

The Path to Becoming the First Dispatcher of the Year

By Deputy Chris Miller (retired)
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Museum

In 1962, when Jan Adams was just seven years old, her father, Howard Adams, became the parking lot attendant at the Hall of Justice. On occasion, Jan and her mother would take the bus from Pico Rivera to spend the day in downtown L.A. In the afternoon they would walk to the Hall of Justice and ride back home in the car with her dad. With all of the activity involving the Sheriff's Department taking place at the Hall of Justice, Jan found it fascinating every time she went there.



Jan's Dad - Howard Adams
(hands on Hips) HOJJ compound

As Jan got older, she begged her father to take her to work with him and once in a while he'd let her tag along. She would spend the day just watching everything around her; radio cars and transportation buses entering and exiting the jail compound area, the helicopters landing and taking off from Parker Center near city hall. Sometimes she even got to turn the key to open and close the big electronic gates to the compound!



Hall of Justice, 1980

When Sirhan was on trial for killing Robert Kennedy, Herbert Walker was the presiding judge. Fully aware of the historical significance and being a friend of Howard, the judge made arrangements for thirteen year old Jan to spend one day attending the proceedings. She also had the dubious distinction of seeing Charles Manson. He was sitting in the back seat of a radio car between two deputies, with two more deputies in the front seat. He looked straight at her and there truly was evil in those eyes!

One time a female deputy took Jan to see the office of Sheriff Pitchess, and then to the Academy at Biscailuz Center. She saw the cadets in the classroom and visited the range. She even met Pappy Benton, an icon at the range who showed her how the deputies re-loaded the ammunition.

In 1969, when Jan was just 14 years old, her father died of cancer. Jan and her mother had no income. It was the caring and generosity of the Sheriff's personnel at the Hall of Justice that kept them alive until her mother was able to find a job so they could pay their bills. From that time on, Jan was indebted to the Sheriff's Department and the kind people who helped them. Her respect, love and gratitude to the Sheriff's Department never waned.

Jan was thrilled when she became a Law Enforcement Explorer for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Starting in 1971, at age 16, after a ride-along with Deputy Al Kopperud who took her to an Explorer meeting and said, "Sign this girl up!" she volunteered until she turned 21 years old. During that time, Jan was assigned to the Norwalk Sheriff's Station where she became the first female Explorer Captain. She spent every spare moment at the station working the complaint desk, the front counter, and riding along with deputies in patrol cars. She also unknowingly began honing her skills for her future career by working in the Explorer mobile command post, dispatching calls to Explorers working special events, such as the La Mirada Fireworks Show.



Torrance Air Show 1971,
Explorer Jan Adams in center

It was 1971, when Jan, and the rest of the cadets in Explorer Academy Class 6, were loaded into a black and white transportation bus and sent to Torrance to work the air show. Jan was elated to go out on her first Explorer assignment and spent all day standing in a dirt parking lot happily directing traffic. Being a huge fan of air shows and law enforcement, the Torrance Air Show was the best of all worlds. A decade later Jan and her husband, Steve, would indulge their interest in airplanes and Steve's involvement in Search and Rescue by joining the Civil Air Patrol.

Jan Adams graduated from high school when she was 18 years old and saw a job opening for a dispatcher at Monrovia Police Department. The announcement stated that the applicant had to be a male, 5' 7" tall, the same requirements as for their police officers. Although Jan was only 5'1" tall, she had been an Explorer for two years and knew that she could do the job, so she applied. She was accepted at Monrovia Police Department as their first female dispatcher and after working there for six months, had the experience necessary to apply for a dispatcher position with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.



Station "B" in the Hall of Justice

In 1974, when 19 years old, Jan Adams was hired as a dispatcher by the Sheriff's Department. The radio room, known then as Station "B," was located on the second floor of the Hall of Justice just down the hall from the Sheriff's office. Jan continued working as an Explorer and the knowledge obtained from years of radio car ride-alongs provided a unique understanding of what the field deputies were doing.

At the time, the radio room only had four dispatchers, known as RTO's (Radio Telephone Operators) on the air to handle the radio traffic from all 14 Sheriff's stations. One RTO was assigned to each dispatch console, and each dispatch console was assigned between two and five Sheriff's stations. The RTO working at that console was responsible for all radio traffic.



1974 Station "B" (Lf to Rt)
(Background) Harriette Colgrove, Lt.
John Kehow and Virginia Chance (Lf)
Dixie Primrose

Two other dispatchers answered the direct telephone lines from the Sheriff's stations, as well as alarm companies and other agencies such as LAPD, CHP, and the Fire Department. The information was written down on a call slip and handed to the appropriate RTO for transmission to the field units. There was also one additional RTO assigned to another console to run subjects. Running subjects on tactical frequencies "E" or "W" kept the working frequencies clear. The RTO's changed positions every hour so everyone had the opportunity to work all positions.

At age 21, Jan began training new dispatchers and found her true calling. Her goal was to make every trainee the best they could be, and she put her heart and soul into each one. Calling on her experience from five years as an Explorer, she told them to visualize what the deputies were doing and if they did that, they could better anticipate what to expect. Jan felt that it was important that her trainees understood not only what they were doing, but why. She also made it clear that they were to do their best at all times and that anything less was unacceptable. Jan took great pride in the success of her trainees, one of which went on to retire 30 years later as Captain Carrie Stuart.



