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60 Minutes: The Boston Bombings

The following is a script from "The Boston Bombings" which aired on April 21, 2013. Scott Pelley is the correspondent.

A five-day battle in the war on terror leaves us with a lot of questions. What was the motive for the marathon attack? Where did the terrorists plan to strike next with their arsenal of bombs? And how did the manhunt stop them in only a little over 100 hours?

Tonight we have the inside story from one of the leaders of that hunt, Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis. Last Monday afternoon, Davis was in the stands at the finish line. All was going well so he left to take a call. One of the city's favorite celebrations was coming to an end. The marathon is always on the day that marks the start of the American Revolution. But suddenly, Ed Davis and a task force of more than 4,000 would soon find themselves defending Boston on Patriot's Day.

Scott Pelley: When you arrived, what did you see?

Ed Davis: I saw a bombing incident that I'd only seen in places overseas.

Ed Davis: I saw Officer Michael Barrett from the Boston Police Department wade into an unbelievable scene of carnage and put the fire out on an individual that was still on fire and then grab belts off people and put tourniquets on the man's legs so he could save his life.

Scott Pelley: This is your city. You're enormously proud of it and these people had done this on Patriot's Day.

Ed Davis: It certainly made me resolve to find these people quickly and to hold them accountable.

Scott Pelley: You were gonna get them.

Ed Davis: Yeah, I was.

Scott Pelley: You made that promise to yourself.

Ed Davis: I did. And to several other people too.

Ed Davis' promise was to the three who were killed and more than 170 wounded. The first calls he made were to Richard DesLauriers, head of the FBI's Boston office, and Colonel Timothy Alben of the state police. The FBI took the lead and the marathon became a sprint.

Ed Davis: Very quickly we established a command post at the Westin Hotel in the ballroom. And that expanded from about a dozen people when I first walked in the door to 100 people in the first hour.

They found bomb parts right away. Evidence cascaded in.

Ed Davis: It's a logistical nightmare. We found very quickly that we needed a place to process this evidence. So a warehouse was obtained, very quickly computers were brought in from the FBI and the state police and the Boston Police and set up to review video.

Among the thousands of faces, they wanted to isolate people who didn't seem surprised.

Ed Davis: And particularly one of the FBI agents who's a technical expert did a tremendous job and really was the person that was able to get to the bottom of this very quickly.

Look at these people running in terror. But look deeper and see what the agent saw. This kid seems unconcerned. Turned out, he came with a backpack but he left without it, just like the older man who seemed to be with him.

Scott Pelley: And when you saw the faces of those two men you thought what?

Ed Davis: I thought about the death of the 8-year-old boy, the Martin child. And how someone who didn't appear to be particularly evil could do such an evil thing.

Scott Pelley: They didn't appear all that evil to you in the video?

Ed Davis: No, they looked like college kids.

Nineteen-year-old Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and his 26-year-old brother, Tamerlan, were from a region of Russia that's mostly Islamic. Their ancestors were from Chechnya where Islamic militants have fought a vicious civil war against Russian rule. Around 2002, the family fled, as refugees, to the United States.

Rose Schutzberg: I can't give you a specific moment when I first met him. He just sort of appeared in my life...

Rose Schutzberg knew Dzhokhar at Cambridge Rindge and Latin, a top high school where Dzhokhar did well.

Scott Pelley: You told us at one point that you had, in high school, a little bit of a crush on him

Rose Schutzberg: I, yes, I did. How could you not?

Scott Pelley: What was it about him?

Rose Schutzberg: I think it was that he was equally smart, but also humble and, you know, incredibly funny. Like, he was just an all around wholesome and good person.

He fit right in. In 2012, he became a citizen, swearing the oath to protect the United States from enemies, foreign and domestic.

Scott Pelley: Did he seem overtly religious to you in any way?

Ahmad Nassri: Not even a little bit.

Scott Pelley: Not even a little bit.

These friends saw him two weeks ago. He was a sophomore at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. Ahmad Nassri and Bassel Nasri tried, without luck to get him to join the MSA, the Muslim Student Association.

Scott Pelley: Did you see him at mosque? You see him at prayers? Nothing like that?

Group: No.

Bassel Nasri: No, unfortunately.

Scott Pelley: Unfortunately?

Bassel Nasri: I would've loved for him to come to the MSA a few times so he can maybe understand his religion better. Maybe that would, that would've helped in what happened, I would say.

Scott Pelley: What was he interested in?

Group: Soccer. Cars.

Ahmad Nassri: If someone a few days ago told me that one of my friends was responsible for the bombs, bombing in Boston, I would've named off at least 90 percent of everyone that I know before I would've said Dzhokhar.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev did not fit in easily. A champion amateur boxer, he was disappointed that he couldn't try for the U.S. Olympic team, because he wasn't a citizen. He lived with his wife and child in this Cambridge house, divided into three apartments. Al Ammon, lives there too, and he says he and Tamerlan argued three months ago.

Al Ammon: He was explaining how the Bible is a cheap copy of the Koran and how it's used for the American government as an excuse to invade other countries. And I remember he said that America's a colonial power, trying to colonize the Middle East and Africa. And he also said that the most casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq are innocent bystanders gunned down by American soldiers.

