



Inside the New ATF

By Andrew L. Llubes, Senior Public Affairs Specialist, Office of Public Affairs, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Washington, D.C.

When the federal government underwent its homeland security reorganization after the passage and signing of the Homeland Security Act in November 2002, one of the seamless changes for state and local law enforcement was with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF). ATF changed its name, its departmental affiliation, and some of its functions without

interrupting its service to local law enforcement. Few street officers noticed the difference in their relationship with ATF.

After more than 200 years under the mantle of the Treasury Department, where it began as a revenue collection agency, the bureau moved in January 2003 to the Department of Justice, was renamed the Bureau of Alcohol,

Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (still referred to as ATF) and shed its regulatory and revenue collection responsibilities over the alcohol and tobacco industries.

Now ATF is part of a department whose primary mission is the administration and enforcement of U.S. laws. ATF is the lead federal agency in the fight against firearms crime, arson, explosives violations, and the illegal trafficking of alcohol and tobacco products. Given that bombs and other explosives are the terrorist weapons of choice, ATF's expanded jurisdiction for enforcement of the Safe Explosives Act means the bureau also brings its expertise and jurisdiction to bear in the fight against terrorism. ATF's missions are to prevent terrorism, reduce violent crime, and protect the public.

ATF provides post-blast investigative and advanced explosives destruction techniques training for state, local, federal, and foreign law enforcement at its facility at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, and firearms and explosives training at the U.S.-funded International Law Enforcement Academies in Botswana, Hungary, and Thailand. In addition, the National Laboratory Center is home to the ATF National Firearms Examiners Academy, which trains state and local law enforcement officers to become firearms and tool mark examiners.

ATF, which became a separate bureau in 1972, traces its proud history as a unique, specialized law enforcement agency back to 1789, when the first Congress passed a spirits tax to help pay the Revolutionary War debt. Through Prohibition, revenuers, and Eliot Ness's Untouchables in the 1920s and 1930s, the missions of ATF have continued to change to meet the needs of criminal justice and community safety.

Today, with nearly 5,000 employees, including special agents, industry investigators, and a host of other administrative and technical professionals, ATF operates 23 field divisions with 250 field and satellite offices and has attachés in Canada, Colombia, and Mexico and a representative in Lyon, France, at Interpol.

Under Director Carl J. Truscott, who was named to the post in April 2004, ATF has reinstated the Directorate of Public and Governmental Affairs, including a Liaison Division dedicated to maintaining the bureau's longtime partnerships with state and local law enforcement agencies. Ultimately, ATF succeeds in its missions because of these partnerships and the dedication and expertise of its employees.

Firearms Tracing

The National Tracing Center (NTC) supports Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) by conducting firearms tracing to link suspects to firearms recovered by law enforcement in the course of criminal investigations. Tracing helps identify potential traffickers, be they licensed or unlicensed sellers, and—when a given community undertakes sufficiently comprehensive tracing—to detect in-state and interstate patterns in the sources and kinds of crime guns. In addition, the eTrace system allows law enforcement to use the Internet to submit trace requests to ATF, receive trace results, and perform limited analysis. Alternatively, law enforcement is supported by the PSN contractors located around the country through ATF's four Regional Crime Gun Centers (RCGC) and through the Crime Gun Analysis Branch (CGAB). Detailed analysis, including the geospatial relationship of the firearms trace data (mapping), is produced at each of the RCGC and at CGAB to support local, state, federal and international law enforcement agencies.

Additional assets and resources ATF can share with state and local law enforcement are a new state-of-the-art National Laboratory Center that includes a fire research laboratory dedicated to fire scene investigations, two other forensic laboratories, and the Arson and Explosives National Repository. The repository has developed the Bomb Arson Tracking System (BATS), which allows local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to share information about bomb and arson cases and incidents. The bureau also helped develop Dfuzze, which provides its users with a comprehensive international and national information management system on explosives incidents. Law enforcement counterparts in the United Kingdom, Colombia, and Mexico were among the first to join ATF in Dfuzze.

Another way ATF assists state and local law enforcement is through the deployment of its four rapid-response National Response Teams to large-scale arson and explosives incidents. These teams of ATF agents and other highly specialized experts have all of ATF's resources at their disposal, including arson and explosives detection canines. The bureau's Special Response Teams are specially trained agents who safely respond to high-risk tactical situations such as arrest and search warrants and undercover operations.

As the federal government's lead agency on explosives, ATF now has jurisdiction for investigating all explosives incidents not related to terrorism and, in an effort to improve information sharing with state and local law enforcement, for maintaining all of the Department of Justice's consolidated arson and explosives incident databases. ATF's explosives expertise extends to the war in Iraq, where explosives enforcement officers and special agents who are also certified explosives specialists are training the new Iraqi Police Service, participating in the Regime Crimes Liaison Office preparing the war crimes tribunals against leaders of the ousted Saddam Hussein regime, and serving as handlers of explosives detection canine teams.

National Tracing Center

ATF's National Tracing Center is a firearms-tracing facility providing leads that help local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies solve firearms crimes. The National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) provides a unified ballistics tool for 230 law enforcement partners who can instantly compare gun evidence.