Station "B" Radio Room
Sgt. Rick Merrick



Steve and Jan Jenkins
Civil Air Patrol

In 1981 Dispatcher Jan Adams married Deputy Steve Jenkins, whom she had met originally in 1974 when they were both Explorers.

Jan Jenkins was diligent when it came to assisting the field units. If deputies broadcast the partial license plate of a vehicle they were looking for, Jan was relentless in trying to track it down. She would spend all shift running different combinations of letters and numbers, hoping to find the vehicle they were looking for. Sometimes she got lucky.

The call of a kidnapping came out in Antelope Valley. Jan took the existing license plate and ran it. She took the registered owner's name and ran that. Then she ran any name or license plate that was associated with the original plate and registered owner. She eventually came up with an address and when deputies went to that location they found the child who was taken and the kidnap suspect. The child was returned to her parents and the suspect was

arrested. She also helped deputies catch a burglary suspect by running plates and names associated with the original information. Helping deputies in the field was all about "doing the job right" and was incredibly rewarding.

One night a West Hollywood deputy ran a plate on a Chevy. The plate came back to a Ford registered in San Francisco. The deputy was excited, thinking he was following a stolen vehicle. Jan kept asking the deputy to confirm the license plate since, for some reason, it didn't sound right to her. The deputy confirmed the plate over and over again while requesting backup units so he could conduct a felony stop. As his backup was responding, Jenkins continued to study the plate, trying to figure out what was wrong. Once the back-up units arrived at the location, they conducted a felony stop. As the driver was being arrested, Jan realized that the deputy had used the incorrect phonetic, saying "John" for "J" instead of "George" for "G." She advised the deputy over the radio that running his plate with a "G" instead of a "J" came back to the vehicle he had stopped. The deputy was grateful and immediately released the driver. Jenkins received a commendation for going above and beyond the call of duty, as well as for her extraordinary perception in anticipating potential problems and requirements of patrol deputies in the field.



Original Radio Tower at the
Sheriff's Radio Center (SRC)

Jan received a commendation for simultaneously handling four emergencies occurring at the same time. The radio traffic she coordinated involved a 245 vehicle stop, code-3 response to a motorcycle down, an assistance request, and a code-3 response to a baby not breathing.



Captain Sue Burgoon, Supervisor
Donna Mason, Jan Jenkins and
Sheriff Sherman Block at SRC

In 1985, the Sheriff's Radio Center (SRC) decided to honor their dispatchers by presenting an award for "Dispatcher of the Month." Jan Jenkins was selected by her peers to be the very first "Dispatcher of the Month," receiving a certificate and an "Employee of the Month" parking space.

In May 1986, all of the dispatchers were given ballots to vote for "Dispatcher of the Year," the contenders being chosen from the list of "Dispatchers of the Month." When the vote was tallied, the honor of being the first "Dispatcher of the Year" fell to Jan Jenkins.

It wasn't that Jan was able to out-dispatch any of the other RTO's, it was about caring and involvement and going above-and-beyond. Every dispatcher is capable of handling any and all emergencies or they wouldn't be there. The job requires the ability to remain calm and organized under the most difficult circumstances and very few people can do it. Where Jan stood out was her expertise and commitment to consistently go the extra mile. Jan trained deputies at the stations on radio procedure and was the first senior trainer in the Radio Room. This meant that the trainees needed her approval before they could dispatch on their own.

Two years in a row, she put together a team to participate in the Jimmy Stewart Relay Marathon in Griffith Park. Each person on the 5 member team ran one 5 mile length for a total of 25 miles. They always came in dead last, but they didn't care. They named their team the "Walkie Talkies."



Carla & Jan at Jimmy Stewart Run

She was also extensively involved in the development of the computers in the radio cars and the set-up of the dispatch consoles as the Sheriff's Department prepared to change over to the MDT system. This involved innumerable meetings, and arguments, over many months, all on her own time.



Captain Sue Burgoon, Sheriff Sherman Block, Jan Jenkins at a Sheriff's Radio Center console

On May 8, 1986, Sheriff Block came to the Sheriff's Radio Center to honor the first "Dispatcher of the Year" at a small ceremony. When he arrived, the radio room was decorated with balloons and there was a special cake for the honoree. The Sheriff presented Jan with her award, a necklace with a charm that said, "#1 Dispatcher." She also had her own "Dispatcher of the Year" parking space. Before leaving, Sheriff Block donned a headset and plugged into a console to see what it was like to dispatch calls. Jan was plugged into the same console to take over if necessary. Since the Sheriff had a very distinctive voice, right after dispatching a non-emergent call to a Lakewood unit, a deputy said over the radio, "Is that you, Sherm?" Captain Sue Burgoon seemed taken aback, but the Sheriff just laughed.

