

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

The Training of Part-time SWAT Teams

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ABSTRACT

The training of part-time special weapon and tactics (SWAT) teams in Texas is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the development and use of these teams has been increasing since the 1990's. The purpose of this research is to determine if there are state mandated minimum training requirements for part-time SWAT teams, and if there is, defining the minimum training requirements. Another purpose of the research is to report on how much time part-time SWAT teams, in Texas, are spending training a month. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, Internet sites, books, and a survey distributed to a group of law enforcement managers from varying agencies across Texas. The researcher discovered that there are no mandated SWAT requirements in Texas. Instead, there are only "suggested best practices" for part-time SWAT teams to train 16 hours per month. The survey instrument indicated that most part-time SWAT teams are not meeting the suggested 16 hours per month amount of training.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen to twenty years smaller Texas police departments have developed and organized Special Weapon and Tactic (SWAT) Teams. These smaller agency teams generally consist of part-time SWAT Officers. The officers assigned to the SWAT team have a primary assignment within in the department and SWAT is considered an extra, voluntary, or secondary assignment. Part-time SWAT officers are expected to respond to and resolve critical incidents as safely, efficiently and effectively as those SWAT Teams which have SWAT officers assigned to their team on a full-time basis.

This research will define the minimum training standards for both part-time and full time SWAT teams in Texas. The research will address the question: what type of training is conducted and how much time is spent training by part-time SWAT teams in Texas? The intended purpose for the research is to inform department administrators of the minimum training requirements for part-time SWAT teams and show them what type of training and how similar agencies with part-time SWAT teams train per month.

The research will be obtained from various sources to include, but not limited to, published books, periodicals, professional journals, and surveys from law enforcement officers across the state of Texas. It is anticipated this research will find Texas Police agencies with part-time SWAT teams are not meeting the minimum training standard as recommended by the state. SWAT requires a great commitment from both the SWAT officer and the police agency. This is a financial and time commitment from both the SWAT officer and their police agency. This commitment becomes harder to accomplish

for part-time SWAT officers and their agencies, with man power, and training budgeting constraints.

The result of this research should provide agency administrators, who oversee part-time SWAT teams, the ability to see whether or not their part-time SWAT teams are meeting the minimum training requirements. The research should also allow these administrators insight to be able restructure the training of their part-time SWAT teams to meet or exceed the minimum training requirements.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The history of SWAT begins in the 1960's and 1970's, when local police were confronted by increasingly well-armed individuals and groups who were willing to engage in armed confrontations with the police, and take hostages. The traditional method of police response by uniformed patrol officers placed both officers and innocent bystanders at increased risk of serious bodily injury or death. In many nations of the world, such situations would likely be handled by national police forces. However, the American people have historically been very wary of deployment of federal forces within local boundaries. It became clear that a new method of response to such complex, high-risk and often high-energy situations was needed. Such a response required expertise and weaponry beyond the normal capability of local law enforcement agencies. Thus, the concept of SWAT (Special weapons and tactics) was developed by the Los Angeles Police Department (Attorney General of California Commission on Special Weapons and Tactics, 2002).

Traditionally and originally SWAT was used for riot counter-sniper, barricaded subjects, and hostage rescue, over the years the role of SWAT has expanded to include

drug search warrants and high risk arrest warrants. As a result of its expanded role, SWAT has gained criticisms of being too military like and over used. An example of this is found in the article “Cops at War” where Miller (2002) writes “what we are seeing here is the militarization of police, with law enforcement officers becoming shock troops in the war on drugs and crime”. Miller (2002) further writes “the problem goes back to the metaphor itself, war and policing are vastly different. In common parlance the military’s job is to kill people and break things”. According to David Korb’s observation, soldiers are supposed to vaporize, not mirandize. Additionally, with scrupulous attention to the suspect’s civil rights, police are trained to solve problems with a multitude of solutions, lethal force being the last rung on the escalating ladder of force. Another example of SWAT being too military like and/or possibly over used is outlined in Radley Balko’s (2006) book “Overkill: The rise of paramilitary raids in America”.

Balko makes several key points to this argument 1) The militarization of domestic policing is increasing across American cities and even into small towns, suburbs, and rural areas. 2) The increase in the frequent use of heavily armed SWAT/Officers for proactive policing and execution of even the simplest drug warrants. 3) The use of anonymous tips and reliance on dubious informants to obtain no-knock search warrants. 4) Executing warrant with dynamic entry tactics, diversionary grenades, and similarly militaristic tactics once reserved for urban warfare. 5) An increase in the amount of tragic outcomes from these circumstances (Balko, 2006, p. 4).

