THE

Tactical Edge®

SWAT | CNT | PATROL | COMMAN MS



SUMMER 2026

IN MEMORIAM

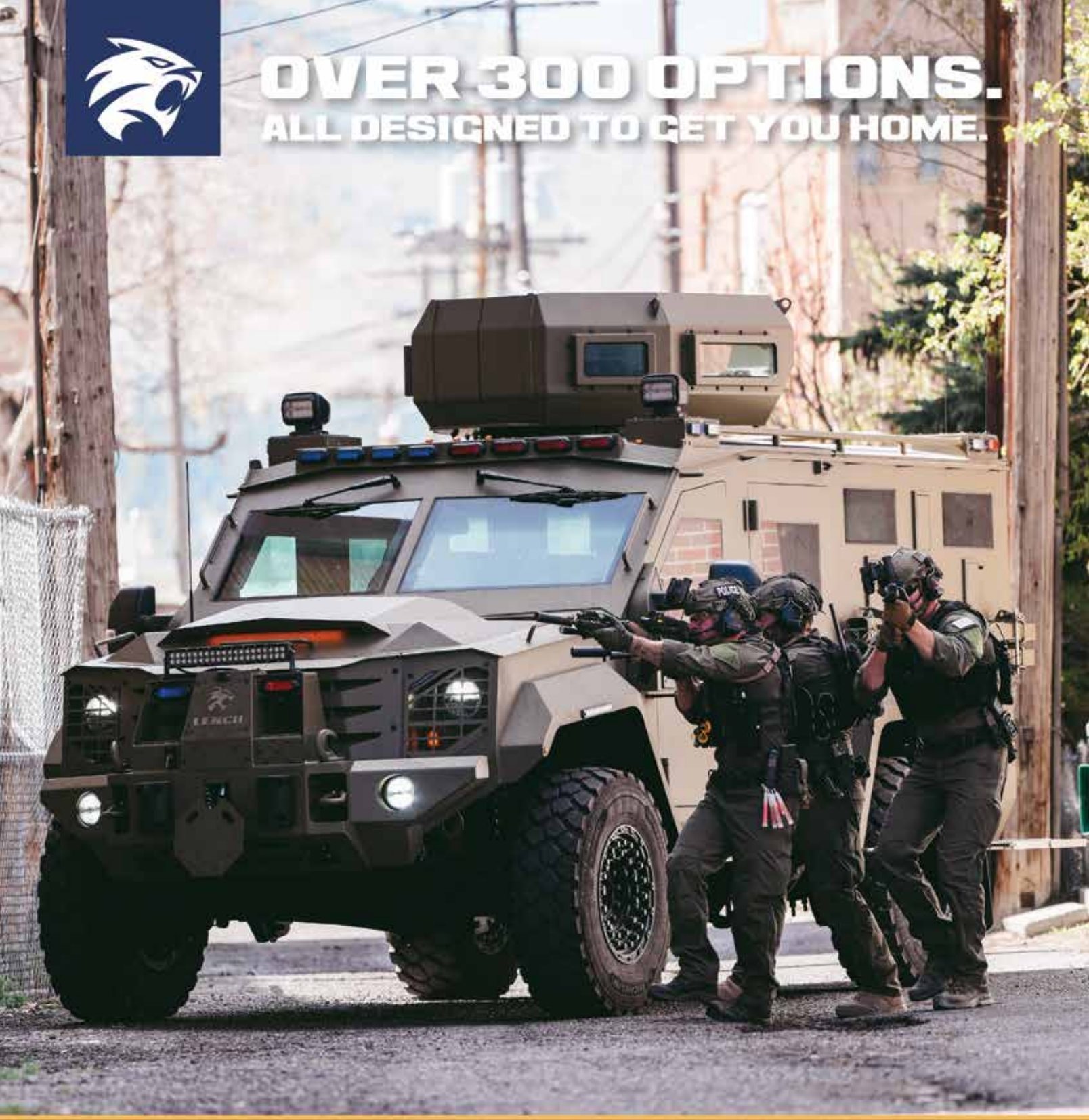
JOHN KOLMAN

1936 - 2026

SOLDIER. OFFICER. LEADER. FOUNDER.

A LEGACY THAT WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.


5.11
READY FOR THE SHIFT
FROM FIRST CALL TO FINAL REPORT.
FROM PREPARATION TO RESPONSE TO RESET, OUR SYSTEMS ARE DESIGNED TO PERFORM THROUGH THE ENTIRE RHYTHM OF THE JOB — AND THE HOURS AROUND IT. PURPOSE-BUILT. PROFESSION-DRIVEN.
READY FOR THE SHIFT.
511TACTICAL.COM
SHOP V.XI®
COLLECTION



Scan to Learn About Our
Free Grant Assistance

LencoArmor.com

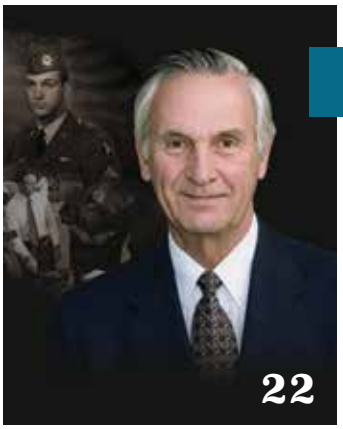
You are tasked with hostage rescue operations, high risk warrants, barricaded subjects and active shooters. **The Lenco BearCat** is your platform to de-escalate, save lives and go home.

This is the standard.

LENCO

Table of CONTENTS

SUMMER 2026 - VOL.44 | NO.3



ABOUT THE COVER

This issue's cover honors the life and legacy of John A. Kolman, founder of the NTOA and one of the most influential figures in the history of law enforcement tactical operations. In a heartfelt tribute, NTOA Director Emeritus Phil Hansen reflects on John Kolman's extraordinary career, from his pioneering work with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department SEB to the founding of the NTOA and *The Tactical Edge*. More than a SWAT innovator, John was a mentor, leader and visionary whose commitment to professionalism and service continues to shape the tactical community more than four decades later.







NTOA UPDATES

04 Director's Message

06 NTOA News

20 Training Calendar

94 Submission Guidelines

FEATURES

22 The End of an Era: Reflections on the Passing of John A. Kolman
By Phil Hansen

28 Establishing Mission Capabilities: Minimizing Risk Through Sound Policy
By Bruce Liebe

34 Perimeter First: Public Order Lessons for High-Visibility Enforcement Operations
By Alexander Bollman

38 Rescue Task Force in Practice: Examining the Gap Between Training and Reality
By Travis Norton

MIX Paper from responsible sources FSC® C012216

WINNER 2013 APEX AWARDS FOR PUBLICATION EXCELLENCE







TO ADVERTISE —
Call 800-279-9127, ext. 111 or email Corey Luby, Advertising Manager, at ntoaadvertising@ntoa.org.

FOR MEDIA KIT —
Visit ntoa.org and click on The Tactical Edge to download the media kit.

FOLLOW US!

DEPARTMENTS

46 CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS
The Dark Side of Influence: Advanced Persuasion for Crisis Negotiators, Part One
By Deb McMahon

52 FIREARMS
The Clock Drill: Tracking Time — Why Seconds Count, and So Do Tenths and Hundredths
By Adam Swon

58 LEADERSHIP
The True Costs of Leadership
By Ben Raymond

62 LEGAL
Qualified Immunity and Tactical Operations: Briscoe v. St. Louis County
By Eric Daigle

66 TEMS
The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Enhancing Medical Operations for SWAT and High-Risk Missions
By Stephen Wood

74 MEMBER TESTED AND RECOMMENDED

FOCUS

86 Lessons Learned from The Debrief – Cake, Not Icing: What We're Getting Wrong About Performance
By Jon Becker

Honoring Our Founder, Preparing for the Future



We release this issue of *The Tactical Edge* with gratitude and pride. As our cover reflects, this edition is dedicated to the memory of NTOA founder John Kolman, whose vision, leadership and unwavering commitment to officer safety helped shape not only our organization, but the tactical profession itself.

More than four decades ago, John recognized the need for a national organization dedicated to sharing knowledge, improving training and advancing professionalism among tactical teams. From that vision grew the NTOA, which today serves thousands of members worldwide. His influence can be seen in every training course we deliver, every conference we host, and every article published in these pages.

I encourage you to read a special tribute on page 22 by John's longtime friend and colleague Phil Hansen. Phil shares personal reflections on the man, leader and visionary whose influence continues to shape the tactical profession. While John's passing marks the end of an era, his legacy continues through the work of the NTOA and the dedication of the officers who strive daily to uphold the standards he championed.

This edition reflects that commitment to excellence. Inside, you will find thought-provoking articles, lessons learned and practical information designed to help officers and teams meet the challenges of an increasingly complex operational environment. As always, our goal is to provide relevant and actionable content that enhances readiness and improves outcomes in the field.

I also want to encourage you to take advantage of the educational and networking opportunities available through our upcoming conferences. Our 43rd Annual Law Enforcement Operations Conference and Trade Show in Nashville promises to be one of our most dynamic events yet, featuring outstanding instructors, incident debriefs, legal updates and an expansive trade show showcasing the latest equipment and technology. Later this year, we will gather in Chandler, Arizona, for the Crisis Negotiations Conference, bringing together negotiators, commanders, mental health professionals and tactical personnel to share best practices and advance the profession. These training events represent the very spirit of the NTOA that John Kolman envisioned — a place where professionals come together to learn from one another, challenge themselves and return home better prepared to serve their communities.

Additionally, watch for new classes being developed by our outstanding training cadre. Many of these are practical courses designed to fill existing gaps in training and take important topics to a higher level of excellence. Their continued innovation ensures that NTOA members have access to the most current, relevant and effective training available.

Thank you for your continued support of the NTOA and for your commitment to professionalism, training and service. I hope to see you at our upcoming conferences.

Stay safe and stay prepared.

Thor Eells
Executive Director



TERRADYNE ARMORED VEHICLES

www.terradyneinc.com

info@terradyneinc.com | 905-895-1010

Photo by Nordstrom Creative
© 2026 All Rights Reserved - Terradyne Armored Vehicles Inc.

Whitepaper - Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS): Evolving Risks to Large-Scale Public Gatherings

As unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) continue to present increasingly complex security challenges at major public events, the Center for Internet Security (CIS), in partnership with DroneSec, has released a new whitepaper examining the evolving threat landscape. *Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS): Evolving Risks to Large-Scale Public Gatherings* explores emerging tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) and provides critical security planning considerations for large-scale events, with particular emphasis on FIFA-related operations and other mass gatherings.

The whitepaper also reflects valuable collaboration and input from numerous law enforcement and public safety partners, including the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA), Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA), Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Units (LEIU), Small and Rural Law Enforcement Executives Association (SRLEEA), National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security (NCS4), New Jersey State Police (NJSP), Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), DRONERESPONDERS and Aerisq Solutions.

We encourage you to review and share this resource with your personnel and stakeholders.

To view please visit:
https://ntoa.org/pdf/UAS-Whitepaper.pdf

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ELECTION NOTICE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

TERM:
January 2027 to December 2029

In August 2026, the NTOA will accept nominations for directors in all three regions (Eastern, Central and Western) for a 3-year term

IMPORTANT DATES

Aug. 1 - Sept. 1, 2026
Nominations accepted

Oct. 1 - Nov. 1, 2026
Online voting at ntoa.org

For More Information:
ntoa.org/about/directors/director-qualifications

VOTE ONLINE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★


MICROTECH
NTOA
MEMBER TESTED
and RECOMMENDED
2025
Performance and Precision For When There Is
NO COMPROMISE
Served in the military, law enforcement or as a first responder?
Get a discount through our Service Personnel Program
MICROTECHKNIVES.COM

MIRACLE

EDUCATE TO PROTECT

MIRACLE™ is an innovative program designed to address our nation's growing mental health crisis by equipping public safety communities with the skills and resources they need to respond effectively and compassionately.

The program provides specialized training that empowers first responders to manage immediate safety concerns when encountering individuals with serious mental illness, while also focusing on long-term solutions. By reducing the strain on jails, hospitals, transport systems, call centers and other critical services, MIRACLE™ promotes a holistic approach to community well-being.

VERY FEW LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

RECEIVE TRAINING TO PREPARE THEM TO RESPOND TO THE MENTALLY ILL.

Programs include:

- **Adult Mental Health First Aid**
- **Agency Response to Critical Incidents**
- **Crisis Intervention Training**
- **Crisis Negotiations Skills for First Responders**
- **Law Enforcement Response to Suicidal Subjects: Legal Realities & Options**
- **Law Enforcement Response and Interaction with the Intellectual & Developmental Disability (IDD) Community**
- **Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety**
- **School and Workplace Violence: Preparation and Response**
- **Youth Mental Health First Aid**

Through a comprehensive blueprint, expert-led training, proven best practices and access to specialized resources, MIRACLE™ ensures first responders are fully prepared to support individuals in crisis and create lasting, positive change within their communities.

MIRACLE™
EDUCATE TO PROTECT

FOR A LIST OF SCHEDULED COURSES, VISIT: NTOA.ORG/TRAINING

SAFARILAND

READY IS A *LIFESTYLE*



INTRODUCING SAFARIMESH™

DECENTRALIZED MESH NETWORK

SAFARILAND®

@SAFARILANDGROUP

SAFARILAND.COM | ©2026 SAFARILAND, LLC



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

> “TRAC GIVES SWAT TEAMS OPTIONS WHEN DEALING WITH OFFICER/CITIZEN RESCUES WHERE VERTICAL ACCESS IS AN ISSUE.”

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).



NTOA TACTICAL ROPE ACCESS COURSE (TRAC)

Learn More About our Upcoming TRAC Courses at

NTOA.ORG/TRAINING

AURORA

COLORADO

SAVE THE DATE

2027



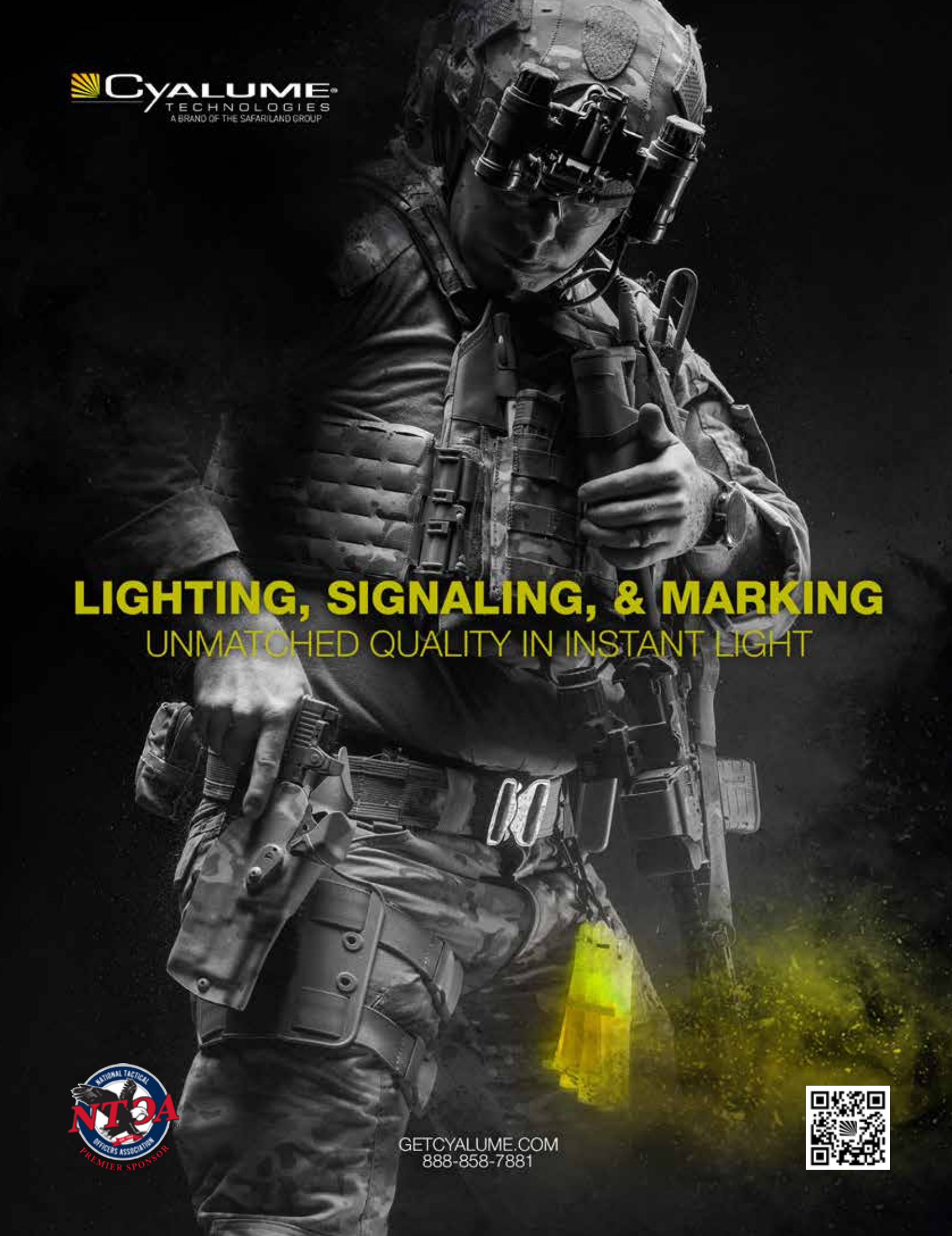
OCTOBER

10-15, 2027

GAYLORD ROCKIES RESORT
& CONVENTION CENTER

NTOA 2027

LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW


CYALUME
TECHNOLOGIES
A BRAND OF THE SAFARILAND GROUP
LIGHTING, SIGNALING, & MARKING
UNMATCHED QUALITY IN INSTANT LIGHT
NTOA
NATIONAL TACTICAL OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
PREMIER SPONSOR
GETCYALUME.COM
888-858-7881







OCTOBER 26-29, 2026

NTOA
EST. 1983
CNT 2026 • CHANDLER, AZ

HOSTAGE/CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS

CONFERENCE

GILA RIVER RESORTS & CASINOS WILD HORSE PASS

3RD ANNUAL

NATIONAL NEGOTIATOR'S CHALLENGE • NTOA •

NEGOTIATOR'S CHALLENGE

The NTOA is hosting its third National Negotiator's Challenge, a unique opportunity for crisis negotiation teams to work together and challenge themselves and their teams against other teams nationwide.

Teams will participate in a challenging, scenario-driven competition. Up to 10 teams (up to 8 negotiators per team) may register. The NTOA will provide judging criteria to teams upon registration.

The National Negotiator's Challenge is a realistic, stress-based training opportunity. It allows participants and observers to witness how other teams address the same scenario in their own way, depending on resources, team size, experience and more. Additional negotiators may attend for observation and training purposes.

Important: All National Negotiator's Challenge attendees must register for the NTOA's Crisis Negotiations Conference (one day, two days or whole week) **BEFORE** registering for the competition. The competition will take place at the same hotel as the conference.

Additional Cost to Register for the Challenge: $85

To register visit: https://training.ntoa.org/cntchallenge

PRICING PACKAGES

Full Week

$324 Individual Member

$374 Non-Member
(Includes 1-year membership)

Two Days

$239 Individual Member

$279 Non-Member
(Includes 1-year membership)

One Day

$119 Individual Member

$139 Non-Member
(Includes 1-year membership)

REGISTER ONLINE: ntoa.org/cnt-conference

NTOA Announces Crisis Negotiation Team Policy

Integration of Behavioral Health Advisors
Standards and Best Practices for Crisis Negotiation Teams
Board for Advocacy, Standards and Excellence (BASE) Project.



The NTOA is pleased to announce the release of the Crisis Negotiation Team (CNT) Policy, which sets best-practice standards for integrating Behavioral Health Advisors (BHAs) into CNT operations.

This focused policy affirms a department's commitment to the safe resolution of critical incidents through communication, de-escalation and the preservation of life. Recognizing crisis negotiations as a core public-safety function, the policy emphasizes structured communication, behavioral insight and coordinated decision-making in high-risk conditions. When properly selected, trained and deployed, BHAs strengthen negotiation strategy by providing behavioral analysis, communication guidance and risk-informed consultation to command and negotiators, while maintaining a clear, non-clinical advisory role.

