

# Times Square Car Bomb Incident Mitigated Expeditiously

by Deputy Chief Daniel Donoghue and

Battalion Chiefs John M. Esposito and Thomas J. Meara

It was an unusually warm spring evening in Times Square on Saturday, May 1, 2010. At approximately 1830 hours while the members of Engine 54 and Ladder 4 were completing equipment inspections, Faisal Shahzad parked his 1993 Nissan Pathfinder on West 45th Street, just west of 7th Avenue. Prior to running from his SUV, Mr. Shahzad ignited a fuse that was intended to detonate a large vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). Although the device did not detonate as intended, several of the small fireworks did explode, resulting in popping sounds and odd-smelling smoke.

Engine 54 and Ladder 4 then were dispatched to a report of a car fire at the location. On arrival, NYPD officers directed them to Mr. Shahzad's vehicle. Then-Lieutenant Mike Barvels (now Captain), Engine 54, and Lieutenant John Kazan, Ladder 4, conducted a size-up. The conditions they observed included a haphazardly, illegally parked vehicle with its four-way flashers on. There was no visible fire, but white smoke was emanating from the rear of the car, while popping sounds were coming from inside the car. The smoke smelled like that from fireworks and the car was outfitted with dark-tinted windows.

FDNY members and the NYPD officers at the scene then exchanged information. Lieutenant Kazan asked an officer to run the license plate, while other officers informed 4 Truck's chauffeur that the car's driver ran away after parking. When the police officer informed the Lieutenants that the Connecticut license plates were *not registered*, they then jointly decided to back away from the vehicle and Lieutenant Kazan told the sergeant to request ESU to evaluate the scene for the Bomb Squad.

Lieutenants Barvels and Kazan processed the information and concluded that the vehicle posed too great a danger. They began to

evacuate the public and create an isolation zone, ordered the Firefighters to areas of temporary shielding behind the apparatus and requested response of the NYPD Bomb Squad. Also in a heads-up move, Ladder 4 members initiated monitoring of the area with their RAD-50 meter early on in the incident.

Their conclusion proved accurate; an investigation by law enforcement revealed a complex explosive/incendiary device that although ignited, was incapable of detonating. Remember, the FDNY members were unable to see the device inside the vehicle. The actions taken were the result of keen situational awareness and decisive action.

Battalion Chief Thomas Meara, 9th Battalion Commander, who was special-called to the scene, arrived and assumed command. Chief Meara coordinated additional evacuation of nearby storefronts with the NYPD, expanded the isolation zone and notified the 3rd Division of the situation.

Deputy Chief Dan Donoghue, Division 3, arrived on the scene and established a Command Post at 7th Avenue and West 44th Street, out of the line of sight of the vehicle. Hazardous Materials Company #1 and the Haz-Mat Battalion were special-called and a charged 2 1/2-inch hand-line was placed in position on West 44th Street to protect Bomb Squad personnel.

The *suspicious vehicle* was declared a *confirmed device* by the NYPD at approximately 2030 hours. At this time, the Command Chief, Deputy Assistant Chief John Sudnik, Queens Borough Commander, arrived and assumed command of FDNY units. He conferred with NYPD officials to coordinate and expand isolation zones and evacuations as deemed necessary. FDNY units remained on the scene during law enforcement operations until the scene was rendered safe at 0300 hours the following morning.

Throughout the incident, progress reports were relayed to the Manhattan dispatcher and additional units were special-called as necessary. The device was successfully dismantled and FDNY units left the scene at 0300 hours, May 2nd.

## Lessons reinforced

- Situational awareness is essential for the safety of FDNY mem-

photo courtesy of the New York Daily News web site



NYPD Bomb Squad member removes items/evidence from the SUV.



The area around the SUV is examined for any potential evidence.

photo courtesy of www.newtimes.com/mediaManager



SUV is readied to be hauled away on a flatbed truck so that a more thorough examination can be performed.

photo courtesy of the New York Daily News web site



## Vehicle Borne IED Identification Guide: Parked Vehicles

### Potential Indicators:

- **Heavy, sagging vehicle (rear-weighted)**
- **Illegally parked or near authorized vehicle entrances or crowded access points**
- **Covered or tinted windows**
- **Large containers on seats or cargo area: bags, boxes, barrels, tanks**
- **License plates removed or altered**
- **Odor of gasoline, propane, acids, or chemicals**
- **Visible wires, switches, batteries, or antennae inside or on vehicle**
- **Cargo concealed with tarp or blanket**



**IF OBSERVED, CALL DISPATCH OR COMMUNICATIONS CENTER**

bers and the public. All members should continually size up the scene and, when necessary, alert their superior Officer and other members of their findings.