Law enforcement has taken note, and responded to this criticism. The State of California’s Attorney General’s Office formed a Commission on SWAT to review the issues of the criticism and make recommendations to resolve the issues. The

commission's report addressed seven issues and made recommendations for each issue.

The commission found there is no agreed upon definition as to what constitutes a SWAT team. They recommended to develop a definition of a SWAT team.

The commission also found there are no set standards for SWAT teams in California. They recommended to develop a matrix defining the Levels of Team Capability.

The first level is a basic team capable of providing containment and intervention with critical incidents that exceed the training and resources available to line-level officers. This does not include add hoc teams of officers that are formed around a specific mission, detail or incident (e.g. active shooter response). Generally 5% of the basic team's on-duty time should be devoted to training.

The second level is an intermediate team capable of providing containment and intervention. Additionally, these teams possess tactical capabilities above the first level teams. These teams may or may not work together on a daily basis, but are intended to respond to incidents as a team. At least 5% of their on-duty time should be devoted to training, with supplemental training for tactical capabilities above the first level team.

The last level is an advanced team whose personnel function as a full-time unit. Generally 25% of their on-duty time is devoted to training. These teams operate in accordance with contemporary best practices. Such units possess both skills and equipment to utilize tactics beyond the capabilities of the first and second teams.

The commission also found there are no mandated training standards for SWAT teams in California and recommended SWAT teams should provide on-duty training in

accordance with the defined team level (basic, intermediate or advanced). Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) should continue to develop and certify contemporary curricula for all basic and advanced SWAT training.

SWAT team personnel should participate in POST basic and advanced SWAT training. New SWAT team members should not be deployed in operational functions without having first completed POST certified basic training.

In-service SWAT training should be relevant to SWAT missions as defined in agency policy. Such policy should address individual team member's responsibilities, performance-related skills, use of force, and command control functions. Training should be performance based and ensure that individual team members maintain physical and operational competencies.

SWAT training "needs assessments" should be conducted annually by each agency to ensure that training is conducted within team capabilities and agency policy. SWAT training must include lesson plans and records of attendance. Training should be documented, and such documentation should be retained pursuant to agency policy.

SWAT team personnel, team administrators and potential commanders should receive training regarding SWAT mission assessment, deployment criteria, operational planning, incident command, multi-jurisdictional protocols, decision making, tactical operations, communications and accountability.

SWAT team training, including firearms, should incorporate established written safety protocols and on-site safety officers. SWAT teams should regularly participate in scenario-based training to include all relevant agency crisis intervention components such as field command, patrol traffic, hostage negotiations, K9, and bomb technicians,

as well as outside agency responders including fire, EMS, and allied law enforcement agencies.

The commission also found there are a wide variety of tactical applications within agencies throughout the state. They proposed agencies should develop a written set of operational procedures, in accordance with their determination of their Level of Capability, using sound risk-reduction practices.

There is a wide variety of SWAT models employed in California. Agencies should analyze their capabilities, utilizing the recommended Levels of Capability, and develop a response policy. There is a lack of written guidelines regarding uniforms, equipment and team-member identification. Each agency should establish written guidelines for the type and utilization of SWAT equipment. Absent extenuating circumstances, team members should be clearly and conspicuously identifiable as law enforcement personnel.

There is a general lack of clarity, among the public as to the exact mission of SWAT. Each agency should engage in a public education program with respect to their SWAT team. The focus of these programs should be to educate the public that the primary mission of SWAT teams is the preservation of human life (Attorney General of California Commission on Special weapons and tactics, pp. 5-9, 2002).

The Attorney General of California Commission on SWAT concludes by stating the recommendations are just that and not mandates, they are a call to POST to assist in the process of developing the necessary standards, guidelines and training. As a result of the California Attorney General's Commission report on SWAT, California POST was directed by California Penal Code Section 135141.1 to develop and disseminate

guidelines and standardized training recommendations for law enforcement officers, supervisors, and administrators, who are assigned to perform, supervise, or manage SWAT. The intent of the guidelines is to provide helpful guidance to law enforcement agencies in the formulation, oversight, operation, and training of effective SWAT teams. To the extent possible, “best practices” have been identified and incorporated into these guidelines. While these guidelines encourage some degree of standardization of SWAT, it is recognized that local conditions and conditions vary considerably and therefore flexibility is afforded to agencies. These guidelines pay particular attention to the SWAT aspects that focus on effectiveness, safety, and prevention of problematic critical incidents.

