

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

An Analysis of SWAT Team Personnel Selection

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Institute**

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Abstract

The need for a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team in Comal County was addressed. Research was needed to set guidelines to choose personnel for the SWAT Team. Personnel selection for a SWAT Team is not a plain and simple process. During the course of research there are many areas of concern that are taken into consideration after surveying policies from several agencies and procedures on SWAT Team member selection. Personal interviews and information from books laid out specific requirements. This information would be used to develop a set of guidelines to be used when selecting members for a SWAT Team.

SWAT members are required to deal with highly volatile situations and must be physically and mentally prepared to deal with any kind of situation that may arise and function as a team. This selection process, which was developed from the resources gathered, helps select the most highly qualified officer. With the liability issues law enforcement has to under go, this research will help define the many areas of consideration that agencies use when selecting members to the SWAT Team. Also, to explain that geographical location can define the needs of expertise with in a SWAT Team. This research will enable our agency to develop guidelines in our policy and procedures manual for selecting team members. This research should help reduce liability, in using the research material as a guide to select quality people to do a highly complex and dangerous job.

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Introduction

Comal County Sheriffs Office currently does not have a Special Weapons And Tactics Team. The Comal County Sheriffs Office is in the process of developing a SWAT Team, in order to respond to an emergency situation. With the increase of violence in schools, cities and counties around the country, the superintendents of the Comal Independent School District and the New Braunfels Independent School District, inquired. "If we had a crisis situation here, in one of our schools, would law enforcement be ready to handle the situation?" The answer was "no". County law enforcement leaders met and decided that the Comal County Sheriffs Office would need to implement a SWAT Team.

The purpose of this research is to determine what is the most effective way to select personnel for the specialized group of individuals who will be taking on a stressful job as a SWAT Team member. The research will determine what requirement personnel should have to be selected for the team. With this new formation of the SWAT Team, conducting research will help provide quality standards for the organization.

This research will involve a survey of other law enforcement agencies. Comal County is located between two large cities, Austin and San Antonio. Both cities have SWAT teams and have policy and procedures on personnel selection. Eight agencies from the state of Texas were contacted to get information. They are Baytown Police Department, Corpus Christi Police Department, Sugarland Police Department, Live Oak Police Department, Bexar County Sheriffs Department, Houston Police Department and Austin Police Department. A study of this literature on SWAT Teams will contribute to the research.

It is difficult at times to select certain people for a specialized job. Bases for quality standards can be developed to select good qualified officers for an intense and difficult job. By doing an extensive research on personnel selection it should help reduce the liability issues.

The implication of the research paper will better assist our agency in selecting members for this special Tactical Team. If an emergency should arise, the Comal County Sheriffs Office will be better prepared to deal with an emergency situation, and to help protect our citizens from serious bodily injury or death.

Review of Literature

There are several law enforcement agencies surrounding Comal County that have S.W.A.T. Teams. Eight agencies were surveyed and they are Austin Police Department, Houston Police Department, Sugarland Police Department, Baytown Police Department, Live Oak Police Department, San Antonio Police Department, Bexar County Sheriffs Department, and Corpus Christi Police Department. Some of these agencies are large and some are small. But it was found that not all agencies call their specialized group of people a SWAT Team. Emergency Response Unit (E.R.U.) Corpus Christi Texas Police Department, Selective Investigation Response Team (S.I.R.T.) Surgarland Texas Police Department, Emergency Response Team (E.R.T.) Live Oak Texas Police Department. Another source found on the Internet was an Emergency Task Force (E.T.F.) Toronto Police Service, Canada. These units, although have a different name, do basically the same task.

In researching the criteria needed in selecting personnel, agencies off of the Internet from different areas through out the United States and Canada included as part of the selection process: physical fitness, being on call, discipline issues and experience. They considered these the most important. It was noted that specific requirements for selecting personnel for the S.W.A.T. Team is separate from the requirements used for hiring regular officers.