Scott Pelley: Did he seem angry about all of this?

Al Ammon: He seemed more passionate about it. He was--

Scott Pelley: Passionate about it?

Al Ammon: Yes, yes. He strongly believed what he said. There was tension between both of us it was more of a really involved discussion.

"Strong beliefs" was exactly what Russian intelligence told the FBI about Tamerlan. Two years ago the Russians asked the FBI to look into whether he was involved in militant Islam. FBI agents interviewed Tamerlan and decided he wasn't a threat. Still, his pending application for citizenship was held up because a background check turned up that 2011 FBI investigation.

The FBI is now looking into why Tamerlan returned to Russia recently for about six months.

Last Thursday, when it released the tape, the FBI knew him only as "subject number one" with subject number two following in his footsteps.

Scott Pelley: It was only five or six hours after the videotape was released that events began to unfold rapidly and there was a great deal more violence.

Ed Davis: It's possible that these individuals activated themselves once again because they saw the pictures, because they knew that we would eventually find out who they are.

By 10:15 Thursday night, Officer Sean Collier was ambushed and murdered in his cruiser. Then, gunmen hijacked a car which was spotted by a lone Watertown officer.

Ed Davis: At that point the vehicle stopped. The two suspects alighted from the area of the vehicle and opened fire on the officer.

Ed Davis: Very quickly another officer, Officer Richard Donohue from the MBTA police, arrived at the scene and also engaged in gun battle. He was shot. And grievously wounded.

[Police radio: Loud explosions!, Loud explosions! Loud explosions!]

Ed Davis: The suspects began to log devices at the police. And the first one was a huge explosion. And then the follow-up explosions were smaller. But they were improvised hand grenades were being thrown at the officers.

The big explosion was a bomb like the ones at the marathon. Parts of it were embedded in the patrol cars. The grenades were packed with steel pellets just like the marathon bombs.

Ed Davis: The gun battle continued until one of the suspects ran out of ammunition. And one of the sergeants tackled him to the ground.

Scott Pelley: A police officer ran out and tackled him, these men who had armed themselves with so many explosives?

Ed Davis: That's correct. That's what happened. It probably would not be advised as a tactical move. But it shows the courage and commitment that officers have in attempting to get this thing under control.

Scott Pelley: He was gonna put the guy down before he had a chance to reload, and risk his own life to do it.

Ed Davis: Right. He saw an opportunity and he took it.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev was down, dying from multiple gunshot wounds.

Scott Pelley: The younger brother gets in the car, backs over his older brother, drives away. What happened then?

Ed Davis: The suspect that fled, abandoned the vehicle four blocks-- four or five blocks away. And took off on foot. We determined that a 20-block perimeter had to be set up.

Scott Pelley: And so began the lockdown of the city of Boston.

The Tsarnaev apartment was raided. They found bombs inside and wondered what plans the brothers had for those. The 20-block search lasted 15 hours. And then Davis announced that they had lost the suspect.

Ed Davis: There was extreme frustration and disappointment in the command post.

Scott Pelley: And it was not, what? Thirty minutes later...

Ed Davis: --it was probably close to 15 minutes later.

Scott Pelley: That a man called 9-1-1. He went into his backyard where he has a boat with a cover over the top and he saw the cover was torn.

Ed Davis: He said he was dying for a cigarette, he had to go outside to have his cigarette. And he saw the blood on the boat. And so he peered in after climbing a ladder. And he told me that he saw a body in there with blood on it.

Ed Davis: A gunshot was heard and officers returned fire. The order was given to cease fire. We then pulled the state police helicopter in which has a forward looking infrared device on its nose. And it was able to come in and actually look through the plastic on the boat and see the suspect inside.

George MacMasters: My thought when I first heard those 20 rounds was that he was already dead

Neighbor George MacMasters heard it all from his home nearby.

George MacMasters: The thought that he'd been killed, just to me is, you know, one more tragedy. Because the last pictures I saw, he's an older face. And that's not the face I remember.

MacMasters had once hired Dzhokhar as a 16-year-old lifeguard.

If Dzhokhar is the bomber, MacMasters has a question.

George MacMasters: How in the world did this happen? You know, How could he have been changed so much in the year, year and a half that I've been absent, go from a young man that-- polite, well-spoken, friendly, engaging, typical American teenager to, what I have to say is a monster.

His question is one of the mysteries. Though his friends didn't see it, we know Dzhokhar was failing in college. Something had changed. An FBI negotiator talked him out of the boat. He had been shot in the leg the night before.

They treated him for a gunshot wound through the mouth that exited the back of his neck. Whether that was a suicide attempt, Davis won't say.

Scott Pelley: Do you think he's gonna pull through?

Ed Davis: I wouldn't comment.

Scott Pelley: But the wounds are serious enough that there's a chance that he might not?

Ed Davis: They're very serious wounds.

On Saturday at Fenway, the Red Sox honored the innocent people who were lost and wounded and the army of 4,000 who were part of the investigation. In Boston, of course, this is a great honor -- the Red Sox are the second oldest sporting institution in the city -- after the Boston Marathon.

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