- Once the FDNY determined there was no car fire and that the vehicle was suspicious, vehicle responsibility was turned over to the NYPD, with the FDNY maintaining responsibility for one of its core competencies--structural evacuation.
- Information-sharing with NYPD officers and others present on-scene is vital. The fact that the driver *ran away*, coupled with the license plate being *unregistered*, proved to be the final pieces of the puzzle necessary for Lieutenants Kazan and Barvels to make their decision. Excellent intra-unit communication was exhibited, too; the ladder company chauffeur (LCC) relayed the information about the driver to Lieutenant Kazan.
- Use the apparatus for temporary protection. When members operate in a roadway, an apparatus--usually the ladder company--is positioned to block traffic and create an area of safety for the members. In this case, the members were able to use the traffic side of the apparatus as an area of safety while the evacuation was beginning. *Note:* The apparatus will not protect against a VBIED, but could be used on your way to a better area of safety.
- When high-rise buildings are evacuated, injuries should be expected among the evacuees. Once the decision has been made to evacuate, EMS resources should be special-called in anticipation of such injuries. If elevators are not used during the evacuation, expect the number of injuries to rise. In non-fire situations, it is deemed safe to use the elevator in independent or manual mode for evacuation purposes. The elevator must have two-way communication to the Fire Command Station (FCS).

### Lessons learned

- The FDNY routinely responds to *suspicious* package incidents to

stand by while the Bomb Squad investigates; very rarely do these turn out to be a *confirmed* device. When the FDNY is present at an incident and the Bomb Squad has *confirmed* the presence of an explosive device, the ranking FDNY Officer must evaluate the scene and request the appropriate units report in to a staging area, essential in the event the device detonates.

- On-duty FDNY members should be notified of the presence of a *confirmed* explosive device anywhere in the City.
- Members need to be aware of the difference between a *suspicious* package or object and a *confirmed* explosive device.
- When requested to stand by at the scene of a *suspicious* package/*confirmed* device, prior to responding, Chief and company Officers must ascertain the location of the package, staging area and the NYPD Command Post. With this information, the

Members are urged to review the following references:

- "Hybrid and CNG Bus VBIED, A Review of Alternate Power Bus Emergency Procedures, Fire Operations and Terrorism Awareness," by Lieutenant Michael Doda, in the 3rd/2010 issue of *WNYF*.
- "Improvised Explosive Devices: Responding to and Managing the Complex Attack Scenario," by Captain John Gormley and Firefighter Jason Brezler, in the 1st/2010 issue of *WNYF*.
- "Mumbai: Terrorist Tactics Hinder Rescue Operations," by Firefighter Christian M. Zisel, in the 2nd/2009 issue of *WNYF*.
- *Fire Tactics and Procedures*, Emergency Response Plan, Addendum 3, Improvised Explosive Devices.
- *AUC 190*, Firearms, Ammunition, Explosive and Incendiary Devices.
- "Dirty Fires: Radiological Incendiary Devices," by then-Deputy Assistant Chief Joseph W. Pfeifer, in the 2nd/2006 issue of *WNYF*.
- July 19, 2010, Bureau of Operations report, Incident Commanders Guideline for Responses to Suspicious Packages and Confirmed Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) or Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs), by Chief of Operations Robert F. Sweeney.

For more information about terrorism, including the FDNY's weekly intelligence report, *The Watchline*, members are urged to go to the Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness' web site, located on the Department's intranet.



Officers shall ensure the response route steers clear of the package on the way to the staging area. Staging area Managers shall have the staging area checked for secondary devices.

- The FDNY and NYPD Incident Commanders (ICs) should strive to remain within an *arm's length* of each other so both agencies are aware of the other's actions and to ensure information is shared quickly and uniformly.
- All subsequent units responding to the scene of a *confirmed* explosive device must, at a minimum, be provided with four pieces of information: 1. location of the device 2. parameters of the isolation area 3. location of the Command Post 4. specific directions for responding into the scene.
- All transmissions to the borough dispatcher must be conducted with the *mixer on*. The mixer shall not be turned off unless the IC specifically requests such action. Members monitoring the frequency need to hear the progress reports and then share that information with the on-duty members in their quarters.

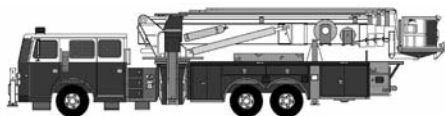
Stay focused, use your training and experience and remember that an incident may turn out to be drastically different from what was reported initially.