A list of specific requirements for SWAT member selection was derived from all information that was gathered. These eighteen requirements will help in selecting the most qualified personnel. They are as follows:

1. Experience
2. Physical ability
3. Firearms ability
4. Recommendation from supervisor
5. Disciplinary action
6. Sick leave used
7. Officer activity report
8. Pass basic tactical school
9. Oral board
10. Non smoking (Austin Police Department)
11. Psychological fitness examination
12. Residence location from work station
13. Willingness to be on call 24 hours a day
14. Drug screen
15. Driving record
16. Written test
17. Background investigation
18. Medical examination

Agencies surveyed have some variance to the selection process, but the end product is the same, selecting the most qualified person for the job. Most agencies were consistent with firearms, physical fitness, oral interview, experience, and discipline action on individuals who applied. Some agencies required written essays. The essay topics were not always the same for each reviewing board.

Prior military experience can be an asset because strict disciplinary requirements of the military and physical training create a good applicant. *Members are also required to maintain their high level of performance and qualification after being selected for S.W.A.T. Prior military experience is a plus because of the mental and physical discipline. (Davidson).*

In the agencies surveyed, gender and age was not found in the written guidelines that would be taken into consideration. There is an equal opportunity for individuals that apply to be a member of the SWAT Team. Most of the agencies used the "Coopers" physical fitness chart.

See appendix 1. This chart was developed to take into consideration gender and age for performance.

The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) has entry level standards that are compatible to the eight agencies surveyed. *Requiring their agents selected to the S.W.A.T. Team to be held at a higher standard of performance and maintain this high level of performance during their time on the S.W.A.T. Team. (Van de Loo).* According to the information found, it didn't matter whether the agency was large or small, the requirements for S.W.A.T. members are very similar. Several books have been written on S.W.A.T. Teams, covering the needs of tactical teams and guidelines as to the selection of personnel.

The selection of SWAT Team personnel can dictate the success of the SWAT Team. Qualified applicants are selected because they specialize in different areas. Training, experience, and the ability to perform in emergency situations are very important attributes. *The success of any S.W.A.T. Team is largely dependent on the selection of its personnel. Necessary specialization dictates that only the most qualified applicants are selected. (Kolman)*

It takes people with proficient skills to get together to form a successful SWAT Team. *Care must also be taken not to over emphasize marksmanship ability, during the development stages of the S.W.A.T. concept. Many departments place too much emphasis on marksmanship. The best shot in the department will not necessarily make the best S.W.A.T. Team member. (Kolman)* Training, experiences, and the ability to perform in an emergency situation are important attributes. *A person's skills have to be taken into consideration as to the different positions in a S.W.A.T. Team as to how the person will perform. Officers most generally selected appear to come from the patrol and detective divisions. (Flowers)* Although criteria may vary, depending upon the perceived requirements of each department, selection of team members should at least take into account the applicants past experience, psychological make up, physical condition and appearance and ability to function as part of a

team. *(Kolman)* Physical fitness and firearm proficiency are the two most important individual abilities every member needs for any mission to conclude successfully. *(Hughes)* Individual traits are important. The individual has to have stamina to withstand condition during a mission. Being proficient with firearms is for protection for one self, other team members, and possible victims. *Individual must be mentally stable, be calm during tense situations and be physically fit to be able to withstand long term situations. (Martinez)* Individual members must have confidence and respect for each other. *If there is a good old boy, a favorite fair-haired son, or an incompetent to put up with on a team, morale will disintegrate and efficiency will cease. In other words, the prime criteria in selecting team members, is competence. (Davidson)*

Selecting members from volunteers should not be your only method of recruiting.

Obviously, not everyone who volunteers is suitable for this type of training and work, so your second step is a careful examination of volunteer's training, experience, personnel records and reasons for wanting to join the team. (Cascio and McSweeney)

Being a team member is a top priority. *You don't need a "Rambo" or "Lone Wolf McQuade" on your team. You absolutely have to operate as a team. You absolutely have to operate as a team. That's why it's called a S.W.A.T. or M.O.U.T. Team and not a S.W.A.T. or M.O.U.T. individual. (Cascio and McSweeney)* Team members need to feel confident that others on the team are working for a common goal. This will determine the success of the SWAT Team.