This integration enhances operational effectiveness, supports ethical and legally sound decision-making, and improves outcomes for persons in crisis, victims, responders and the community. In addition, the policy provides clear guidance on role definitions, authority, information sharing and legal safeguards, and outlines standards for selection, vetting, training, deployment, supervision and accountability. Designed for law enforcement leaders, CNT personnel and risk management professionals, it offers a practical framework for agencies seeking to formalize or strengthen behavioral health integration in crisis negotiation operations.

This document marks a major step forward for the crisis negotiation profession. It moves teams toward a more modern, collaborative and informed response model while maintaining the core principles of negotiation, command structure and operational discipline.

The NTOA looks forward to offering workshops and training opportunities to help agencies integrate Behavioral Health Advisors into their Crisis Negotiation Teams, using this policy as a foundation and guide.

Follow link to view/download the policy.
https://www.ntoa.org/ntoa-announces-crisis-negotiation-team-policy/


CTS®
COMBINED
TACTICAL SYSTEMS
BUILT FOR THE BREACH.
READY FOR THE MISSION.
2577
BREACH
DOOR
NON-TOXIC
BREACHER
CTS
2570
WWW.COMBINEDSYSTEMS.COM

Investing in the Future: NTOA Scholarship Funds and How You Can Help

The National Tactical Officers Association is proud to invest in the next generation through its three distinguished scholarship programs: the Sid Heal NTOA Academy Scholarship Fund, the John Kolman Training Scholarship Fund and the James Torkar Educational Scholarship Fund.



Sid Heal
Academy Scholarship

Recognizes innovation, leadership and advancing the profession



John Kolman
Training Scholarship

Honors the legacy of NTOA's founder and officer safety and training



James Torkar
Educational Scholarship

Supports educational opportunities for the families of NTOA members

Support the Next Generation of Law Enforcement

Whether you are an individual member, agency or industry partner, your support makes a lasting difference.

These scholarships are made possible through the generosity of donors who believe in supporting the law enforcement community beyond the badge. Every contribution directly supports students pursuing their educational goals and helps expand opportunities for deserving families.

The NTOA is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations may be tax-deductible as permitted by law.

Your donation:

- Helps fund the NTOA scholarship program of your choice
- Supports educational advancement for members' families
- Strengthens the NTOA mission of service, professionalism and leadership

You may contribute via credit card, Venmo or personal check.

ntoa.org/donation
Venmo @NTOATrainingScholarships

VANGUARD

Level III Rifle Threat Ballistic Shield Protection

BALLISTIC PERFORMANCE

Special Threats Rounds Tested



7.62mm x 39mm
PS Ball (MSC)



7.62mm x 51mm
(M80)



5.56mm x 45mm
(M193)

Features:

- Lightweight (20" x 30" with viewport) weighs only 14.8 lbs
- Thickness = 0.4"
- 3" x 9" Reinforced Ballistic Viewport
- Left and right weapon index platform for accurate handgun or long-gun deployment
- Solid handle system
- Thick high density foam pad
- Hook and Loop forearm strap attachment system
- Reinforced Ballistic Bolt System for added protection

Options:

- LED Light with Strobe Mode
- 1200 Lumens
- Transport Bag



VS
14.8 lbs
(20" x 30")

VL
16.8 lbs
(21" x 36")



VR
18.5 lbs
(21" x 36")

XL
22.5 lbs
(20" x 48")



PARACLETE®
PROVEN UNDER FIRE

NTOA

ONLINE TRAINING

Managing Critical Incidents
Sept. 28, 2026

Crisis Negotiations Skills for First Responders
Oct. 5, 2026

SWAT Command Decision-Making and Leadership I
Oct. 6, 2026

Advanced Crisis Negotiations
Oct. 19-21, 2026

SWAT Team Leader Development
Oct. 19-27, 2026

Crisis Negotiations Team Leader Development
Nov. 4-5, 2026

Integrating Mental Health Professionals into Crisis Negotiation Teams
Nov. 9, 2026

Basic Crisis Negotiations
Nov. 10, 2026

Supervising Patrol Critical Incidents
Nov. 12-13, 2026

Training Management and Risk Mitigation for SWAT
Nov. 16-23, 2026

SWAT Team Leader Development
Dec. 7-15, 2026

Crisis Negotiations Skills for First Responders
Dec. 8, 2026

Crisis Negotiations Team Leader Development
Dec. 14-15, 2026

Managing Critical Incidents
Dec. 14, 2026

Advanced Crisis Negotiations
Dec. 16-18, 2026

ADVANCED CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS

Appleton, WI // Mar. 16-18, 2027
Spokane, WA // June 22-24, 2027

BALLISTIC SHIELD

Richland, WA // Oct. 15-16, 2026
Tulsa, OK // Oct. 19-20, 2026
Spokane, WA // Mar. 4-5, 2027

BASIC CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS

Lawton, OK // Oct. 5-9, 2026
Independence, MO // Dec. 7-11, 2026
Spokane, WA // Feb. 8-12, 2027

BASIC SWAT

Orangeburg, SC // Oct. 5-9, 2026
Brewer, ME // Oct. 12-16, 2026
Harrisburg, PA // Oct. 12-16, 2026

HIGH-RISK WARRANT SERVICE

Claremore, OK // Oct. 12-14, 2026
Madison, WI // Nov. 2-4, 2026
E. Stroudsburg, PA // Nov. 16-18, 2026
Grand Island, NE // Feb. 1-3, 2027

HOSTAGE RESCUE TACTICS

Atlanta, GA // Oct. 12-16, 2026
Hendersonville, NC // Oct. 26-30, 2026
Reading, PA // Dec. 7-11, 2026
Spokane, WA // Sept. 20-24, 2027

LESS LETHAL, FSDD, CHEMICAL AGENT INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION

Forsyth, GA // Nov. 2-6, 2026
Commercial Point, OH // Nov. 16-20, 2026
Orlando , FL // Nov. 16-20, 2026
Sioux Falls, SD // Nov. 30 - Dec. 4, 2026
Chandler, AZ // Dec. 7-11, 2026
Manchester, CT // Mar. 15-19, 2027
Spokane, WA // Apr. 12-16, 2027
Washington, IA // Apr. 19-23, 2027

TRAINING CALENDAR

MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Broomall, PA // Oct. 8, 20266
Forsyth, GA // Oct. 14, 2026
Dallas, NC // Nov. 3, 2026
Deer Park, TX // Dec. 7, 2026
Spokane, WA // Jan. 19, 2027

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

Sandy, OR // Oct. 15, 2026

PUBLIC ORDER BASIC COMMAND CERTIFICATION

Bryan, TX // Nov. 30 - Dec. 4, 2026
Portland, OR // Dec. 14-18, 2026
Madison, WI // Feb. 1-5, 2027

SCHOOL AND WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: PREPARATION AND RESPONSE

Sanford, FL // Oct. 8-9, 2026

SNIPER INSTRUCTOR DEVELOPMENT CERTIFICATION

Olathe, KS // Oct. 26-30, 2026

SUPERVISING PATROL CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Tampa, FL // Oct. 5-6, 2026
Forsyth, GA // Oct. 12-13, 2026
Wheat Ridge, CO // Oct. 13-14, 2026
Bryan, TX // Oct. 19-20, 2026
Hurricane, UT // Oct. 22-23, 2026
Broomall, PA // Nov. 2-3, 2026
Queen Creek, AZ // Dec. 7-8, 2026
Sioux Falls, SD // Dec. 8-9, 2026
Okeechobee, FL // Jan. 11-12, 2027
Jaffrey, NH // Mar. 1-2, 2027
Spokane, WA // Mar. 8-9, 2027

SWAT COMMAND DECISION-MAKING AND LEADERSHIP I

Chandler, AZ // Oct. 5-9, 2026
Rexburg, ID // Oct. 19-23, 2026
Noblesville, IN // Nov. 2-6, 2026
West Deptford, NJ // Nov. 9-13, 2026
Deer Park, TX // Nov. 16-20, 2026
Union, MO // Nov. 16-20, 2026
Henderson, NV // Dec. 7-11, 2026
San Angelo, TX // Jan. 11-15, 2027
Appleton, WI // Jan. 18-22, 2027
Rio Rancho, NM // Feb. 8-12, 2027
Camarillo, CA // Feb. 22-26, 2027
Marana, AZ // Mar. 15-19, 2027
Spokane, WA // Apr. 5-9, 2027

SWAT TEAM LEADER DEVELOPMENT

Columbia, MO // Oct. 5-9, 2026
West Deptford, NJ // Oct. 5-9, 2026
Douglas, WY // Oct. 26-30, 2026
Tucson, AZ // Nov. 2-6, 2026
Abington, PA // Nov. 2-6, 2026
Harrisburg, PA // Nov. 16-20, 2026
Smyrna, GA // Dec. 7-11, 2026
Dallas, NC // Dec. 7-11, 2026
Johnson City, TN // Jan. 4-8, 2027
Pensacola, FL // Jan. 11-15, 2027
Spokane, WA // Feb. 22-26, 2027
Webb City, MO // Mar. 1-5, 2027

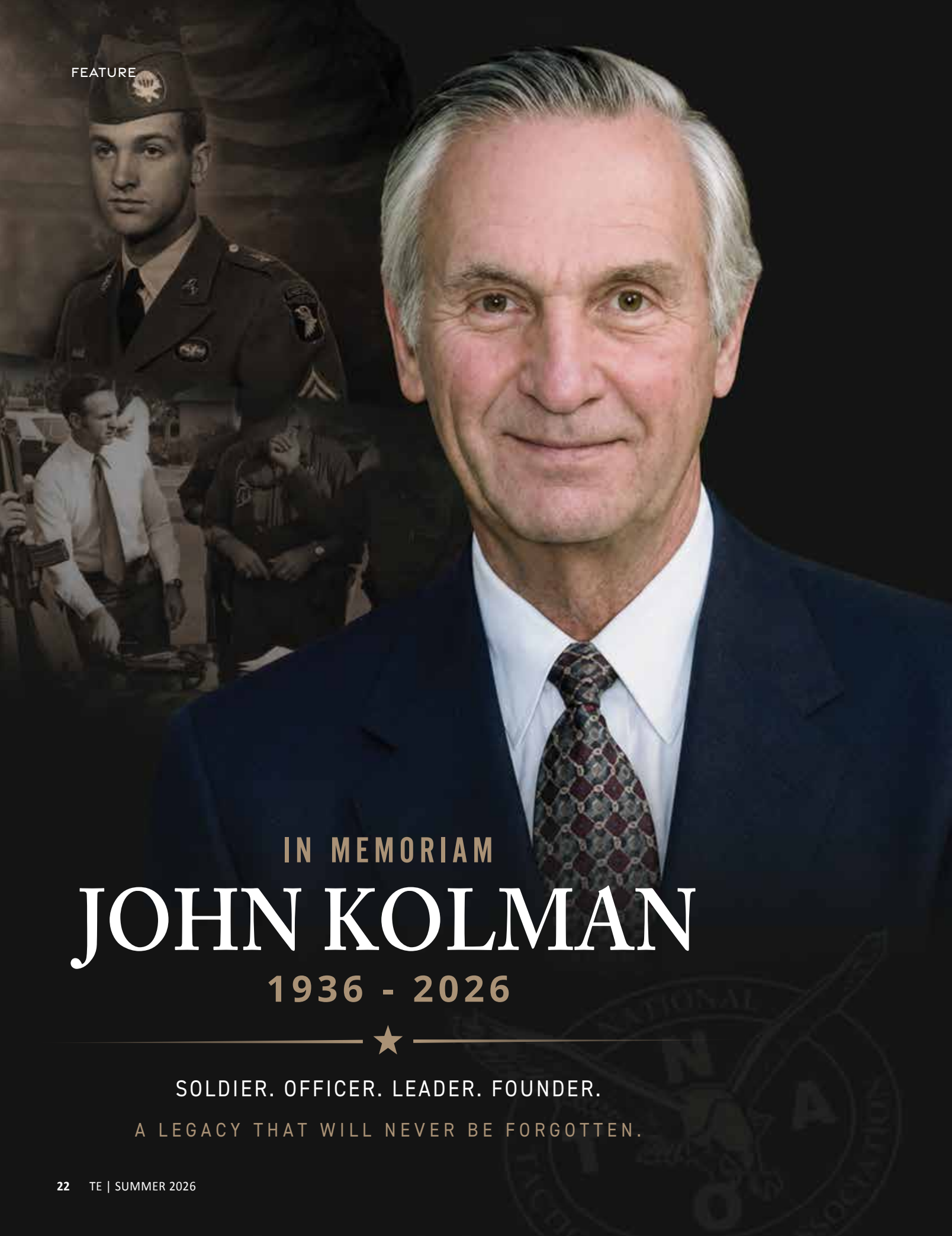
TACTICAL ROPE ACCESS COURSE (TRAC)

Forsyth, GA // Oct. 26-29, 2026

TECHNOLOGY IN TACTICAL OPERATIONS

Rexburg, ID // Nov. 2-3, 2026

Visit NTOA.ORG for a complete list of courses.
Questions, please contact the NTOA Training Department at: 800-279-9127 ext. 2.



IN MEMORIAM

JOHN KOLMAN

1936 - 2026

SOLDIER. OFFICER. LEADER. FOUNDER.

A LEGACY THAT WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.

The END *of an* ERA

REFLECTIONS ON THE PASSING OF JOHN A. KOLMAN

BY PHIL HANSEN

> "JOHN WAS MUCH MORE THAN A SWAT PIONEER. HE WAS A TEACHER, A VISIONARY, A COLLABORATOR AND A HISTORIAN."

There are times when each of us suffers the loss of someone who has had a tremendous personal impact on our lives. The advancing age and full life of that loved one may help to dull the impact of our loss, but we still feel that a piece of our heart has been taken from us, leaving a hole that will never completely be filled. Those of us who were fortunate enough to know our association's founder, John A. Kolman, have felt this since his passing on March 6, 2026.

"The end of an era" is no exaggeration. John Kolman defined an era in the development of SWAT. John was much more than a SWAT pioneer. He was a teacher, a visionary, a collaborator and a historian. His integrity and strength of character are legendary, and he was not only the NTOA's founder but also the association's North Star in establishing its organizational culture of excellence. John also was the consummate gentleman and an example of graciousness to others in every respect. He exemplified the type of selfless leadership we seldom see today, but so desperately crave. John's impact was generational. If you are reading this article as a tactical law enforcement professional, chances are John Kolman had a significant impact on your training and culture.

A brief glimpse at an extraordinary career

There are far too many facets of John's career to recount in this article, but a glimpse into his background provides some context concerning his professional development and achievement. John joined the U.S. Army out of high school, serving as a soldier and NCO in the 101st Airborne Division. After completing his enlistment, he joined the Whittier (CA) Police Department, graduating as the first outside-agency Honor Cadet from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Academy. In 1963, John transferred to the Sheriff's Department (LASD) and eventually earned an assignment to the Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) in the earliest days of what we now know of as the SWAT concept.

In those first formative years of law enforcement tactical team operations, John set the standard for collaboration. He made his own, unannounced visit to LAPD to propose that LAPD SWAT and LASD SEB begin training together. During that visit, John met LAPD's Ron McCarthy and Mike Hillmann, two men who would become legendary SWAT figures within their own right. In the ensuing years, the three established lifelong friendships, and importantly, they established a culture of camaraderie and mutual

support between LASD SEB and LAPD SWAT that set an example for other teams to emulate and still flourishes to this day.

In 1969, during his tenure as an SEB sergeant, John authored the operations plan for and led a large-scale mission at Spahn Ranch, resulting in the arrest of Charles Manson and several Manson Family cult members. Manson was later re-arrested, tried and convicted for the notorious Tate / LaBianca murders. As a lieutenant and SEB team commander, John served as chairman of the Inter-Agency Security Subcommittee for the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. This was a watershed period in the development of SWAT, as teams from LAPD, LASD, FBI and 1st Special Operations Detachment-Delta (aka Delta Force) trained together intensively for hostage rescue missions in the post-Munich Olympic massacre years. John's personal strength and charisma were crucial to the effective coordination and collaboration between those elite teams.

Throughout his military service and law enforcement career, John developed a passion for law enforcement tactical operations. He was convinced of the value and life-saving qualities of SWAT, and in 1982, John authored and published the very first textbook on SWAT, "A Guide to the Development of Special Weapons Teams." He would go on to write additional books and articles on SWAT command, as well as two beautifully crafted volumes titled "Rulers of the Night," a detailed, 50-year history of LASD SEB from 1958 through 2008.

John believed that the growing utilization of tactical units in our country created the need for a source of training and information exchange between teams. Lessons learned were valuable and often far too costly in terms of life and property to not be shared throughout our discipline. Accordingly, (long before the existence of email), John and his wife, Janice, hand-typed and mailed over 400 survey letters to law enforcement agencies across the country, asking if they perceived a need for and would support some sort of organization that would facilitate tactical training and information exchange. The response to John's survey was overwhelmingly positive, so in 1983, he founded the National Tactical Officers Association. Together, John and Janice began publishing what is now the industry's flagship publication, *The Tactical Edge*. John, Mike Hillmann and Ron McCarthy were among the magazine's first authors, with Janice serving as the publication's editor.

John retired from the LASD at the rank of captain. He was a beloved leader at SEB who set the standard not just for operational excellence, but for establishing a culture of giving back to the profession. It was John Kolman who encouraged Sid Heal to write his first published article for *The Tactical Edge*. Sid went on to write over 160 articles and three books that are now considered essential reading in our profession. To this day, SEB personnel are still renowned for their willingness to assist other agencies and for candidly sharing lessons from their successes and failures.

John may have left the Sheriff's Department, but his contributions to tactical law enforcement remained immense. While John and Janice continued to manage the rapidly growing NTOA, John also served extensively as an expert evaluator and trainer. Following the Branch Davidian shootout with the ATF and FBI in Waco, Texas, John was asked by the U.S. Department of the Treasury to participate in an investigation and review of the incident. As a result, John testified twice before Congress regarding his findings. John was then tapped by another government agency in 1998 to assess and develop training for police agencies in the war-torn nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Finally, in 2005, as part of the California POST SWAT Subcommittee, John was instrumental in developing our nation's first state-sponsored SWAT Guidelines, which were then followed in 2008 by the NTOA's first release of SWAT Standards for Law Enforcement Agencies, now known as the NTOA's Tactical Response and Operations Standard (TROS).

A life to emulate

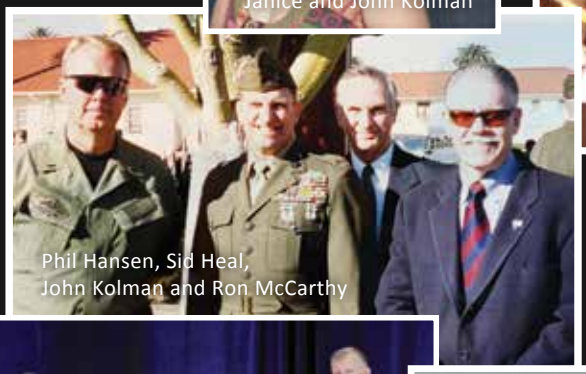
As anyone can see, John Kolman continues to have a generational impact on law enforcement tactical operations. Nevertheless, in many respects, his greatest influence was based on the example he set for others as a man of character and principle.

"OVER THE YEARS AND LONG AFTER HIS DEPARTURE, MANY DECISIONS BY THE NTOA BOARD OF DIRECTORS HAVE COME DOWN TO ONE SIMPLE TEST: WHAT WOULD JOHN KOLMAN THINK OF THIS? THAT TEST HAS ALWAYS SERVED US WELL."

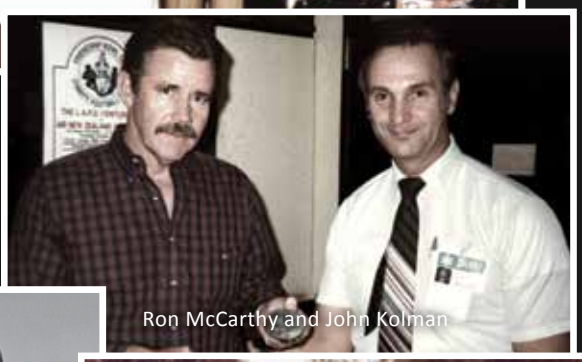


Janice and John Kolman





Phil Hansen, Sid Heal,
John Kolman and Ron McCarthy



Ron McCarthy and John Kolman



Kolman family accepting
2024 Hall of Honor award.