The National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) suggested SWAT best practices recommend a SWAT team must have at least a reasonable measure of competency in order to effectively respond to emergency or pre-planned operations. NTOA suggests SWAT policy be created which includes the following:

- 1) A mission statement of the SWAT team which also addresses the rationale for staffing the team.
 - 2) A written description and composition of the team.
 - 3) A written state of the command structure of the team and parent organization.
 - 4) A written process for activation of the team.
 - 5) A written statement on the Use of Deadly Force consistent with department policy.
 - 6) A written description of the selection process for all ranks within the team.
 - 7) A written description of standards regarding qualification and subsequent periodic re-qualification for all team members.
 - 8) A written standard for a minimum number of hours of tactical training per month for all members and positions.
- The NTOA recommends a

minimum of two days each month for a part-time team and 25% of the on-duty time for a full-time team. 9) A written standard for safety equipment. 10) A written statement of the need and rationale for all weapons, ammunition, diversion devices, chemical agents, forced entry tools, less lethal devices and explosives. 11) A written standard detailing the utilization of a complete and formatted operation plan that is written/documented and retained for a prescribed length of time after the operation. 12) A written standard detailing the development and utilization of team incident reports for the activation and implementation phases of all call-outs and operations. 13) A written standard detailing the development and utilization of an after-action critique format to be completed and retained for a prescribed length of time following all team call-outs, operations and significant training events. 14) A written standard detailing the time line and conditions for periodic review and updating of all applicable policies. 15) A written policy statement ensuring that the standards adopted meet local and state requirements and are approved by the agency head. 16) A written policy statement regarding the option(s) chosen for the incorporation and utilization of Tactical Emergency Medical Support (TEMS). 17) A written policy statement defining mutual aid agreements with federal, state, and local agencies including a clear incident command structure during mutual aid. (n.p.)

The NTOA also recommends four main areas of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) which are personnel selection, training, equipment, and operational deployment procedures (NTOA.org). The Texas Tactical Police Officer's Association (TTPOA) based their "Suggested SWAT Best Practices" after the NTOA'S and acknowledged the

NTOA for allowing them to print similar text on the TTPOA website (TTPOA.org). There are no mandatory SWAT training standards, only suggestions by the California POST, NTOA, and TTPOA. The suggested best practices are for teams to have written policy defining the team, the structure of the team, the training of the team, and when the team is to be utilized. It is suggested part-time teams should train 16 hours per month and full-time teams should train 25 percent of their on-duty time. Another point made by all organizations is the documentation of training, if it is not documented it did not happen.

It is suggested SWAT teams train on the “big four” tactical operations law enforcement tactical teams are generally assigned (Howe, 2006, p. 136). These “big four are hostage rescue, high risk warrant service, and barricaded person (Howe, 2006, p.136). Howe (2006) also suggests these four tasks should be performed at dynamic and slow movement. The author believes teams should spend time shooting and working out together as these activities instill confidence and trust in team members. There are other activities for team building such as rappelling and obstacle courses.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not there is/or if not should there be a mandated minimum training standard for part-time SWAT teams in Texas. The researcher hypothesizes that a majority of part-time SWAT teams in Texas are not training as much or as often as they should. The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, Internet sites, and published books. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher’s finding regarding the subject of the training of part-time SWAT teams in Texas will include a questionnaire. The size of the survey will consist of nine questions, distributed to 24 law enforcement manager participants from varying

agencies across the State of Texas. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by the researcher to determine the number of hours part-time SWAT teams are spending training per month, and to determine if there is a concern that these training hours should be mandated by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE).

FINDINGS

A nine question survey was distributed to 24 law enforcement managers from across Texas. The rank of the law enforcement managers' ranged from Police Sergeant to Police Chief. From the 24 survey participants, 17 (71 percent) worked for municipal police agencies, five (21 percent) worked for specialized police agencies (university, school district, and transit police), one (4 percent) worked for a Sheriff's Office, and one (4 percent) worked for a state agency. Of the 24 survey participants 16 (67 percent) agencies had part-time SWAT teams, 6 (25 percent) did not have a SWAT team, and two (8 percent) reported having full-time SWAT teams, see Figure 1.