Selection of S.W.A.T. leaders has a unique twist, as in most agencies; the rank structure dictates ones authority. But a Sergeant on patrol may not make a good team leader in a tactical situation if he or she does not have tactical abilities. In the process of selecting SWAT members, team leaders must be considered for the group.

In the Tactical Edge Journal, summer 1998, page 45, talks about non ranking officers who are put into the position of team leader, weather this could create legal issues. According to the Tactical Edge Journal, summer 1998, and p.52. *The popular election process in no way*

guarantees that the most talented or best person will be identified as the best leader or director of activities of the team. Team leader selection is based on experience, proven judgement, and capability. Do not choose this person by rank or seniority alone. (Jones) Law enforcement liability issues are a daily consideration, the team leader will be held accountable for any decisions made. Legal issues for SWAT Teams are more exposed due to media coverage because of the violent nature of the missions.

The following information was found in Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management research papers, "LEMIT", on SWAT Teams. In "LEMIT" #249, by Iverson *Police managers need to be very careful in selecting their tactical personnel when they have the luxury.* In "LEMIT" #400, p.8, by Larkin *Members of most teams are selected based on physical requirements, SWAT school, obstacle course, shooting course, disciplinary record, driving record, non-smoker, drug screen, and psychological fitness.* Depending on geographical location, some agencies would require more than basic SWAT skills. Other "LEMIT" papers discuss the need for specialized groups. In "LEMIT" #352, p. 1 by Stallcup *The City of Highland Village has a need that goes beyond a basic SWAT. Therefore the department needs to create a team that can handle downed aircraft and incidents involving hazardous material spills caused by train derailment.* In "LEMIT" #017, p. 22, by Braden *The need to employ military tactics in police services provide tested techniques, which were proven effective in policing the international jurisdiction through the Military services.*

Methodology

This research is to determine the most effective way to select members for the SWAT team. It is believed by this research that if careful and complete guidelines and procedures are in place when persons are selected, agencies will be able to select the best personnel for the job, not just a good person for the job. The basis of this research is from several resources. Eight law enforcement agencies', standard operating procedures on SWAT were studied. The data was

charted to determine the similarities and differences to the selection process. Other agencies were asked for their standard operating procedure on SWAT team selection of personnel and so were reluctant to share information, without knowing specifically the intent of use of this information.

Several books on SWAT were found in the library at Sam Houston State University. These books covered the history to the selection of team members. The books suggested when selecting a member for a SWAT Team, the position the person would have on the team should also be considered. Information on SWAT teams through out the state and nation was also found on the Internet. Some agencies have web sites with their teams listed, with a brief description of their units as to their mission and to their requirements to be on the team. Most of the information on the Internet to selection of members is brief and did not contain specific requirements.

Several G.M.I. research papers were found in the library at Sam Houston State University, pertaining to S.W.A.T. These research papers had the same concerns that are being addressed in this paper. The need for S.W.A.T. team, and the selection of personnel. Some personal interviews were conducted with S.W.A.T. members and former S.W.A.T. members as to their recommendations for S.W.A.T. team member selections. All information gathered from the different resources would be analyzed and put on a chart in the finding section of this research.

Findings

Researcher found that during the course of reviewing the literature from the different agency standard operating procedure for SWAT team selection, many agencies have in place the criteria for the selection. In San Antonio, Texas, Police Department standard operating procedure, number 112.00 the following must be met.

1. At least 2 years field experience.
2. Score of 200 or above on the San Antonio Police Department "Coopers" physical test.
3. Department pistol qualification of 90% or better.
4. No suspensions in the last 2 years.
5. Copies of sick leave taken in the past year, plus all physical injuries (on or off -duty reports) in the past.
6. Copies of the last 6 months of activity reports.
7. Recommendation from immediate supervisors

Bexar County Texas standard operating procedure number 103.00 requires the following.

1. One year of law enforcement experience with the Sheriff's Office (law enforcement personnel only)
2. Must pass basic SWAT school
3. Must pass "Coopers" test with minimum of 200 points on preliminary testing and final testing within three (3) months.
4. Firearms proficiency requirements: forty (40) or fifty (50) rounds minimum with required improvements of forty-five (45) or fifty (50) rounds or 55% of final score within six (6) rounds.
5. Must not have any disciplinary action within the last year.
6. No more than six (6) sick days within a year.
7. Must pass oral review board.