Ron McCarthy, Mike Hillman and John Kolman



One of John's *greatest gifts* was that he didn't just build teams,
he built people, and relationships that last a *lifetime*.

When I first met John Kolman, we were serving together on a California POST training committee. John had just retired from the LASD, already achieving legendary status on a nationwide basis as a SWAT leader and innovator. There's an old adage about first impressions that says, "People may not always remember what you said to them, but they'll always remember how you made them feel." I clearly remember how John made me feel when we first met. I was struck by the grace and level of respect he extended to me as a young SEB team leader. Here was this legendary figure treating me as a peer and with great kindness, as though we had both served together for years. I guess you could say that this was the first of many life lessons I learned from John over the next 40 years. He set the standard for how to treat others with dignity.

> "BEING WITH JOHN KOLMAN MADE YOU WANT TO BE A BETTER PERSON AND TO PASS LIFE'S LESSONS ON TO OTHERS."

Sometime later, John asked me if I would be interested in instructing at an upcoming NTOA conference. Of course, I said yes and was thrilled beyond belief! That conference in 1988 was a life-changing experience for me. In many ways, it altered the course of my future. It was also the beginning of my nearly 40-year association with the NTOA as an instructor, director and now as a director emeritus. As I became more involved in the association, I had the opportunity to watch John and learn from the example he set for the rest of us. Over the years and long after his departure, many decisions by the NTOA Board of Directors have come down to one simple test: What would John Kolman think of this? That test has always served us well.

John was never one to overlook the importance of small gestures and expressions of appreciation to others. One example of this is how he always called our editor, Mary Heins, whenever a new edition of *The Tactical Edge* was released. Long after he retired from any official involvement in the association, John would call just to thank Mary and other members of the staff for a job well done. She has told me several times how much those calls meant to her. Throughout the years, I also received a number of thoughtful handwritten notes from John, always in his impeccable printing, encouraging me or commemorating some milestone in my career. I will keep and treasure those mementos for as long as I live.

You'll note that I tend to speak of John with reverence, almost as though I'm speaking of a parent. I think that it's appropriate that I do so because of John's influence on who I have become. I like to believe that I'm a better man and a better leader today than I was 40 years ago. If that's true, it's because I had a friend and mentor like John Kolman.

The true and lasting impact of a great leader is on the people they lead. John practiced and taught devotion, courage and commitment to things greater than oneself, like God, country, profession, and the sanctity of his marriage to Janice, which lasted over 62 years. These are values and characteristics that true leaders pass on from generation to generation. Young people who will never know John will be beneficiaries of his character and leadership. Being with John Kolman made you want to be a better person and to pass life's lessons on to others.

On April 26, a beautiful celebration of life was held for John, not far from the home where he and Janice lived and raised a family for over 60 years. More than 200 friends and family came to pay their respects to a man they loved. The attendees included several current uniformed members of LASD SEB and LAPD SWAT. Their presence was a visual representation of John's lasting effect on professionalism and collaboration. Speaking of his old friend during remarks as the event's emcee, Mike Hillmann said: "One of John's greatest gifts was that he didn't just build teams, he built people, and relationships that last a lifetime."

Thank you, John, for all you did to make us better people and better tactical officers. Godspeed to you, sir. We'll look forward to your broad smile and warm handshake when we meet again in a better place.

Phil Hansen is Director Emeritus of the NTOA. For more on John Kolman's exemplary career and contributions, please visit the Hall of Honor page on NTOA's website.

> "I LIKE TO BELIEVE THAT I'M A BETTER MAN AND A BETTER LEADER TODAY THAN I WAS 40 YEARS AGO. IF THAT'S TRUE, IT'S BECAUSE I HAD A FRIEND AND MENTOR LIKE JOHN KOLMAN."

HONORING THE LEGACY OF

JOHN A. KOLMAN



To honor the legacy of NTOA founder John Kolman, his family has commissioned a limited-edition commemorative challenge coin in his memory.

Proceeds from each coin sold will support the John Kolman Training Scholarship Fund, which provides financial assistance to NTOA members from small and rural agencies who may not otherwise be able to attend NTOA conferences or training courses.

QUANTITIES ARE LIMITED.

TO PLACE AN ORDER VISIT:
https://shopntoa.org/products/founder-coin


- TARGET LOCATION
- TEAM COMPOSITION
- ENTRY PLAN
- CONTINGENCIES
- COMMS PLAN
- EXFIL PLAN
- MEDICAL PLAN
POLICE
SOP
TACTICAL OPERATIONS
POLICY & PROCEDURES



ESTABLISHING MISSION CAPABILITIES:

MINIMIZING RISK THROUGH SOUND POLICY

BY BRUCE LIEBE

The challenges facing law enforcement in today's world have driven many agencies to field tactical teams. Some have established comprehensive, well-structured programs with proper staffing, training and equipping. While some opt to establish an intra-agency team, others elect to employ a multi-jurisdictional approach. Yet there are departments that have implemented a tactical team without full appreciation or understanding of all the considerations involved. They mistakenly believe they have established full-capability SWAT teams when, in fact, they have not. This could be because the agency command does not fully understand the concept and demands of a full-capability tactical team, or because they knowingly disregard established standards in the belief that they are excessive, overly burdensome and perhaps even elitist.

If the requirements and demands of having a tactical team are not realized, units can be understaffed, undertrained and inadequately equipped. While they may enjoy success, those teams are up to the task until they're not. Finding that the team did not meet muster for an operation typically becomes harshly evident in the wake of a failed mission.

Agency pride and self-sufficiency are understandable. But that mindset must be pushed aside, and a true appreciation of what is required to establish and maintain a tactical team is essential. Under the NTOA's Tactical Response and Operations Standard for Law Enforcement Agencies (TROS) (commonly referred to as NTOA SWAT Standards), a good number of units presently in service fall under the Tier 4 category, as they do not have the requisite table of organization, training and equipment needed to meet the requirements outlined for Tiers 1-3.

> "Those teams are up to the task until they're not."

Much of policing involves activities that can generate risk. Use-of-force incidents, whether they involve lethal or less-lethal force, are, of course, high on that list. With respect to tactical teams, their duties constantly place them in adversarial situations in which incident resolution may involve the application of force. Even if the actions of police are within the law and contextually appropriate, it's likely a lawsuit will follow. Further, there are some areas of the country where prosecutors are quick to file criminal charges in the aftermath of a use-of-force event. Factors that can increase the risk of civil and criminal liability are negligence, lack of policies and improper training.

> "Factors that can increase the risk of civil and criminal liability are negligence, lack of policies and improper training."

To minimize vulnerability as much as possible, agencies that maintain tactical teams should have clear policies that define the mission and operational scope, and ensure the team is properly trained and equipped. Additionally, it is important to maintain a culture that supports meaningful operational debriefs. Conducting honest after-action reviews (AAR) allows teams to build upon success and make corrections when needed. If the department's efforts regarding any of these considerations are lacking, the risks can increase.

While volumes have been dedicated to the various aspects of tactical teams and their management, this discussion will be limited to defined mission profiles, appropriate training and post-operational analysis.

Considerations for risk mitigation

At any program's foundation is a sound policy that defines the departmental criteria for utilizing its tactical team. The policy should state the agency's preference for the team's design and their operational capabilities. Other areas of policy might be identifying selection criteria, a table of organization, training requirements and other administrative considerations.

Having a clearly defined mission will establish operational parameters. Whether through a matrix or an enumerated list, departments should define the factors that must be present to warrant using their team. This establishes clear guidance to aid in the decision to deploy, assigning the team when necessary and avoiding utilization when the situation does not justify a SWAT response.

Department command should understand the level of team they are placing in operation. To do so, they must be cognizant of what differentiates between team capabilities. Some mistakenly believe that the mere existence of a tactical team provides them with full SWAT capability. This is often compounded by a failure to adequately support their team in terms of the level of training, equipping and staffing. The NTOA TROS provides excellent guidance for establishing the scope of the team's operational capabilities in policy.[1] The standards indicate that a team may be a single agency team, a multijurisdictional team, a regional team or a team established through a memorandum of agreement.[2]

Is it the department's intention to have a "full service" tactical team that would fall under the characteristics of a Tier 1 or Tier 2 team? Or perhaps the preference is to have a team that is limited in scope for duties such as warrant service, street crimes, gang enforcement or a similar specific mission.

The standards detail the team composition necessary for a Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 and Tier 4 Team as noted below:

Tier 1 SWAT Team: Minimum 34 personnel, consisting of a team commander, 4 team leaders, 8 snipers, 18 entry operators and 3 TEMS personnel.

Tier 2 SWAT Team: Minimum 25 personnel, consisting of a team commander, 4 team leaders, 6 snipers, 12 entry operators and 2 TEMS personnel.

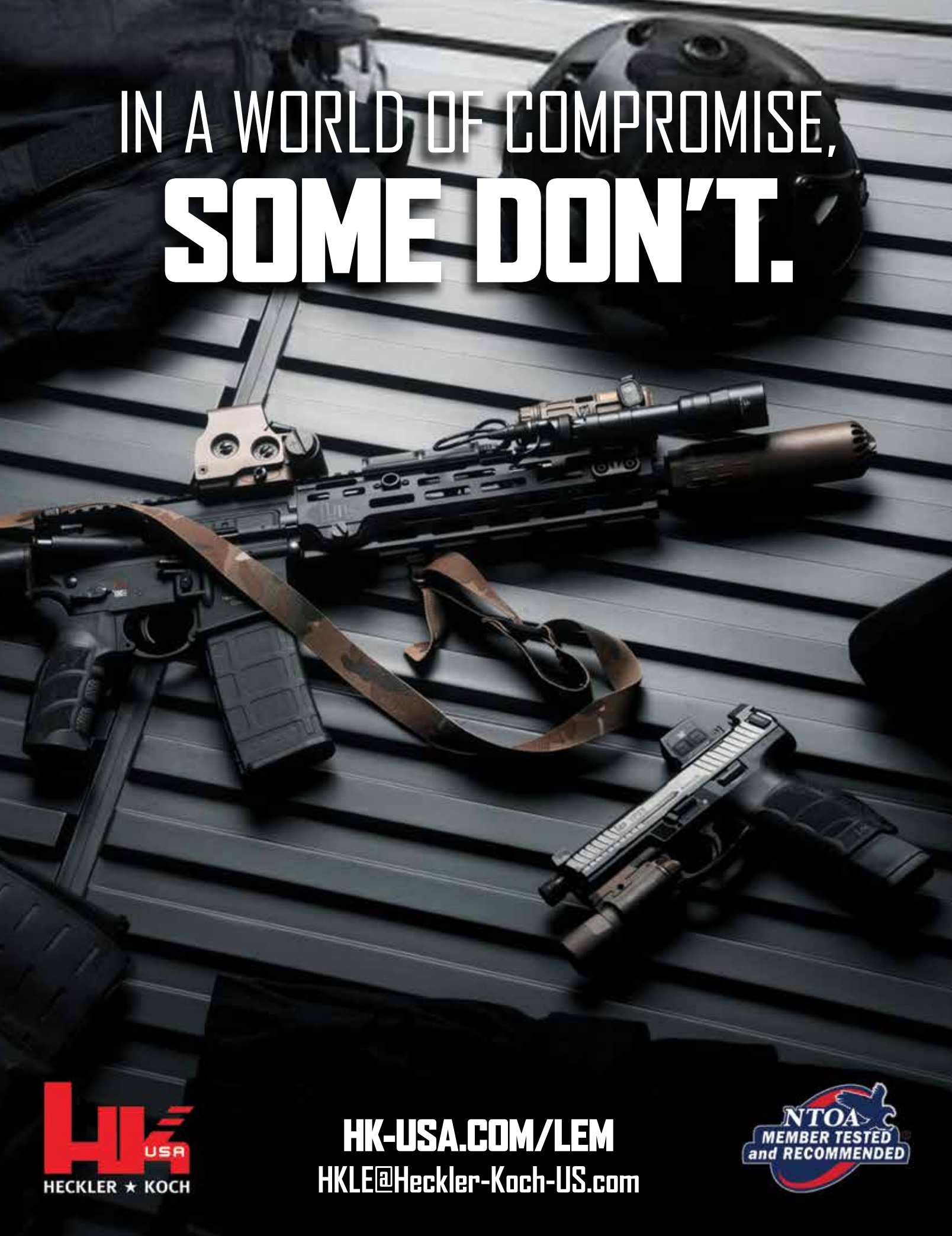
Tier 3 Tactical Response Team: Minimum 16 personnel, consisting of a team commander, 2 team leaders, 0 snipers, 12 entry operators and 1 TEMS personnel.

Tier 4 Perimeter Control and Containment Team: Less than 15 personnel; the team composition is defined as any number of tactically trained personnel for perimeter control or containment.[3]

Regarding the types of operations the teams are suited for, the standards are presented in a color-coded matrix. It identifies mandatory capability requirements (green), optional requirements (yellow), and capability requirements that are not necessary (red), indicating that those capabilities do not meet the function of the team.[4]

Team mission profiles are identified in the standards as follows:

- Hostage rescue operations
    - Crisis entry
    - Deliberate planned hostage rescue
- Barricaded subject operations
    - Criminal (crime has occurred)
    - In crisis (mentally disturbed and in need of intervention)
- High-risk warrant service and apprehension operations
    - Search warrants
    - Arrest warrants
- Terrorism response operations
- Critical infrastructure protection
- Dignitary protection operations
- Man tracking operations (rural and woodland)
- Active assailant (shooter/killer)
- Public order operations support


IN A WORLD OF COMPROMISE,
SOME DON'T.
HK USA
HECKLER ★ KOCH
HK-USA.COM/LEM
HKLE@Heckler-Koch-US.com
NTOA
MEMBER TESTED
and RECOMMENDED

Based on the matrix, a Tier 1 team possesses all the capabilities listed above. A Tier 2 team has the same capabilities as the Tier 1 team, except for deliberate planned hostage rescues. A Tier 3 team is not situated for deliberate planned hostage rescue or terrorism response operations. Optional missions include barricaded criminals and persons in crisis (mental health issues requiring intervention), critical infrastructure protection, dignitary protection operations, and rural and woodland man tracking. A Tier 4 team is suited for hostage rescue crisis entries and active shooter response. Man tracking and public order operations support would be optional capabilities.

Similarly, the standards provide guidance for the training required based on mission profiles. Agencies should ensure that their teams are trained accordingly. There should also be an understanding of the amount of time that should be devoted to training, as well as the need to balance its distribution throughout the year.

The training requirements detailed in the standards address what should be provided for new team members, monthly training, annual training, and specialty assignments, as well as listing core competencies by mission profile and tier status (pages 27-36). The standards also identify equipment requirements (pages 37-56).

After-action reviews

An absolute necessity for any tactical team is a sound operational debrief that assesses overall team performance and the contributions of individual members. After-action reviews provide valuable insight into which actions/tactics were successful and which were not.

An effective after-action review should be conducted as soon as practical after a deployment. It should be led by a neutral facilitator to ensure there is an open, unbiased exchange. The debrief should focus on expected versus actual outcomes, and the feedback provided should include specific, actionable recommendations for future improvements. A proper AAR goes beyond merely listing failures; it addresses both positives and negatives.

There is a natural tendency to celebrate a successful outcome, which may cause us to skip a debrief or reduce it to a round of "high fives." Aspects that might not have gone precisely as planned may receive little consideration or even be ignored. Simply celebrating present success risks setting the stage for future failure.

"An absolute necessity for any tactical team is a sound operational debrief that assesses overall team performance and the contributions of individual members."

In the AAR after a successful mission, an unbiased assessment will reveal whether the outcome was due to skill or good fortune. Were we good or were we lucky? A common saying is that it is good to be lucky, but when your luck runs out, you'd better be good. This saying emphasizes that while luck (chance/opportunity) helps, long-term success requires skill (being good) once luck inevitably runs out.[5] When aspects of the operation fall short of the anticipated outcomes, the AAR provides an opportunity to identify corrective measures. Similarly, in the aftermath of success, an honest, unbiased debrief indicates if the outcome was due to happenstance. If so, necessary changes can be implemented to ensure future positive outcomes are attained through skill.

Determining whether the outcome was rooted in skill or good fortune also prevents what is referred to as mission creep. Mission creep occurs after a successful operation where the team may have extended beyond their mission capabilities but achieved a favorable outcome. Success builds confidence, and the team begins to expand its operations beyond the mission profiles it is suited for. Sid Heal describes mission creep as "a gradual and barely noticeable change or expansion of missions without a conscious decision."[6]

Another form of mission creep can occur when SWAT is utilized for an operation that does not warrant their use. The lack of defined criteria for deployment in department policy can contribute to this occurring. Additionally, without proper assessment of a request for team deployment, i.e., an adequate evaluation of available information and intelligence, a tactical unit may be used when not appropriate. Mission creep can also occur when a team that is rarely utilized is deployed for the purpose of justifying its existence. Aside from generating unnecessary risk, the use of a team for lower-level enforcement actions serves to fuel the "militarization of police" narrative.

Conclusion

In the high-risk environment of tactical team deployment, it is essential that agencies establish sound policies, define mission capabilities and train their teams to meet those capabilities. In the post-operations phase, it is equally critical to conduct an honest after-action review to reinforce success, identify areas for improvement and assess whether training has adequately supported the team's operations.

Ensuring mission capability and preparedness is crucial to performing successfully in tactical operations. Anything less can result in adverse litigation, which risks negatively affecting not only the agency involved but also law enforcement in general and the SWAT concept in specific.

Endnotes

1. National Tactical Officers Association. (2023) Tactical Response and Operations Standard for Law Enforcement Agencies. file:///C:/Users/Owner/Dropbox/PC%20(3)/Documents/NTOA/NTOA%20SWAT%20Standards.pdf

2. Ibid, 12

3. Ibid, 12

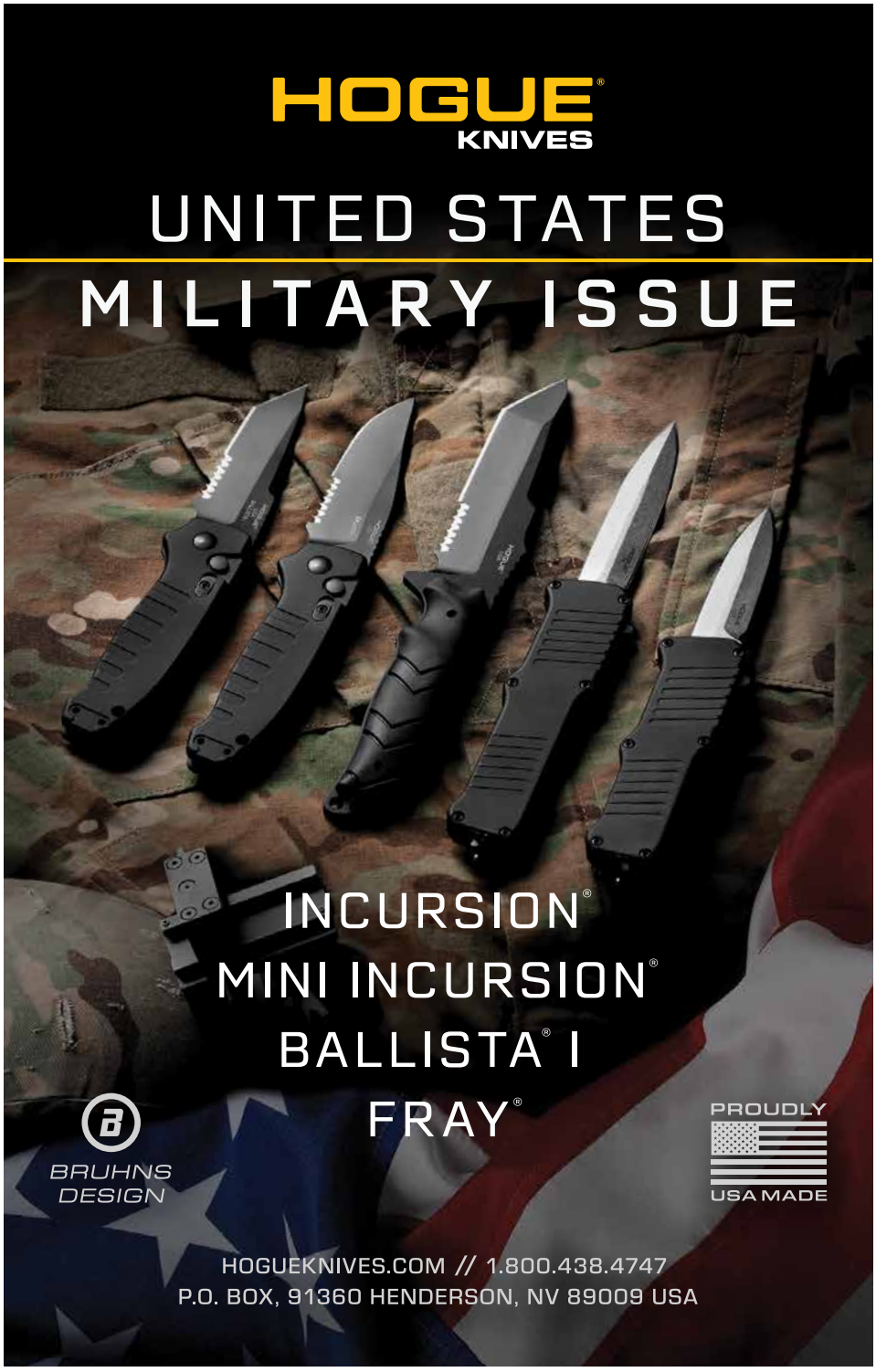
4. Ibid, 13

5. This and similar phrases have been adopted in sports and business to emphasize preparation over mere chance. It is a modern adaptation of an old adage, based on Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea: "It's better to be lucky, but I would rather be exact." It is also associated with World War II aviation.

