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Assessing the need for a
Special Operation Reaction Team

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by
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ABSTRACT

In the past, the city of Highland Village, Texas as a small community, relied on larger cities to provide many services. Now the police department has reached the point, because of the cities rapid growth, where it must provide for itself. The city is located in the flight path of the Dallas - Fort Worth International Airport, and has a major railroad running through it. These present several potential hazards. The Dallas - Fort Worth Airport has approximately 2,500 flights daily. Many of these flights pass over Highland Village, posing a real threat of an aircraft crash within the city. Several trains pass through the city each day, carrying many types of hazardous liquids and gases. This poses a threat of a hazardous material spill should one of the trains derail. Finally, the increase in population and business activity increases the threat of a hostage situation or a barricaded person. Should any of these situations occur, the city must have properly trained and equipped personnel to protect its citizens and insure their safety. In order to accomplish this the department should consider establishing a Special Operations Reaction Team (SORT).

Introduction

The city of Highland Village is faced with several potential emergency situations each day. At the present, the police department does not have the trained or equipped personnel to handle them. The purpose of this project is to assess the need for the City of Highland Village, Texas to create a Special Operations Reactionary Team, (SORT).

A Special Operation Reaction Team (SORT) is a selected number of individuals trained to respond to an emergency situation and operate as a team. A SORT is different from a Special Weapons Assault Team (SWAT). A SWAT is primarily trained to handle situations involving a hostage situation or a barricaded person. However the City of Highland Village has a need that goes beyond a basic SWAT. Therefore this department needs to create a team that can handle a hostage situation or a barricaded person and also one that is trained to handle downed aircraft and incidents involving hazardous material spills caused by train derailments.

The potential problems are considerable. First, the city is located in the flight path for the Dallas - Fort Worth International Airport. With approximately 2,500 daily flights in and out of the airport, (many of which pass over the city) this poses a very realistic risk of a plane crash occurring in the city. Second, several trains pass through Highland Village each day. Many of these are transporting hazardous materials and gases. Third, with the increase in our population and businesses, poses a threat of a hostage or barricaded person situation.

The sources of information used in this report are other law enforcement agencies, personal interviews with agency coordinators, news articles, and other printed literature. It will be instructive to determine how other departments are utilizing their Special Operation Reaction

Teams. A review of this reference material will provide documentation explaining the need to establish a Special Operation Reaction Team. The results of this research will be presented to the Chief of Police for his recommendation and then presented to the City Council and the City Manager for their approval and adoption.

Risk Assessment

In 1980, Highland Village was a small community with a population of 3,246. By 1990 the population increased to 7,027. The current population is 11,500. The proposed population growth is estimated at 21,000 by the year 2006.

To keep up with the changing society and its new problems, the police departments have made several changes. One is the creation of Special Weapon and Tactical units (SWAT). These units were developed in the early 1960's for the purpose of handling tactical situations that the regular trained police officer was not trained or equipped to handle. SWAT is still a very effective concept today. Many departments have expanded their basic SWAT teams to handle other emergencies. These teams are commonly referred to as Special Operation Response Teams, (SORT). These are teams that are trained to fit the needs of a certain area. They are also teams that are trained to work together in emergency situations, more effectively than a larger group of officers.

The needs of the city of Highland Village have changed. Likewise the responsibilities of the police department changing. It is now necessary to refocus our resources to insure that the department is providing the best possible protection and services for the citizens. Some of the cities special needs are, (1) specially trained personnel to handle aircraft crashes, (2) train

derailment and chemical spills, (3) barricaded persons and hostage situations.

The city is located in the flight path for the Dallas - Fort Worth International Airport (DFW). This is one of the busiest airports in the United States. DFW manages approximately 2,500 flights daily in and out of the Metroplex. A new runway scheduled to open in the near future will increase this number. It is very possible that a aircraft could have a problem and go down in the city. On August 2, 1985, a large plane crashed just prior to the airport. Several people on the adjacent Highway 114 were injured and killed. Many in the plane were killed or suffered serious injuries (Timms 1985). On August 31, 1988, another large plane crashed at the airport killing 13 passengers and injuring another 94 (Pusey 1988).

