

NTOA COMMAND COLLEGE STUDENT PROFILE



LT. DIANA M. CLEVENGER MESA (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

After serving in the United States Navy, Lt. Diana Clevenger began her law enforcement career in 2004 with the Mesa Police Department. She holds a master's degree in administration in leadership from Northern Arizona University and has held numerous leadership positions throughout her agency. She currently serves as SWAT executive officer.

Q: HOW DO YOU ENVISION THE NTOA COMMAND COLLEGE BENEFITING YOU IN YOUR LEADERSHIP ROLE ON YOUR TEAM?

A: The NTOA Command College has been a great networking tool. The academic portion is self-paced and web-based so even with my chaotic schedule I have been able to watch the training videos, participate in the discussion groups, and complete the course work. Some of the benefits of the course content is the transfer of general leadership theories into the very specific type of work our people are doing every day, with a strong emphasis on leading people versus operations, and a focus on team trust gained through shared experiences, training and education.

Q: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF ACCEPTING A POSITION LIKE THIS, WITHOUT PRIOR EXPERIENCE AS AN OPERATOR?

A: The benefits far outweigh the challenges. The close-knit relationships on the team and the small community of tactical officers around the country makes it easy to build relationships and capitalize on the experience of other tactical officers. Many members of our team have served in a tactical capacity for more than 10 years, some even closer to 20 years. I rely on their expertise to gain my own set of experiences to draw from. I spend time training with them and attending classes as any new operator would. This allows me to see how they perform, what considerations they must make when selecting tools, and how effective tools and tactics are in eliciting the desired response.

There is no substitution for real world operations. I have committed to attend every operation I possibly can since June 2018. I have been involved with more than 50 operations in six months including criminal barricades, high-risk search warrants, buy-covers for narcotics, multi-agency operations and two regional response team deployments.

The Mesa Police Department's support of my integration into the team has been crucial to my success. They allowed me to attend the Command College and have provided opportunities for me to complete the SWAT Team Leader Development course, Basic SWAT, SWAT Management, and both of NTOA's annual conferences, and have approved continued education. One of the benefits of coming in without prior team experiences, is the ability to see through a fresh set of eyes. To view the team, the leadership and the operations through a set of lenses, not clouded by the decisions of the past. Asking why from a place of education and curiosity, has allowed me to better understand our team's specific strengths and identify areas where my prior experiences fit into making us even better.

Another benefit has been the mentoring I have received from team members. Every member of the team has been supportive

of me during this educational time. They have been patient, provided excellent, candid feedback, and been encouraging. The department created a two-prong approach to my team integration which was education and mentor-led experiences.

By remaining true to my strengths, taking care of people, building relationships, decision-making and organization, I can add value to the team. I lead technically very competent team members. I do not need to breach a door, manage gas, deploy the robot, operate as a sniper or any of the other highly technical aspects of the team. If I take care of my team by seeking out equipment, training, funding, manage operational demands and liaison for them, the challenges become opportunities to learn the rules and flow of operations.

In SWAT, our role is to support the department and the specialty units in it. We serve the community, the city management and our fellow cops and our goal is to do it the safest way possible. Our department is dedicated to maintaining our team as a Tier 1 SWAT team. This commitment carries a challenge to ensure we are educating, training and serving all 800 members of our department and nearly 500,000 residents.

Q: HOW HAVE THE LESSONS IN THE COMMAND COLLEGE IMPROVED YOUR INTERACTION WITH OTHER TACTICAL TEAMS AND LEADERS IN YOUR AREA?

A: The SWAT team functions much like the military unit I was assigned. They have existing rules, language and expertise. Through the NTOA Command College and other NTOA-sponsored trainings, I have connected with tactical members from across the country. I have sought them out for advice, technical expertise, and debrief material related to critical incidents. The lessons in the Command College allowed for open dialogue with other Command College students who have read the same leadership books and completed the same residency courses.

Q: AS PART OF THE COMMAND COLLEGE PROGRAM, YOU WERE ASKED TO SELECT A CAPSTONE RESEARCH PROJECT. WHAT TOPIC DID YOU SELECT AND WHY?

A: My Capstone project was written on “Leadership from the Outside.” I wrote about individual drive, leadership in any assignment, igniting change and developing credibility. My drive comes from being average. I came from a very poor family that relied heavily on churches and nonprofits to feed and house my family. I didn’t do well in school and have to work incredibly hard at tests and academics to

succeed. The average person recognizes what their challenges are and accepts the calling to study harder, work longer and push beyond natural limits. This is what drives me.

Leadership is not about what unit you supervise, what the unit’s mission is or how long you have been with a team. It is about the leader’s ability to ignite change, identify areas for improvement, have confidence in culture shift and develop followers who will go where you lead. I chose this topic for my Capstone because of the layers of challenges I faced coming to the team as a leader from outside the tactical world. I realized tactics can be taught through experiences and education; trust is earned.

Q: AS THE FIRST WOMAN TO ENROLL IN THE COMMAND COLLEGE, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER PROFESSIONAL WOMEN LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS CONSIDERING THIS PROGRAM?

A: Go for it! This past year has truly been a dream come true for me. The mission accomplishment and camaraderie has been even better than I could have anticipated. The support from the NTOA community and my department has been outstanding. I have had access to mentors from across the country.

My advice is for anyone who has thought about improving their leadership: If you want to become a better leader in any capacity, the NTOA Academy is for you. The leadership principles and concepts of motivation, strategic planning, change management, communication, and ethical decision-making, affect everyone in law enforcement. This is a great investment in your future and in the future of your staff.



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THE NTOA COMMAND COLLEGE
IS RIGHT FOR YOU!**

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