

SWAT ROUND-UP INTERNATIONAL: A LEGACY EVENT THAT MUST LIVE ON

By Mike Foreman

HISTORY

In 1982, Lieutenant Edward “Buffy” Cullinan of the Orlando Police Department had a vision of bringing Central Florida SWAT teams together to train, share ideas and compete in a friendly environment that would build lasting relationships. The first SWAT Round-Up was held in the fall of 1982 at the Kissimmee Police Department Range, a modest facility south of the Kissimmee Regional Airport in Osceola County. It was not about the venue, but Buffy’s dream to bring all SWAT teams together. Eight SWAT teams competed in the first SWAT Round-Up, which was won by Orlando Police Department SWAT. We owe the Kissimmee Police Department special thanks for sharing Buffy’s vision and for spearheading a long-lasting tradition of local agency support for the competition. The SWAT Round-Up was then moved to the Orange County Sheriff’s Office Range where it has been held ever since.

Over the past 30 years we have learned from teams and individuals that have contributed to lifesaving incidents, tragic outcomes, public relations nightmares and logistical debacles. Injuries have been prevented and lives saved as a result of these incidents and lessons learned being shared. This is what makes the SRI different from any other event of its kind. It is not just about competing, it is about the training, the debriefs, equipment and technology reviews, and most importantly, the network that has been built and relationships that have lasted over the years. Have no doubt about it, every red-blooded SWAT officer who walks

Since its origin in 1982, SWAT Round-Up has evolved into the SWAT Round-Up International (SRI) and has become arguably the greatest tactical event in the world, one which has made and continues to make a difference in our lives. As we approach the 30th anniversary of the Round-Up, it is astonishing and inspiring to note that over 115,000 people have come to compete and witness world-class athletes, see the latest in technology and equipment, and most importantly, learn from incidents that have taken lives, saved lives or protected a community from a catastrophic incident. SWAT teams exist for one reason: to save lives. SWAT Round-Up International challenges these teams to be the best.

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In the early years, we experienced “growing pains” with flashbangs in the pool, chemical agents in the hotel rooms, rappelling from the balcony, and enough machismo to last a lifetime. We learned we were building a great event and it could only be remembered as such if we delivered a polished, well-structured product and insured all attendees acted in a professional manner at all times.

The comments of one man marked a turning point in the SWAT Round-Up legacy. Legendary Marine sniper Carlos

Have no doubt about it, every red-blooded SWAT officer who walks onto the OCSO range wants to leave as world champion, but the beautiful thing is that so much more than a trophy can be gained at the event.

Hathcock was brought from Virginia Beach to be our honorary judge. In 1989, our event was in its seventh year and growing in popularity and esteem. After watching the young SWAT studs show off their many talents at the hotel throughout the evening, “White Feather” asked to address the SRI participants. Carlos delivered a well-deserved dressing-down to all, and the message was clear: To be a true warrior you must act as one. He told us we must behave professionally, ethically, and as an upstanding member of the “one percent” at all times, on or off-duty.

The silence was notable. His remarks had hit home. We knew, but Carlos had reminded us, that SWAT officers are judged each day. We have an obligation to market ourselves and the program we represent among fellow officers and the community we serve. Our actions and decisions will influence others, command staff and supervisors included. We learned we were building a great event but it would only be remembered as such if we delivered a refined product and ensured all attendees represented their career and SWAT Round-Up in a professional manner. Carlos left us much in his passing; his words spoken in 1989 should never be forgotten.

In 1997, “60 Minutes” anchor Diane Sawyer arrived at the SRI as a reporter for the story, “The Para-Militarization of Police.” Ms. Sawyer found only highly trained and highly motivated SWAT officers who were dedicated professionals. Lakeland Police Sergeant Larry Giddens stepped up to be interviewed on camera and Ms. Sawyer discovered, through his guidance and with time spent observing, only well-trained, knowledgeable operators who contradicted the stereotype of the overly aggressive shooting machine. Sergeant Giddens is another example of the caliber of personnel that you see at the SRI.

While some have voiced concerns over the strict safety rules and procedures that are enforced during the competition, they are there to guarantee a safe event for all. It will always be safety first! Tremendous effort is put forth to ensure that the competition is judged fairly and consistently. All the judges are volunteers who come from around the world to offer their services and be a part of this great event. There are many dedicated souls who have served for nearly two decades. Each year, too, new LE officers volunteer to be part of the support staff, and every one of them makes the SRI possible.

From Chief Daryl Gates to trailblazers like Ron McCarthy, the standard for SWAT has been set high and the SRI has been a great contributor to the level of excellence achieved by many. We must continue to provide this legacy event for teams and individuals to gather so the new warriors can learn from the veterans and continue the tradition of providing the finest that SWAT has to offer.

CONTRIBUTORS

Those who have contributed over the past 30 years include the founders of SWAT from the late 1960s, who participated in history-making events like the SLA shootout in Los Angeles; WACO Branch Davidian Compound; Ruby Ridge; BlackHawk Down in

Mogadishu, Somalia; Columbine High School; School House Hostage Rescue in France; Beslan, Russia; the Fight Against Terrorism, and countless other barricaded subjects, high-risk warrant service, and hostage rescue incidents faced by law enforcement everywhere.