6. Heal, Charles "Sid." Field Command. Brooklyn, NY: Lantern Books, 2012. 362.

About the author

M/Sgt. Bruce Liebe is a 30-year law enforcement veteran who has served five years with a municipal police agency and 25 years with the Illinois State Police. He was assigned to ISP's Tactical Response Team (SWAT) for 13 years, serving as statewide program coordinator, assistant team leader and entry team member. At retirement, he was serving as deputy chief of staff in ISP's Division of Operations. Liebe served as an assistant professor of homeland security and as senior director of the School of Professional Studies at MacMurray College in Jacksonville, Illinois. He is currently serving as director of the Law Enforcement Training Advisory Commission, Mobile Team Unit #10 in Springfield, IL. He owns and operates Paladin Tactical LLC and the Paladin Tactical Academy. He holds an A.A.S. in criminal justice from Illinois Valley Community College and a B.A. in criminal justice and an M.A. in legal studies from the University of Illinois at Springfield. He may be reached at liebebr@sbcglobal.net

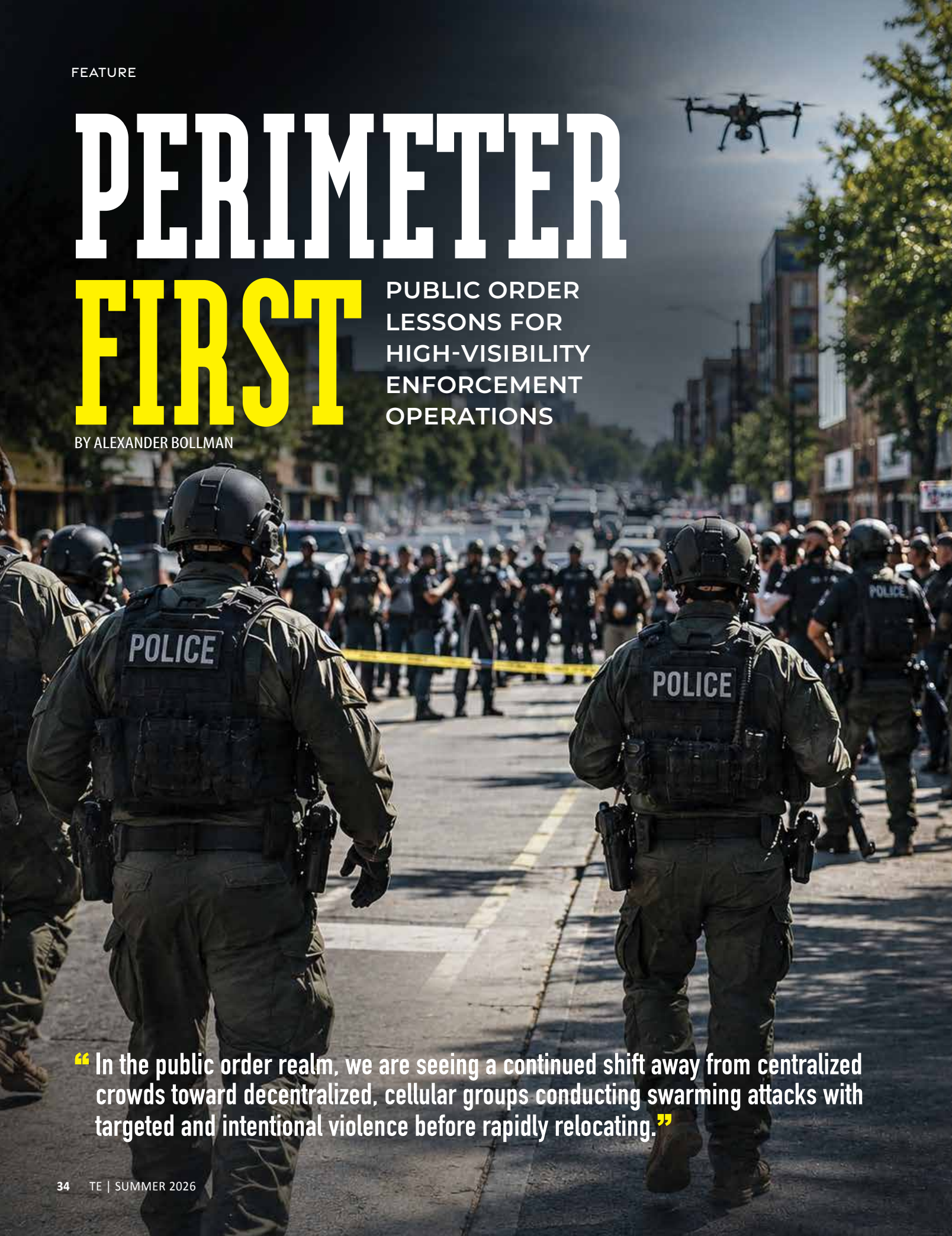


> "In the high-risk environment of tactical team deployment, it is essential that agencies establish sound policies, define mission capabilities and train their teams to meet those capabilities."

PERIMETER FIRST

PUBLIC ORDER LESSONS FOR HIGH-VISIBILITY ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS

BY ALEXANDER BOLLMAN



> "In the public order realm, we are seeing a continued shift away from centralized crowds toward decentralized, cellular groups conducting swarming attacks with targeted and intentional violence before rapidly relocating."

In the public order world, 2026 has been a very active year. Immigration operations, which began in earnest in 2025, have intensified and expanded to one of the most politically violent cities in the nation, Minneapolis. This article is being written on Jan. 26, 2026. Three officer-involved shootings have already occurred, and significant flash rioting has taken place outside massive traditional, coordinated, peaceful demonstrations.

I want to make something abundantly clear at the outset of this piece. I am not casting judgment on any officer-involved shooting nor the actions of officers undertaken while undermanned, outnumbered and under siege. I was not there. That said, there is great value in learning from our experiences as a profession.

Each year brings new challenges to law enforcement, including the advancement of artificial intelligence, the increased accessibility of drone technology, and the ongoing transition from recruiting and training millennials to Generation Z. In the public order realm specifically, we are seeing a continued shift away from centralized crowds toward decentralized, cellular groups conducting swarming attacks with targeted and intentional violence before rapidly relocating. These groups are less interested in occupying space than they are in creating friction, drawing officers out of position and forcing reactive policing decisions.

The U.S. Department of Justice has noted in multiple crowd management and civil disorder reviews that modern unrest increasingly involves small, semi-autonomous groups exploiting gaps in law enforcement deployment, command and coordination rather than confronting police formations directly. This evolution places a premium on mobility, discipline and unified command rather than sheer manpower.[1]

Today's case study focuses on the role of public order teams operating alongside high-visibility arrest operations. While the current national conversation centers on large-scale federal immigration enforcement actions, the lessons discussed here extend well beyond that context. What we are observing in real time, quite literally in high-definition video, is what the absence of effective crowd management and public order policing looks like during a planned enforcement operation conducted in a public space.

These same dynamics can apply to a tactical or narcotics search warrant executed in a high-density, high-crime neighborhood, a targeted gang arrest likely to draw community attention, a bar-close disorder, or a sudden crush of agitated patrons following a sporting event or concert. The Police Executive Research Forum has repeatedly emphasized that while the timing of crowd-related incidents may be unpredictable, their form, triggers and escalation patterns often are identifiable during the planning phase.[2]

For the sake of operational familiarity, this article will examine a targeted arrest operation that planners reasonably expect to draw a crowd. Planning and intelligence must support the likelihood of the public attempting to interject or interfere with operations prior to mobilizing additional resources. The appropriate time for that assessment is during the planning stages and alongside the planning for the actual mission itself, not once officers are already committed on the ground. Scene security, freedom to operate, and the safety of both the public and law enforcement demand it.

The role of public order teams

What we are seeing through both official and non-official video is that many of these operations are taking place during daylight hours, in public areas, and without a defined perimeter or cordon. While freedom of movement is an important civil consideration, the International Association of Chiefs of Police has long recognized that law enforcement may temporarily restrict access and movement in areas where active operations present a clear risk to public and officer safety.[3]

Mission creep becomes a real issue in these environments. As officers are drawn away from the primary objective to address secondary crowd issues, personnel with the wrong specialty end up in the wrong position. This not only increases risk but also prolongs on-the-ground time for the mission group as a whole, further compounding exposure and fatigue. The NTOA has consistently identified task saturation and role confusion as precursors to tactical failure, particularly in complex or rapidly evolving operational environments.[4]

Having a specialized public order unit on the ground and arriving concurrently with the main effort allows for a defined cordon to be established early. That team remains outward-facing, focused on crowd management and scene integrity, until it is time to facilitate an organized exit for the main effort. Properly trained public order teams are highly mobile, utilizing dedicated vehicles to collect, move and redeploy teams quickly throughout an area to outpace rapidly relocating companion clusters of agitators.

"What we are observing in real time, quite literally in high-definition video, is what the absence of effective crowd management and public order policing looks like during a planned enforcement operation conducted in a public space."

Teams trained to modern standards deploy with organic medical support, arrest teams and less-lethal capability to maintain initiative while reducing reliance on ad hoc responses.[5] They are equipped with discrete limb protection, uniforms and load-bearing equipment configured specifically for this role. Their communications equipment allows effective command and control despite noise, confusion and chaos. When necessary, these teams deploy munitions, make arrests, and otherwise use force within established agency and team SOPs vetted for compliance with local, state and federal law.

NTOA public order training materials and after-action reviews consistently stress that uniformity and equipment discipline are not cosmetic concerns, but foundational elements of command presence, control and legitimacy in crowd environments.[6] No dangling chains of flex cuffs attached to a poorly mounted gas mask bag. No ill-fitted plate carriers adorned with rifle magazines for a rifle that is likely blocks away in a squad car. No gas canisters threatening to eject from cargo pockets with the slightest misstep.

When officers or tactical operators are pulled away from the main effort, one or two at a time to deal with individual protestors or small companion clusters, situations can deteriorate rapidly. These are often solo, reactive efforts initiated in response to a stimulus from the crowd. When a physical altercation erupts, responding officers frequently lack full context of the initial interaction, have limited communication with one another, and function more as a collection of individuals than as a coordinated team.

At the same time, individual officers equipped with less-lethal launchers, such as 37/40mm systems or pneumatic platforms, may independently respond to perceived threats and deploy munitions without coordinated intent. Other officers may deploy hand-tossed chemical or smoke munitions in an equally uncoordinated manner. Department of Justice critical incident reviews and PERF guidance both warn that uncoordinated individual action in crowds increases the likelihood of escalation, reduces supervisory control and degrades the effectiveness of less-lethal tools.[7]

PERF has further emphasized that less-lethal tools are most effective when deployed as part of a coordinated strategy under unified command, rather than as individual, stimulus-based reactions.[8] Without that coordination, visibility degrades, accountability diminishes, and both officer and public safety suffer.

The officers involved in recent operations are doing the job they were employed to do, under the circumstances presented to them. Indeed, local law enforcement agencies should be permitted and encouraged to support these operations with peacekeeping and crowd management assets. Effective crowd management requires local knowledge as well as established command relationships and specialized training.[9]

Conclusion

Which visual plays out better in the mind of a chief, mayor, U.S. attorney or Joe Citizen watching the evening news: a disciplined, well-equipped cordon of officers surrounding an operational area, deploying precision munitions and making targeted arrests while maintaining control of space and time? Or officers in mixed uniforms, running into the crowd one or two at a time, pockets of physical confrontation scattered throughout the scene, and gas munitions deployed indiscriminately, obscuring the environment for everyone involved? The answer should be obvious.

Endnotes

1. U.S. Department of Justice, COPS Office and Civil Rights Division, Critical Incident Review and civil disorder guidance.
2. Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), Managing Major Events and Demonstrations.
3. International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), Crowd Management and Control Model Policies.
4. National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA), Public Order and Crowd Management doctrine.
5. NTOA, Public Order Team organization and deployment principles.
6. NTOA, Public Order training materials and after-action reviews.
7. U.S. Department of Justice and PERF, Critical Incident Review findings related to crowd operations.
8. PERF, guidance on coordinated less-lethal deployment and unified command.
9. IACP

About the author

Sgt. Alexander Bollman is a patrol sergeant with the Fargo (ND) Police Department. He is assigned as a team leader with a collateral duty public order team. He is a former U.S. Army Infantry NCO and veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Bollman is an NTOA-certified less-lethal, FSDD and chemical agent instructor and is a graduate of the Oregon Civil Disturbance Training Unit basic course, among other law enforcement professional education. He holds Basic Command certification in Public Order from the NTOA. He holds a BA in Intelligence Studies from American Military University. The views and opinions expressed in this article are his own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Fargo Police Department.

“When officers or tactical operators are pulled away from the main effort, one or two at a time to deal with individual protestors or small companion clusters, situations can deteriorate rapidly.”


BETTER PREPARED TO RESPOND
FIRST TACTICAL
AERO-TAC™
FEATHER LIGHT. FIELD TOUGH.
NTOA
MEMBER TESTED and RECOMMENDED
2025
MEMBER DISCOUNT
25% OFF
Scan QR Code
EXTREMELY LIGHTWEIGHT
FREE OF METALS
ANTI-MICROBIAL LINING
DURABLE
ORTHOLITE® COMFORT INSOLES
WATERPROOF
EXTREMELY SLIP RESISTANT
STAY FLAT PULL TAB
LACE GARAGE
MOLDED TPU TOE CAP



> “Questioning how and when a tool is applied does not reject the tool, but it is a necessary step in ensuring expectations remain grounded in operational reality rather than idealized response models that are being taught nationwide.”



RESCUE TASK FORCE IN PRACTICE:

EXAMINING THE GAP BETWEEN TRAINING AND REALITY

BY TRAVIS NORTON

The concept of protected medical access under law enforcement security has existed in various forms for decades. The Rescue Task Force (RTF) model, as it is currently taught, is a more recent development. RTF appears in policy, grant language, exercises and instructor development across the country. However, when those same incidents are later examined through timelines, after-action reports and participant accounts, patterns emerge. The conditions required for RTF to occur as trained often are not present when the killing is active or the threat remains uncertain. That gap between what we prepare for and what develops on scene deserves closer examination, particularly in how it shapes expectations about medical access.

This article is not an argument against RTF or the value of protected medical access during active shooter incidents. RTF remains an important tactical option for fire/EMS care during unknown threat conditions. This discussion examines how RTF often is trained and discussed as a primary strategy rather than a context-dependent tactic, and to explore whether that design aligns with the harsh time constraints and uncertainty of most active shooter incidents. Questioning how and when a tool is applied does not reject the tool, but it is a necessary step in ensuring expectations remain grounded in operational reality rather than idealized response models that are being taught nationwide.

RTF often is described as a flexible model. However, if that flexibility is real, it should be identifiable in the available literature in varying forms. Instead, after-action reports mostly document medical access occurring through decentralized, improvised actions rather than recognizable variations of RTF deployment. This suggests the issue may not be rigid execution, but whether the tactic appears under real-world conditions.

The promise being taught

RTF is commonly taught as a structured approach to moving medical care forward during active violence incidents under conditions of partial or uncertain security. Training typically emphasizes paired or team-based movement of fire and EMS personnel under law enforcement protection, operating in designated warm zones once an

initial level of threat control has been established. The model is presented as a way to reduce preventable death by compressing the time between injury and care while maintaining responder safety.

Some training also teaches responders to assume the presence of a second suspect despite incident data showing that multiple suspects are involved in only a small percentage of cases.[1] More recent FBI data is consistent with that pattern. The 2024 FBI active shooter report identified one incident involving two shooters out of 24 total incidents.[2] This does not eliminate the possibility of additional suspects, but it places that risk in context relative to how these incidents typically unfold.

RTF instruction often focuses on clearly defined roles and sequencing. Law enforcement is responsible for providing security, route control and threat mitigation, while fire and EMS personnel are tasked with rapid assessment, hemorrhage control and casualty movement. RTF teams are usually described as forming in staging, receiving a briefing and deploying forward once command determines conditions are appropriate. This sequencing reinforces an expectation that medical access follows a deliberate transition from cold to warm zones. Sequencing also implicitly prioritizes responder safety because it requires the scene to be sufficiently controlled before medical care enters the crisis site. However, in time-constrained incidents, responders may need to consider medical access before those conditions are in place.

Training scenarios frequently depict RTF deployment as a coordinated evolution within an organized incident command structure. Emphasis is placed on communication, accountability and adherence to the model, with successful execution framed as evidence of effective interagency integration. Within this context, RTF is often taught not only as a tactical option, but as a visible marker of coordinated, modern response to active violence.

