

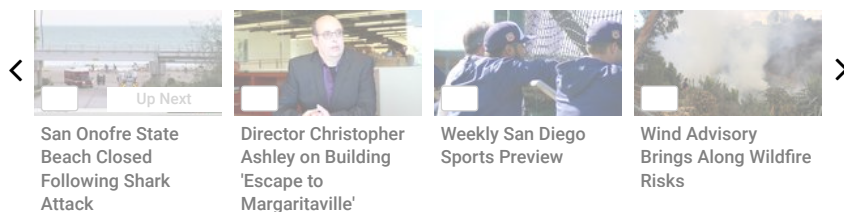
'I Couldn't Breathe:' Firefighter Stabbed in Attack Recounts Horrifying Moment

On June 24, 2015, San Diego Fire-Rescue Department firefighter Ben Vernon was stabbed while on duty in downtown San Diego

By Wendy Fry



One of the San Diego firefighters stabbed by defendant Ryan Allen Jones recounted the terrifying moments in an interview with NBC 7's Wendy Fry. (Published Saturday, March 26, 2016)



When the medical aid call came in on June 24, 2015, Ben Vernon and Alex Wallbrett's entire San Diego Fire-Rescue Department (SDFD) crew groaned.


"Intoxicated male down. Possible mixed medications."

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Jury Returns Verdict in Firefighter Stabbing

A jury convicted Ryan Allen Jones, a man accused of stabbing two San Diego firefighters, of two counts of attempted voluntary manslaughter, but acquitted him of the more serious attempted murder charges on March 24, 2016. (Published Thursday, March 24, 2016)

"I could not have been more calm," Vernon, an SDFD firefighter told NBC 7 in an exclusive interview Friday. "We'd been on the same call a thousand times before."

As they rolled up, Vernon surveyed the scene. He saw uniformed armed guards at the Park and Market trolley station in downtown San Diego. He saw no threats, no commotions, and he could hear the patient yelling, meaning he didn't even need to bring the trauma kit from the engine.

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"It was a calm scene," Vernon said.

Within minutes, it all took a drastic and violent turn.

Jarring Body Cam Vid Shows Man Stabbing Firefighters

This short video, captured on a body camera worn by an MTS security guard, shows the chaotic moments when suspect Ryan Allen Jones stabbed SDFD firefighters Benjamin Vernon and Alex Wallbrett on June 24, 2015, in downtown San Diego. (Published Friday, July 17, 2015)

A bystander refused to leave and became confrontational with those trying to provide medical aid to the patient.

"He pulled a knife, and I was like 'Uh, oh, back-up, calm down.' And that's when I tried to get away. And I hit this railing," Vernon recounted.

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At that moment, [Ryan Allen Jones](#), 35, rushed Vernon, thrusting a hunting knife into his back twice, barely missing Vernon's kidney and puncturing his lung with the second strike.

Vernon's partner, Alex Wallbrett, tried to stop the assault and was himself stabbed three times. A fire engineer stepped in to stop the attack on Wallbrett.

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1,000

I don't know

100

2,000

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my feet was how I was going to stay alive," Vernon said.

The violent act shattered many of Vernon's core beliefs, such as that "no one would ever try to hurt a firefighter."

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Vernon held onto that railing until his friends arrived with an ambulance.

"They said: 'We got it. We got you, Benny.' So, I was very grateful for that," Vernon said.

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When Vernon was able to take a full breath again that's when he realized he was going to live. But, the healing process was long and it isn't over yet.

"I started having nightmares. The most amazing nightmares I've ever had. The most graphic, violent nightmares, to the point where I wasn't sleeping," Vernon said.

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As the firefighter continues to recover, he's hoping his experience will help others. Vernon is publishing an article in the "Journal of Emergency Services" about getting help as a first responder after a traumatic ordeal on duty.

"We try to be the toughest of the tough. We run into burning buildings. We run toward danger when everyone else is running away. So, appearing weak is not good," Vernon said, adding it takes real strength to admit to needing to talk to someone.

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In his article in JES, Vernon stresses the need of finding the right doctor as being just as important as admitting to needing therapy.

After four months out of commission, Vernon has returned to service working desk duty for the SDFD.

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A jury found Jones guilty Thursday of two counts of attempted voluntary manslaughter and two counts of assault with a deadly weapon for the attack. Jones is scheduled to be sentenced in mid-April.

Vernon said he's relieved the trial is over and can put it behind him but feels nothing but sympathy for Jones.

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"I just feel really bad for him," Vernon said. "He's obviously got a lot of anger issues and I just feel bad."



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"The most dangerous call I've done in my career was the most routine thing I've ever done," Vernon said. "So, it just shows how dangerous this job can be on a daily basis."

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Like · Reply · Mar 26, 2016 2:21pm



Burt Hulbert · Works at San Diego Zoo

But this isn't attempted murder is it? Sure seems like it with a hunting knife puncturing your lungs.

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Nadir Maitlo · Works at *noT yeT workinG! !M still studyinG*

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Regards a humble Human being.

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