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## **The Feasibility of a University Tactical Unit**

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by  
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### **Abstract**

Special response teams have been in existence for several years in both municipal and county police agencies. It has only been recently that universities have found a need for the specialized training and response of a tactical unit. With the desire for better crowd control, the rise of terroristic threat and the dangers of being overwhelmed by heavily armed suspects as has occurred in several high schools across our nation, universities have begun searching for the best possible answer.

The Texas Womans University Department of Public Safety, a university without a tactical response team, requested to know what the possibility of developing such a team would be. This idea was discussed at all levels within the department. Many questions such as the feasibility of such a unit, its training and equipment, and when to deploy such a unit had to be answered. Many articles written by experts in the field of tactical usage were reviewed, equipment costs were located from supply companies, and operating procedures were obtained from other agencies. Texas Woman's University sent several officers to a tactical school to better understand the use and types of uses for such a unit. After reviewing the information and observing the requirements of other police agencies it is concluded that a response team is a necessary part of any agency able to obtain and maintain such a response unit.

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A tactical response team is a group of carefully selected police officers who have received intensive specialized training in crises situations that a regular police unit is not equipped or trained to handle. (Davidson vii.) This research is intended to show the need to develop a response or tactical team for Texas Woman's University Police Agency. When and how officers respond to critical incidents depends largely on their training, equipment and department regulations and policies. Tactical teams typically include hostage negotiators, snipers, area or reconnaissance scouts and entry team positions. All of these positions receive specialized training for their specific duties. Many agencies cross train officers to perform several of these positions. Over the past two to three years both the Denton County Sheriffs Department and the City of Denton, where Texas Woman's University is located, have seen an increase in violent crimes and their use of their tactical response teams have seen a marked increase. The City of Denton is unique in that the University of North Texas is also located here. In 1995 they developed a C.R.I.T.(Critical Incident Response Team) due to the rise of problems in crowd control, drugs and violence.

In research for this project officers attended a basic tactical training school and received information about the types of uses for tactical units. Articles from police magazines were obtained, books which were written by people in the field of tactical operations and current tactical policies were obtained. These policies were both from city tactical units and from a university tactical unit. The results of this research will be presented to the department administration of Texas Woman's University for evaluation

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to determine the need for a tactical team at the Denton campus of Texas Woman's University.

After review, this research will indicate that a tactical response to a critical incident is a necessity. Any agency with the possibility of volatile, life threatening police situations within their jurisdiction is responsible for responding to those threats. Those agencies able to respond with a well trained, equipped tactical team will contain the threat so that no further citizens are involved or injured and control the situation so that the threat can be addressed. These tactical units main goal is always to conclude the situation with a minimal amount of injury to the victims, the officers or the suspect.

### **Historical and Theoretical Context**

The development of police tactical units occurred in the United States over about a ten-year span and continue, to be evaluated and redefined. Police were often faced with the same types of violent criminal confrontations before the formulation of tactical units. In 1950's the Chicago police department had an unofficial unit which existed of veteran officers who were called upon to serve high risk warrants and respond to other violent occurrences which today's tactical units are required to address (Williams 34). Prior to the development of tactical teams many police agencies used the same type of unofficial unit placing their experienced officers in control of the activity. Many of these incidents were given to the experienced officer to resolve with little or no training in critical incidents or supervision (Williams 35).

The development of Special Weapons and Tactics (S.W.A.T.) or Tactical units

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began in the late 1960's and continued through the early 1970's. In Los Angeles California, after the 1965 riots in the Watts area, the development of a full-time response team with its primary responsibility to better address crowd control, the containment of violent events, and use of force by police was created (Olin 23). Initially this tactical unit would respond to violent situations that overwhelmed the abilities of patrol units.

