

Former Division 5 Operator Volunteered to Transport Troops

By AMY HOWELL

(May 3, 2002) Bus Operator Eugene Pobol was on his way to work at Division 5 in South Central Los Angeles when "all hell broke loose."



Eugene Pobol

"We were supposed to have a barbeque the day of the riots," says Pobol, who had been a part-time operator for about a year when the civil disturbance occurred. All of the barbeque supplies were used to feed the police and National Guard personnel responsible for restoring civil order.

With bus service cancelled along the line he operated, Pobol had the option of going home. Instead, he volunteered to drive police and National Guard troops to makeshift command posts. After a brief trip back to his house, Pobol joined other operators stationed at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

Getting involved anyway

"We were getting reports that buses were being shot at," Pobol says. His sentiment was, "Let's not get involved in this—but we did anyway." Pobol and other operators eventually donned flak jackets provided by SCRTD Transit Police Chief Sharon Papa.

Pobol recounts driving National Guard troops to a supermarket-turned-command post as a particularly poignant experience. Police car escorts drove in front, in back and on the left side of the bus.

"It was pretty nerve-wracking," he says.

Pobol recalls the lieutenant aboard the bus telling his troops that a tip from a local resident revealed there was a good chance they would be shot at while making the transition from the bus to the supermarket. The lieutenant instructed his troops to be "locked and loaded."

After dropping off the troops, Pobol, who is currently a full-time operator at West Valley Division 8, headed back to the Coliseum without incident. Although the experience didn't yield any close calls, Pobol says it was "scary enough."

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