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These men in blue braved bullets, grenades and fire

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Of the entire force of 2,500 men, more than half of Mumbai's firemen were involved in some way in dousing last year's terror attacks.

"We are so used to death. We have been seeing bodies, blood and have fought in very ugly circumstances. But this was an experience that changed everything," said Prabhat Rahangdale of the Nariman Point fire station. "But we have to move on. We can't stay in this profession if we keep brooding about those days. We realised that in addition to all the risks we face in our job, dealing with and not being emotionally affected by external circumstances is part of our occupational hazards," added Rahangdale who entered the Trident and the Taj to douse the fires that were set ablaze by the terrorists.

Though the firemen had initial problems getting to their job-the police did not give them permission to start work-eventually they ended up rescuing more than 200 people from both Taj and Oberoi. Braving bullets, exploding grenades and flying shrapnel, Mumbai's men in blue were on the job throughout the three days of terror.

Rahangdale missed a grenade lobbed at him as he went up the snorkel to rescue people at the Taj. Firemen at Oberoi had grenades lobbed at them from 16th and 17th floors.

A not-so-lucky Mohan Tawre was injured when a grenade exploded inside the Taj. Several firemen suffered burns at Trident's Kandahar restaurant. "Had we not moved quickly, fire would have spread," said Tawre who started work as soon as his treatment was over. A posse was also posted at Nariman House.

For most, the toughest part was mollifying their families. "Our phones went off and there was no way of contacting them. Most of us got out on the 26th and didn't return home till the siege was over," said fire officer K F D'Souza.


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