

## Operators Went 'Above and Beyond' During Civil Unrest

By ERIC RAPP

(May 3, 2002) Arthur Winston Division 5 operator Melvin Dearden was one of many operators caught in the middle of events. As he drove his bus north on Manchester Boulevard near Florence Avenue on April 29, 1992, he was mystified to see people running in the streets, breaking windows.



Melvin Dearden

Because of a faulty radio on his bus, he didn't even know what had happened until a passenger got on and told Dearden that there had been a "not guilty" verdict in the Rodney King trial.

Dearden also didn't know that Division 5 in South Central had been taken over by police and fire personnel, and that dispatchers were sending buses to other divisions.

So despite flames, people trying to assault passengers at bus stops, and having a metal trash can thrown through one of his windows, Dearden finished his route.

When he arrived at his terminal in Westchester, he had to turn around and head to Division 18. So he took his bus back out through the riot-torn streets, finally making it to Carson. "It was chaos in that yard," he said.

"There were two or three hundred operators milling around, all trying to use the same pay phone," he laughs, adding, "it was really something. I'll never forget that day."

### Last Train Out Of Los Angeles

On the first day of the unrest, Metro Blue Line operators managed to make every scheduled run. Operators Charles Walker and Robert Ponce were on the last train from 7th and Metro to Long Beach – one on each end of the train in case they had to stop and change directions.



Charles Walker

Walker already knew things were bad. On his northbound trip, the train suddenly developed a mechanical problem and stopped dead on Washington Boulevard just before San Pedro station.

"People were running all over the place, breaking windows and looting," he remembers. Luckily he was able to get the train into 7th and Metro safely.

The southbound run was worse. "There were people running across the tracks, fires everywhere," Walker remembers. "Somebody pushed a shopping cart onto the tracks."

The operators persevered, though. "We made it all the way to the Transit Mall and back to the yard," he says proudly.

James Bernard, a dispatcher at the Office of Central Instruction, probably echoes the thoughts of everyone when he says, "those were real bad times. I'm glad we've all grown past that."



James Bernard

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