RTF training sets expectations about when medical care should begin and under what conditions: Medical care moves forward once sufficient security is in place, rather than as a series of contingent decisions made under rapidly changing and often incomplete information and intelligence. In real incidents, those conditions rarely exist. After-action reviews and practitioner accounts show incidents unfolding quickly, with limited intelligence and prior to full threat resolution. Medical access frequently occurs through ad hoc decisions and opportunistic movement rather than through the deliberate deployment of structured teams that RTF prescribes. The issue is not the intent or effort of police responders, but the gap between how medical access is expected to occur and how it occurs under real conditions. RTF continues to be taught because it offers a clear, teachable

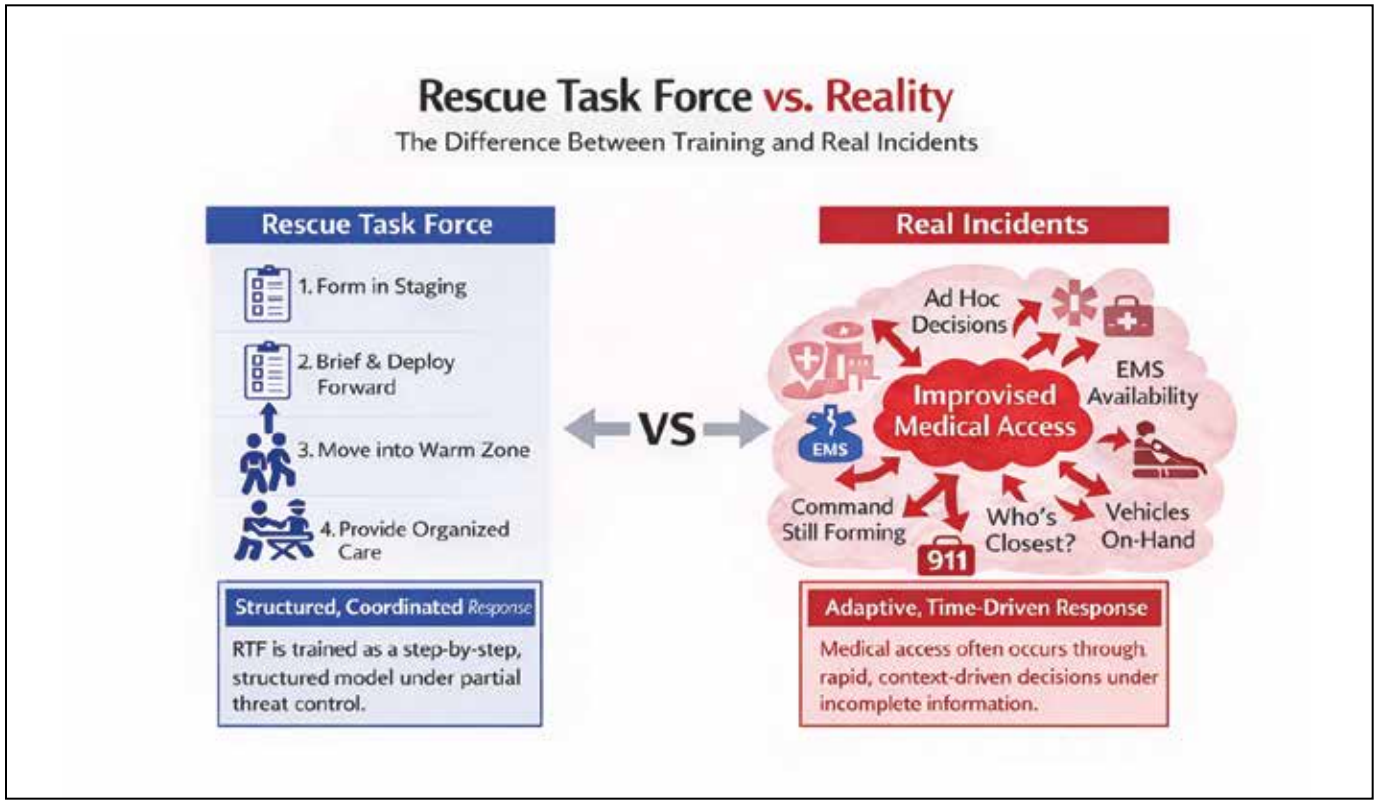


FIGURE 1. Summary of the core issue: RTF is trained as a sequence, but real incidents are driven by speed, proximity and improvisation.

way to talk about medical access under threat, even if those conditions rarely materialize in real incidents. It provides structure and reassurance in training and planning, regardless of how often it appears in the record. Therefore, the question is not why RTF is taught, but how often the conditions it assumes are present when medical access is needed.

What the record shows

RTF is commonly taught as a primary approach for treating wounded victims in active shooter training, as noted in Figure 1. Despite this training, there is little evidence that RTF has been executed in active shooter incidents in the manner it is typically trained. At best, RTF teams have been established but not used because responders adapted and used more expeditious options available to treat the injured.

In post-incident discussions and qualitative interviews related to recent active shooter incidents, responders described situations in which RTFs were formed but never deployed, while medical access occurred through faster, improvised means. These accounts emphasized adaptation, expediency and availability rather than adherence to planned RTF response models. In these accounts, it is important to distinguish between individual actions that resemble elements of RTF and execution of the RTF model as trained.

While RTF is often described as flexible or adaptable rather than a rigid checklist, officers' actions in many active shooter incidents reflect more than just adaptation of the RTF model. In these cases, responders move away from RTF's underlying structure and sequencing altogether, relying instead on context-driven tactics to achieve faster medical access than would be possible by waiting for RTF deployment. Further, many incidents are resolved before the full RTF model can be implemented. Responders act on proximity, availability and time constraints rather than the formal sequencing of RTF.

> "The question is not why RTF is taught, but how often the conditions it assumes are present when medical access is needed."

AFTER-ACTION REPORTS

FROM ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENTS

Broward County Aviation Department (2018).
After-action report: Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport shooting. Broward County, FL.

City of Virginia Beach (2020).
Municipal center building 2 shooting: After-action report. City of Virginia Beach.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (2018).
Las Vegas mass casualty incident: After-action report. U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (2014).
After-action report: June 8, 2014 shooting. LVMPD.

Los Angeles World Airports & Los Angeles Police Dept (2014).
Active shooter incident after-action report: Los Angeles International Airport. City of Los Angeles.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission (2019).
Initial report and recommendations. State of Florida.

Police Executive Research Forum (2016).
The Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting: Response and lessons learned. Washington, D.C.

TriData Division, System Planning Corp (2014).
Aurora Century 16 theater shooting: After-action report. City of Aurora.

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (2017).
After-action review of the San Bernardino terrorist incident. https://cops.usdoj.gov

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (2021).
Critical incident review: Active shooter at the Henry Pratt Company, Aurora, Illinois. https://cops.usdoj.gov

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (2024).
Critical incident review: Active shooter at Robb Elementary School, Uvalde, Texas. https://cops.usdoj.gov

U.S. Department of the Navy (2014).
Washington Navy Yard shooting: After-action report. Department of Defense.

Ventura County Sheriff's Office (2019).
Thousand Oaks mass shooting after-action report. County of Ventura.

These behaviors are not unique to RTF but are rather long-standing tactical and medical practices that existed prior to its development. For example, several incidents were described by interviewees as situations in which the shooter was down and instead of waiting for formal RTFs, responders adapted and escorted medics directly to the injured to begin treatment as opposed to waiting for RTFs to form and enter. This adaptive decision-making led to positive outcomes.

Qualitative interviews suggest that RTF is not consistently executed as trained in prior incidents, and after-action reviews reflect a similar pattern. This consistency across both practitioner accounts and formal documentation suggests the pattern is not isolated to individual incidents or reporting gaps. In a review of 13 publicly available after-action reports from active shooter incidents, none clearly described the deployment of RTF teams as trained in structured team-based deployment. (See a list of after-action reports from active shooter incidents on page 41.)

Rescue Task Force is one of several deployment approaches used in both training and practice. Current models include law enforcement rescue, protected corridor, protected island and RTF, and more than one may be used during the same incident. Medical access was instead documented as occurring through ad hoc escort, post-threat entry or improvised movement rather than formal RTF operations. These early actions are often immediate and based on conditions at the scene rather than structured deployment, with RTF sometimes forming later as the incident stabilizes.

Given the emphasis on RTF in training and planning, the lack of documented execution of RTF as trained deserves closer examination. The federal after-action report documenting the Henry Pratt Co., shooting in Aurora, Illinois, describes the deployment of 13 RTFs, of which four entered the structure, while also noting confusion regarding RTF roles, differing doctrinal interpretations among responding agencies, and instances of entry without clear assignment, suggesting a gap between the use of RTF terminology and execution as trained.[3] The issue is not the use of RTF terminology, but whether the model was executed in the manner training envisions.

This is not an exhaustive analysis that accounts for all active shooter responses. However, it does show a consistent pattern across documented incidents and practitioner accounts reviewed, which were informed by informal discussions with practitioners and active shooter instructors. If there are actual incidents in which RTF was executed as trained during an active or uncertain threat phase, they are not prominent in the available record and are difficult to identify in practice.

“If there are actual incidents in which RTF was executed as trained during an active or uncertain threat phase, they are not prominent in the available record.”

Separate from execution questions, RTF training may also provide secondary benefits by familiarizing fire and law enforcement personnel with each other’s roles and communication styles, and by building personal relationships that, in turn, can reduce friction during a crisis. However, those relationship-building benefits can be achieved outside RTF training and are distinct from evaluating whether the RTF model itself functions as a reliable method of medical access under real incident conditions.

Considering these observations, RTF is being trained as a tactic that supports the strategy of “stop the dying,” but the record indicates it is not being used in the conditions for which it was designed. This suggests training is focused on scenarios that do not often occur rather than the situations responders encounter.

Why this matters tactically

Tactics are context-dependent, and what works in one situation can be a calamity in another. Accordingly, it is important to have a variety of tactics to use in any crisis that support the overall strategy based on the context of the situation. No two active shooter situations are the same, and as such, responders should have multiple tactics available to apply, including medical access. However, many agencies are spending most of their integrated training time with Fire/EMS focused on RTF. Allocating the majority of training to one tactic crowds out other tactics that can be useful during an active shooter incident. A focused look at what is occurring at active shooter incidents can provide agencies with insight as to what tactics they should be training on for medical access as opposed to a dogmatic adherence to RTF.

Another challenge with RTF training is that it teaches movement based on sequencing in a planned order. Secure first, then move; brief, then deploy; transition zones, then treat. However, sequencing only works when the incident is stable enough for each step to occur. This stability is rarely present. Active shooter incidents, like many crises, do not unfold in a linear fashion. They involve feedback loops in which actions, information and threat conditions change in real time. Further, sequencing does not account for the inherent uncertainty and harsh time constraints that pervade active shooter response. This reliance on sequencing can cause officers to hesitate or delay when it does not appear

HORNADY TAP® TACTICAL APPLICATION POLICE

WHEN LIVES ARE ON THE LINE, ONLY THE BEST WILL DO.™

Specialized for unique tactical situations, Hornady TAP® offers a complete line of high-performance ammunition that delivers during that critical split second when it counts.

NTOA MEMBER TESTED and RECOMMENDED

- Performance-matched bullets for each application
- Superior terminal performance
- Optimized propellants provide exceptional temperature stability and reliable weapon functioning



SCAN TO LEARN MORE

Hornady®
LAW ENFORCEMENT & MILITARY

www.hornadyLE.com

in an actual incident, as they wait for the next step in the model rather than adapting or using other tactics to treat the injured. In many incidents, the offender does not remain in a single location but continues to move or leaves the initial scene, further disrupting any expectation of a structured sequence. This creates competing priorities between searching for the suspect and moving the injured to care, forcing responders to balance time spent on security tasks against the need for rapid medical access.

In practice, medical access decisions may be made before a formal command structure has had time to establish objectives or unified command. Command requires time to gather information and intelligence, assign roles, coordinate resources and confirm conditions. That process takes time, even when it is working well. Meanwhile, officers with situational awareness of the actual incident are already at the crisis site and often know what is immediately needed. These responders should be empowered to align decision-making authority with situational awareness, rather than relying on a model that depends on command sequencing and waiting for decisions to be made. Responders also should be able to exploit windows of opportunity to move the injured when the situation calls for it. Training that does not account for this timing mismatch risks preparing responders to wait when action is possible.

> "Responders should be empowered to align decision-making authority with situational awareness, rather than relying on a model that depends on command sequencing and waiting for decisions to be made."

What should be done instead?

It is important that agencies train for what is factually occurring at active shooter incidents, particularly how injured victims are being treated, rather than relying on idealized tactics that are not consistently used. Agencies should review past active shooter incidents and align training with what is occurring. Based on qualitative interviews and review of after-action reports, the following reasonable training topics are suggested:

- Train for ad hoc medical access, not formalized RTF.
- Emphasize decision-making under uncertainty rather than scripted movement.
- Teach how to move medical care forward without waiting for RTF.
- Be honest about likely timelines and constraints.

These recommendations are not a rejection of RTF, but a reframing of its role as one option among several rather than the organizing principle for medical access under threat.

Conclusion

RTF remains a viable tactic under specific circumstances, but it should not be used as the primary solution for medical access during active shooter incidents. The conditions needed for RTF to occur as trained are rarely present during the time-constrained phases of real incidents. Further, if RTF training assumes clean steps and safe movement, responders may wait for those conditions rather than adapt to what's happening.

Actual incident reports and qualitative interviews reveal that medical access is often driven by the availability of resources, proximity to the injured and timing rather than formal response models. The time available for active shooter training is finite, and over-emphasizing one tactic can take the place of preparing for more likely operational contexts. When training aligns with how incidents unfold, responder adaptability improves while still offering a variety of tactics to choose from.

Ultimately, this discussion is about reducing preventable death. When training and planning focus solely on a tactic that is not consistently used under real conditions, attention is diverted from the decisions and actions that will save lives when it matters most. Stay safe.

About the author

Travis Norton is a retired lieutenant with the Oceanside (CA) Police Department, where he served 17 years on SWAT and as the SWAT commander. He currently works as a police practices expert witness, teaches for the NTOA and CATO, and leads the CATO After Action Review Team. He is also a subject matter expert for the National Policing Institute on active shooter after-action reviews and holds a doctorate in public policy from the University of Southern California. He can be reached at travis@norton-pc.com

Endnotes

1. National Center for Integrated Emergency Response. (n.d.). *Active shooter incidents in the U.S. 2000–2023: Key facts.* https://www.ncier.org

2. Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2025). *Active shooter incidents in the United States in 2024.* U.S. Department of Justice.

3. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. (2021). Critical incident review: Active shooter at the Henry Pratt Company, Aurora, Illinois. https://cops.usdoj.gov

> "RTF remains a viable tactic under specific circumstances, but it should not be used as the primary solution for medical access during active shooter incidents."

ICOR TECHNOLOGY

NTOA MEMBER TESTED and RECOMMENDED 2020

MINI-CALIBER®

RESOLVE BARRICADED SUSPECTS QUICKLY AND SAFELY WITH J&N TACTICAL MINI DRACO

Introducing the new patented Mini DRACO Gas Delivery System (GDS) from J&N Tactical: custom-engineered for seamless integration with the Mini-CALIBER® robot from ICOR Technology. Specifically designed for safe deployment of command-initiated chemical grenades indoors or in vehicles, it can be operated remotely from the Mini-CALIBER® robot providing enhanced control and safety during operations. The two-canister GDS offers flexibility in gas selection, utilizes indoor-safe baffled grenades, and features a wireless firing system and air unit for controlled precise deployment.

Upgrade your Mini-CALIBER® robot effortlessly with the Mini DRACO Gas Delivery System. No need to return your robot to ICOR as this retrofit option integrates with ease.



icortechnology.com



THE DARK SIDE OF INFLUENCE:

ADVANCED PERSUASION FOR CRISIS NEGOTIATORS, PART ONE

BY DEB MCMAHON

Crisis negotiators rely on influence and persuasion to guide subjects toward safety, surrender and cooperation. Yet, in the most difficult situations, when emotions are high and rapport alone fails, negotiators must understand how deeper psychological forces shape human decision-making.

This article explores the ethically complex space where persuasion meets manipulation. It examines both the tools and temptations of advanced influence: how they work, when they fail and what ethical lines must never be crossed. The exploration of the dark side of influence challenges negotiators to go beyond active listening skills (ALS) and explore the mechanics of persuasion, emotion and decision-making under stress — tools that, when used with intention and restraint, can save lives.

The four anchors of effective crisis negotiation

All persuasive communication in crisis rests on four essential anchors. These are both tactical and moral guideposts, each one grounding the negotiator in purpose, restraint and human connection.

1. Truth — The foundation of credibility. Tactical transparency and honesty preserve integrity even when information is limited.

2. Tether — The fragile emotional and psychological connection between negotiator and subject. Empathy forms the tether that keeps communication alive.

3. Time — Slowing the pace preserves life. Time allows emotion to settle and logic to re-emerge. It is one of the negotiator's greatest allies.

4. Trust — The ultimate reward of ethical communication. Once a subject believes the negotiator is consistent, humane and nonjudgmental, resolution becomes possible.

Together, these anchors form a stabilizing framework: truth creates credibility; tether sustains connection; time allows change; and trust enables resolution.

Ethical influence vs. psychological manipulation

Negotiators walk a fine line between guiding a person and controlling them. Ethical influence preserves autonomy and trust. Manipulation seeks compliance at any cost. The difference often lies not in what is said, but in why and how it is said.

Ethical influence: Ethical influence uses rapport, empathy and transparency to encourage voluntary cooperation. It allows the subject to feel seen, heard and respected — thereby maintaining dignity while encouraging safer decisions.

Ethical influence is rooted in authentic connection and the deliberate building of rapport. It promotes voluntary compliance rather than coercion by framing choices in a way that aligns with the subject's best interests. Through transparency and clear expectations, it reinforces credibility and mutual understanding. At its core, ethical influence relies on active listening, empathy and trust to guide interactions toward constructive and responsible outcomes.

Examples:

- "You've already made a good decision by picking up the phone. Let's talk about how we can make this end safely."
- "I'm here to work with you. If you let those people go, I can tell you what kind of options we have moving forward."
- "If you were talking to your best friend right now, what would you tell them to do?"

Ethical persuasion never removes the subject's power of choice; it simply helps them see which choices lead to safety and control.

Tactical transparency: Tactical transparency means using truth as a tool. In crisis negotiation, subjects often expect manipulation. When you tell the truth, even when it's uncomfortable, you disrupt that expectation and build credibility faster than any promise.

Being transparent does not mean revealing tactics or operational plans. It means acknowledging limits by saying, "I can't promise what happens next, but I can promise to be honest with you." It involves explaining the process so the subject understands what to expect, and owning your intent by clearly stating your objective, such as, "I want everyone, including you, to walk away alive."

Tactical transparency disarms suspicion and makes honesty a form of influence. It turns the negotiator into the most trustworthy person in the room — even to those who mistrust everyone.

Psychological manipulation: Manipulation aims for control rather than cooperation. It relies on pressure, distortion and emotional exploitation. Though it can produce short-term compliance, it erodes trust, increases volatility and damages long-term credibility.

Psychological manipulation relies on deception or half-truths to shape perception and behavior. It often creates artificial urgency to pressure decisions and exploits fears or personal vulnerabilities to gain leverage. Compliance is encouraged through guilt, confusion or emotional coercion rather than informed choice. In doing so, manipulation undermines the subject's autonomy and erodes their ability to exercise independent judgment and self-determination.

Examples:

- "You have five minutes to comply, or the team will move in."
- "Your father abandoned you, and now you're going to abandon your own kids?"
- "Release one hostage, and I'll guarantee you walk out free."

Even when manipulation achieves immediate compliance, the loss of trust can make subsequent negotiations harder or even impossible. Ethical influence strengthens future credibility; manipulation destroys it.

Cognitive shifts in crisis negotiation

A cognitive shift occurs when the negotiator introduces a new perspective that competes with the subject's current narrative. The subject may not agree immediately, but introducing that new frame opens space for reconsideration.

This process relies on three elements:

1. Emotional synchrony: The negotiator must first match the subject's emotional rhythm. Without rapport, no shift will take root.

2. Strategic disruption: Once connected, the negotiator introduces a subtle redirection, a new way of thinking that momentarily breaks the emotional feedback loop.

3. Guided reflection: The negotiator reinforces this shift through empathy and validation, helping the subject connect logic to emotion.

"Even when manipulation achieves immediate compliance, the loss of trust can make subsequent negotiations harder or even impossible. Ethical influence strengthens future credibility; manipulation destroys it."

Examples of cognitive shifts are shown in Figure 1. Each example honors the subject's reality while guiding them toward a safer, more reflective mindset. The shift happens because the subject is gently forced to pause, think and process a new idea.

Avoiding patronizing responses: Well-intended phrases can sometimes backfire when they sound dismissive, moralizing or overly therapeutic. These patronizing responses shut down conversation rather than opening it.

Examples of patronizing responses:

- "It's a permanent solution to a temporary problem."
- "You just need to calm down."
- "You're not thinking clearly right now."

These phrases may be true, but they invalidate the subject's current experience. They make the subject feel inferior or misunderstood. Instead, effective negotiators use respectful curiosity and statements that affirm the subject's humanity and invite dialogue.

Better alternatives:

- "It sounds like you've been carrying this alone for a long time."
- "That sounds exhausting. What's been the hardest part for you?"
- "You say you've been through worse before; how did you get through that?"

Ethical boundaries and tactical use: A cognitive shift must never be used to trick or corner a subject. The goal is not compliance through confusion, but clarity through reflection. When used ethically, cognitive shifts promote self-control, reduce impulsivity and rebuild problem-solving capacity. A poorly timed shift can sound dismissive; a well-timed one can save a life.

Cognitive biases in negotiation

Effective negotiation is not driven solely by tactics — it is shaped by how people think under stress. In crisis situations, subjects rarely make decisions through calm, logical analysis. Instead, their thinking is influenced by predictable cognitive biases that affect perception, risk assessment and judgment. By understanding these biases, negotiators can communicate in ways that align with natural human decision-making patterns, reduce resistance and guide subjects toward safer outcomes. When applied ethically, this knowledge allows negotiators to restore perspective, reinforce autonomy and create pathways to voluntary compliance rather than coercion.



