

## **Mission Readiness**

Ken Wallentine

"Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win." Sun tzu. The victorious are the prepared. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans and surrounding communities. News media reports and images showed cops in a state of challenge and even confusion as communications systems failed and emergency supplies were non-existent. A common misconception held by both the public and officers is that there is some vast reserve of state and federal aid that can be quickly airlifted to a disaster, and that there is an army of sworn officers to quickly respond to public safety emergencies. Reality: we're often on our own for quite some time, whether in a major city or a small, rural town.

It no longer is any stretch of the imagination that a Katrina-like natural disaster or a Columbine attack will be repeated. We've seen replays. Your area may not have hurricanes, but are you prepared for severe winter storms, heat waves, earthquakes, and floods? Terrorist events aren't just for New York, Denver, and Los Angeles. No officer knows when he or she will be called upon to respond quickly. You may be called to hold a perimeter for hours, possibly even days. You may be asked to leave town quickly and assist in a neighboring community, or even in the far rural reaches of your state. Will you be mission ready?

Mission readiness includes an array of issues: physical conditioning, mental preparation, tactical education, and proper equipment. This article suggests a base of equipment preparation to prepare an officer to respond to an emergency and be mission ready. On a recent road trip with a highly prepared officer, we discussed the "Go bag" concept as a foundation piece for emergency preparation for officers. Three small, lightweight pieces of luggage can hold all that an officer is likely to need in the initial stages of a protracted emergency event. They include the "Go Bag," a 72-hour car kit, and the "Deployment bag."

### **Go-Bag**

A "Go bag" is just what the name implies. It is a small bag kept near during any on-duty time, and trips away from the home base. This bag contains the "need it now" gear for a rapid tactical deployment. This is the bag that allows an officer to hold a perimeter position for hours on end, possibly even multiple days. This bag provides the essentials of a combat response when an officer may have been attending court and was not fully equipped. Because it is "need it now" stuff, it has to be lightweight and easily carried.

My Go-bag is a mid-sized lumbar pack, a step up from a fanny pack. I found the perfectly-sized lumbar pack at a sporting goods store for about thirty dollars. It holds approximately 1100 cubic inches, has space for two large water bottles, and can quickly convert to a backpack with shoulder straps. Other alternatives include a small backpack or shoulder bag. Whatever you choose, make sure that it doesn't interfere with your normal carry gear on your duty belt.

As you consider the contents of the Go-bag, think first about water. I live in the desert. Because of the low humidity in our region we don't always see visible perspiration. We may have to be reminded that we're losing water and need to hydrate. Water is heavy. Boy Scouts learn the maxim: "a pint's a pound the world around." In the dog days of summer, an officer may need as much as a liter of water per hour to compensate for water loss in heavy activity.

Less active duty, such as maintaining a security post or perimeter position, requires less. The rule of thumb is to carry as much as you can comfortably carry, but no less than two liters. Most small lumbar packs or large fanny packs have holders on either side that neatly fit a single liter bottle. One possible solution to the water carry challenge is a backpack with an integrated water bladder, such as the CamelBak. Be sure to follow manufacturer's recommendations for cleaning and rotation of water.

Following are some suggested equipment items for the Go-bag. Add your own items depending on conditions in your area and your personal needs. Remember that every item must justify the additional weight.

-Water

-Back-up gun and ammunition for the primary weapon and back-up weapon. If you carry a long gun, consider how much extra rifle or shotgun ammo to carry.

Many officers choose to carry an extra mag or two attached to the rifle. Remember the words of the late, great Colonel Jeff Cooper: "the purpose of the handgun is to fight your way back to the car to get the rifle that you never should have left there in the first place."

-Good quality knife. A non-folder sheath knife is best.

-Business cards. When a school is on lock down during an active shooter incident and you want to prove to the teacher on the other side of the door that you are a cop and not a bandit, slip a business card with your badge and agency printed on it under the door for the teacher to see.

-Extra handcuffs. Our agency issues "Tuff Ties" to all officers. These lightweight single-use handcuffs take little space. An officer can carry five or six pair easily.

-10 to 12 feet of 1" nylon webbing with slide tensioners at each end. Consider a couple of these. They can act as tourniquets or straps to hold doors open when needed.

-Cell phone charger or battery pack. There are wind-up cell phone chargers available from a variety of suppliers. Some combine flashlight and charger together. Low cost powerful rechargeable batteries can recharge a smart phone several times over.

-Light and pinch light. Carry a good quality spare light as well as a small pinch-type light. The best light options for storage and long battery life are the 3-volt systems.

-Baby wipes and tissue. Add a small bottle of waterless hand sanitizer. Need we say more?

-Sun block, either in wipes or roll-on stick. If you've ever held a post on a rural Utah manhunt, you know why these are essential. Add some lip balm that won't melt easily, preferably a sun block lip balm.

-Deet wipes. They say that Plain City, Utah, breeds mosquitoes that may only be defeated by a small caliber cartridge. With West Nile Virus and other bug-borne diseases, this is more than a mere convenience item.

-First aid kit. Include the basics, and consider a small piece of moleskin, a few pain relievers, and a needle and lighter (for ticks). Include a small container of mentholated rub. Anyone who has had to work around a warm corpse knows why. Master trainer and Katrina veteran Chief (ret.) Jeff Chudwin suggests an Israeli Battle Dressing. I carry enough to patch a couple of holes in me. My friends in Israel all carry them in the event of a gunshot (a real possibility for them). I carry a tactical tourniquet in my Go Bag and my 72 Hour kit.

