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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

E-Man: Life in the NYPD Emergency Service Unit
Al Shappard
Al Sheppard
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Al Sheppard, a retired detective with the New York Police Department, focuses on his experiences as a rookie and later as a respected officer in his first memoir, *E-Man: Life in the NYPD Emergency Service Unit*. When he was a teenager growing up in New York City's Hell's Kitchen, Sheppard saw police work as a well paying and secure government job and a chance to be a hero and have some adventure. This attitude led him to join the Emergency Services Unit (ESU), an elite corps of highly trained police officers that preceded SWAT teams in the 1970s.

Emergency Services Unit officers, nicknamed E-Men, received a thorough education in all manner of special services including various machines and weapons use, emergency medicine and CPR, hostage negotiations, and bomb dismantling. Shep, as his colleagues called him, used his training to successfully rescue jumpers from the top of the Washington Bridge, scrape up remains of victims of subway accidents, break up domestic violence situations, and respond to calls of gunfights, robberies, murders, and worst of all, endangered children. All were part of a day's work. He asserts that he did whatever he was assigned, even acting as security for celebrities and infamous criminals.

The book opens with a description of the Williamsburg Siege. Four Sunni Muslim gunmen inside John & Al's Sporting Goods Store drew on an endless arsenal of guns and ammunition, pinning down several squads of policemen. ESU arrived and fanned out to form a protective barrier between the patrolmen and the gunfire. Besieged officers escaped to safer locations. Sheppard, who served in Vietnam and was no novice to such fire fights, watched as one ESU officer was killed.

Sheppard proceeds with a rather disjointed series of recollections, where time and the sequence of events get a bit muddled, and spins one story into another. One of the book's most emotional descriptions involves a foiled attempt to rescue six firefighters trapped when a supermarket roof collapses. Only one survived. "Grown men lined the sidewalks, crying like

babies as one by one, the fallen firefighters were removed from the ashes and rubble," Sheppard writes.

Profanity often rips like a scar into the midst of the action and the author's anger and frustration spill over onto the page. Emotions run high as Sheppard moves from rookie to elite officer to burned-out civil servant. In 1985, he finally realized that "I came to the police department to help people, and now …they were just numbers to me." He asked to be reassigned. Sheppard served with the NYPD for another ten years working in various departments. The television program *Prince Street* was based on Sheppard's work in the NYPD Intelligence Division.

Readers who enjoy police procedurals and true crime should also enjoy this simply told yet emotional memoir.