FIGURE 1: EXAMPLES OF COGNITIVE SHIFTS

SITUATION	COMMON RESPONSE *(Ineffective)*	COGNITIVE SHIFT RESPONSE *(Effective)*
Suicidal subject says, "I just want this to be over."	"You don't have to do this."	"I get that. Before you do anything, can I ask one last question?" *(This buys time and reintroduces thought.)*
Subject says, "Nobody cares about me."	"That's not true - people do care."	"You've been through a lot, and you're still here. That says something about you."
Hostage-taker says, "I'm in control here."	"You're not in control; we are."	"Right now, yes, you are in control. But rushing this could take that control away."

The following are examples of key cognitive biases and their applications in negotiations.

1. Loss aversion — The fear of losing: People feel the pain of loss about twice as strongly as the pleasure of gain. This means they are more motivated to avoid losing something than to achieve a reward.

Compliance should be framed as a way to avoid loss rather than simply gain a benefit. By helping the subject recognize what they stand to lose if they continue the crisis, the negotiator increases motivation to choose a safer path forward. Loss aversion reinforces a sense of urgency through ownership — the subject realizes they are giving up control the longer they resist.

Example:

Ineffective: "If you come out, we can talk about what's next."

Effective: "Every minute you stay inside, you're losing control of what happens next. If you come out now, you still have a say in how this ends."

2. The Anchoring Effect — First impressions stick: People rely heavily on the first piece of information they receive, the "anchor." It shapes every subsequent decision and perception.

Set a positive negotiation frame early. Use favorable, safe language before introducing difficult topics. The initial tone you establish becomes the lens through which all subsequent dialogue is interpreted. Anchoring allows the negotiator to establish cooperation as the default mode.

Example:

"You and I both want this to end safely; let's figure out how we can make that happen."

3. Sunk Cost Fallacy — "I've come too far to quit" The more time, energy or emotion someone invests in a course of action, the harder it is for them to abandon it, even when it's harmful.

Reframe the subject's investment as momentum toward resolution rather than destruction. Acknowledge the effort and emotion they've already committed, then redirect that energy toward an outcome that preserves their sense of control and agency. Recognizing sunk cost allows the negotiator to transform the subject's stubbornness into motivation for positive follow-through.

Example:

Ineffective: "You don't have to do this."

Effective: "You've already made a huge decision by talking to me. That tells me a part of you still wants to find a way through this."

4. Confirmation bias — Hearing only what supports my beliefs. People seek and interpret information that confirms what they already believe while ignoring evidence that challenges it. This bias highlights why respectful alignment is more effective than argument agreement that feels internally authentic.

Frame options so that cooperation feels consistent with the subject's identity and values. Make surrender feel like their idea, not yours.

> "A cognitive shift must never be used to trick or corner a subject. The goal is not compliance through confusion, but clarity through reflection."

Example:

Ineffective: "You need to surrender for your own safety."

Effective: "You're the kind of guy who takes care of business and doesn't let others decide things for you. That's why I want you to be the one to decide how this ends."

5. Reciprocity — "You owe me one": When people receive something — even something small — they feel an internal obligation to give something back.

Use small gestures of goodwill or empathy to establish a social contract of fairness. Then, ask for something meaningful in return. Reciprocity is powerful because it feels mutual rather than imposed. The subject experiences compliance as an act of integrity.

Example:

"You've shown me some trust by talking. Can I ask you to show a little more by putting the gun down while we figure this out?"

6. The Availability Heuristic — What's most vivid feels most real: People overestimate the likelihood of events that are vivid, emotional or easily recalled, especially recent or dramatic examples. By anchoring on a positive mental image, negotiators help the subject visualize a resolution rather than a catastrophe.

Paint vivid mental pictures of safe outcomes. Help the subject imagine what success feels like, what waking up tomorrow, seeing their family again or walking out alive looks like.

Example:

"I've worked with others in your situation, and I've seen them walk away stronger. I know it might not feel like it now, but people have found a way through worse."

7. Illusion of control — "I need to feel in charge": People are more likely to cooperate when they believe they are making the choice — even if that choice is framed by someone else. Every time a subject chooses something, even something small, they regain a sense of dignity and control.

Offer choices that allow the subject to feel empowered, while subtly guiding them toward the desired outcome.

Example:

Ineffective: "Put the gun down now!"

Effective: "Would you rather talk with me here or over at the hospital, where we will both be more comfortable?"

Ethical caution

Bias-based persuasion is powerful and potentially dangerous. The ethical negotiator's duty is to influence without exploitation.

Biases should be used to restore rational thought and emotional control, not to coerce. Always ask:

- Does this increase trust?
- Does it preserve autonomy?
- Would I be comfortable hearing this recording in court?

Part two of this article will be published in the next edition and examines how crisis negotiators can recognize and counter manipulative tactics used by subjects, maintaining control, credibility and emotional stability under pressure. It outlines practical strategies to deflect common psychological ploys while reinforcing structure, professionalism and purposeful dialogue. The article also explores the ethical use of hope and fear as balanced tools to guide behavior, de-escalate crises and influence safer outcomes.

Follow this link for Negotiator Tips:
https://ntoa.org/pdf/NegotiatorTips.pdf

Recommended Reading

Ariely, D. (2009). Predictably Irrational.

Cialdini, R. (2006). Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion.

Duhigg, C. (2012). The Power of Habit.

Ekman, P. (2009). Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage.

Gladwell, M. (2005). Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking.

Greene, R. (1998). The 48 Laws of Power.

Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2007). Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die.

Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow.

Lieberman, M. D. (2013). Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect.

Pink, D. H. (2014). To Sell Is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others.

About the author

Deb McMahon is a retired special agent with the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division and a nationally recognized crisis negotiation trainer. She develops and facilitates crisis negotiation challenges across the United States and has authored and presented more than 1,100 hours of curriculum. She is the senior editor and co-author of *Into the Chaos and Into the Chaos 2.0.* Most recently, she is an inaugural member of NTOA's National Negotiator BASE.

"Bias-based persuasion is powerful and potentially dangerous. The ethical negotiator's duty is to influence without exploitation. Biases should be used to restore rational thought and emotional control, not to coerce."

ARC RAIL SYSTEM
(SHOWN WITH RAILINK® POWER AND DATA SYSTEM)

TESTED TO NIJ IIIA/HG2 STANDARDS



HEAD-LOC® FLEX RETENTION SYSTEM

LOCKDOWN® LINER + OCC-DIAL® ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM

THE NEW STANDARD IS KNOCKING

PREPARE FOR ANYTHING WITH THE FAST® XP HELMET SYSTEM.

It's time for next-level protection for your team. The newly redesigned Ops-Core® Helmet System was born for the battlefield but bred specifically for law enforcement. It's fit for any operator and any operation with all-day comfort, a lightweight design, and the most modular system available. Tested to NIJ IIIA/HG2 standards, elite protection is now available for all law enforcement.

ops-core®

MEET FAST XP
GENTEXCORP.COM/FAST-XP

Copyright © 2026 Gentex Corporation



An officer with the Moberly/ Randolph County Joint SWAT team turns into the target while performing the clock drill. Notice how he first turns his head to find the target and then will turn and engage.

THE CLOCK DRILL:

TRACKING TIME – WHY SECONDS COUNT, AND SO DO TENTHS AND HUNDREDTHS

BY ADAM SWON



> “Even small gains in shot-to-shot splits put us in a much better position in an actual lethal force situation.”

Mike Williams of Intrepid Defense demonstrates the Clock Drill from a compressed position. In this position he will turn towards the target, acquire it visually then engage with the sights tracking to where his eyes are fixed on target.

This is first in a three-part series focused on drills to improve your department members' shooting ability.

Departments have a duty to provide realistic firearms training that doesn't just check boxes. However, providing that training can be challenging due to a lack of funding, time and range environment. Firearms instructors sometimes struggle to get the most out of our limited time and budgets, so simple drills that teach multiple lessons are important. The Clock Drill (aka: ups) is one such drill that is widely shared and utilized. It is simple and has almost infinite variations. For years I used it as a warmup for both patrol and SWAT units alike. Recently, I realized it had much more to offer and now see it as a great tool to teach and track progress. Tracking progress is important for developing and evaluating your training programs and showing officers how training benefits them.

Running a Clock Drill

In the Clock Drill, the shooter starts standing, facing a 5x7 inch target at about 7 meters, or what we commonly refer to as gun fight distance. The distance from the driver's door of your patrol car to the driver's door of a suspect's vehicle is another way to look at it. Most police shootings occur within the 7-to-10-meter range. It makes sense to concentrate much of our training there.

The drill is simple: The shooter stands at the 7-meter line facing a single target. At the signal, the shooter engages the target with three rounds. This can be with a rifle or pistol. Run the shooter through a series of “ready” positions, eventually repositioning to face left, right and away like the numbers on a clock (hence the clock name) and continue or repeat the drill.

What I learned is most shooters have a shot-to-shot split time between .25 and .30 seconds once on target. SWAT officers can run as quickly as .15 seconds per shot. Some are faster, some slower.

The split times stay pretty much the same at around .25 seconds per round fired shot to shot. Although the skill of mounting and firing the weapon (long gun) is important to the drill, it is those shot-to-shot split times where we can really gain ground.

Bigger picture

So, what does this drill have to do with the bigger picture and how can we learn the lessons it can teach? First, create a

test format. In the Clock Drill that is simple. Follow a written set of instructions and record the results. Firearms trainers can control three factors of a drill: time, target size and distance. In my version of the Clock Drill the target size is a USPCA A zone or 5x7 inch box. You can also use 8x11-inch paper if that is what you have, so long as the distance is consistent. The time it takes to complete the drill is the result we want to record.

I encourage you to not only record the time to first shot but the shot-to-shot split times as well. This data can show over time whether an officer is improving and by how much. It also gives you a good indication of where an officer might need more focused work. Officers should try to be as consistent as possible in their starting positions. Law enforcement officers are known for being extremely competitive, and they may try to game the data if you let them.

Below is an example of what the drill looks like with a rifle. With a pistol you may work in a tactical or slide lock reload after every five drills (15 rounds).



An officer with the Moberly/Randolph County Joint SWAT team begins this stage of the Clock Drill turned away from the target. He will acquire the target visually by turning towards it, tracking it visually then engaging it.

Instructor command examples

Shooter will:

- Fire three rounds from low ready
- Fire three rounds from high ready
- Fire three rounds from port
- Fire three rounds from compressed underarm position
- Fire three rounds from compressed over-the-shoulder position
- Fire three rounds from compressed outside the bicep
- Face 90 degrees left turn and fire three rounds
- Face 90 degrees right turn and fire three rounds
- Turn 180 degrees from the target, turn and fire three rounds
- From low ready facing the target, fire one round, transition to pistol, shoot one round, then reload rifle to a new 29-round mag

For 29 rounds total (the drill is now reset if you want to continue to run it)

The data is how we judge progress. Although the overall time is important, the real info is in the way we look at that split number. If you consider that each split is a shot either outgoing or incoming, it becomes something to really dig into. I now refer to that as my shot advantage or disadvantage. For every .25 seconds we save or waste is a shot for or against us.

Reports from the New York and Los Angeles police departments and the FBI state that most police lethal force encounters are settled in about seven rounds of pistol fire or just under three rounds of rifle fire. Using the shot-to-shot split time of .25 means we successfully engage and stop our threat in about three seconds per encounter (seven shots plus draw time). Cutting a split time only .08 seconds per shot moves us up one shot per encounter per three-shot string. Statistics also support that the first effective shot on target in a fight is the most likely to win. So even small gains in shot-to-shot splits put us in a much better position in an actual lethal force situation. Slow split times can be caused by a multitude of reasons. Poor grip is one to look out for.

So how do we chase the speed we need with the accuracy that's also important? How do we create

FAS G4

Modular Low-Profile Carrier System



Modular in design and functionality, the FAS G4 low-profile carrier system is available in different configurations for multiple mission sets. Scale down from a Tactical vest to a concealable, or scale up from a Plate Rack to a Plate Carrier. The FAS G4 provides the flexibility to meet your needs no matter the situation.

Point Blank BODY ARMOR

Wear It For LIFE

1-800-413-5155

pointblankenterprises.com/fasg4

an advantage while still being responsible for every round fired? We go right back to where this article started: the Clock Drill. To judge the effectiveness of something, it must be assessed and repeated over time.

Once a baseline is established, it becomes something of a throttle control drill where officers learn exactly how fast they can run the drill and still put 100% of their rounds into the target. This is the goal of the drill. When an officer pushes past their ability to accurately engage the target, a miss may teach more than a hit. A missed shot may be recorded as a failure, but the information is still important to log. You should encourage officers to run the drill to failure or even beyond at times. If a student comfortably paces the drill and never seeks to lower their time, they are not going to get anything out of it other than being good at putting zero shots in a box in the exact time every time.

As an instructor or student, look for the *why*. Look for why something went faster than your baseline or slower or the same. "What felt different?" is a great question to ask at the end of each run. Teaching advanced shooters is not as much about teaching as it is putting them in positions where they can self-correct and feel the right from the wrong. You can use those failures to present options in technique that would benefit the student. A student struggling with recoil management or trigger control may need adjustments in their technique. Anyone can be fast for a single round, but grip shows itself on the follow up rounds. The Clock Drill allows you as the instructor to subjectively test officers' skills and improvement over time.

One last thing

In this article we discussed the .25-second split time. Interestingly, another place where we see the .25 second time pop up is the average human reaction time to a stimulus. That's typically around 0.25 seconds for visual stimuli, 0.17 seconds for auditory stimuli and 0.15 seconds for touch stimuli. These times can vary based on several factors including the type of stimulus, individual physical and psychological conditions, and level of training. This means we react faster to the beep of a timer than the visual cue of a gun being drawn. True reaction to a threat will be slower than .25 seconds, as we must still orientate, decide and act in the lethal force encounter. Some firearms drills should be done via visual stimulus if you have access to turning targets or even by using a laser pointer as the "threat" stimulus.

Photos courtesy of Bill Phillips Photography

About the author

Officer Adam Swon recently retired from the Moberly (MO) Police Department having served 27 years. During that time, he was involved in Special Operations since 1995 in a variety of roles. He has been a firearms and tactics instructor including specialty instructor for precision rifle. He was a firearms instructor for the Law Enforcement Training Institute at the University of Missouri. He has been published on the topics of tactical training, school violence and physical fitness for police. He also works as a professional MMA judge through the state of Missouri.

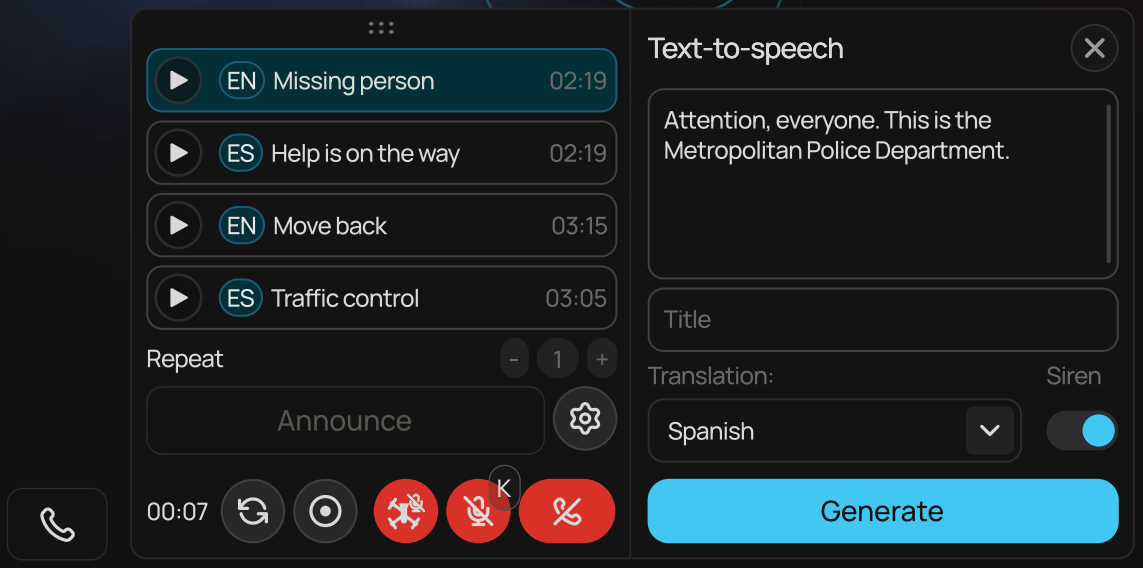
"The Clock Drill allows you as the instructor to subjectively test officers' skills and improvement over time."



An officer with the Moberly/Randolph County Joint SWAT team begins this stage of the Clock Drill turned away from the target. He will acquire the target visually by turning toward it, tracking it visually, then engaging it.

brinc





Text-to-speech announcements from your drone

The Only Drone That Speaks Your Language

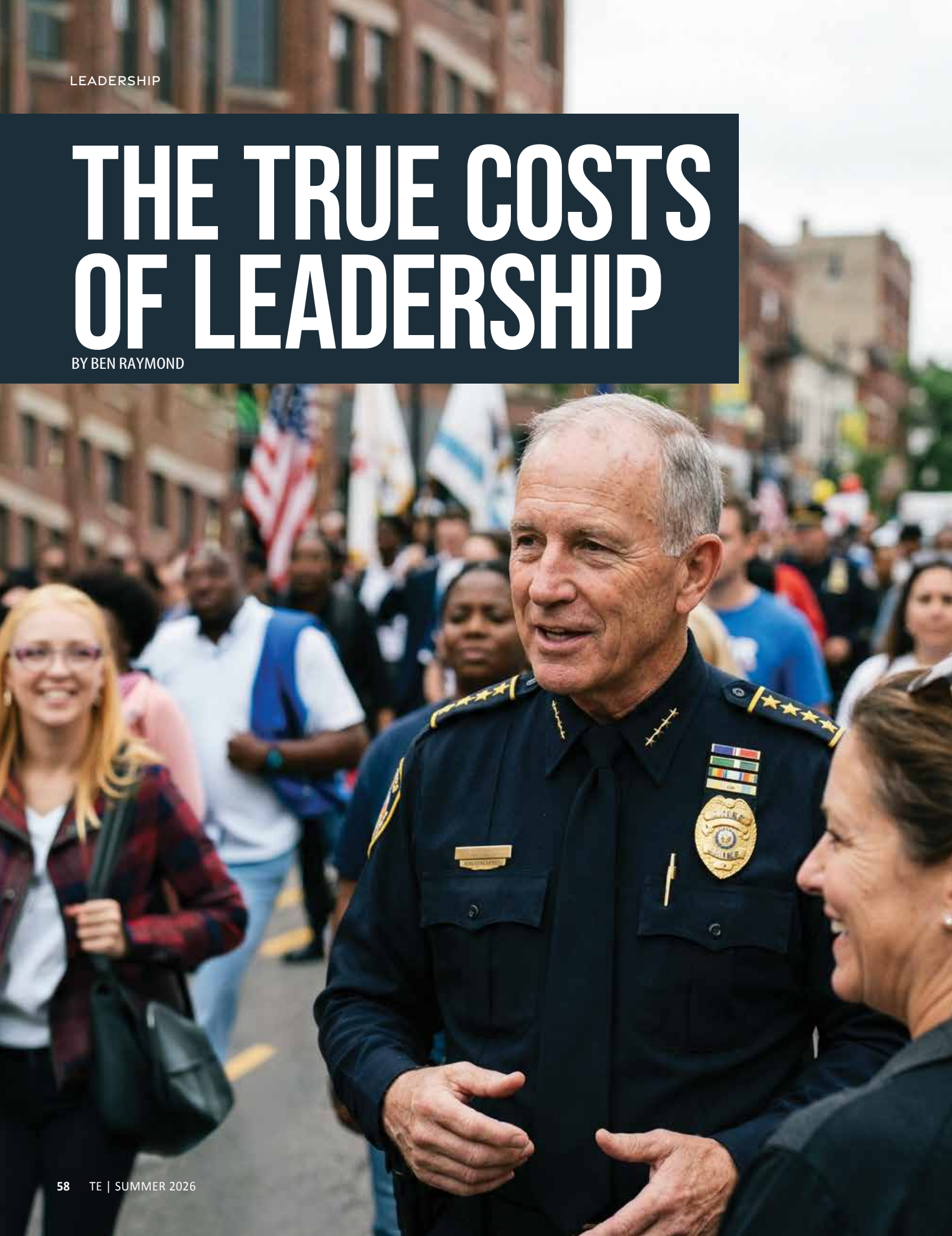
Generic drones observe. **BRINC drones communicate.** As the only drone with real integrated two-way audio, the Responder doesn't just show you the scene — it gives you control. **De-escalate** suspects. Make announcements. **Coordinate** response teams. All before officers arrive on scene.

brincdrones.com

MANUFACTURED ★ IN USA ★

THE TRUE COSTS OF LEADERSHIP

BY BEN RAYMOND



We hear it all the time: "If I were in charge of this agency, I would change x, y, z." Realistically, once someone is in a leadership role, making changes can be difficult. Until a person is leading a law enforcement agency, it's easy to criticize those on the front lines. The ideals, skills and principles taught in leadership courses often don't prepare someone for the true costs of leadership.

