

Medal of Valor and Meritorious Conduct Medal

MEDAL OF VALOR

The Medal of Valor award is the highest honor a member of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department can receive. It is awarded to persons who distinguish themselves by displaying great courage, above and beyond the call of duty, in the face of immediate life-threatening peril and with full knowledge of the risk involved.



MERITORIOUS CONDUCT GOLD MEDAL

This medal is the second highest award a Department member can receive. It is awarded to persons who place themselves in immediate peril and perform an act of heroism and/or save the life of another person.



MERITORIOUS CONDUCT SILVER MEDAL

This medal is awarded to persons who, when confronted by circumstances beyond the normal course of their duties, place themselves in potential peril while performing an act of heroism or while saving or attempting to save the life of another.





Sergeant Eugene L. Leslie



Deputy Michael D. Cofield

On May 20, 2001, Sergeant Leslie and Deputy Cofield responded to a Santa Monica residence that had been rocked by an enormous underground explosion. The explosion occurred in a "Cold War" era bomb shelter 15 feet below the ground in the backyard of a residence. Family members told Leslie and Cofield that their 85-year-old father had built the shelter in the early 60's and had used it to store items, including possible explosives and explosive chemicals.

Leslie and Cofield searched through the debris for several minutes; they located the victim, who was obviously deceased, and attached a retrieval line to the body. While attempting to ascend, the victim's body wedged into the narrow shaft, trapping them in the shelter. Fire Department personnel pulled Leslie and Cofield to the surface just as their air ran out.

For displaying great personal courage above and beyond the call of duty in the face of immediate life-threatening peril, with full knowledge of the risk involved, Sergeant Eugene Leslie and Deputy Michael Cofield are awarded the Department's highest honor, the Medal of Valor.



SERGEANT THOMAS M. SHANNON



DEPUTY DARREN W. LASS



DEPUTY CHAD MILLAN



DEPUTY RICARDO PEDROZA

On October 13, 2002, East Los Angeles Deputy Ricardo Pedroza observed a vehicle that had crashed into the fence of a residence and appeared to be on fire; a 10 year-old boy was standing bewildered next to the truck. The boy's uncle had shot himself in the head and was still alive inside the vehicle.

Deputy Pedroza removed the boy from harm's way and called for assistance. Sergeant Shannon, Deputy Lass, and Deputy Millan responded. As the vehicle suddenly erupted in fire, its interior quickly filling with thick black smoke, Pedroza reached in and cut the occupant loose with a knife. Shannon, Lass, Millan, and Pedroza dragged the occupant from the fire. Rescue efforts failed to save the man's life, but that does not diminish the effort displayed by the deputies in their attempt.

For acting in the face of circumstances beyond the normal scope of their duties and placing themselves in potential peril while attempting to save the life of another, Deputy Darren Lass and Deputy Chad Millan are awarded the Meritorious Conduct Medal, Silver. For placing themselves in immediate life-threatening peril to perform an act of exceptional heroism while attempting to save the life of another, Sergeant Thomas Shannon and Deputy Ricardo Pedroza are awarded the Meritorious Conduct Medal, Gold.



DEPUTY ALLEN R. DOLLENS



DEPUTY MICHAEL C. KNIERIEM



DEPUTY JESUS J. ROJAS

On January 28, 2003, Deputies Allen Dollens and Michael Knieriem were patrolling Compton Boulevard when they observed a female standing next to a black sports utility vehicle (SUV) screaming for help. The deputies could clearly see three small children and two male adults in the vehicle. The deputies were driving towards the woman when the two men jumped from the SUV and ran into the adjacent neighborhood. Dollens and Knieriem knew an attempted carjacking when they saw it and turned their patrol car to follow the fleeing felons.