Located in Martinsburg, West Virginia, the National Tracing Center, the National Firearms Act Branch, and the Federal Explosives Licensing Center offer services

that help law enforcement agencies solve crimes through tracing, licensing, testing, evaluation, technical support, and training.

National Laboratory Center

Located in suburban Maryland and completed in June 2003, the state-of-the-art National Laboratory Center includes a laboratory devoted to fire investigation support and forensic fire research. Law enforcement agencies throughout the world use the facility for training to solve some of the most challenging cases. This facility has three basic components:

- The Forensic Science Laboratory, where investigators examine evidence from criminal investigations related to firearms, explosives, arson, and alcohol and tobacco diversion.
- The Fire Research Laboratory, dedicated to fire scene investigations, including the ability to reconstruct fire scenes to determine how fires start and spread.
- The Alcohol and Tobacco Laboratory, which conducts chemical, physical, and instrumental analyses to support alcohol and tobacco product taxation and assure safety for consumers. The Department of the Treasury's Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau runs the lab.

Project Safe Neighborhoods

Project Safe Neighborhoods is the federal government's top domestic criminal justice initiative and a nationwide commitment to reduce gun crime. ATF works with state and local law enforcement agencies to investigate violent firearms offenders, firearms traffickers, and gangs who use firearms. Since June 2004, ATF has deployed Violent Crime Impact Teams (VCIT) in 20 cities to identify, disrupt, arrest, and prosecute the most violent offenders. VCIT participants use innovative technology, analytical investigative resources and an integrated federal, state, and local strategy. VCIT areas witnessed a 17 percent decline in homicides committed with guns during the program's six-month pilot.

Canine Enforcement Training Center

Completed in September 1999, the Canine Enforcement Training Center in Front Royal, Virginia, includes an indoor training area for accelerant and explosives detection canines from local, state, federal, and foreign law enforcement agencies. More than 131 accelerant-detection canine teams and more than 450 explosives detection canine teams have been trained and certified through the ATF program.

Explosives Detection Canine Training

ATF's Explosives Detection Canine Course, begun in 1990 in conjunction with the State Department's Office of Antiterrorism, has trained 474 teams since its inception. They are currently deployed throughout the United States and in 19 foreign countries, including Iraq, where they assist in counterterrorism missions and critical infrastructure protection. Building on lessons learned in its own program, ATF has begun to implement national odor recognition testing as part of a scientifically validated program. The testing will help to test and train explosives detection canines used by federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to ensure that the dogs are fully capable of detecting a wide variety of explosive odors commonly used in attacks around the world. ATF is working to support organizations such as the National Bomb Squad Commanders Advisory Board, which is seeking to have every explosives detection canine working in conjunction with a U.S. bomb squad to have passed a standard certification test.

ATF Programs

The bureau cooperates with local, state, and federal agencies in carrying out Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) and the Violent Crime Impact Teams (VCIT) initiatives. PSN and VCIT take a highly focused approach and combine the personnel and resources of U.S. attorneys nationwide, state and local prosecutors, and local, state, and federal law enforcement in designing local plans and targeting areas with high rates of violent crime.



Laboratory Services

ATF regulates the explosives industry as well as investigates explosives-related crime. The bureau has the statutory authority to oversee 12,000 explosives licensees and permit holders as well as 106,000 federal firearms licensees.

ATF provides countless hours of explosives training to local, state, federal, and foreign agencies through its programs at Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia and the training offered at the U.S.-funded international law enforcement academies in Botswana, Hungary, and Thailand.

In investigating diversion, the illegal trafficking of alcohol and tobacco products on which no taxes have been paid, ATF works to stop the vast profits from these smuggling enterprises that end up in the hands of criminals and, in some cases, terrorist organizations.

ATF enhances its enforcement missions with community outreach programs designed to deter crime and violence. In all too many cities, children face the grave threat of gang violence. ATF's educational outreach to schoolchildren in the 1980s eventually became the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program, now funded by the Office of Justice Programs. ATF trained 16,000 officers to provide GREAT instruction to nearly three million children, who learn to make good decisions, resist negative influences, and develop more positive attitudes toward police officers.

ATF is also proud of its partnerships in reducing violent crime to a historic low and supporting the Department of Justice in preventing terrorism. ATF's tradition of excellence will enable it to continue to make real progress in promoting the country's security and making communities safer. The men and women of ATF remain steadfast in their resolve to safeguard the American people and embrace the challenges of the future with confidence and determination.❖

ATF's laboratories help federal, state, and local investigators perfect their cases. ATF maintains three national laboratory facilities, in Maryland, Georgia, and California. The National Laboratory Center in Maryland serves as the administrative headquarters for ATF Laboratory Services nationwide and houses the ATF Forensic Science Laboratory and the Fire Research Laboratory. The Fire Research Laboratory can replicate initial fire scenarios approaching a quarter of an acre in size, to scale, and under controlled conditions to allow for detailed analysis. The ATF Forensic Science Laboratories are accredited by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors. In fiscal 2004, ATF Forensic Science Laboratories personnel received 3,460 forensic cases; provided 731 days of instruction to ATF and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies; spent 257 days providing expert testimony in court; and spent 332 days providing scientific advice and support at ATF-investigated crime scenes.

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