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Is a Special Weapons And Tactics Team Needed
Within The Galveston Police Department?

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ABSTRACT

Police departments across the country are disbanding their tactical teams and some administrators are not allowing their formation. It is feared by some academics and police administrators that the growing number of police para-military (SWAT) units are not needed. This same section of academics and administrators contend that many police para-military (SWAT) units are created more out of normalcy rather than genuine operational need.

The purpose of this research was to examine the operational need for the existing SWAT team within the Galveston Police Department. The research included, community evaluation, needs assessment, cost analysis, area law enforcement administrator's views and concerns, and interviews with SWAT team members. Relevant printed data was also reviewed to substantiate and support the conclusion reached by this researcher.

It is concluded through methodical and current research that the Galveston Police Department can substantiate its operational need for the existing SWAT team. Additionally, the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team has been progressive and Voluntarily adapted to the ever-changing criminal justice field. This team would be an excellent example as a model for other law enforcement agencies to follow.

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INTRODUCTION

Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Teams and SWAT type training has become commonplace throughout the United States. This all too common practice is not without criticism. Some fear the movement toward the normalization of small-locality police paramilitary units. Some police academics, however, have also criticized the military model as playing a central role in numerous problems that plague policing (Krask & Cubellis, 1997). Joseph McNamara the former chief of Kansas City and San Jose police departments, who is now at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, is one of the most noted critics (Hoffman, 1998).

Special units to support or enhance police operations is not a new concept. Stakeout units, vice, bunco units, intelligence, and organized crime units have been with law enforcement for many years. These specialized units all serving a particular function.

There is no part of the United States, urban or rural, rich or poor, heavily or sparsely populated that does not need a SWAT Response. There is no neighborhood, no town or county, no suburb or city immune from a violent offender or group of criminals. Any community can be a victim of a major violent incident and there must be a system in place to respond immediately.

Does the Galveston Police Department have an operational need for the existing Special Weapons and Tactics Team? Additionally, we will examine if the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team is capable of successfully handling a mission that deviates from the standard SWAT situation (Barricaded Suspect, Hostage Taker).

The information that will be researched will be in the form of personnel interviews with Chiefs of Police, Commanders and Police Administrators, SWAT Team

Commanders and Team-leaders as well as team members. Books, Police trade journals, newspapers, general orders, actual police cases, training bulletins and the Internet.

This writer is confident that the information presented within this report will affirm the justification for the Special Weapons and Tactics Team within the Galveston Police Department. Additionally, the implications of this research will assist other small and medium size agencies in their assessment of implementing a Special Weapons and Tactics Team or not having a team at all.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The growing number of SWAT units is becoming more common among small and medium size law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. This increase in the formation of these paramilitary specialized units is quite alarming to some. However, the threat to our society does not come from a proliferation of police tactical teams, but from modern-day guerillas in schoolyards in places like Paduca, Ky., Jonesboro, Ark., and Littleton, Colo. (Glick,2000).

The reality of police work, however, is that most departments are not large enough to field a separate team of officers. These small agencies have had access to the large SWAT teams, but that was not always the best solution. As crime moved from urban to rural areas, the demand for these special teams in smaller departments increased (Sanow,1993).

Another over statement by those opposed involves the number of SWAT teams-as high as 30,000 teams by one ill-informed critic. By several estimates, there are 2,027 law enforcement agencies in the United States with 50 or more officers (Glick, 2000).

Of those who responded to an operations survey conducted by the National Tactical Officers Association, 58 percent-1, 176 departments-had tactical teams, while 42 percent-851-did not. There were 24 full-time SWAT teams, 269 part-time teams and 13 included both full-time and part-time members. Only the largest cities or counties have full-time SWAT teams (Glick, 2000).

With various forms of political terrorism on the rise, internationally and domestically, there is little doubt that SWAT-type units are vital and necessary. The problem appears to be one of gaining proper public acceptance of the concept and public

support for its funding (Miller, 1980). SWAT teams though, are not vital to the police program of every city.

The review of hundreds of pages of articles, surveys, opinions, and case reports all focus or head in one unified direction. The mission of SWAT is to save lives. In addition, SWAT is to assist the department in accomplishing the goals and objectives as set forth in the Manual of Policy and Procedure, and be as responsive to as many requests for their services as possible (Simon, 1999).