Suddenly, one of the suspects turned and pointed a stainless steel Smith and Wesson .45 caliber handgun at them and began shooting. The first suspect continued to fire, while the second fired a barrage of bullets at the deputies from a Tech 9 semiautomatic machine pistol. Dollens found cover in an alcove and began returning gunfire. Knieriem found himself on the other side of the radio car and began to return fire, as well. The deputies continued to engage fire until both suspects were down. Both suspects succumbed to their wounds.

We will never know what might have happened if Dollens and Knieriem had not been present. However, due to their conspicuous display of great courage in the face of immediate life-threatening peril, and with full knowledge of the risk involved, Deputy Allen Dollens and Deputy Michael Knieriem are awarded the Department's highest award, the Medal of Valor.

On August 12, 2003, in the mid-morning, Century Sheriff's Station received a call that a man was drowning in the lake at Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park, located in the unincorporated area of Athens Park. Responding units were met by panicked workers from the Los Angeles County Parks Department. They told the deputies that a man had walked into the lake until he was completely submerged. It appeared the man was attempting to kill himself.

Deputy Jesus Rojas and Los Angeles County Police Officer Michael Clark stripped off their gun belts, shoes, and protective vests. The two men, tethered together by a cord, waded into the water. About 40 feet from shore, the water level reached their chins. After several minutes of searching, they saw the victim. Unfortunately, and despite the heroic efforts of his two rescuers, the victim never regained consciousness.

For placing themselves in immediate peril in an attempt to rescue a drowning man, with full knowledge of the danger involved, Deputy Jesus Rojas is awarded the Meritorious Conduct Medal, Gold, and Officer Michael Clark of the Los Angeles County Office of Public Safety is awarded the Sheriff's Department's Star Scroll.



DEPUTY TRACY D. RIVER

On January 10, 2004, around 2:00 p.m., a call went out that a vehicle had driven into the California Aqueduct. Normally, two Emergency Services Detail paramedic/divers would respond in the Air 5 rescue helicopter, large enough to carry both divers and their equipment. But, at the time, Air 5 was busy transporting a patient to Huntington Memorial Hospital and was unable to respond in a timely manner. Another much lighter helicopter, Air 29, was available, but its smaller size necessitated transporting only one diver to the accident. The decision was made to send Deputy Tracy River alone.

It took River less than two minutes to locate the car at the bottom of the channel in 17 feet of water. River diligently worked to free the occupant who finally came free. River struggled with him to the surface. Although the occupant died as a result of the accident, Deputy River's efforts were noteworthy.

For displaying great courage above and beyond the call of duty in the face of immediate life-threatening peril, with full knowledge of the risk involved, Deputy Tracy River is awarded the Department's highest honor, the Medal of Valor.



SERGEANT MYRON R. JOHNSON

On June 28, 2004, Sergeant Myron Johnson responded to a call of a suicidal man who was standing on the wrong side of a freeway overpass safety fence. Sergeant Johnson and officers from the Hawthorne Police Department were talking to the man and trying to approach close enough that they might handcuff him to the fence. They tried to grab him; fingers, shirt, sleeve -- anything to keep him from jumping. As the man struggled to free himself, Johnson climbed the 10-foot fence, bent over at the top of the fence, and grabbed the man's hand. Johnson eventually secured both of the man's hands to the fence with handcuffs.

For displaying reverence for human life when confronted by circumstances beyond the normal scope of his duties and placing himself in potential peril to save the life of another, Sergeant Myron Johnson is awarded the Meritorious Conduct Medal, Silver.



SERGEANT RAYMOND S. ROTH



DEPUTY CARLOS R. BOWERS



DEPUTY JEFFERY A. KNOX

On July 3, 1989, Deputy Raymond Roth and Deputy Carlos Bowers were dispatched to the top of Turnbull Canyon to evacuate any residents who hadn't yet evacuated from an approaching brushfire. There was a single home positioned at the very summit of the hill that appeared occupied, thus the deputies headed for that. A 10-foot-high wall, coupled with a sturdy steel front gate, precluded them from entering the residence, but using their patrol car's public address system, they made contact with the occupants.