I have had the privilege of attending various leadership courses throughout my career, and I have learned a great deal from them. However, having served as the head of a large, mid-sized agency, nothing can prepare a person for the challenges, politics and stress of being in the "hot seat." Many agency heads leave the job under less-than-ideal circumstances, forced out due to high crime rates, a controversial use-of-force incident, a lack of political acumen, or years of stress and anxiety from managing such incidents. During the daily struggles of holding a leadership position, a person's moral integrity and principles will be tested time after time. There may even come a point when a person must choose whether to step away from the position, be forced out, or change their values and morals to maintain their role.

Early in my career, three officers were involved in a high-profile use-of-force incident involving a suspect who pointed what appeared to be a handgun at them following a police pursuit. The officers responded using deadly force in what became a nationally debated case. Our chief of police stood behind the officers from early in the investigative process and told the media and others that, based on the investigation, the officers acted appropriately and according to their training. We were proud of our chief for supporting the officers, who responded to what appeared to be a valid lethal threat, well within the guidelines set by *Graham v Connor*. However, in the eyes of some local and national politicians, the chief's early support implied that he was biased and racist. Ultimately, he was asked by the mayor to resign from his position. This was done even though the officers were vindicated, and the incident has become a case study in use-of-force classes in the state of Louisiana.

I remember being upset, even as a young officer, that a police chief who supported his officers when they responded appropriately and stood his ground against unwarranted calls for the officers' indictment and removal from the force, was essentially being terminated because of politics. Twenty years later, I experienced a similar fate. Unfortunately, standing on morals and principles can sometimes put one at odds with the political climate, and could result in an abrupt end to a lifelong career of service. Having a good grasp of the political climate within your locality is essential to success, and observing what your predecessors have endured can be indicative of what you can expect during your tenure.

With the exception of those elected to agency head positions, most chiefs lack autonomy in decision-making. Some serve in mayoral-strong governments, and the mayor has the legal authority to influence and even override decisions made by the chief of police. Others may answer to a city manager or a city council form of government, who also have the legal ability to overrule a chief's authority. Most agency heads in larger municipalities answer to others and, therefore, are not able to make decisions without input and buy-in from people who may not share the same values and most likely do not have experience working in law enforcement. Much like the relationship officers had with their superiors when they rose through the ranks, chiefs can disagree with the mayor, manager or city council, but ultimately may be forced to go along with decisions with which they do not agree. Pick your battles, but always know where to draw the hard line.

Before stepping into the role of agency head, one needs to be comfortable with their beliefs and values and have clear boundaries they refuse to cross. To be successful, if one has a "my way or the highway" mentality, then one may want to reconsider taking on such a role. Similarly, a person needs to be grounded enough in his belief system to be willing to walk away if superiors try to force him into illegal, immoral or unethical decisions. Remember, as chief of police, you will be blamed for those decisions, regardless of whether the mayor, manager or council forced your hand. Politics can be a dirty playing field, and there are "no-win"

"THE IDEALS, SKILLS AND PRINCIPLES TAUGHT IN LEADERSHIP COURSES OFTEN DON'T PREPARE SOMEONE FOR THE TRUE COSTS OF LEADERSHIP."

situations in some cases. If you find yourself in a scenario of this magnitude, be willing to tell your boss that you cannot, or will not, go along with their instruction and be willing to step away.

Another unfortunate reality of competitive promotions is that those not selected for the position may become jealous and even feel the process was not "fair." It is entirely possible the process was not "fair" because appointments to leadership positions can be politically motivated, and in most instances, politics does play a key role. My dad told me years ago, "Life is not fair, get used to it." It does not make things easier, but it does help to know that when a person is passed over for a leadership position, it does not mean he or she was not qualified or even not the best candidate.

If you have been selected over others for a competitive position, expect to face some resentment. In some instances, leaders may lose "friendships" simply because of their new title. Such resentment may also lead to false rumors and accusations being spread about you. The best way to handle these attacks is to always hold yourself accountable and ensure your professional and personal life are indicative of the morals, values and standards you proclaim to have. Every leader professes to have high moral and ethical standards and to lead with integrity. Unfortunately, not all leaders truly embody these principles, so it is incumbent upon you to practice what you preach.

Many of the stressors leaders face in their professional lives will follow them home at the end of the day. The unfortunate reality of leading an organization is that one is never "off duty." The emails will still come, the phone will still ring, and the leader will be held responsible for what occurs within his agency 24/7. If one is fortunate enough to have a good command staff, then there may be an opportunity to unplug from time to time. However, the leader still will be responsible for the outcomes.

Remember, one can delegate authority but not responsibility. During my tenure as chief of police, I found a few hours on a Sunday afternoon to do some fishing. Later that evening, I posted a photo of the trip on a personal social media account. During the afternoon fishing trip, there was a shooting that occurred within my municipality. I had several comments that "it must be nice for the chief to have time to go fishing while his officers are out working violent crimes," or something to that effect. Taking time off to re-energize is important, as is not neglecting family life, but do not expect the public or your bosses to recognize you are off duty, on vacation or otherwise "out of the office" when something needs to be done.

Lastly, a core principle of any leadership course is to appoint good people to key command positions within your organization to help you lead. Realistically, many agencies are bound by civil service rules or other policies and politics that prevent an agency head from truly hand-picking his or her team. Recognize these shortfalls before accepting the role and know that in many cases a leader may be stuck with those promoted through a tenure-based process, or with those the mayor, council or manager wants — not necessarily a good leader or team player with quality skills, morals and ethics.

In closing, attend as many leadership courses as you can. Additionally, read all the books and articles on the subject you can find, and develop your skills in preparation for future opportunities. Do not limit yourself to the law enforcement field; there are many great leaders in other areas, and it is helpful to be well-rounded. The principles that will be discussed, opportunities to learn more about individual personalities, how to lead different types of people, the development of emotional intelligence, and all the other information one may glean from such courses and books are important for developing effective leaders.

> "WE DO NOT LIVE IN A PERFECT WORLD, AND UNTIL YOU ARE THRUST INTO THE HARSH REALITIES OF LEADERSHIP, YOU WILL NOT TRULY GRASP THE DIFFICULTIES."

Just remember, we do not live in a perfect world, and until you are thrust into the harsh realities of leadership, you will not truly grasp the difficulties. Additionally, each person's experience will differ, often due to factors beyond the leader's control. Some will step away with a sense of accomplishment and gratitude for the opportunity to lead, while others will leave the agency frustrated, stressed and angry. No, life is not "fair," but that does not excuse a leader from doing their best regardless of the situation. We need quality leadership in law enforcement now more than ever, and I hope this article has helped highlight a few of the "true costs of leadership" without deterring your desire to lead.

About the author

Ben Raymond is a 25-year veteran with the Shreveport (LA) Police Department, currently assigned as an instructor at the Shreveport Police Regional Training Academy, where he instructs cadets and in-service personnel in areas which include firearms, defensive tactics, use of force and legal updates. He served as the chief of police for the Shreveport Police Department for three years (2018-2021). Prior to that role, his career included assignments to patrol, narcotics investigations, SWAT and as the chief administrative assistant. The bulk of his career (14 years) was spent working narcotics and as an operator, sniper and ultimately a team leader and training coordinator for the Special Response Team.

Raymond is a past-president of the Louisiana Tactical Police Officers' Association (2016-2018). He has instructor certifications in several disciplines, but his passion lies in shooting and tactics. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice from Northeast Louisiana University, where he graduated summa cum laude in 1999.

NEW FAMILY OF SHIELDS

TYR TACTICAL®

BALLISTIC PERFORMANCE TESTING STANDARD

LEVEL IIIA, LEVEL III, & LEVEL III+

NFS VIEWPORT

- Available in 4 sizes

LEVEL IIIA, LEVEL III, & LEVEL III+
ASTM E3141 – HG2, RF1, RF2

NFS NON-VIEWPORT

- Available in 6 sizes

FEATURES:

- Lightweight *(20 x 31" Level III non-viewport - 12 lbs.)*
- Lateral wings with an integrated weapon rest
- Patented Ballistic Ridge®
- Padded forearm rest
- Adjustable forearm strap
- Ergonomic molded grip handle
- Reinforced corner bumps
- Protective Carry Bag



INNOVATE OR DIE®

WWW.TYRTACTICAL.COM

Qualified Immunity and Tactical Operations:

BRISCOE V. ST. LOUIS COUNTY

BY ERIC DAIGLE

In *Briscoe v. St. Louis County*,[1] the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit addressed the constitutional limits on SWAT tactics and deployments when officers mistakenly raid a home occupied by innocent residents.

While leaving Waffle House, two teenagers were ordered to exit their black Dodge Charger at gunpoint. After the teens complied, the carjackers drove off in the Charger. In the moments that followed, four other individuals arrived with the carjackers in a separate Kia and Chevrolet, and all three cars drove away together. St. Louis County police responded to the incident, and during their investigation, the victims' friend informed officers that his AirPods were in the back seat of the stolen Charger. Utilizing the "Find My" application, the AirPods were electronically tracked and located at 1022 Wylin Court.

After initiating surveillance, officers located the stolen Dodge, which was occupied by a driver and four passengers. The driver fled an attempted stop at high speeds, initiating a pursuit. The pursuit ended when two males and two females abandoned the vehicle and fled on foot. The females were immediately taken into custody. Officers chased the males and noticed two pistols with drum magazines and a satchel with the victims' property along the chase. The males were ultimately taken into custody. In an interview, one of the females stated that she arrived at the Waffle House in the Kia with a male in a red sweatshirt and a male in a blue sweatshirt.

After leaving, the group met at a gas station to dispose of the victims' backpacks in the trash. At the gas station, detectives recovered three backpacks with the victims' property. Video surveillance footage showed all three cars arriving and departing in tandem. The vehicles were last seen leaving northbound on South Florissant Road, toward Woodstock Road, an intersection close to Wylin Court. At this point, Detective Joseph Percich applied for a no-knock search warrant based on that information, given that the AirPods were still located at 1022 Wylin Court. The warrant was granted and authorized a search for stolen property, firearms and other evidence associated with the carjacking.

A tactical team executed the warrant using a SWAT-style entry with a battering ram to break through the front door. Brittany Arlesia was in the house with three of her children. When the officers broke through the door, they aimed their guns at her, and she informed them that there was a 3-month-old baby in the house. Lindell Briscoe and their other two minor children were in a truck outside the home. Officers pointed their guns at him and demanded that he and the children exit the truck. The whole family was detained in handcuffs for about 30 minutes while officers conducted a residential search. During the search, officers left the house in disarray and punched a large hole in the bedroom drywall. The AirPods were eventually found in the street outside the house. The officers concluded that the family were not connected to the Waffle House carjacking.

The plaintiffs sued St. Louis County and Percich under §1983, alleging six claims, including a Franks claim, an unconstitutional SWAT raid policy and a Missouri Sunshine Law claim. St. Louis County and Percich moved to dismiss all the claims. The district court granted the motion, finding that Percich was entitled to qualified immunity for the unreasonable use-of-force claim and that the unreasonable seizure claim failed to state a claim for relief. The Briscoes appealed, seeking review by the Eighth Circuit.

When the case reached the Eighth Circuit, the court first analyzed the Franks claim, concluding that the warrant was valid and supported by probable cause. Accordingly, the unreasonable use-of-force claim based on the use of a SWAT team examined whether calling in SWAT to execute the warrant made the search objectively unreasonable. The court then applied the *Graham v. Connor* framework, which governs excessive force claims by a standard of objective reasonableness. This requires considering the totality of the circumstances from the perspective of a reasonable officer. The court emphasized that a public official may not be held liable for constitutional violations under qualified immunity, which shields government officials from lawsuits unless they violate "clearly established" constitutional rights that any reasonable officer would know at the time of the incident. Although "[a]n officer's decision to authorize a SWAT team to execute a warrant can…constitute a Fourth Amendment violation" in some cases, the court ultimately found that Percich was entitled to qualified immunity. Here, his affidavit complied with constitutional requirements, and a neutral judge issued the no-knock warrant. Both Percich and the judge believed that the residence was tied to an armed carjacking and robbery and that the suspects used firearms with at least one being equipped with a drum magazine. Moreover, the suspects had already demonstrated that they were armed, dangerous and unwilling to comply with law enforcement. Therefore, the court concluded that it was not unreasonable to use a SWAT team to execute the warrant to protect officers from harm.

The court then addressed the excessive force claim based on the SWAT team's conduct. The court cited their past precedent in *Z.J.* by and through *Jones v. Kansas City Board of Police Commissioners*. In that case, there was no evidence that suggested a detective who authorized a SWAT team to execute a search warrant directed the SWAT team on what to do or how much force the SWAT team used. Thus, the court held an official can only be held liable for their own misconduct under §1983. However, the court concluded that a detective who authorized a SWAT team to execute a search warrant could violate the Fourth Amendment only if their "own actions were directly responsible for a deprivation of the plaintiff's rights." Here, Percich's affidavit only requested and obtained authorization for a no-knock warrant. There is no evidence that he directed the SWAT team to allegedly use excessive force. Further, the Briscoes could not prove that Percich was responsible for the tactical decisions made during the raid. There was no factual proof to prove their allegations. Accordingly, the court concluded that allegations alone were insufficient to state a claim for relief and affirmed the district court's dismissal of the claim.

Finally, the court turned to the Briscoes' claim alleging unreasonable seizure, arising out of the investigation into the carjacking, headed by Percich. Since the court had already concluded that Percich could not be held directly liable for the SWAT team's actions, he could also not be held liable for their decision to seize the Briscoes. The court also concluded that even if he could be held liable, the Briscoes were not unconstitutionally seized.

In *Michigan v. Summers*, the Eighth Circuit held the Fourth Amendment allows officers to detain the occupants of a premise while executing "a warrant to search for contraband founded on probable cause." Since the SWAT team was executing a valid search warrant, the seizure was not unconstitutional. Moreover, there was no other evidence that the Briscoes were handcuffed for an unreasonably prolonged time beyond what was needed for the SWAT team to execute the warrant. Therefore, the court concluded that the Briscoes were not unreasonably seized. Ultimately, the court affirmed the district court's dismissal of all claims.

In Briscoe v. St. Louis County, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit addressed the constitutional limits on SWAT tactics and deployments when officers mistakenly raid a home occupied by innocent residents.

Takeaways

As the Eighth Circuit illustrated in this case, SWAT deployment must be based on the specific risks known to officers at the time, not judged solely by the outcome of the search. Here, the court found the tactical response reasonable where officers were investigating an armed carjacking involving firearms, a drum magazine, a high-speed pursuit, flight from police and an unidentified suspect still at large. As the court reiterated, "the suspects involved in the carjacking had already demonstrated that they were armed, dangerous, and unwilling to comply with law enforcement. Thus, it was reasonable to employ a SWAT team to execute the search warrant as a safety precaution for officers."

Briscoe emphasizes that officers should use SWAT deployment and tactics when a warrant supports concrete safety concerns tied to the underlying crime and known risks. It emphasizes the importance of clear, contemporaneous documentation supporting all decisions and actions. Officers should record why a no-knock entry was chosen, what was done to secure occupants, and how long and under what conditions they were detained. Solid documentation and recorded reasoning to support the operation are critical if later scrutinized in litigation.

Endnote

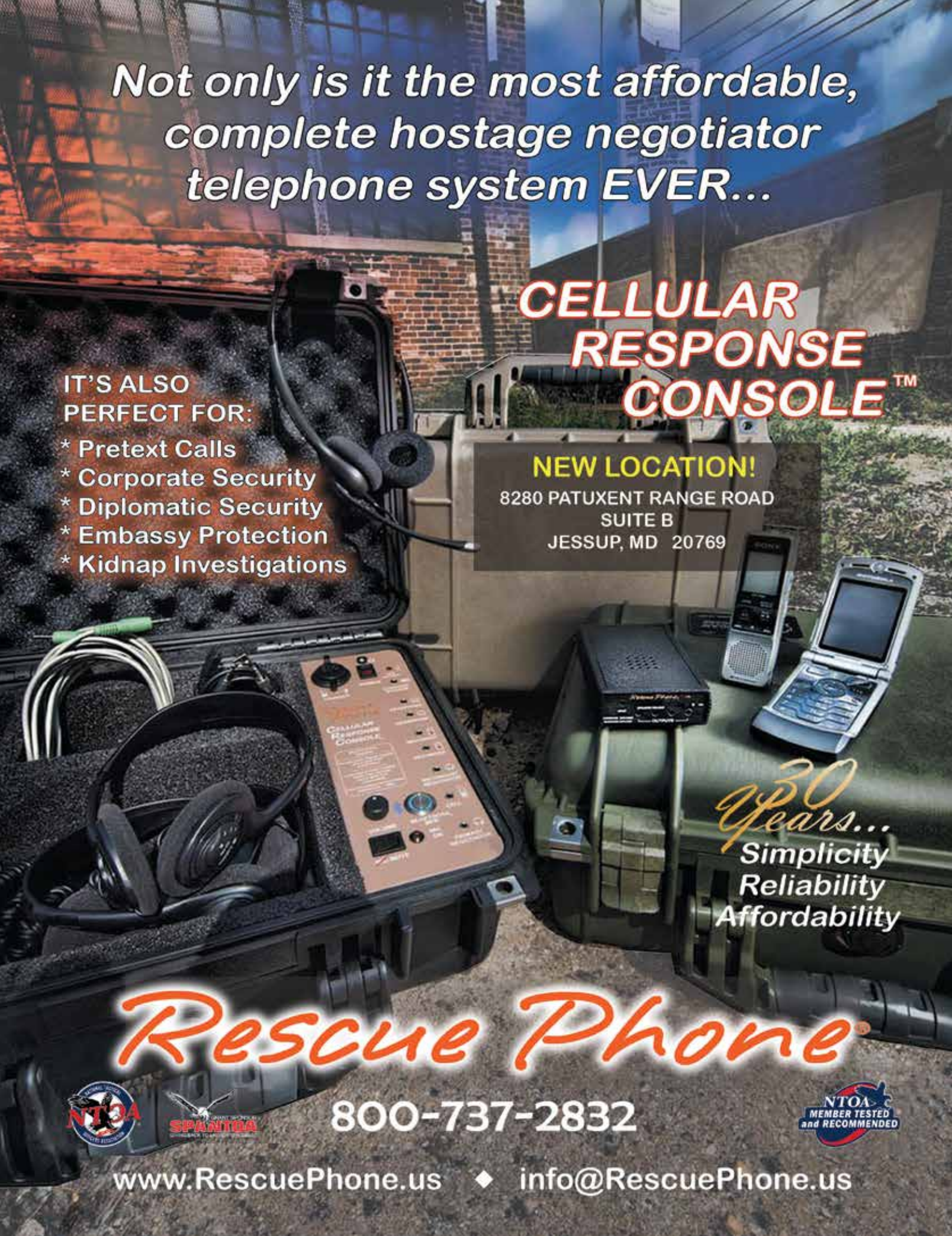
1. Briscoe v. St. Louis County, No. 25-1668 (8th Cir. 2026)

About the author

Eric P. Daigle Esq. practices civil litigation in federal and state courts, with an emphasis on defending municipalities and public officials. He acts as legal adviser and consultant to police departments across the country. Daigle is the Legal Section Chair for the NTOA.

Briscoe emphasizes that officers should use SWAT deployment and tactics when a warrant supports concrete safety concerns tied to the underlying crime and known risks.