The primary responsibility of SWAT is to respond to barricaded persons, hostage incidents, emotionally disturbed persons who pose a threat to the community, and sniper incidents. In addition, SWAT will function as a mobile, flexible force for special police problems, which require a highly trained, disciplined unit. These problems include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Civil Disorder;
- Surveillances;
- Terrorist Threats or Activity;
- Security Details (VIP's and other high profile individuals);
- Fugitive Apprehension;
- High Risk Search and Arrest Warrants;
- Crisis Negotiator Responses;
- Hazardous Devices (bombs, explosives);
- Prevention Patrol;
- Police Funeral Details; and
- Special Assignments (as designated by the Chief of Police or Sheriff).

In order to successfully carry out these tasks, SWAT personnel must be properly trained to handle the following:

- Determine the goals and objectives of the incident;
- Gather available information and convert it into intelligence;
- Analyze intelligence and develop a course of action;
- Weigh courses of action against mission goals (risk assessment);
- Select courses of action and implement (adjust as situation develops);
- Conduct after-action review/debriefing.

Recognizing that SWAT operations are hazardous and that a successful resolution of an incident may involve the need for decisions that may affect the lives and safety of persons involved, the following shall always be the priority of life during a SWAT operation:

1. Citizens and or civilians in the involved area.
2. Hostages.
3. Hostage taker/suspects.

Police agencies throughout the United States have compiled an impressive record of bringing high-risk incidents to peaceful conclusions but it hasn't happened by accident. Effective strategies have evolved from experience, evaluation, and careful study of successes and tragedies. It is with this commitment that the tactical community strives to continually improve and meet the complex and changing problems that are posed to our society daily.

Currently, there is no national reporting requirement for SWAT encounters. However, what research there is indicates the need for, and the value of, SWAT teams. For facts regarding SWAT effectiveness, most agencies defer to the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA). NTOA, in collaboration with the University of Houston and the National Institute of Justice, is in the process of collecting useable data on SWAT teams across the country. An initial study has analyzed 308 SWAT incidents between 1996 and 1998. Over 96 percent (297) were concluded with no shots fired, though 58 percent (180) of the incidents involved suspects armed with firearms. Of the remaining 4 percent that involved shots being fired (11), only five cases resulted in the death of the suspect by SWAT officers. Of the 308 incidents, 163 (53%) involved barricaded subjects, 112 (36%) involved hostage situations, and 33 (11 %) involved high-risk warrants (Flesher, Zuber, & Jones, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

Does the Galveston Police Department have an operational need for the existing SWAT team? With our ever-changing society can a regular patrol force handle high-risk incidents?

Through this report an in depth review of as much data as possible will be utilized to support the existing operational need for a SWAT team within the Galveston Police Department. Not only will support for a SWAT team be realized, but the expanded integration of the existing SWAT team with other units within the department, and other entities within the community.

The device or benchmark to measure the needs of the community, along with the department is going to be conducted in several ways.

1. Community Evaluation
2. Needs Assessment
3. Cost Analysis
4. Area Law Enforcement Administrator Views & Concerns
5. Interviews with SWAT team members

The aforementioned five areas of inquiry will be examined to formulate an accurate basis for determining the current existence of the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team.

1. Community Evaluation- What are the risk institutions or areas within the city of Galveston? Prisons, heavy industry, colleges or universities?

2. Needs assessment-Is there a need within the Galveston Police Department to justify a SWAT team? Physical location of subject city, including access issues.
3. Cost Analysis- Can the Galveston Police Department support the SWAT team financially? Additional areas of expense, training, court time, and incident deployment. This includes examination and review of the Galveston Police Department's operations budget.
4. Area Law Enforcement Administrators views and concerns- Area agency law enforcement officials opinions on the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team. Interviews to include the Galveston Police Department's Chief of Police, the Sheriff of Galveston County, and area chiefs of police within Galveston County.
5. Interviews with SWAT team members- Is the current team effective, is there a real need for the team? Perspective from the actual operations personnel.

The information obtained will be examined using the outlined criteria to substantiate the findings of this research paper in an effort to have a positive impact upon the community we serve, along with the men and women of the Galveston Police Department.

FINDINGS

The area of SWAT teams and paramilitary police units is an important part of modern law enforcement today. The community evaluation of high-risk institutions and areas revealed some' startling information.