These portions are pending approval of the Bexar County Sheriff. (Benson)

The Austin Texas Police Department standard operation procedure section 6-1.

1. Applicants must pass a physical fitness test based on the Cooper clinic standard of the 70th percentile.

2. Applicants must have attended and successfully completed a basic SWAT school approved by the Special Missions Lieutenant.
3. Applicants must be able to run a SWAT related obstacle course in the prescribed minimum time or faster. Course includes such things as running, climbing, shooting, dummy drag, and barricade traversal.
4. Applicants must complete a SWAT related shooting course achieving a score of at least 80%. The course is designed to test safety, judgement and accuracy.
5. Applicants must demonstrate the ability to climb to heights and walk and turn without loss of balance, while secured with safety ropes and belaying techniques.
6. Applicants must not have had more than one sustained, formal complaint of any nature within the last two years proceeding the date of application to the team.
7. Applicants must not have had more than one negligent collision within the last two years.
8. Applicants must be non-smokers.
9. Applicants must pass a drug screen if requested to do so by a SWAT supervisor.
10. Applicants must pass a psychology fitness examination administered by Austin Police Department staff psychologist.
11. Applicants must reside within 10 miles of the Austin City limits.

The Live Oak Texas Police Department general orders, number 36, require the following for team selection.

1. Applicant must have successfully completed his/her initial probationary period as a fully commissioned regular officer.
2. Applicant must be a volunteer.

3. Applicant must be in good physical and mental health.
4. Applicant must submit a written paper on any specialized training he/she has obtained in the field and why he/she wishes to become an ERT member.
5. Applicants must successfully appear before an ERT review board, consisting of at least four members and the Chief of Police or his designated representative.

The Houston Texas Police Department general orders 600-05 have the following requirements.

1. Minimum of four years as a police officer
2. Minimum of three years patrol and/or enforcement experience.
3. Sharpshooters classification or higher for primary weapon.
4. Must reside within a 30-mile radius of the Central Station at time of application with continued residence within that radius while assigned to SWAT.
5. Willingness to respond to special threat situations at any time, including vacation time and days off, unless out of town.
6. Successful completion of basic S.W.A.T. school within one year of being assigned to the S.W.A.T. detail.
7. No history of numerous and/or recurring injuries that indicate a chronic problem.
8. Physical fitness test
 - a) Two (2) mile run (sixteen minutes or less)
 - b) Fifty (50) sit-ups (two minutes) resting only in the up position
 - c) Fifty (50) push-ups (two minutes) resting only in the up position
 - d) Five (5) pull-ups
9. Written essay.
10. Written test.
11. Screening by the Psychological Services Division.

12. Back ground investigation.
13. Interview by a panel of team leaders and S.W.A.T. supervisors.
14. Candidates must submit to and pass a drug test.

The Sugarland Texas Police Department Chapter 12 selection of member S.I.R.T.

1. Membership voluntary
2. Non-probationary, sworn personnel with the equivalent rank of patrol officer or higher.
3. Must pass a specified batter of qualification tests and interviews.
4. Candidates will be given a course of five that is intended to test the candidate's ability to utilize firearms under strenuous conditions. (No minimum percentage given)
5. Must pass physical agility test of 80%
 - a) One mile run (9 minutes)
 - b) Fifty (50) sit-ups (2 minutes)
 - c) Thirty (30) push-ups (2 minutes)
 - d) Three (3) pull-ups (no time limit)
6. Psychological assessment must be passed.
7. Background investigation.

Corpus Christi Texas Police Department Chapter 10.03 Team Selection Requirements, members shall be selected by the chief based on a combination of the following.