In Texas, the event most credited for bringing tactical response units to our state is the 1966 Austin tower incident. (Dateline, Aug. 1999) A heavily armed man entered the clock tower on the campus of the University of Austin in Austin, Texas. After hours of firing upon people killing many and wounding many more, two Austin police officers entered the tower and confronted the shooter. With no plan, no evacuation, no direction from supervisors or communication with each other, these two officers ended the assault, but not without a great loss of life. If any one incident illustrates the need for planning, teamwork, communications and coordination in a violent incident the above incident should. "This is the reason Texas now has S.W.A.T. teams." (Dateline Aug. 1999).

Tactically trained officers would have the knowledge and training to respond swiftly and with prior planning to violent assaults which would overwhelm ordinarily trained street officers (Davidson 63).

May 4, 1970 was another day that tested the ability of police to control peaceful demonstration and conflict. A day that would see military units called to control demonstrators at Kent State. The inability of police to observe the demonstration

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and take the necessary steps to ensure a peaceful demonstration without confrontation ended in disaster. The Kent State University and the Kent City Police agency were unable to address the situation with personnel who were aware of the culture and turbulence which were common on the university and others had to be relied upon to respond (Olin 23). With anti war protesters speaking out regularly on many universities, the need to contain the situations increased. When Kent State relied upon the National Guard for assistance they released any ability to have the personal who were most familiar with the students and most used to the protests control the actions of the enforcers (Olin 23). There is no way to rewrite history, and to say that the National Guard was wrong in its attempt to stop the violence at Kent State would be a misrepresentation of many facts. If the university had a trained tactical unit made up of the officers who, on a daily basis, patrolled and knew the people at Kent State, this type of incident may well have been avoided.

As smaller agencies began experiencing more and more violent crimes they began to develop tactical units similar to those being used in the larger metropolitan area departments. Unable to commit the same level of manpower, equipment, and funds to the development of such units, smaller agencies began adapting these units to fit the need and abilities of their communities and their departments (Randall 19). Many required their tactical officers to be either full-time patrol or full-time investigation officers who performed the duties of tactical officer part-time (Hanson 34). Many police agencies joined in the development of a combined tactical unit in their immediate area that

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would be made up of officers from each agency and would respond to incidents aiding the agency where the incident occurred (Strickland 22). The use of some tactical response teams has broadened in the last several years to include several situations which are not readily identifiable as critical incidents. Many agencies are using tactical units in daily control of juvenile gangs and high drug traffic areas. They are assigned as saturation units in high crime areas for maximum impact on drug sales, prostitution, pandering and other crimes against persons (Kraska 74).

### **Review of Literature or Practice**

When it comes to the use of lethal or deadly force, the tactically trained officer uses force less often than officers not trained in tactical response. When tactical officers respond to increasingly unpredictable and volatile situations, they are able to conclude the incident with less force (Stevens 51). Although this statement seems minor in the overall view of tactical uses, consider the overreaction of an officer placed in a situation where deadly force is present and available to the suspect and the officer reacts by using deadly force. In many departments this situation would be viewed as an acceptable but less than desirable conclusion depending upon the circumstances. However that same situations responded to by tactically trained officers may very well end without deadly force being used. Research and evidence supports the findings that tactical units use less deadly force than officers left to conclude critical situations on their own (Stevens 50). Agencies with police tactical units resolve critical incidents far safer than agencies without tactical units, 71% versus 44% of the time (Stevens 51). It is also clear from this

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research that officers and criminals do not get injured as often with police tactical units on the scene (Stevens 51). A poorly equipped tactical unit, no matter how well-trained and disciplined, will always be at a disadvantage (Hall 42). This can lead to mission failure, injuries, and greatly increased liability factors (Hall 42). As stated earlier, the use of tactical units has found its involvement in several non-traditional settings such as area saturations of high crime neighborhoods, special juvenile gang units, and others. The primary reason for the development of tactical units in mid-size to small agencies still remains the response to critical violent incidents (Hanson 38). The purpose of developing a tactical unit for a small university is to lessen the injury potential to both citizens and officers during critical incidents, crowd control and other hazardous duty assignments. One-hundred fifty-seven law enforcement agencies in 10 states were surveyed and the findings revealed that tactical units enhanced the likelihood of a safer resolution to critical incidents (Stevens, 48). The typical uses of a tactical unit can be exemplified in the Plano Texas Police Departments tactical operation procedures, it states:

