



Gateway Division 10 Operator Michael Bullock was brutally attacked.

Operators in the Line of Fire – A Brutal Beating

By CHRISTINA ESPARZA

(May 3, 2002) Gateway Division 10 Operator Michael Bullock remembers watching the 1992 civil disturbance on the news and reporting to his job the next day at Central City Division 1.

The former corrections officer wasn't scared, but his supervisor's words echoed in his ears as he was en route: "Go out there and be careful. If they want a free ride, let them. The customer is always right."

Stopping at 8th Street and Western Avenue to use a pay phone, Bullock heard someone approach him from behind and utter angry words about "what they did to Rodney King." Suddenly, he felt a stinging pain.

Bullock was brutally attacked. Left with a broken collarbone and a torn rotator cuff, among other injuries, and unable to flag anyone down for help, he waited for the Transit Police to rescue him.

"It was a rough day," Bullock says.

"It makes you think twice about what's out there and the risks we take as bus operators," says Sam Morales, Acting Transit Operations Supervisor at Division 1.

A temporary morgue

Morales, who in 1992 was a bus operator, was one of many operators who drove police units from Arthur Winston Division 5, where police and firefighters set up headquarters and a temporary morgue, to troubled areas in Los Angeles.

"To tell you the truth, it was scary because we didn't know what to expect," Morales says.

Crossroads Depot Division 2 Transportation Manager Diane Frazier was acting manager at Division 5 during the civil disturbance, and was called back to work after it started.

"They called and said the police were taking over the division," Frazier remembers. "I asked why, and they said, 'A lot of stuff

is burning around here.' At first I didn't think it was going to be all that it was, but once we knew what it was, we just started handling things."

Burning buildings and broken windows scarred the landscape of Los Angeles that week.

Everything was broken and burnt

"It looked like Beirut," Bullock says. "There wasn't a window intact. Everything was broken and burnt. It was bad."

If the civil unrest taught MTA employees caught in their midst a lesson, it was teamwork. They also learned to be careful and to be grateful for what they have.

"I think the thing I remember most was how operators participated," Frazier says. "They took their own lives in their hands. It made me really proud."

Although still wary from his attack, Bullock isn't bitter.

"I'm a little less comfortable with my fellow man. I watch people more," he says. "But I know he wasn't beating me up, he was beating up the system. You never know what someone's going through before you pick them up."

Every night during that week in 1992, Morales safely and happily went home to his wife and four children.

"You learn the value of what you have at home," he says. "And you appreciate life more."

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