#### About the Authors...

**Deputy Chief Daniel Donoghue** (right) is a 25-year veteran of the FDNY. He is assigned to the 3rd Division. He holds an Associate degree in Nursing from Suffolk Community College, a BA degree in Fire and Emergency Service from CUNY-John Jay College of Criminal Justice and



is a graduate of the FDNY Officers Management Institute (FOMI). He writes frequently for WNYF. **Battalion Chief John M. Esposito** (right) is a 20-year veteran of the FDNY. He is assigned to Battalion 11 and detailed to the Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness. Previous assignments include Engines 324 and 47 and Squad 18 as a Firefighter, Squad 18 as a Lieutenant and Division 13 and SOC as a Captain. He holds a BA degree in Political Science from Stony Brook University and an MA degree in Security Studies from the Naval Postgraduate School. He also attended NY Law School. Currently, he is enrolled in FOMI. He is an adjunct instructor in the Health Sciences Disaster Management Concentration at Stony Brook University, as well as a Fire Tech Promotions, Inc., instructor. This is his first article for WNYF. **Battalion Chief Thomas J. Meara** (right) is a 21-year veteran of the FDNY. He is assigned to Battalion 9. Previous assignments include Engine 54 and Ladder 4 as a Firefighter, Division 6 as a Lieutenant, Division 1 and Engine 10 as a Captain and Battalion 8 as a Battalion Chief. He holds a BS degree in Chemical Engineering and an MS degree in Management. This is his fourth article for WNYF.



# Taking Up

October-December 2010



#### Battalion Chiefs

Robert N. Cicero Battalion 38  
Lawrence J. Cleary, Jr. Battalion 53  
William Gillespie Battalion 40  
John T. Maguire Battalion 54  
Richard A. Posavetz Battalion 21

#### Fire Medical Officer

Neil L. Coplan ADMHS

#### Captains

Joseph F. Bachety Ladder 124  
Steven Balkunas Engine 320  
George J. Becker Division 1  
Robert Ditrani Engine 250  
James E. Walsh, Jr. Ladder 17

#### Supervising Fire Marshal

Philip J. Gibbs ADMBFI

#### Lieutenants

Stephen J. Chase Engine 52  
Kevin P. Coenen, Jr. Engine 54  
Michael G. Connolly Engine 291  
Frank Decesare Ladder 115  
James K. Donohue Ladder 8  
Donald R. Gander Engine 229

Kevin D. Heaney Ladder 80  
Michael T. Kilduff Engine 264  
Charles LaClair Marine Division  
John D. Lopez, Jr. Ladder 15  
Joseph J. Parrino Engine 259  
Kevin G. Powers Battalion 51  
John B. Quealy Ladder 127  
Joseph R. Stach, Jr. Ladder 6  
David J. Zdanok Engine 239

#### Fire Marshals

John W. Malley ADMBFI  
Robert H. McDewitt ADMBFI  
John P. Paoletta, Jr. ADMBFI  
Brian T. Watson ADMBFI

#### Marine Engineer

Paul T. Coulbourne Marine Division

#### Firefighters

Jeffery B. Attridge Engine 293  
Christopher S. Boggan Ladder 158  
Dana C. Bolte Engine 73  
Christopher R. Burack Ladder 133  
Colin T. Byrne Ladder 152  
Keith A. Carlsen Engine 157  
Joseph A. Cicero Engine 167  
James J. Cody, Jr. Ladder 24

Stephen A. DiBiase Ladder 126  
Thomas N. Distasi Engine 315  
Thomas P. Dooley Ladder 151  
Joseph J. Farrell Ladder 130  
William J. Gaughan Engine 238  
William J. Gillman Marine 1  
John D. Gubelli Rescue 4  
William B. Heaney Ladder 44  
William C. Holihan Engine 94  
Kevin W. Holtje Engine 302  
Claude Kebbe Engine 313  
John R. Kenny Ladder 40  
Michael J. Kollman Ladder 162  
Michael Ladka Ladder 38  
Michael E. Lambert Marine 1  
Thomas J. Lambui Rescue 2  
Anthony Liantonio Engine 251  
Michael V. Loporcario Ladder 85  
Neil F. Miller Engine 158  
Mark F. Munley Engine 66  
James P. Murphy Ladder 102  
Michael P. Newbert Engine 274  
Gerard Nicoletti Engine 34  
Jose B. Nogue Engine 46  
Stephen C. O'Hagan Engine 80  
Matthew F. Olszewski Ladder 167  
Keith A. Palumbo Engine 320  
Jerry P. Paolillo Ladder 125

Joseph R. Papillo Ladder 24  
Douglas A. Pederson Engine 158  
Robert W. Petersen Marine 1  
Terence K. Quinn Ladder 164  
Paul E. Sainsbury Rescue 4  
Charles R. Schery Engine 287  
Larry D. Schneckeburger Ladder 120  
Arthur T. Schwab Engine 311  
James J. Seaman Engine 264  
Sherman Smalls, Jr. Ladder 127  
Vincent J. Sobal Ladder 112  
Michael C. Soprano Engine 43  
William F. Thompson Engine 37  
Michael J. Tuohy Ladder 46  
Christopher Turner Engine 218  
Anthony F. Vanacore Ladder 164  
Stephen Versace Ladder 31  
Daniel J. Ward Engine 96  
Bryan L. Weckmann Ladder 144  
Charles J. White Engine 83  
Charles E. Wiemann Rescue 4