The emergency response team will be utilized in all of the following high risk or potentially violent situations: Hostage situations, barricaded persons incident, sniper incident, hazardous warrant service, narcotics search warrants, narcotics buy bust operations, V.I.P. protection, civil disorders, natural or man-made disasters. (Plano Police Department Operation Policy #203001).

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The development of a tactical team for critical incidents or operation assignments does little for any community without clear goals. The obvious goals are to protect life and stop the violent episode as quickly and safely as possible. As these episodes occur, the plan of action which is developed must have systematic obtainable goals which can generally be applied to all situations. The best example of such goal setting found is that of the University of North Texas' critical incident response team (tactical team) operations procedure manual which states: " The goals of a high risk situation requiring a tactical deployment includes; The release of any hostages (if present), The protection of bystanders, The apprehension of suspects and the restoration of normal activities to the area." (University of North Texas S.O.P.)

In armed and barricaded situations it is critical that a response teams are aware of their tactical objectives. In Alert's "First response to armed and barricaded situations" Alert lists these objectives as: " Containment, try to confine the suspect to the smallest possible area, establish an inner and an outer perimeter, call for additional personnel if needed, clear the area of spectators and nonessential personnel, get an arrest team in place and ready to approach, gather intelligence and have the negotiator contact or attempt to contact the suspect." (Alert 45).

The use of tactical units should include high risk felony warrant service, conducting narcotics raids and assisting patrol force in building or ground searches for dangerous suspects among others. (Olin 20)

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A tactical unit at Texas Women's University would be used for crowd control and special events, such as dignitary protection, along with critical incident response. Because of the lack of manpower and the inability to purchase equipment for all officers at Texas Woman's University, a selection process to pick the most qualified officers would be developed.

The cooperation and collaboration of Denton City, Denton County, and the University of North Texas were requested to develop a joint tactical team combining members from each agency. A multi-jurisdictional tactical unit would be worth consideration if all agencies operated fully equipped and trained units which would be able to rely on one another for additional manpower and support should the incident warrant such a response. Those agencies would then be able to operate without assistance for less critical situations such as dignitary protection, planned felony warrant service, or crowd control situations. This agreement would be of great benefit to the Texas Woman's University Police Department. It would allow the Texas Woman's University Police Department to develop and use a tactical unit in smaller numbers, requiring less equipment and fewer officers to maintain a stable tactical unit.

Several variations of multi-jurisdictional tactical teams are in existence with on-call or part-time officers who respond to critical incidents. This type of tactical unit is the most prevalent in small or medium-sized police agencies today (Strickland 24). One of the items addressed in tactical issues is that of response time. There is a direct

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relationship between the response of a police unit to an emergency and the result of that response: the longer it takes an officer to respond, the less likely an apprehension will occur (Hanson 36). This same correlation exists in respect to the response of a tactical team. The ability of a tactical team to contain, control, and conclude a critical incident is in direct relationship to their response time. Over the last several years law enforcement has made gains in the development and uses of tactical teams (Walker 46). Our society is faced with more violent confrontations which need immediate tactical response. Most agencies who rely on other police department's full-time or on-call tactical teams extend this critical response time. When an incident evolves, these teams need to assemble, stage, and deploy. This often takes as long as an hour before they can be used (Hawkins 53). By having a primary tactical unit Texas Woman's University could avoid such a costly and possibly deadly delay.

Tactical units are identified as paramilitary units. Among the necessary factors, the units must train and function in a military special operations team manor which requires a strong command structure and discipline (Kraska 610). This command structure is essential for coordination and deployment. Members must be disciplined in their response to commands for their given position in the tactical operation (Kraska 610).