Several trains pass within a few hundred feet of two local schools and through portions of residential areas. Many of the trains are loaded with hazardous liquids and gases. If even one of these cars derailed, it could cause a serious situation requiring specially trained people to react immediately to prevent injuries or deaths to the public and the emergency response personnel. On February 2, 1996, a train derailed in Cajon Summit, California. Two people were killed and 20 injured due to the chemicals. This did not occur in a heavy populated area. On September 28, 1982, another train derailed in Livingston, Louisiana. This train had twenty-seven cars containing flammable petroleum products, or hazardous chemicals. The first command post was set up two miles from the actual derailment site due to the possibility of fire and explosion. Three days later the command post was moved to within 2,000 feet. One tank car containing vinyl chloride exploded rocketing a large section of the tank car over 700 feet. More than 100 spot fires were started in Livingston due to this one explosion. The residents of Livingston were not allowed to return home until 15 days later on October 12 (Maxon 1996).

Finally, the increase in population and city growth, increases the potential of a barricaded person or a hostage situation. These situations are extremely dangerous and even life threatening for a sufficient number of citizens.

All of these situations require specially trained and equipped officers. The department cannot wait for an emergency situation to occur before beginning preparation. The preparation must start now to continue to provide the city with a proactive police department. This level of preparedness is an established goal and what the citizens expect.

Review of Literature

Because of the change in society during the early 1960's many law enforcement agencies were faced with a growing need to train some of their members to handle certain situations. From this need SWAT teams were created (Bradley 1990). Many area departments have SWAT teams that are prepared to react to a hostage situation, barricaded person, or other emergencies. Many departments have created special names to fit the needs of that city such as ERS - Emergency Rescue Squad, PASS - Police Anti-Sniper Squad or HOB0 - Hostage or Barricaded Operation (Miller 1996). Team members are highly trained for particular situations. Some are trained in bomb or explosive device recognition. Many, such as Lake Dallas and Lewisville, are equipped with a mobile command post. The mobile command post is used for problems that are going to be several hours in duration. Most area departments do not have the need for creating teams to handle situations other than SWAT related incidents. However, The City of Highland Village, based on its location, does have additional needs. The Arlington Police Department created a Tactical team in 1989, primarily to handle situations involving terrorists,

riots or barricaded and hostage situations (Arlington Police Department 1989). In 1993, the city of Trophy Club created a SORT team to handle situations pertinent to their area (Miller 1996).

For the purpose of this research a survey of eleven law enforcement agencies in Denton County was conducted. Of the eleven, six have some type of special response team. As the chart below indicates, cities can create a team that will conform to their needs and budget.

Department	# on Team	Training	Times Used 1995	Cost of Training	Requirements
Lake Dallas PD	6	30 hrs/yr	4	All Donated	Complete FTO
Trophy Club PD	6	96 hrs/yr	0	\$2,300	1 Yr with Dept
DFW Airport	32	80 hrs/yr	30	\$3,000	3 Yrs with Dept
Lewisville PD	13	96 hrs/yr	13	\$1,000	Complete FTO
Carrollton PD	18	192 hrs/yr	9	\$7,000	2 Yrs with Dept, Physical Agility, Oral Review Board
Denton PD	21	48 hrs/yr	4	\$800	1 Yr with Dept, Written Exam

In 1995 the emergency response team from DFW answered 180 Alert 2 calls. An Alert 2 call is a signal that an aircraft is experiencing some type of emergency, i.e., fire while in flight, engine shut down or other serious problem (Black 1996). Departments must establish the type of team that will address the needs of that city, and an ongoing training program that will conform to that team's needs. But regardless of their special needs, all special response teams should have the same general goals and objectives.

- 1) to take charge of an emergency situation in a professional and orderly manner;
- 2) to resolve the emergency with the least amount of confusion;

3) to accomplish this without the loss of life either from the people involved or innocent bystanders;

4) and to restore law and order and quality of life.

