

Stabbed Firefighters "Damn Proud" to Work for SDFD, Want to Return

Both injured firefighters were released from the hospital within 48 hours of the East Village stabbing

By Andie Adams and Dave Summers



Benjamin Vernon and Alex Wallbrett – two firefighters stabbed in a violent encounter – say despite the traumatic incident, they're "damn proud" to work for the san Diego Fire-Rescue Department. NBC 7's Dave Summers reports on June 27, 2015. (Published Saturday, June 27, 2015)

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Two firefighters stabbed in a [violent encounter Wednesday](#) say despite the trauma, they are "damn proud" to work for San Diego Fire-Rescue Department (SDFD) and look forward to returning to their jobs.

Benjamin Vernon, 37, was released from Scripps Mercy Hospital Friday after suffering two stab wounds and a collapsed lung. Standing beside him was his partner Alex Wallbrett, 32, who was also treated for stab wounds and released Thursday.

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"Thank you for your love and support," he added. "I am damn proud to be a San Diego City firefighter."

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While the firefighters could not talk about specifics of the case, [prosecutors say](#) the men were attacked while answering a medical call in East Village Wednesday.

Suspect [Ryan Allen Jones](#), 34, is accused of interfering with the scene and becoming enraged when officials pushed him away. Surveillance video allegedly shows Vernon backing away with his hands up as Jones pulls out a knife and stabs him. When Wallbrett rushed to his partner's aid, he too was stabbed, according to prosecutors.

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"The whole thing happened so quickly," said Wallbrett. "When it was done, just disbelief. Still trying to put together some things that happened and make sure that it's... I'm sorry, it's hard to describe."

After spending the night in the hospital, the firefighter said what he feels now is sore.

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"It's incredible how many muscles you need to do the smallest things in your life and how much you take them for granted until you can't move like you normally do," Wallbrett said.

During the news conference, both expressed their deep gratitude to their fellow emergency responders, the hospital staff that healed them, and everyone who expressed their well wishes.

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Vernon said he could not believe he was walking out of the hospital within 48 hours.

"The fire department is a big family," he said, choking up. "You forget that sometimes until you get stabbed. Then everybody comes to your aid. I've had nonstop visitors for the last two days. People I haven't seen in years have come to visit me, and that's just an overwhelming response, and I think it helped me heal twice as fast."

Now, Vernon and Wallbrett are looking toward the future – to the day they can again help others.

"I can't wait to get back to work," said Vernon, "and I want to go back to Station 4 and I want to go back to helping the people of this city. I'm looking forward to that."

Wallbrett echoed the sentiment, though it's unclear how long it will take them to fully heal.

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However, there was nothing in Wednesday's call to indicate the danger awaiting them. It started as a normal incident, according to Wallbrett. When asked if the stabbing will change the way he approaches his job, he said not for him.

"We do this job because we love helping other people," Wallbrett said. "We are always going to like helping other people, and regardless of a crazy incident like this, it's not going to stop us from going out and still helping people."

SDFD Chief of Operations Steve Ricci reinforced that point, telling the crowd that this is not going to change what they do things.

He said with crews responding to nearly 120,000 calls a year – 85 percent of which are medical – he is "surprised this hasn't happened before, with either guns or knives. It's unfortunate it happened, but it's important to know that these guys and gals are out there 24 hours a day on the street, doing this 120,000 times a year."

Scripps Mercy Dr. Seth Krosner said both firefighters should have no lasting physical effects from the violence.

But emotionally, the incident shook even his staff.

"In the field of trauma care, you work so closely with the medics bringing you patients that when one of them is injured, it is a little bit like a member of your own family or extended work circle being injured," said Krosner.

Jones, the man accused of stabbing them, [has pleaded not guilty](#) to charges against him. He faces 25 years to life in prison if convicted.

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Seeing the danger, he came to the aid of his fallen partner. A very brave thing to do. I'm glad they both are mending. Thank you for your work. Life will feel a little safer knowing they will do what is necessary to save a life.

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