-N-95 masks. Though we've not yet seen SARS or avian flu epidemics, an N-95 mask may mean the difference between life or death if you're called on to take the battle into a potentially infected area. N-95 masks are also very useful for respiratory protection in emergency searches of disaster sites, such as the World Trade Towers.

-Food. Avoid the time-honored Utah emergency ration of elk or deer jerky, unless you carry floss. Consider Coast Guard emergency rations, hard candy, or energy bars (avoid bars with high oil content or chocolate and rotate regularly).

-Hat and socks. Most of us don't wear a hat that offers decent protection from the sun. For about ten dollars, pick up a Boonie hat that offers both water and sun protection and can be stuffed away. Add a spare pair of socks. Wet feet are unhappy feet. While you're at it, throw in a spare pair of shoe laces.

-Other miscellaneous items that come in handy include some cash and coins (to buy food and pay phones), pen and paper, Sharpie marker, zip ties, zipper lock baggies, and a small roll of duct tape.

## **72 Hour Kit**

Is there anyone out there who has not heard plenty about 72 hour kits? If so, then why do so few of us carry them in our law enforcement vehicles? There are innumerable web sites and grocery store lists of what ought to go into a 72 hour kit. The American Red Cross is a great information resource. The purpose of such a kit for a law enforcement officer is to provide a much more survivable and comfortable three days after the earthquake, school shooting, hostage crisis, escaped killer, or other deployment. If this seems like excessive preparation, ask yourself for how much you could have sold a 72 hour kit to a New Orleans cop (not that you wouldn't have given it away as many of us did)?

The first step in the vehicle 72 hour kit is to keep the law enforcement vehicle itself mission ready. Always keep the gas tank as full as possible. Keep fluid levels up, and have the regular shop maintenance done on time. Carry a case of water in the trunk. It will be worth its weight in gold for the less-prepared officers and other disaster victims.

Consider the following basic list. If you keep the Go-bag and the 72 hour kit together, the duplicate items may be deleted. However, weight is generally not an issue for vehicle-based 72 hour kits.

- FM radio (includes headphones, batteries, and light)
- LED flashlight (shake activated)
- Emergency contact cards with numbers for family living out of state (arrange emergency contact number for your family members so that they will know that you're are taking care of business)
- Two emergency blankets. Consider carrying a sleeping bag in the trunk.
- Poncho and/or winter coat (depending on the season)
- Knife and unbreakable eating utensils
- Waterproof matches
- Emergency candle
- Small tool kit
- Water
- Light sticks
- Whistle
- Compass
- Signal mirror
- Flint or other fire starter
- Three 2,400 calorie energy bars
- Water bottle with purification tablets (capable of purifying up to 4 liters of water)
- Hygiene kit (soap, toothbrushes/toothpaste, comb, toilet paper, feminine products, cortisone cream for rashes)
- Sunblock wipes
- Insect repellent wipes
- Sanitation bag
- 50 foot rope
- Work gloves

- Notebook and pen (for patient/victim logging)
- Hand and body warmers
- Three N95 Masks (more if you want to share with buddies)
- Waterless hand sanitizer
- Safety vest
- First aid kit

### **Deployment Bag**

Mission readiness means training and preparing for the potentially undesirable and the unusual. It is not very likely that any of us will be sent off for days or weeks with little or no time to go home and pack a bag. Or is it? It happened in Utah in the hot summers of 2010 and 1998. Officers dropped everything, abandoned vacation plans, geared up, and headed to the least populated corner of the state to search for cop killers. Other states have experienced similar manhunts, most recently in New York and Pennsylvania. When will such an event occur in your region?

The deployment bag is simply a bag with a change of clothing (perhaps you'll be coming from court and wearing a suit when the call for help comes) and other basics for comfort. Include a full change of clothing, including two sets of underclothes. Maybe you will opt to carry more depending on where you live and work. Consider tough duty clothes, such as BDUs, and don't forget a belt, socks and shoes.

Add a more complete personal hygiene kit, any necessary prescription medications, earplugs (officers responding to Katrina valued their sleep amid the constant noise), an unread paperback novel or two, towel and shower gear, a small amount of laundry soap. Powdered detergent may be easier to store, but liquid laundry soap will be easier to use in small batches and with limited water. Store it in a sturdy container and package in a heavy-duty zip lock bag. Items on the Katrina workers "wish we'd had" list included baby powder, spare batteries for everything that required batteries, sleeping pad.

As Chief Jeff Chudwin, veteran of a Hurricane Katrina aid team, notes: "Power is king." In addition to the wind-up cell phone charger in a Go-bag and the extra batteries, pack a three-prong extension cord and a power strip. Select a power strip that has widely-spaced outlets to accommodate electronics chargers. Don't forget the 3-volt lithium batteries for small flashlights. Consider a small power inverter for the patrol car. Black and Decker makes a 100-watt power inverter that plugs into a car cigarette lighter outlet. It has a single outlet and a USB charging port and can be purchased for under \$25.00. Don't forget an extra wall charger for your cell phone.

### **Conclusion**

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, I am prepared for battle, but I preferred that it be delayed. Become mission ready now and perhaps you will never need to enjoy the fruits of your preparation. Remember, a warrior surprised is a warrior half defeated, and a warrior prepared has already won the battle.

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