

# STUDENT PROFILE



**LT. MICHAEL WHEELER**  
SOUTH CAROLINA LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION (SLED)

Lt. Michael Wheeler has served with the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) since 2005 and is the current supervisor of the SLED SWAT Team. He also serves as vice president of the South Carolina Tactical Officers Association. Lt. Wheeler holds a bachelor's degree in history from Erskine College.

**Q:** In your role, you are constantly challenged with leading people. What qualities and skills do you think are most important for today's leaders?

**A:** Teamwork is key. I think it's a word that's thrown around board rooms and war rooms, but in action, it can make the difference between life and death. If you're looking to lead, you need to be willing to set the example you expect others to follow. That means acknowledging mistakes and earnestly looking to learn from them. You won't be perfect, because no one is. But you can always be looking to improve yourself and inspire those around you. A simple but powerful way to do that is not to expect a member of your team to do something you're not willing or capable of doing yourself.

**Q:** How have the lessons in the Command College improved your interaction with other tactical teams and leaders in your area?

**A:** As part of the Command College, I had the opportunity to attend the National Conference to meet the in-person class requirements. While there, the openness and willingness to give by the staff and guest presenters was amazing. Without exception, every person was willing to share information, lessons learned or debriefs. They believed that by sharing their experiences, they could add value to other SWAT officers and SWAT teams. This encouraged me to share knowledge and information with any other teams that I meet. As a result, with the assistance of like-minded operators from other teams in South Carolina, we created the still-fledgling South Carolina Tactical Officers Association (SC TAC). It is our hope that SC TAC will be a leader in training, research and sharing knowledge with all officers throughout the state.

**Q:** You have the opportunity to serve in a number of assignments that involve training law enforcement officers. What qualities and skills do you think are most important for today's officers?

**A:** Address burnout and unhealthy coping mechanisms... It's a lot easier just to say "train more," but really, it's making sure your mission and your mental health are locked in. There are plenty of physically demanding jobs that involve carrying a firearm – that shouldn't be the main reason anyone wants to be a cop. No matter who your chief, sheriff, mayor, governor or other official is at any given time, there will be dangerous situations and people will need help. And on the worst day of someone's life, a good law enforcement officer can be both a technical professional and a caring person.

**Q:** As part of the Command College program, you are asked to select a Capstone Research Project. What topic did you select and why?

**A:** During Module Three, Strategic Leadership, I had the chance to sit through a debrief from a West Coast team's callout that I had seen in Module One, Tactical Leadership. During the first exposure to this debrief, the tactical or operational considerations were the focus. During my next time through it, the same callout was used to illustrate a more strategic thought process. The use of one debrief to teach new SWAT officers critical lessons, as well as instruct senior operators, with more strategic takeaways was enlightening. As a result, I chose to write an in-depth debrief of a barricaded suspect that my team handled. My hope is to use this debrief to educate our future operators, team leaders and commanders.

**Q:** Operating in a strong multi-jurisdictional response team, you must constantly collaborate with others to accomplish your goals. What advice would you give aspiring leaders learning to operate in this environment?

**A:** Emotional intelligence and humility. It's one thing to have great tactical skills and a solid response plan. Those things are very important, but to truly make a difference, you need to know that you constantly need to be looking to learn and improve. I'm incredibly grateful to say that I have had very few fatalities in my career. My colleagues and I are constantly in life-or-death situations, and time and again, it is a calm mind that helps us save lives.



**SET YOURSELF APART FROM  
OTHERS IN THE PROMOTIONAL  
PROCESS BY ENROLLING TODAY!**

The NTOA Command College isn't just for aspiring leaders, it's also the perfect opportunity for experienced tactical team leaders and commanders to validate the leadership philosophies and tactical concepts that they may already know.



**VISIT [NTOA.ORG/ACADEMY](https://ntoa.org/academy) TO LEARN MORE.**