The community evaluation revealed that Galveston, Texas had the following risk factors:

- Deadly and Contagious Disease Laboratory
- Texas Department of Criminal Justice Hospital
- Major Medical Complex (77 Major Buildings over 100 acres)
- 2 Major Universities
- 1 Junior College
- Federal Courthouse
- 2 United States Post Offices
- County Jail & County Court House
- International Airport
- Moody Gardens Convention Center and Recreational Facility
- Massive Fluctuations in Populations
- Special Events Promoted by City Government (Mardi-Gras, Kappa)
- Largest Public Housing per capita in the U.S.
- IH-45 Causeway (Main Ingress and Egress to City)
- United States Coast Guard Base
- Inter-coastal Waterway

- International Cruise Ship Terminal
- Casino Gambling Vessel
- International Seaport and Container Cargo Terminal
- 5 Texas Department of Transportation Ferry's Operated Daily
- Marine Grain Terminal

Galveston, Texas is an island that is located approximately 50 miles south of Houston, Texas. The island is often referred to as Houston's playground by the local media, merchants, and those in the tourist industry. Galveston is 32 miles long and 4 miles wide at the widest part. The current resident population is approximately 66,000. However, on any given weekend the local population can swell to between 100,000 and 250,000. At present there are only 2 direct access routes to the island. The State of Texas also operates a toll free ferry system between Galveston Island and Bolivar Peninsula.

Is the Galveston Police Department large enough to accommodate a SWAT team? The authorized strength of the Galveston Police Department is 164 sworn personnel. The current SWAT team within the Galveston Police Department is composed of 25 sworn police officers. All personnel on the SWAT team are part-time, including its commander. Participation in the unit is voluntary, however, all candidates must pass a rigorous qualification process before final acceptance to the team. The SWAT team commander comments (B. Riedel, personnel communication, July 12, 2000) that you have to really want to be on the team, and by being an all volunteer unit, we are able to determine if the applicant is committed to physical fitness, discipline, team work. A SWAT officer must be dedicated to himself both physically and mentally by actively

pursuing additional training on his own. Officers that display this type of motivation and drive are selected for appointment to the team.

With the current system in place SWAT officers are allowed to attend 1 training or SW A T day per month. This training day is selected well in advance and all are required to attend. Should an officer be off on the training day, he is given a choice of overtime or compensatory time. If a specialized school or training seminar presents itself, SWAT officers are also allowed to attend this training in addition to regular monthly training. It appears that the current system in place works well for Commander Riedel and his unit.

According to the National Tactical Officers Association (D. Augello, personal communication, June 15,2000) many 10 officer SWAT teams are highly qualified and very talented on 70 to 100 officer agencies. And many agencies that are numerically capable of supporting a SW A T unit do not have enough qualified persons to fill a ten officer team.

Cost of the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team is another area of concern. Several issues are relevant to our report. According to the current Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Galveston Municipal Police Association and the City of Galveston, SWAT team members are compensated at a rate of \$25.00 per month for their membership on the team. All officers must provide all of their own equipment. The SWAT unit has always taken the initiative and embarked on fundraising efforts to purchase big-ticket items, such as ballistic shields, and some specialty firearms.

For the last 25 years of Galveston Police Department has maintained an account dedicated to SWAT team deployment and training. This funding also includes special response teams for immediate community problems that are non-planned or arise

overnight. The SWAT team has always stayed within its allotted budget, and usually has a small surplus each budget cycle. These funds are transferred within the Galveston Police Department, or returned to the general fund at the end of the fiscal year.

Area law enforcement administrators within Galveston County concede that the Galveston Police Department is the largest and most active municipal police agency within the county. The Galveston Police Department handles over 88,000 calls for service per year (K. Kerr, personnel communication, July 1, 2000). Galveston County has a population of just over 200,000, while the city of Galveston has a resident population of approximately 66,000.

The Galveston Police Department has always responded to the needs of neighboring departments. The Galveston County Sheriff's Department and the Galveston Police Department have an agreement involving mutual aid. This verbal agreement works quite well. The Galveston County Sheriff's Department can request the SWAT team at any time. According to Chief Deputy Gene Leonard of the Galveston County Sheriff's Department (G. Leonard, personnel communication, July 14, 2000), he could not justify the expense of a SWAT team for his department. Leonard further states that the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team has an excellent record, and his agency does not have a sufficient number of incidents to form his own team, so therefore it is more cost effective and prudent to request the Galveston Police Department's when needed. By the same token, the Galveston Police Department does not have the funding or manpower to operate a Marine Law Enforcement Unit. The Galveston County Sheriff's Department does. The Sheriff's Department responds to the Galveston Police Department's marine enforcement concerns. These types of agreements are essential for law enforcement

agencies in this day and age. The sharing of responsibility, and elimination of duplicate service help provide efficiency and fiscal responsibility in local and county government.

According to Glenn Mannis the Chief of Police for the City of Hitchcock, Texas he always request the Galveston" Police Department's SWAT team whenever he has an operational need for them. Mannis goes on to further state that he could not justify the formation of a SWAT team within his agency, and the level of training and experience the Galveston SWAT team has is certainly sufficient for his jurisdiction. The City of Galveston has also entered into a mutual-aid agreement with the City of Hitchcock (G. Mannis, Personnel Communication, July 2, 2000).

