

The EMS Experience

Saluting those with 20 years or more in EMS

Tommy Ray Dunsworth, EMT-P



Doak Bechthold, EMT-P, training with Tom Dunsworth.

What was your first day on the job in EMS?

After serving in Vietnam, I returned to my hometown, Perryton, Texas, where I went to work as a city police officer in 1972. At that time, the City of Perryton had one paid firefighter who was trained in first aid and CPR. I responded to all calls within the city and often drove the ambulance in an emergency. After three years as a peace officer, I went to work for the fire department, where we ran medical calls in a 1972 Ford station wagon.

After a few days on the job, we responded to a motorcycle wreck near the local hospital. I was busy packaging the patient, who had an obvious fractured femur, when a bystander stepped forward and asked

if he could help. I quickly told him that we had the situation under control. After a couple of minutes, the man again stepped forward, asking if I was sure he couldn't help. I reassured the bystander that we had the situation under control and to please step back. As we wheeled the patient into the ER, I looked up and saw that same bystander who said, "Now may I see my patient?" That bystander was the new doctor for Ochiltree General Hospital, Dr. Rick Siewert. With a grin of embarrassment, I said "You sure can, Doc."

Which services have you worked for over the years?

Beginning with certificates in first aid and CPR, and progressing to EMT, then EMT with special skills,

and paramedic, I worked for Perryton Fire and EMS from March 1976 to October 1998. During all those years with Perryton Fire Department, I served under Chief C. B. Luther. As a basic coordinator, I conducted classes in-house and for area students. After my retirement I volunteered with Perryton Fire Department and provided paramedic coverage for Hansford County EMS. Currently, I am a paramedic with Booker EMS.

Why did you get into EMS?

I served with the First Infantry out of Fort Riley, Kansas, as a combat photographer in Vietnam. While I was not a medic, my experience in Vietnam prepared me well for a career in EMS. Before serving in the military, I was quiet and introverted, but I was a different person after my return from the war. Since I was running most of the emergency calls as a police officer in Perryton, Texas, I realized that I would be more welcome on the scene in the uniform of a medical attendant than in the uniform of a police officer. It all comes down to "helping people." I felt that I could do more good as an EMT.

How has the field changed since you've been in it?

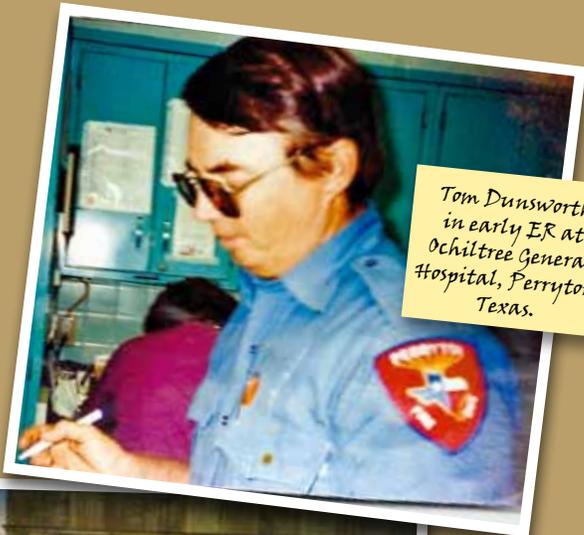
When I started in EMS, we ran a one-man unit in a station wagon with a shoebox of equipment. In those days, it was scoop and run, and speed was important. Often we ran a transfer the one hundred thirty miles to the closest definitive care with only one person in the unit—the driver. We drove fast and occasionally stopped to check the patient. If the patient was especially severe, we might have an RN from the hospital accompany the patient.

Tom Dunsworth exiting ambulance with Lipscomb County Chief Deputy Sona Alexander at rollover.



Tommy Ray Dunsworth, circa 1972.

Tom Dunsworth in early ER at Ochiltree General Hospital, Ferrytton, Texas.



Tom Dunsworth, kneeling at right, Lipscomb County Health Fair, October, 2002.



We blew an engine every few months. Today we have a staff of EMTs in the ambulance and fully equipped MICU boxes with more equipment on one shelf than we had in the whole ambulance in the early days. Today the driver's only job is to drive!

Is there a particular moment or call that stands out?

There are many great days in EMS as well as many tragic ones. Being there for the delivery of six babies was a great part of the job, and delivering my daughter, Lisa, was a highlight.

But, by far the best moment happened on September 22, 2011. That day started like any other. I spent the morning with Fire Chief Scott Miller, who teaches Ag science at Booker High School. He, my co-workers Efran

Hermosillo and Jason Garcia, and I were preparing for a homecoming pep rally. We broke for lunch and I met my wife and friends at a local restaurant. Sitting next to her in the booth, I suddenly slumped over in V-fib arrest. Fortunately for me, my wife is an EMT. Also eating in the restaurant that day were Charlene Duke, who was director for Darrouzett EMS, and Lisa Yauck, principal of Booker High School. All trained regularly in CPR. CPR was started immediately, and Booker EMS responded with a defibrillator. One bi-phasic shock was administered by Jonathan Sell, director of Booker EMS. The best sight was to open my eyes and see my wife and familiar EMS personnel around me. I knew they would take care of me. As a paramedic, I know the odds of

survival and feel fortunate. As you can imagine, I was not the easiest patient on the ambulance or later in the coronary intensive care unit. I had two stents placed and am part of a national study of a new type of implantable cardioverter-defibrillator, the Fortify. My diet and lifestyle have changed, and I lost one hundred pounds. The doc said "lose it," so I lost it. I feel like a walking miracle.

What has been your favorite part of your career in EMS?

Responding to all types of calls and making a difference in people's lives has made it all worthwhile. Being able to teach classes through the years and never charging anyone for a class has been important to me and to my students.