Some of the individuals who must be mentioned for their contributions to the formation and continuance of SWAT and SWAT Round-Up include Daryl Gates, Ron McCarthy, John Kolman, Carlos Hathcock, Kevin Beary, John Bolle, Eric Viehman, Emmett “Butch” Hummel, and many more.



Several members of the legendary SWAT team from the Los Angeles Police Department have shared their commitment to excellence to help others train in many areas. It is this type of interaction that makes the SRI great and keeps our mission on the right track. We are forever grateful to Mike Odle, Ernie Haleck, Lee McMillian, George Ryan and other members of the LAPD Metro-Division D Platoon for their contribution to SRI and tactical teams worldwide. Other agencies and teams who have contributed their skills, teaching and guidance over the years include:

- Dallas Police Department SWAT (Bob Owens, Steve Claggett and Robert Cockriel)
- Florida Department of Law Enforcement (Dale Wise, Dan

Miller, Mark Rominger and Joe Martel)

- Lakeland Police Department (Larry Giddens and Ruben Garcia)
- Champaign Police Department (John Gnagey)
- Maryland State Police (Keith Runk)
- Coral Gables Police Department (Frank Rawley and William Burrows)
- Miami-Dade Police Department (Ed Canvena)
- Ogden Police Department (Randy Watt)
- Orlando Police Department (Frank Repass, Jeff O’Dell and Paul Rooney)
- Orange County Sheriff’s Office (Eric Viehman, Emmett Hummel, Tom Stroup, Calvin Wacker and Tom Foster)
- and so many others who have contributed in countless ways.

Throughout the past decade, a small group of Orlando PD officers and Florida SWAT Association members have carried the torch that was lit by retired Captain Buffy Cullinan. Dave Arnott, Shawn Hayden, Jim Marchione and Tim Stanley have proudly stood as representatives of SRI, carrying the message to the NTOA conference and every state SWAT association. With the energetic assistance of Dave Arnott, the Florida SWAT Association has taken on a bigger role and will play an integral part in the future of the SRI. The SRI and Florida SWAT Association make it possible for many teams to represent their state and attend by providing financial assistance. Most of these teams earn this right by winning state and regional events which put them in the spotlight at the “big show” every November.

To me there is one lesson that is repeated year after year. Excellence can be, and is, demonstrated by teams of all agency sizes. There are many that shine from year to year, but there is one that always stands out: Lakeland (FL) Police Department SWAT. The City of

THE PRICHER SCRAMBLE

Sergeant Gary S. Pricher, a Tampa Police Department SWAT team member, was returning home after competing in SWAT Round-Up on the evening of November 4, 1983. When he stopped with fellow team members to assist stranded bus passengers on Interstate 4, a truck driven by a drunk driver swerved off the road and hit Sergeant Pricher, who died at the scene.

Sergeant Pricher was a warrior and the SRI named one of the events in his honor. The Pricher Scramble has remained one of the five core team events during the competition.

Lakeland has a police department with 220 personnel and a 30-man part-time SWAT team. What makes the Lakeland team different is that throughout two decades they have demonstrated a level of commitment and dedication to their profession that few can match. They have proved that it is not the size of the department or budget that determines greatness; it is the men and women and those who lead them that drives their success. They have achieved this through a proven selection, retention, training and mentoring program. Sustaining this level of excellence for nearly 30 years is beyond admirable, and an inspiration to teams everywhere. Larry Giddens, Mike Chin and Reuben Garcia are just a few of the many officers from the team who have been standouts over the years.

Special thanks go out to the agencies that form the SRI committee: Orange County Sheriff's Office, Orlando Police Department, Maitland Police Department, Winter Park Police Department and the Criminal Justice Institute at Valencia State College. Each agency has provided numerous officers and deputies who have contributed hundreds of hours to the SRI. I wish I could list all the names because each one deserves acknowledgment for a job well done. Retired OCSO Chief Eric Viehman was the face of OCSO SWAT during the early years of the SRI and thereafter for two decades. Eric led by example and was one of the finest SWAT commanders to ever lead an agency. He made it his mission to ensure that the SRI never lost sight of the core mission to serve the tactical community.

Over the past 16 years, one person behind the scenes who has made sure the SRI runs smoothly is Beverly Thornton. Beverly is an executive assistant with OCSO and she has been involved in everything from registration to the annual awards dinner throughout the years. Many moving parts of the event flow flawlessly due to her untiring efforts. Beverly is the true ambassador of SRI.

The vendor show plays an important role in the success of the SRI. We sincerely appreciate the 120 annual vendors who sponsor and support the SRI, sharing the latest in equipment and the prizes that are provided. One sponsor, Florida Bullet and the Falone family, have made enormous financial contributions to the event over the past 20 years. The family has been unwavering in their dedication to supporting law enforcement, and they have helped make this all possible in the most amazing fashion. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the Falones for their generosity. ▀



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