



SWAT And a Little Bit More

by Lt. Bill Sullivan

It's 0230 hours on a Saturday morning and the phone rings at the home of the sheriff's SWAT commander.

He rolls over in bed and picks up the phone after the third ring. As he puts the phone receiver to his ear and says hello, he hears, "Lieutenant, this is the sergeant in the Communications Center. We have a Code 11 in Spring Valley. It's been brewing for about an hour. 60 Paul Lincoln is on the scene and has requested your assistance. The situation we have is a drunk and distraught man armed with a rifle. He is threatening to kill himself, his wife and two small children that he is holding hostage in their home. 60 Charles has been advised and is en route."

The SWAT commander is then given the location of the command post, the safe route of approach, and whatever other pertinent information the Communications Center sergeant has regarding the incident.

After the lieutenant gathers all the available information, he directs the sergeant to broadcast a Code 11, and terminates the conversation. He immediately leaves his bed, dons his uniform and heads for the command post in Spring Valley.



The 40-foot SWAT bus: call number 10-E-30.

Moments later, pagers throughout the county will be blaring out the Code 11 and some 20 S.E.D. deputies will be hurriedly preparing to set out for the scene of the SWAT call-out.

A scenario similar to this one has been repeated many times over in the law enforcement communities of this nation.

Today SWAT teams are commonplace in most of the large and progressive law enforcement agencies in this country, but only 20 years ago SWAT teams were basically nonexistent.

An incident occurred on Aug. 1, 1966, that was to change law enforcement's posture in this area forever.

After killing his mother and spouse the night before, Charles Whitman, a 25-year-old former U.S. Marine Corps marksman, loaded a footlocker full of firearms and ammunition onto a passenger elevator inside the administration building of the University of Texas at Austin.

Surprised by a family of tourists and a receptionist, the former Eagle Scout and student at the university wounded them and proceeded to the observation tower of the 28-story building.

Just before noon, shots rang out, and what was to be a 96-minute reign of terror had begun. Firing from concealed and covered positions around the observation tower,



Whitman commanded the entire open quadrangle.

Before two Austin police officers could work their way up to his position, Whitman had killed 15 persons and wounded 31 others, some two blocks away.

Upon learning of the tragedy at Austin, which quickly became known as the "Texas Tower" incident, law enforcement administrators throughout the United States began to assess their own departmental capabilities on how they would handle a similar incident within their jurisdictional boundaries.

Most agreed that their departments were ill-equipped to resolve such problems.

Consequently, during the late '60s and early '70s, specially trained tactical units were developed in law enforcement agencies throughout the nation.

In the early years of the '70s, the San Diego Sheriff's Department developed such a tactical unit, which by then were commonly known as SWAT teams.

The team went through several organizational evolutions during the first 10 years of its existence.

One of the consistent factors with respect to the organizational structure during these early years was that personnel who served on the team also worked a full-time assignment elsewhere on the department.

In 1982, the SWAT team experienced a major organizational change when the sheriff formed the Special Enforcement Detail (S.E.D.), placing all of the SWAT team in the newly formed detail. The department had several S.E.D.s prior to this current detail, but none of the predecessors included a SWAT team.

In forming S.E.D., the sheriff made it clear that in addition to providing tactical assistance at critical incidents, he expected his S.E.D. personnel to provide a variety of services to the department.

The detail originally did, and still does, consist of one lieutenant, two sergeants, and 18 deputies.

I must admit that throughout the tenure of the detail, the full complement of 18 deputies has been a rarity.



Chuck Hahn takes aim during a practice shoot.

It is the variety of services I mentioned that makes S.E.D. an ever-changing and interesting place to work.

Some of the most frequent requests are for patrol or investigative support.

S.E.D. personnel might find themselves working Imperial Beach in a patrol car during a sand castle building holiday weekend, serving a high-risk warrant for detectives, or digging for bones in the Borrego desert with homicide investigators. Or their day might

call for a dignitary/witness protection assignment.

Assignments such as these have proved to be quite interesting. We have worked on a Presidential detail; watched Prince Phillip get mud on his shoes while stomping around Fairbanks Ranch, and ask a veteran S.E.D. man if he remembers Holly at Grossmont Hospital.

Some of the divers will recall diving below 100 feet off La Jolla Shores in search of a

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human skull reportedly seen by a recreational scuba diver.

Other divers will remember diving for the children at Rodriguez Dam in Baja California while the grieving parents patrolled the shore. We will also remember a lovely dinner the La Presa (Tijuana suburb) police gave us honoring our efforts at Rodriguez Dam.

S.E.D. personnel have been called upon to provide tactical training for our own department and countless other agencies.

But, when I think of training, my mind drifts to the three very interesting and enlightening weeks we spent training Ecuadorian national police officers.

At the onset of S.E.D., the detail was employed to manage the department's K-9 program. In addition to coordinating and conducting the training for all the K-9 handlers on the department, two of S.E.D.'s deputies are certified explosives detection K-9 handlers. On any given day they might be searching for an explosive at a local bank or responding to a bomb threat at the airport.

S.E.D. has now been in existence for nearly four years. The old department vets have seen S.E.D. units come and go, but I think the current S.E.D. is here to stay.