In 1987, Jenkins transferred to Wayside Honor Rancho as a Services Assistant. Having two young children in school and a husband working different shifts at Crescenta Valley Station it became necessary to get closer to home and work an "A" schedule. Then her mother who had, for years, watched the children while she was at work, passed away from cancer. Since family must come first, in 1992, Jan made the difficult decision to retire.



Jan Jenkins working at Wayside

Even after retirement, Jan remained involved with the Sheriff's Department, volunteering to dispatch at training sessions for the patrol deputies, and even going back to SRC to help out after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The patrol trainings were always a favorite as they were a family affair, with Jan Jenkins dispatching, Sgt. Steve Jenkins acting as a monitor to evaluate the deputies, and kids Michael and Kellie Jenkins participating as role players.



Steve, Mike and Kellie at role playing

During one training session held at Magic Mountain Amusement Park, Jan sat alone in a patrol car trying to balance two clipboards, a hand-held radio and the radio car mic, while dispatching the calls, answering the deputies on the radio, as well as the helicopter circling overhead. This was challenging enough in itself, but it's hard to concentrate while you're anxiously watching a skunk walking along next to where you're sitting.

Since 1986, there have been many qualified and highly capable people to wear the title of "Dispatcher of the Year." It is doubtful, however, that any of them were more dedicated and devoted than Jan Jenkins. The kindness shown by the people of the Sheriff's Department to a teenage girl and her widowed mother was never forgotten, and Jan paid it back in the best way she could.



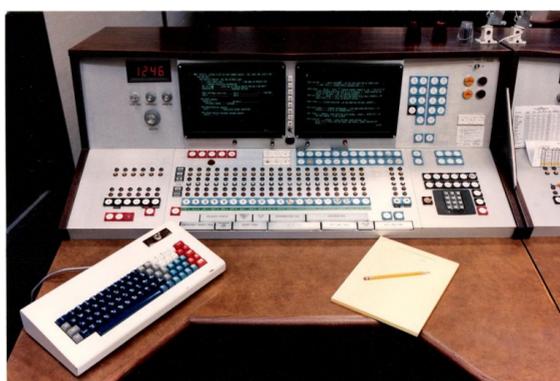
Jan Jenkins Supervising on New Year's Day



Steve Jenkins, Jan Jenkins and Sheriff Block at SRC

Frequency	Use	Base	Mobile
U	car to car	39.48	39.49
H	helicopter to car	39.60	39.60
E	east division, subject/tactical	39.72	39.72
W	west division, subject/tactical	39.32	39.32
D	detective	39.24	39.24
M	mobile command posts	39.52	39.52
F-1	field to car	39.40	39.40
F-2	field to field	39.76	39.26
A	administrative	39.36	39.35
11	San Dimas, Upland Car	39.94	39.46
12	Industry	39.64	39.22
13	Norwalk, Fico Rivera	39.88	39.42
14	East Los Angeles	39.76	39.30
15	Montrose, Altadena, Temple	39.82	39.34
21	Lakewood	39.20	39.66
22	Firestone, Carson	39.44	39.78
23	Lennox, Lomita	39.14	39.84
24	Malibu, West Hollywood, Calabasas	39.02	39.74
2b	Newhall, Antelope Valley	39.08	39.86
2c	Avalon	39.68	39.68
27	Antelope Valley Expansion #1 (1)	39.28	39.70
28	Antelope Valley Expansion #2 (2)	39.17	39.92

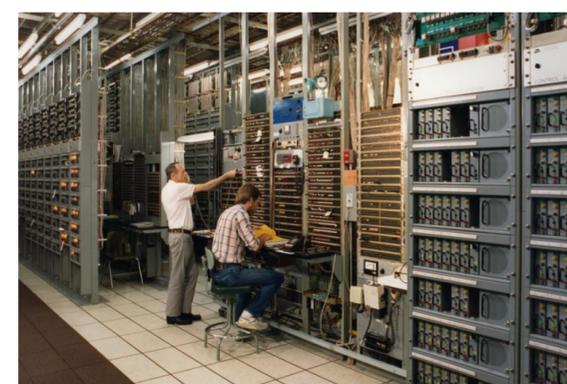
LASD Low Band Radio Frequency Chart (Prior to MDTs) Artifact from SRC



Dispatch Console at SRC



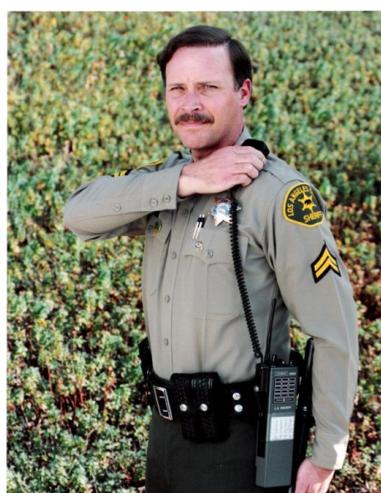
Original Radio Wiring System at SRC



Original Radio Wiring System at SRC



Dispatch Consoles at SRC



First Portable Radio



SRC Dispatch Consoles



MDT in Radio Car

A Moment in History by the Los Angeles Sheriffs' Museum

Poster designed by Lieutenant Dan Waidner (Retired)