Discussion of Relevant Issues

The key issues in this research project are:

1) the threat of a possible aircraft crashing in the city;

2) the possibility of a train derailment with a hazardous material spill;

3) and the possibilities of a barricaded person or a hostage situation.

Since the City of Highland Village being located in the flight path for the Dallas - Fort Worth International Airport, there is great potential for an aircraft crashing during an approach or take-off from the airport within the city limits. On the morning of August 2, 1985, Delta flight #191 was on approach to land at the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. The aircraft was caught in a downdraft and crashed. Fortunately, this occurred in a non-populated area, however several people on the ground were injured and others killed as a result of the aircraft striking vehicles traveling on the adjacent Highway 114. Also 122 people in the aircraft were killed (Timms 1985). If an incident such as this occurs in the city of Highland Village, it could involve anywhere from four to twelve city blocks. It is estimated that it could damage or destroy from 30 to 40 homes. Depending on the time of day, as many as 100 people on the ground could be injured or killed. This situation would require a specialized reaction team that can react immediately and take charge to decrease the possibility of further injuries or deaths.

Captain Black of the DFW Department of Public Safety said that emergency crews from

the airport will respond only if they are requested by the city. However their response will be with very limited equipment and personnel. Their response time will still be approximately 30 minutes (Black 1996).

Each day a large number of trains pass through the city. They pass within a few hundred feet of two elementary schools and one junior high school. For several miles they pass through residential areas. Many of the train cars are carrying hazardous materials and gases.

Should a single train car derail that is transporting a hazardous material, and the proper steps to evacuate people in the effected area are not taken in a timely manner, the results could be more catastrophic.

With the increase in population, both in business and residential, there is a much greater threat each day that the department will be required to handle a barricaded person who is a threat to himself, or a hostage situation where several lives are at risk. These situations require special training and equipment.

At the present time, the Highland Village Police Department does not have properly trained people or equipment to handle the emergencies identified by this research.

In the past, the Lewisville Police Department has responded to such emergencies. with both cities growing in size and population, Highland Village can no longer rely on Lewisville. In a small department with a limited budget, it is not possible to train all personnel for every type of potential response. Also, it is not feasible for us to create a special team for each situation and equip each member with the required equipment. However five or six properly trained personnel can establish the core of a Special Operations Reaction team. This program is in line with department policy on proactive policing.

Team members should be selected on a voluntary basis from department members that meet the following criteria.

- 1) a minimum of one year with the department;
- 2) no disciplinary action within the past year;
- 3) no physical limitations;
- 4) pass an oral review board;

The department will be responsible for providing one set of battle dress uniforms which will cost approximately \$70.00. Team members will be responsible for furnishing their own duty belt and accessories. It will require approximately 24 hours of training, 8 hours in handling hazardous materials, 8 hours in hostage situations and barricaded persons, which can be accomplished with our own instructors. Also 8 hours in the handling of downed aircraft. This can be taught by Captain Black at no charge to the city. It will also require approximately 4 hours training each month.

The team should consist of 5 members. One commander, (at least the rank of Sergeant) and 4 team members. The decision to deploy the team would be made by the Chief of Police, Lieutenant or the on call duty officer.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to conduct a needs assessment for a Special Operation Reaction Team for the city of Highland Village. The city of Highland Village is at a very high risk of being faced with any one of three situations that could result in the loss of life, property, severe injuries, the disruption of the day to day life of citizens or the operations of the city. The department must plan now so that should one of these problems occur it will be better

prepared to handle it. These precautions are not meant to prevent these emergencies from occurring. Unfortunately that is not possible. But the department can, with properly trained and equipped personnel, be prepared to handle emergency situations should one occur.

The city is most vulnerable to aircraft crashes, train derailment creating a hazardous material or chemical spill and a hostage situation or a barricaded person. These problems have been identified and addressed by other departments and the research shows that such emergencies do occur. To think that it could not happen in Highland Village is very naive. There is no way any city, or police department, no matter how well trained, equipped or prepared can prevent one of these problems from occurring. However a city can be prepared to handle an emergency. Emergencies of this magnitude must be prepared for in advance. This is done by having a team of well trained, and properly equipped personnel ready to respond to an emergency.

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