The minium equipment needed for a small tactical unit would consist of ballistic helmets and vests, protective goggles, knee and elbow pads. Tactical weapons which would include at least one entry weapon and a sniper rifle. Because communications are so essential during a crisis situation, good tactical communication equipment is a must.

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The use for the equipment and call out use on a university campus is expected to be low so, it is possible to avoid the costly servailence equipment many larger agencies purchase for their tactical units. Although beneficial, these items are not necessary for the completion of a successful mission. Through Botach Tactical Supplies and other companies it is possible to purchase complete outfits for each officer involved in the tactical unit for about \$2,400.00. Add to that the cost of a good, reliable sniper rifle and entry weapons (an additional \$3,000 to \$4,000 dollars) and a tactical unit can be equipped sufficiently enough to respond to critical incidents.

Training must be an ongoing process. This process of training is especially important for a tactical officer (Hall 42). In the Denton County area, tactical units that are already in existence train once a month. Although the training may shift from one topic to another, such as firearms training one month and building entry the next, tactical officers are required to attend training and absenteeism is not tolerated. An officer must commit to the demands of becoming a member of a tactical unit that often requires time not only for training but for the incidents for which the tactical units were formed. If such a mutual agreement could be reached, it should be required that all involved agencies train together six (6) times each year in a collective training exercise. In this manor, all involved agencies would be able to function as a single unit regardless of the jurisdictional command structure. These training exercises would be held at a different jurisdictional location each time. This would give all agencies training in the areas of command and support of the other agencies involved. This unit would be placed into

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effect whenever one of the involved agencies is in need of assistance. Texas Woman's University would be responsible to locate and purchase the necessary equipment needed to allow our tactical officers to deploy both as a single tactical unit for smaller controlled events, or as part of the larger collective tactical force of the mutual aid unit.

As with most university settings, Texas Woman's University desires to be less conspicuous than our county or city tactical units. To have tactically dressed officers roaming around our campus would heighten concern of many of our citizens and alarm many others. Due to this concern our training would be conducted during times of least student and staff population and in a manner which would least alarm the community.

The use of a tactical unit at Texas Woman's University would create a better response to those situations where officers would be overwhelmed, would provide better planning and deployment of officers during event crowd situations and dignitary protection. It would afford the officers greater safety when operating in a crisis situation and protect the citizens of the community in a more deliberate controlled manner. Since Texas Woman's University has a small department, the administration of such a unit could be delegated to the commanding sergeant who would be responsible to schedule training, update equipment and oversee selection of officers.

#### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

In the beginning of this research, it was believed that the development of a tactical unit for Texas Woman's University would be an act of planning for the future security of our campus. As the information was compiled, it became clear that this idea is not

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visionary but instead an act of hindsight. The recent school shooting at Combine High School, the Unibomber, the Waco incident, and many others remind us almost daily that violent acts of terrorism and defiance can and do occur anywhere. There is no way to foretell whether such an occurrence could ever happen at our university. Although some may point at statistics of low violence, it does not place Texas Women's University on an island impervious to crime of any type. Texas Womans University can develop the ability to prepare for such an event and support its citizens by planning for their protection in the worst possible situation. As stated earlier, Texas Women's University agency is small. The ability to address warrant service or crowd control may well be within a self contained tactical units' ability. The Texas Womans University tactical unit would consist of patrol officers who would work tactical incidents in an on-call and/or part-time position. In the event of a major situation, assistance would almost be required and left to our own it would surely be difficult to properly respond. To that situation it is recommended that our agency seek an agreement with the surrounding agencies in the development of a mutual aid response whereby the agencies involved would develop, train, and plan as one unit. . Although Texas Woman's University has not had a major incident, planning for that incident would only create a better ability to respond to and control such an incident. It would give the university the added assistance of other well trained officers to respond should the need arise and clearly protect our community in a responsible, sensible manor.

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