A man who said he was the gardener told the deputies there were two female employees also in the house. The deputies collected the two others, but by this time the entire surrounding area was in flames and the burning trees and bushes lining the driveway blistered the house.

Trapped, the deputies used the one lifeline they had, requesting assistance from any fire department personnel in the area. A fire department water-dropping helicopter was directed to their location and dropped water onto the front gate, extinguishing the flames momentarily and opening up a path through the inferno. The patrol car raced through the opening and made its way to a fire company on a nearby access road. The deputies assisted the firefighters in beating back the flames, again helped by water-dropping helicopters. At this point, the deputies were able to successfully transport the others to a safe area. Later, they received a report from the helicopter crew that the house had burned to its foundation.

For conspicuously displaying great courage in the face of immediate life-threatening peril, with full knowledge of the risk involved, to perform the rescue of three other people who surely would have perished, Sergeant Raymond Roth and Deputy Carlos Bowers are awarded the Department's highest honor, the Medal of Valor.

On January 1, 2005, around 3:45 a.m., Deputy Knox and his partner, Pasadena Police Officer Matthew Widger, were working a foot beat, providing overnight security for the Rose Parade attendees camped out for a good spot. A resident ran up to the pair and screamed that a house was on fire; further, that her boyfriend was trapped inside.

Knox and Widger ran to the house and found it fully engulfed in flames, smoke pouring out of every opening. With complete disregard for their own personal safety, they crawled into the house on their hands and knees. They made it a few feet into a room, but intense heat and black suffocating smoke forced their retreat. Yells for help from inside the location steeled Knox and Widger for another try. They broke out a window and pulled the 230-pound victim out to safety. Within minutes, the entire structure was completely destroyed.

For conspicuously displaying great courage above and beyond the call of duty in the face of immediate life-threatening peril, with full knowledge of the risk involved, to save the life of another human being, Deputy Jeffery Knox is awarded the Department's highest honor, the Medal of Valor, and Officer Matthew Widger of the Pasadena Police Department is awarded the Sheriff's Department's Star Scroll.



RESERVE DEPUTY RAUL CENTENO

On November 17, 2004, Reserve Deputy Raul “Sonny” Centeno was negotiating the twists and turns of the Angeles Forest Highway on his way home from a long shift. A Los Angeles Police Department motor officer passed Centeno and lost control of his bike, plunging over the steep sides that make up the canyon. Centeno stopped his car and ran to the spot where the officer and the motorcycle had disappeared. At the road’s edge, Centeno observed the officer lying motionless about 40 feet over the side; the motorcycle was 75 feet below that.

Although Centeno was 55 years old, in street clothes, without emergency equipment, and unable to get reception on his cell phone, he was a trained emergency medical technician. If he could just make his way down to the injured police officer, Centeno knew he would be able to help. He reached the officer and carried him up the steep embankment. Centeno then transported the injured officer to a local hospital.

For placing himself in immediate peril and performing an act of exceptional bravery to save the life of another, Reserve Deputy Raul Centeno is awarded the Meritorious Conduct Medal, Gold.



DEPUTY JOSE M. OVALLE

On April 13, 2004, while heading home, Deputy Jose Ovalle saw a fireball erupt on the opposite side of the freeway a short distance ahead of him. The Golden State Freeway was unusually deserted, even for 3 a.m. As he pulled up, Ovalle saw a car engulfed in fire.

Ovalle stopped his car and rushed over to the burning vehicle. He saw a female trapped in the rear seat of the burning car, her hair on fire. Ovalle ran back to his own car and took out a crowbar. He broke out the back window and pulled the victim out of danger. He extinguished the victim and carried her to a position of safety. He then used his cell phone and called for assistance; the California Highway Patrol arrived within a few minutes. The injured woman was taken by ambulance to a local hospital.

For placing himself in great peril to perform an act of exceptional heroism in the attempt to save another life, with full knowledge of the risk involved, Deputy Jose Ovalle is awarded the Meritorious Conduct Medal, Gold.