The Village of Jamaica Beach only has five full-time officers. It is a common occurrence for their department to request the help of the Galveston Police Department. The Village of Jamaica Beach has a mutual aid agreement with the Galveston Police Department. This agreement serves both of the communities very well. It also has a positive role for the SWAT team. Jamaica Beach is within the city limits of Galveston and not only does the Galveston SWAT team have a working knowledge of the Village, but it increases their experience base, without having to leave the city. The last critical incident that occurred in Jamaica Beach was handled professionally and without incident by the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team. As the police chief of a smaller police department I am extremely satisfied with the current arrangement our two cities have, and the level of support from all members of the Galveston Police Department, states Chief Kershaw (*D. Kershaw, personnel communication, July 24,2000*).

During an interview with one original member of the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team it was reported that the team formed over 25 years ago at the

request of the FBI. Not only is the SWAT team effective as a tactical unit, but also its many different roles have been expanded and integrated into the community and the department. The animosity of non-SWAT members has also greatly been reduced over the years. In the SWAT teams start-up phase, SWAT only dealt with high profile situations after they had happened. Now SWAT also takes a proactive approach to prevention, and also attempts to educate and make the rest of the department feel and understand the necessity of working together. Additionally, due to the many public events the local government promotes, along with the increased demand for a safer community, it is more important than ever to have a trained SWAT team ready to respond to a critical incident (1. Maffei, Personnel Communication, August 12, 2000).

DISCUSSION

The problem facing the Galveston Police Department that requires a detailed investigation and extensive research was whether or not the department could justify the existing SWAT team. There is a growing concern among police and public administrators involving police paramilitary units. Some feel that many police agencies have a SWAT team out of normalcy rather than justifiable need (Krask & Cubellis, 1997).

This author hypothesized that the Galveston Police Department had a significant need for its existing SWAT team. Substantial research was conducted to verify and support the hypothesis. Through objective research a methodical approach was used to investigate and support the findings of this report to insure a logical well developed decision could be executed by the administrative personnel within the city government.

With our growing ever complex society it is clear that change is evident, and the agency that fails to change or is too slow to change, will only hurt itself, its employees, and the community of which it serves. SWAT team missions have always been to save lives, but now the many diverse special assignments that are directed to a police department, usually are sent to the SWAT unit. SWAT units that are progressive accept these details willingly to broaden their scope of operational experience. This experience increases the value of the team, reinforcing it as a valuable resource.

This author researched and studied five areas to support the conclusion. These areas are:

1. Community Evaluation
2. Needs Assessment
3. Cost Analysis
4. Area Law Enforcement Administrators Views and Concerns

5. Interviews with SWAT team members

The City of Galveston was discovered to be the home of over thirty possible high risk targets. These targets are all potential locations in which a critical incident could occur. This is a significant number of targets within the community, but another factor must also be included. The City of Galveston promotes numerous special events throughout the year. These events cause massive population fluctuations within the city or the special event area.

The authorized strength of the Galveston Police Department is 164 sworn personnel. This is the selection pool for potential members to the SWAT team. Application to SWAT is voluntary, just as service on the team is voluntary if you are selected.

The existing SWAT team has been in existence for over 25 years. During this time a budget has been established. Careful review of previous budgets and interviews with past and current police administrators confirm that the existing SW A T team has not exceeded its established budget guidelines. Further research affirms that a small surplus is returned ever year. Officers are paid \$25.00 per month for their assignment to SWAT per collective bargaining agreement. All team members must supply their own equipment. The SWAT team is authorized to have 25 members.

Interviews conducted by this author with various law enforcement agency top administrators revealed a dependence on the Galveston Police Department's SWAT team in a critical situation. These interviews also revealed a genuine working mutual-aid agreement between all departments.

While talking with a variety of team members who were on the SWAT team, the general message relayed was that the SWAT team has become more diverse over the years, and has made strides to become integrated with the patrolman and supervisors whom are not on the team. SWAT has also taken a proactive approach to specific special events, and assisted with the planning, and security. The desire to work together is being put into practice and appears to be extremely effective. SWAT personnel also teach officers tactics in semi-annual training.

After careful review of all information it is the opinion of this author that the Galveston Police Department can justify its existence. The Galveston Police Department's SWAT team has successfully progressed, and kept up with the law enforcement communities norm. The team provides a professional and safe environment for the City of Galveston, and its visitors.

The methodology used in this study should assist other agencies in determining a need for a SWAT team within their jurisdiction. This report will act as a resource, and guide for the law enforcement professional trying to substantiate a SWAT unit.

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