

NTOA INTRODUCES

TACTICAL ROPE ACCESS COURSE (TRAC)

BY DANA VILANDER

Simplicity, not complexity, in vertical access work.

The NTOA is proud to introduce its Tactical Rope Access Course (TRAC), designed around modern tactics, techniques and operational methods. The philosophy in TRAC is simplicity, not complexity, in vertical access work. Historically, rappelling was a very formal, strict, procedural discipline that required considerable time to set anchors, prepare ropes, etc., and then descend.

TRAC de-emphasizes what traditional courses have taught, such as memorizing numerous complicated knots. The instructors teach a few multi-use knots and hitches. The stress in a high-risk operation can be quite high, so the knots and hitches that are taught should have an inherent ease to recall. TRAC technique and equipment selection was developed with the understanding that many SWAT team end users are not full-time rope-handlers, where vertical access or rescue may not be their primary or even secondary team function.

Throughout the training, TRAC students are encouraged to keep their rope systems simple. PACE (Primary, Alternate, Contingency, Emergency) is emphasized, for both equipment and technique. Each day students will get many repetitions on the ropes.

Hands-on Topics Include:

- Knots and hitches
- Descent devices
- Single-point anchors
- Contingency anchors
- Improvised anchors and emergency techniques
- Emergency egress
- Tight area access
- Retrievable ropes
- Mechanical advantage and raising systems, and lowering systems

Problem-solving team scenarios help put the “tactical” application to rope access. In addition to a traditional rappelling scenario for a hostage rescue (a scenario that has been rarely used in SWAT operations), TRAC trains additional uses for rope and tubular webbing including officer (or injured suspect) rescues in a confined vertical, and mass citizen rescue during a mass casualty event (i.e. an active shooter scenario). Consider who would rescue a SWAT operator and/or a citizen who is injured during an active operation. Odds are the fire department will not respond until the area is secured. TRAC gives SWAT teams options when

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dealing with officer/citizen rescues where vertical access is an issue. Traditional evacuation (i.e. down a stair well) is cumbersome, takes considerable time, and is generally slow going. Citizen evacuations using vertical descent is faster, and the rate in which the wounded can be evacuated to a casualty collection point is dramatically faster.

For a possible suicidal person at height, or a suspect that needs to be talked down above the first floor, there should be a trained team ready to set up a rope safety line. LAPD for example has been using ropes when they talk with suicidal individuals who are on elevated platforms. LAPD has a standard

operating procedure (SOP) that negotiators be secured with safety lines and a climbing harness. The use of rope safety lines allows negotiators to engage the suspect or subject effectively without compromising safety. LAPD uses this tactic 8 to 10 times a year.

As with any new concept course, SWAT operators can be a tough audience. With training time, staffing issues and budget resources scarce, it is paramount that the NTOA doesn't waste members' time with fly-by-night training concepts. The course is designed to provide SWAT team members with vertical access skills applicable to a full spectrum of environments, urban through mountain, the moment they leave the course.

Rope access is a critical skill identified in the NTOA Tactical Response and Operations Standard (TROS). The course provides students with more than just rappelling skills, teaching how to use the skills to solve numerous operational scenarios. Develop your team's capability and train as often as possible. Then prove your capability to the decision-makers so when an event happens and you need to use vertical techniques you will be given the go ahead.

Watch our website for upcoming classes. This course was originally developed by Dana Vilander (a 32-year LASD SEB/Air Rescue deputy) and Sean McKay (a retired firefighter/paramedic and SWAT rescue medic team leader in Florida).



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Learn More About our Upcoming TRAC Courses at

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