1. Performance qualification, shooting proficiency
2. Master qualification, shooting proficiency
3. Psychological test and interview
4. Internal affairs history
5. S.W.A.T. medical exam

6. Physical fitness/agility testing
7. Structured interview by S.W.A.T. supervisors and or commanders.

The Baytown Texas Police Department has the following criteria for member selection. (**Sgt. Alford**)

1. Letter goes out for opening.
2. Letter of intent needs to be submitted.
3. Physical fitness:
 - a) Fifty (50) push-ups (2 minutes)
 - b) Fifty (50) sit-ups (2 minutes)
 - c) Five pull-ups (no time)
 - d) Obstacle course
4. Shift supervisor's opinion.
5. Firearms qualifications 90%

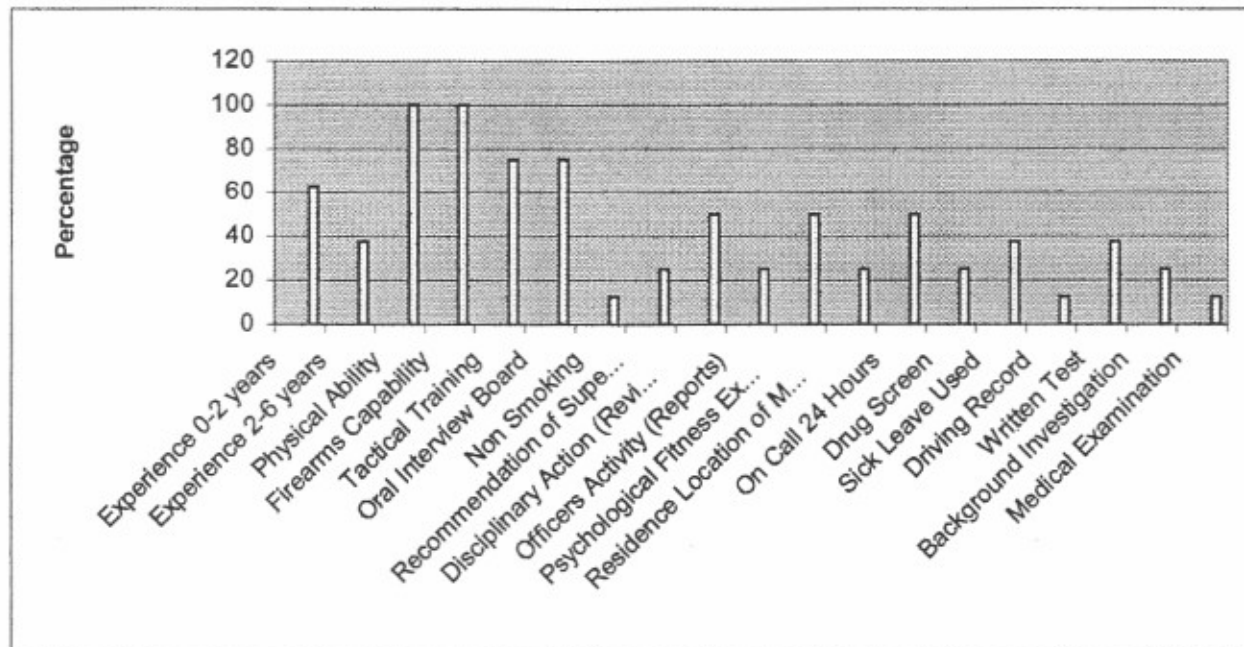
Researcher has put together Table I to show the similarities and difference agencies have in the selection process.

Table I

	San Antonio Police Department	Bexar County Sheriff's Office	Austin Police Department	Live Oak Police Department	Houston Police Department	Sugarland Police Department	Corpus Christi Police Department	Baytown Police Department
Experience 0-2 years		•		•		•	•	•
Experience 2-6 years	•		•		•			
Physical Ability	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Firearms Capability	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Tactical Training	•	•	•		•	•	•	
Oral Interview Board	•	•		•	•	•	•	
Non Smoking			•					
Recommendation of Supervisor	•							•
Disciplinary Action (Reviewed)	•	•	•				•	
Officers Activity (Reports)	•						•	
Psychological Fitness Examination			•		•	•	•	
Residence Location of Member			•		•			
On Call 24 Hours	•				•		•	•
Drug Screen			•		•			
Sick Leave Used	•	•			•			
Driving Record			•					
Written Test				•	•	•		
Background Investigation					•	•		
Medical Examination							•	

Out of the eight agencies surveyed and put on Table I the following was determined by percentages of area agencies used during the selection process. See Table II

Table II



The two tables show what areas of consideration are used by the eight different agencies and how frequent the same areas are used by the different agencies.