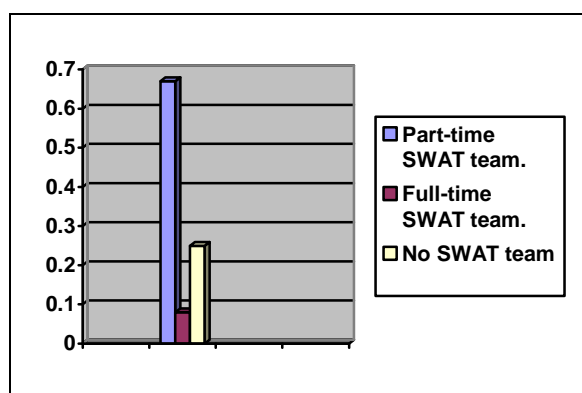


Figure 1. Percentage of survey data illustrating part-time, full-time, or no SWAT team.

The survey instrument asked the participants how many hours they thought a part-time SWAT team should train per month. Four-teen (58 percent) indicated a part-

time SWAT team should train 16 hours a month, five (21 percent) indicated eight hours a month, four (17 percent) indicated 12 hours per month, and one (4 percent) indicated a part-time SWAT team should train more than 16 per month. The questionnaire asked the participants whose agency has a part-time SWAT time, and how many hours per month does their team actually train? This data is illustrated in Figure 2. Sixty-six percent of the survey participants reported having a part-time SWAT team in their agency. This group of participants was asked how many hours per month their part-time team actually trained? The results indicated only 25 percent of the agencies surveyed trained for 16 hours a month, 6 percent trained for more than 16 hours per month, 6 percent trained for four hours a month, and 44 percent trained for eight hours a month. See Figure 2.

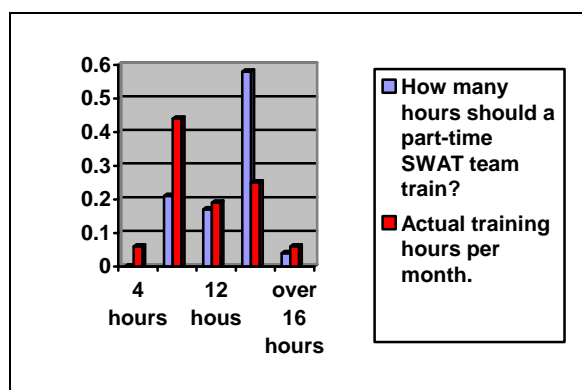


Figure 2. Illustrates the difference between how many hours it is thought a part-time SWAT should be training compared to how many hours they are actually training.

The questionnaire further asked the participants if they thought TCLEOSE should mandate the SWAT training of part-time and full-time SWAT teams. The results regarding TCLEOSE mandating a minimum number of training hours for a part-time was the same 50 percent for and 50 percent against a training mandate. However, 54

percent of the participants felt TCLEOSE should mandate the training hours for full-time SWAT teams. The final question asked in the survey was, is SWAT being over utilized? Seventy-five percent responded, they thought SWAT was not being over utilized.

CONCLUSION

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not part-time SWAT teams in Texas had to meet a mandated minimum training requirement per month, and how much training was actually being completed by the part-time SWAT teams. The research results indicated there are no mandated part-time SWAT team training requirements, only suggestions on best practices made by the NOTA and TTPOA. The research results also showed, of the agencies surveyed; only 25 percent of part-time SWAT teams were meeting the recommended 16 hours of training per month. The purpose of this research was to inform agency administrators, with part-time SWAT teams, information on the training standards of part-time SWAT teams. The research question that was examined focused on how many hours a month were part-time SWAT teams in Texas actually training. The researcher hypothesized that the part-time teams were not training enough. The researcher concluded from the findings that there are no mandates on SWAT training, only suggested best practices, and that a majority of the part-time teams in Texas are not meeting the minimum number of suggested training hours per month. The finding of the research supported the hypothesis. The reasons why the findings support the hypothesis are could be contributed to manpower scheduling issues and limited training budgets. The study of the training of part-time SWAT teams is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the implementation and use of SWAT teams by law enforcement agencies is

continually increasing. Any law enforcement administrator who oversees a SWAT team stands to benefit from the results of the findings of this research.

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