



## **Bicycle Rapid Response Team Triumphs at the Republican National Convention**

**by Tony Holte, PCI #1035**

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*Ed.'s Note: IPMBA Instructors Tony Holte and Jason Bain will share their RNC experience during the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual IPMBA Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. On April 27-29, 2009, participants in the Bicycle Response Team Training course will learn and practice the techniques and tactics employed during the RNC as well as hear first-person accounts of the four protest-filled days and nights. Registration materials are available on the conference page at [www.ipmba.org](http://www.ipmba.org). Slots are limited, so register early!*

During the four days of the Republican National Convention (RNC) in St. Paul and Minneapolis MN, we used our bikes for more than just getting from "Point A to Point B". As would be proven time and time again over the next four days, this was truly training come to life. Because of the extensive Bicycle Response Team training we engaged in throughout the summer, our teams executed their maneuvers seamlessly.

On the first day of the convention, we were challenged by a group of a few hundred anarchists, just as we anticipated. A Bicycle Rapid Response Team of 13 officers responded to a group that had taken to the streets and impeded several vehicles. Because we were on bikes, we were able to reach the scene with great speed. In a column of two, the 13 bike officers pierced through the crowd, which had surrounded the car of an elderly Vietnam veteran and his wife. We encircled the vehicle, moved the crowd along and sent the couple safely on their way.

The story above is just one of the many examples of how our team of 110 Bike Rapid Response Team Officers assisted in the efforts at the RNC. We were able to interject ourselves into large crowds and surgically remove arrestees with ease. We were also able to use our bikes as a mobile road block, keeping the crowd at bay by moving our team in sync as one unit.

Because the security around the RNC venue made it impossible for normal vehicle traffic to navigate from east to west, the bicycle teams were the *only* officers with the ability to travel to and from all ends of the downtown area. This was imperative because incidents were taking place on all sides of the venue. Immediate response was necessary to all corners of St. Paul, and without bicycles, the response time would have been significantly reduced.

In another incident, we were able to use our bicycles as weapons of opportunity to defend ourselves. As we were corralling a group of protestors during an illegal march, our unit was charged and a breach was attempted on our line of officers. We lifted our bikes, and using them as shields, pushed the crowd back, in the same fashion a mobile field force officer might use his baton.

When not directly dealing with specific incidents, we were able to break down our platoon into proactive patrols groups. We separated into groups of four and patrolled throughout the crowd. We received media commentary, echoed by other police personnel, that our presence made it



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appear that there were teams of hundreds of bike officers. Our constant and mobile presence was a great deterrent that stunted the efforts of well-organized protestors and anarchists.

During marches, we were able to be on-site to provide live situation reports to our incident command. This arrangement was superior to the alternative – air support or helicopters or pole-mounted cameras – as we were able to actually hear and see situations in live time and react accordingly.

We also found that people felt more comfortable with approaching us. We had several conversations with peaceful protestors who welcomed our presence and appreciated our protection of their First Amendment rights.

The Bicycle Rapid Response Teams at the RNC proved to be a very successful tool. There simply is not a more effective way to deploy a group of officers throughout an area during an event such as this. I foresee utilizing these tactics at such events as city celebrations and festivals, large sporting events, as well as future protests and political events.

*Officer Tony Holte has been with the St. Paul Police Department for eight years. He has been an IPMBA Instructor since 2007. Tony and his team of instructors from St. Paul and Minneapolis successfully trained over 100 Bicycle Rapid Response Team Officers for the 2008 Republican National Convention. He will be an instructor for the Bicycle Response Team Training Course offered at the 2009 IPMBA Conference. He can be reached at [anthony.holte@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:anthony.holte@ci.stpaul.mn.us).*

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