Discussion/Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to find the most effective way to select S.W.A.T. team members. The other portion of this research dealt with the growing need for the development of a SWAT team. Upon gathering, policy portions from eight different agencies, relevant issues pertaining to selection of SWAT members was found. The larger agencies seem to be more detailed in their manuals and more requirements must be met before being selected to the SWAT Team.

This research hinged on the most effective way to select members. By looking at Table I it shows that there are several areas of consideration that all agencies surveyed used. It was found that the eight agencies surveyed had a special portion in their policy manuals that addressed the S.W.A.T. teams, to include the selection process. The most frequent areas used by

the agencies were 100% considered physical abilities, 100% considered firearms ability, 75% considered tactical training, 75% oral interview.

With all the data gathered from this research, our agency should be able to establish a selection process to chose the most qualified personnel for our SWAT Team. Some of these agencies surveyed were close in geographic location and some were further away, but all were from the State of Texas. All agencies surveyed had written guidelines for the selection of S.W.A.T. personnel, except for Baytown Police Department. Baytown has established guidelines for negotiation teams and is in the process of adding S.W.A.T. according to Sgt. David Alford. This researched found Baytown's selection of S.W.A.T. members to be consistent in nature to the other seven teams surveyed.

Part of this research in the Introduction portion, addresses the growing need for a S.W.A.T. team is evident with the increase of violence. This researcher found in a book called "Why Have a SWAT Team" speaks of the August 1, 1966 "Tower" incident in Austin Texas where one Charles Joseph Whitman went on a killing spree. (Snow) Austin Police Chief Robert Miles admitted that the police had no specific plans for the handling of a sniper incident. (Snow) In an interview with Ramiro Martinez, the officer that was credited for silencing the sniper, stated, *They didn't have adequate high-powered weapons, no team organization (everybody was working individually) and no radio communication with each other outside the patrol car.* In a more recent incident the Columbine incident in Littleton Colorado April 20, 1999 were two teenagers go on a killing rampage (Nation News).

The Lost Altos California Police Department recently formed a special weapons and tactics group known as a S.W.A.T. team. In an article in the Lost Altos Town Crier staff writer quoted Police Captain Cliff Balch as saying, *"We realized we won't get help from our neighbors", as*

the city was considering contracting with the county's Sheriffs Department for a S.W.A.T. team. The Sheriffs office replied, "But they'd do it only if the city released them of all liability." (Domingue)

Then during the time of this research, on June 28, 2000, Arch Bishop Patrick Flores was taken hostage in San Antonio, Texas, as another sample of the ongoing need for S.W.A.T. teams.

The main focus of this research is the selection process of members of a S.W.A.T. team. Information on the selection of was found to support the basis of this research. Some limitations were found while requesting information on the selection of personnel. Two agencies did not send information to researcher on their S.W.A.T. teams after information was requested. Other agencies that responded did after researcher explained the intent of the information requested.

With our agency in the process of developing a S.W.A.T. team the information gained by this research will help develop written guidelines to the selection of personnel. This research will help enable our agency to select the most qualified people for this highly specialized job.

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Van de Loo, G., Former F.B.I. SWAT Team Member 20 years. Personal Interview.

APPENDIX 1

COOPER'S PHYSICAL FITNESS CHART

<u>AGE</u>	<u>MALE</u>			<u>FEMALE</u>		
	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40+</u>	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40+</u>
Sit & Reach	15.5	14.5	13.3	18.3	17.3	16.5
1 Minute Sit-Up	33	32	27	29	22	17
1 Minute Push-Up	26	20	15	13	9	7
1.5 Mile Run	13.22	14.08	15.57	15.57	16.31	17.24

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	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40+</u>	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40+</u>
Sit & Reach	15.5	14.5	13.3	18.3	17.3	16.5
1 Minute Sit-Up	33	32	27	29	22	17
1 Minute Push-Up	26	20	15	13	9	7
1.5 Mile Run	13.22	14.08	15.57	15.57	16.31	17.24