning to "snatch" and kidnap uniformed officers. Nevertheless, we owe a debt of gratitude to all the Mobile Field Force officers who assisted us in navigating the streets with throngs of demonstrators.

In conclusion, as a member of J.H.E.R.T. 2, I wish to recognize the work and professionalism of the following individuals: David Gottschalk, retired ATF currently serving with the Ramsey County Sheriff's Department, Special Agent Kerry Svare, ATF/ Saint Paul Office, Special Agent James Walsh, F.B.I., and Special Agent Kevin Cotter, United States Secret Service. It was an absolute pleasure to work with each one of you... a true learning experience, and for that we thank you!

Officer Mark Ficcadenti has been a St. Paul police officer since 1984. He became a member of the department's Canine Unit in 1990 where he currently serves as the Unit's head trainer. Mark has been a member of the IABTI, Region III, since 2002.



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