Not only is it the most affordable, complete hostage negotiator telephone system EVER...
CELLULAR RESPONSE CONSOLE™
IT'S ALSO PERFECT FOR:
* Pretext Calls
* Corporate Security
* Diplomatic Security
* Embassy Protection
* Kidnap Investigations
NEW LOCATION!
8280 PATUXENT RANGE ROAD
SUITE B
JESSUP, MD 20769
30 Years...
Simplicity
Reliability
Affordability
Rescue Phone®
800-737-2832
NTOA MEMBER TESTED and RECOMMENDED
www.RescuePhone.us ◆ info@RescuePhone.us



> “IN EMERGENCY AND TACTICAL MEDICINE, THE POTENTIAL FOR AI TO AUGMENT HUMAN PERFORMANCE IS PARTICULARLY COMPELLING.”

THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENHANCING MEDICAL OPERATIONS

FOR **SWAT** AND **HIGH-RISK** MISSIONS

BY STEPHEN WOOD

Introduction

Artificial intelligence has transformative capability across sectors requiring rapid, high-stakes decision-making under conditions of information uncertainty. In emergency and tactical medicine, where clinicians operate under extreme time pressure, with limited personnel, in degraded communication environments and amid dynamic threat conditions, the potential for AI to augment human performance is particularly compelling. Law enforcement special operations — including SWAT activations, barricaded subject incidents, hostage rescue and mass casualty events — present a unique operational medicine challenge: Skilled providers must deliver care at or near the point of injury, often without immediate evacuation options, specialist support or the diagnostic infrastructure available in hospital settings.

Traditional approaches to tactical medical care have relied on training, protocol memorization and provider experience under stress. While these remain foundational, cognitive performance degrades under sustained operational pressure, and critical interventions can be delayed or omitted. Machine learning (ML), large language models (LLMs), and AI-assisted sensor systems offer the potential to provide real-time decision support, automate documentation, optimize resource allocation and predict clinical deterioration in ways that were previously unachievable in austere settings.

> “Machine learning, large language models and AI-assisted sensor systems offer the potential to provide real-time decision support in ways that were previously unachievable in austere settings.”

It is important to note at the outset that the peer-reviewed literature directly evaluating AI in SWAT or civilian law enforcement tactical medicine remains nascent. The foundational science reviewed here draws primarily from military trauma medicine — specifically from the Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) framework developed by the U.S. Department of Defense — and from civilian prehospital EMS research. Of relevance to law enforcement and TEMS environments is the Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC) framework, which adapts TCCC principles for civilian tactical settings, including active threat and mass casualty scenarios involving law enforcement.

TECC is the predominant training standard for civilian tactical medical providers in the United States, and its three-phase structure — direct threat care, indirect threat care and evacuation care — maps directly onto the operational environments that SWAT medics and tactical emergency medical support (TEMS) providers encounter. The extrapolation of AI evidence from military TCCC contexts to civilian SWAT settings is therefore scientifically reasonable, with TECC serving as the bridging framework. Nonetheless, dedicated research in the SWAT context is a recognized and important gap that should motivate future investigation.

AI technologies in high-risk medical operations

Clinical decision support systems. AI-driven clinical decision support systems (CDSS) can process physiological data in real time and provide evidence-based recommendations to providers who may not have subspecialty training. In military settings, this need is acute: Non-physician medics and soldiers frequently deliver prolonged field care to critically injured casualties in environments where physician consultation is unavailable. The same challenge confronts civilian TEMS providers, who often operate without physician oversight, under threat conditions, and with the added complexity of managing bystander civilians and law enforcement personnel with varied degrees of medical training.

Researchers at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) have developed a proof-of-concept conversational AI agent — the Clinical Practice Guideline-driven AI (CPG-AI) — built on a large language model architecture.[1] The system ingests more than 30 clinical practice guidelines from the Department of Defense Joint Trauma System, including TCCC protocols for common battlefield injuries, and provides plain-language guidance to non-specialist providers at the point of care. The prototype demonstrates the ability to infer patient condition from conversational input, answer provider questions without medical jargon, and guide users through tactical field care algorithms in real time. CPG-AI is explicitly described by its developers as a proof-of-concept rather than a field-ready system, and it has not yet undergone prospective clinical validation — a necessary step before operational deployment.

> **“Triage accuracy is among the most consequential decisions in tactical medicine, and it is the most studied AI application in prehospital care.”**

A more extensively validated approach to CDSS in tactical settings is the machine learning-based decision support system developed specifically for TCCC environments, which uses ML models trained on intensive care unit data to detect and differentiate shock, achieving an accuracy exceeding 83% in prospective external validation.[2,3]

Designed for tablet or phone deployment in resource-limited prehospital settings, this system was developed through iterative input from 17 Army, Air Force and Navy medical subject-matter experts, lending it operational grounding that purely academic systems sometimes lack.[2]

AI-enhanced triage. Triage accuracy is among the most consequential decisions in tactical medicine, and it is the most studied AI application in prehospital care. A 2023 scoping review of 106 studies across AI applications in prehospital emergency care found that triage and prognostication represented the largest category of applications, accounting for nearly half of all published work, and that AI outperformed clinicians and conventional algorithms in the majority of comparative studies.[4] The review also noted that most studies were retrospective and internally validated, highlighting the need for rigorous prospective validation before these tools can be responsibly deployed in dynamic, real-world environments.

In the trauma and combat casualty context, the most scientifically mature AI triage system to date is APPRAISE-HRI (Automated Processing of the Physiological Registry for Assessment of Injury Severity — Hemorrhage Risk Index). The underlying algorithm, developed by researchers at the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command, uses three routinely measured vital signs — heart rate and diastolic and systolic blood pressure — to stratify trauma patients into low, average and high hemorrhage risk categories. In the original validation study, which used 540 hours of continuous vital sign data from 1,659 trauma patients across prehospital and emergency department settings, patients classified as high risk were more than five times as likely to have hemorrhage as those in the average trauma population.[5] The system subsequently received FDA 510(k) clearance as a Software as a Medical Device following an independent prospective-retrospective validation across approximately 6,000 patients at nine medical centers, becoming the first AI-powered software cleared by the FDA specifically for assessing hemorrhage risk in trauma patients.[6]

Although developed in military and hospital trauma contexts, APPRAISE-HRI's reliance on readily available vital signs makes it a plausible candidate for adaptation in law enforcement medical settings.

A complementary development involves the proposed architecture for AI-enabled triage platforms that would integrate live biometric data from military-grade wearable sensors and apply AI-enhanced decision engines to generate real-time, color-coded casualty categorization under multiple established protocols including MARCH, START and SALT.[7] It bears noting that this work is a conceptual design paper describing planned capabilities; prospective evaluation of the platform's performance in operational or simulated settings has not yet been published. Notably, SALT triage shares foundational elements with the TECC framework and is routinely employed in mass casualty exercises involving law enforcement. The interoperability of this type of platform — capable of operating across different agencies' protocols — is directly relevant to the multi-agency environments common in major SWAT activations and law enforcement mass casualty responses.

Predictive analytics and physiologic monitoring. The ability to anticipate clinical deterioration before it is clinically apparent is a recognized priority in trauma care. Research supported by the Department of Defense has demonstrated that neural network-based AI models can predict vital sign trajectories in hemorrhage casualties and theoretically optimize fluid resuscitation allocation in simulated mass casualty scenarios, with modeled results suggesting meaningful improvements in the proportion of casualties restored to physiologically stable vital signs under AI-guided versus protocol-guided allocation strategies.[8] These findings are based on synthetic data generated from computational modeling and must be interpreted accordingly; prospective validation in operational settings remains necessary.

Wearable biosensor integration represents a parallel line of development with strong relevance to SWAT medicine. Continuous passive monitoring of heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen saturation can feed machine learning models that detect patterns predictive of impending hemorrhagic shock or respiratory compromise. In prolonged field care scenarios — increasingly relevant to domestic SWAT activations involving remote locations, barricaded structures or delayed extraction, all recognized phases within the TECC Indirect Threat Care framework — this capability could provide critical early warning to a single tactical medic managing multiple casualties simultaneously.



Automated documentation and resource management. Documentation of prehospital interventions, the equivalent of a TCCC card or TECC casualty care record in law enforcement tactical settings, is a persistent source of error and cognitive burden in austere care environments. Medics managing active casualties in a threat environment cannot reliably complete paper records in real time, and retrospective documentation introduces gaps that affect downstream hospital care. The U.S. Army's Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC) is currently developing and validating AI-driven systems for autonomous documentation of TCCC interventions, using sensor arrays and machine learning to auto-populate the DD Form 1380 from passively captured procedure data.[9] This research protocol, now underway across multiple simulation sites, represents a near-term application of AI to reduce documentation burden on tactical providers without interrupting care delivery.

In the domain of resource optimization, AI systems capable of forecasting medical supply requirements based on mission profile, team configuration and anticipated casualty patterns could improve cache composition before operations and reduce critical supply shortfalls during them. Pamplin and colleagues have described a conceptual framework for AI-augmented logistics in battlefield casualty care, including automated supply tracking and predictive resupply as components of an integrated autonomous care architecture.[10] While operational implementation in law enforcement settings is not yet described in the peer-reviewed literature, the architectural principles are translatable.

Ethical considerations

The deployment of AI in high-stakes tactical medicine raises ethical concerns that must be addressed before, not after, operational implementation.

> "The deployment of AI in high-stakes tactical medicine raises ethical concerns that must be addressed before, not after, operational implementation."



Algorithmic bias is among the most significant. AI models trained on non-representative datasets can perform inequitably across demographic groups, a phenomenon with direct clinical consequences. Obermeyer and colleagues demonstrated this in a widely cited study of a commercial health algorithm, showing that Black patients were substantially sicker than white patients assigned identical risk scores — a disparity arising because the algorithm predicted healthcare costs as a proxy for illness, and structural inequities in healthcare access resulted in systematically lower spending on Black patients.[11] Cross and colleagues have further characterized how bias compounds throughout the AI development pipeline, from data labeling through model deployment, and documented its potential to perpetuate and exacerbate longstanding healthcare disparities when left unaddressed.[12] In tactical medicine, where training datasets are often derived from military or predominantly male civilian trauma populations, these risks are particularly salient for law enforcement agencies serving diverse urban communities.

Data privacy and security represent distinct and multifaceted concerns. Tactical operations involve sensitive personnel information, classified operational data and protected health information for members of the public. AI systems that collect, transmit, or store biometric and clinical data require robust cybersecurity frameworks, clear data governance policies, and explicit consideration of how data generated in tactical contexts may be accessed, stored or shared. A specific and underappreciated challenge arises from the intersection of automated data capture and public records law.

In most jurisdictions, law enforcement records, including incident documentation, body-worn camera footage and operational communications, are subject to disclosure through public information requests (PIRs) or state public records statutes, subject to enumerated exemptions. Medical care records generated in the context of a law enforcement operation occupy an ambiguous space; while protected health information (PHI) is generally shielded from compelled disclosure under HIPAA, the integration of AI documentation tools — automated scribing systems, body camera footage capturing clinical care or wearable biosensor logs — creates new evidentiary artifacts that may not be cleanly classified under existing exemption frameworks.

Agencies deploying these technologies should develop explicit, written policies that address what categories of automatically generated medical documentation are subject to PIR disclosure, how such records will be stored and accessed, what de-identification or redaction procedures apply before any potential release, and how conflicts between transparency obligations and patient privacy will be adjudicated.

Until clear policy frameworks exist, the operational deployment of AI documentation systems in law enforcement tactical medicine may expose agencies to legal liability and may inadvertently compromise the privacy of injured officers, detained individuals and civilian bystanders who receive care during SWAT operations.

Human oversight is the most fundamental requirement. AI tools in tactical medicine must augment provider decision-making, not replace it. The time-compressed, high-consequence nature of tactical care demands that providers retain situational awareness and final decision authority. Algorithmic outputs should be presented as decision-support inputs rather than directives, and the lack of transparency in complex model reasoning, the so-called "black box" problem, is a particular concern in settings where an incorrect recommendation may be irreversible.

Limitations and future directions

The available literature provides a meaningful but incomplete foundation for AI implementation in SWAT tactical medicine. Most published work comes from military trauma or civilian EMS contexts that differ from law enforcement special operations in mission type, legal framework, operational tempo, patient population and medico-legal accountability structure. The TECC framework, while providing a more proximate conceptual bridge to domestic law enforcement settings than TCCC alone, has similarly not been studied as a context for AI tool validation. Prospective, externally validated studies specifically evaluating AI applications in SWAT and TEMS settings are needed.

Collaboration between law enforcement agencies, academic medical centers and federal research sponsors, including the DoD's Combat Casualty Care Research Program and the Department of Justice, will be essential to generate the targeted evidence base required for responsible implementation. Until that evidence base exists, practitioners should approach AI tools in this context with the same critical appraisal standards applied to any emerging clinical technology.

"Artificial intelligence holds genuine and well-grounded promise for improving patient care in SWAT and high-risk tactical environments by supporting triage accuracy, clinical decision-making, physiologic monitoring and documentation efficiency."

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence holds genuine and well-grounded promise for improving patient care in SWAT and high-risk tactical environments by supporting triage accuracy, clinical decision-making, physiologic monitoring and documentation efficiency. This promise is anchored in a growing body of peer-reviewed literature that includes FDA-cleared AI software for hemorrhage risk stratification, validated machine learning models for shock detection in TCCC environments and emerging platforms integrating wearable biometrics with real-time triage algorithms. Translating this evidence into domestic law enforcement settings requires recognition that TECC — not TCCC — is the operative training and protocol framework for civilian tactical medical providers, and that AI tools developed for military applications will require re-validation within this context.

Realizing the full potential of these technologies will further require dedicated operational research, rigorous prospective validation, systematic attention to algorithmic equity, and an unwavering commitment to maintaining human judgment at the center of care, as well as proactive policy development to address the novel data privacy and public records challenges posed by automated clinical documentation in the law enforcement environment. The goal is not to automate tactical medicine, but to ensure that every medic operating in the most demanding environments has the best available decision support at the moment it matters most.

Endnotes

1. Barham S, Reddy A, Kelbaugh M, Bishop C. Designing conversational AI to provide medical assistance on the battlefield. Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory [technical communication]. 2023 Aug 17 [cited 2026 Apr 1]. Available from: https://www.jhuapl.edu/news/news-releases/230817a-cpg-ai-battlefield-medical-assistance. Note: As of the date of this writing, CPG-AI has not yet been described in a peer-reviewed publication; the project remains at the proof-of-concept stage.

2. Nemeth C, Amos-Binks A, Burris C, et al. Decision support for tactical combat casualty care using machine learning to detect shock. Mil Med. 2021;186(Suppl 1):273–280. doi:10.1093/milmed/usaa275. PMID: 33499479

3. Nemeth C, Amos-Binks A, Burris C, et al. TCCC decision support with machine learning prediction of hemorrhage risk, shock probability. Mil Med. 2023;188(Suppl 6):659. doi:10.1093/milmed/usad222. PMID: 37948287

4. Chee ML, Chee ML, Huang H, et al. Artificial intelligence and machine learning in prehospital emergency care: a scoping review. iScience. 2023;26(8):107407. doi:10.1016/j.isci.2023.107407. PMID: 37609632. PMC10440716

5. Stallings JD, Laxminarayan S, Yu C, Kapela A, Frock A, Cap AP, Reisner AT, Reifman J. APPRAISE-HRI: an artificial intelligence algorithm for triage of hemorrhage casualties. Shock. 2023;60(2):199–205. doi:10.1097/SHK.0000000000002166. PMID: 37335312. PMC10476583

6. Frock A, Robbins JT, Vital-Lopez FG, et al. A case study of AI-enabled software as a medical device cleared by the FDA for assessing hemorrhage risk index (APPRAISE-HRI) after trauma. NEJM AI. 2025;2(11):AIcs2401170. doi:10.1056/AIcs2401170

7. Alnuaimi MK. Integrating wearable sensor data with an AI-based, protocol-flexible triage platform to accelerate decision-making during the golden hour of combat casualty care. Cureus. 2025;17(8):e91121. doi:10.7759/cureus.91121. PMC12467467

8. Jin X, Frock A, Nagaraja S, Wallqvist A, Reifman J. AI algorithm for personalized resource allocation and treatment of hemorrhage casualties. Front Physiol. 2024;15:1327948. doi:10.3389/fphys.2024.1327948. PMC10851938

9. Little JR, Rivera-Nichols T, Pavliscsak HH, et al. Demonstrating tactical combat casualty care in simulated environments to enable passive, autonomous documentation: protocol for a prospective simulation-based study. JMIR Res Protoc. 2025;14:e67673. doi:10.2196/67673. PMID: 40096684. PMC11959195

10. Pamplin JC, Remondelli MH, Fisher N, Quinn MT. Fully autonomous casualty care on the future battlefield. Mil Med. 2025;190(3-4):81–85. doi:10.1093/milmed/usae377

11. Obermeyer Z, Powers B, Vogeli C, Mullainathan S. Dissecting racial bias in an algorithm used to manage the health of populations. Science. 2019;366(6464):447–453. doi:10.1126/science.aax2342. PMID: 31649194

12. Cross JL, Choma MA, Onofrey JA. Bias in medical AI: implications for clinical decision-making. PLOS Digit Health. 2024;3(11):e0000651. doi:10.1371/journal.pdig.0000651. PMC11542778

About the author

Stephen P. Wood, DMSc, ACNP-BC, FAWM, FNAP is a clinical associate professor and program director of the Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Program at Northeastern University's Bouvé College of Health Sciences. He maintains active clinical practice in emergency medicine and critical care and serves as a tactical paramedic with the Quincy (MA) Police Department SWAT Team, Marine Unit and Dive Unit. Wood holds visiting research and fellow appointments at the Harvard Medical School Center for Bioethics and Harvard Law School's Petrie-Flom Center and serves as co-director of the Northeast Prehospital Blood Coalition. His background includes service as a toxicologist with the New Hampshire State Police and deployment experience with Team Rubicon in disaster medicine. He is a fellow of the Academy of Wilderness Medicine and holds advanced training in tactical medicine, disaster response and bioethics.

"The goal is not to automate tactical medicine, but to ensure that every medic operating in the most demanding environments has the best available decision support at the moment it matters most."


Skydio
R10
Clear rooms. Protect lives.
Go home safe.
Skydio R10 gives officers eyes inside before they enter.
skydio.com/Indoor-DFR
Proudly designed, assembled,
and supported in the USA

NTOA MEMBER TESTED and RECOMMENDED®

NTOA

The NTOA Member Tested and Recommended Program has tested more than 3,000 products in real-world situations since 2003 and is regarded by many law enforcement agencies as paramount to their product purchasing decisions.



OVERALL SCORE: 4.52

37/40mm Side Saddles

Hurricane Butterfly
hurricanebutterfly.net

Individual Score 4.71
Tested by a police officer from Tennessee
Tester 1 of 8

Installation was very easy and the mounting hardware holds the tool very tight with no movement. It was nice to have the two reloads at a convenient, easy-to-reach spot for faster reloads. The Kydex material was extremely durable and survived various situations for testing purposes. The top mounting did not change the footprint for storage of the launcher. We tested the clamp mount and it exceeded my expectations for durability and ease of use.

Individual Score 4.32
Tested by a member from Minnesota
Tester 2 of 8

Very cool product that we used in protests and high-risk warrants. I do like the quality of the product; I had the barrel mount, and it was very easy to install. I wanted to put some cat tongue tape to secure it, but it wasn't needed. It stays on the barrel very snug without anything added to it. I love that it adds two more 40mm rounds on your launcher. With the two on the barrel, we can have seven rounds on the launcher itself and the two on the front are easily known because you can visually see them all the time. We put marking rounds on the barrel so we could switch if needed quickly. I would recommend this product to teams that are doing protest details and on perimeter of high-risk warrants.

Individual Score 4.11
Tested by a member from California
Tester 3 of 8

For us the one with the rail mount would sort of work, but the other would not. We do prefer this over our current pouch that is located on the stock. Our only issue with this currently is that because our cars are not totally uniformed, officers would have to constantly re-adjust the holder each time they grabbed a different 40 mm launcher to put it in their car (because many of the gun racks are situated differently from car to car. The foam baton rounds can also be a little hard to remove from the holder, but I am sure this can be adjusted with the set screw. We would say that if our cars were totally uniformed, I would probably prefer this over what we currently use. We'd suggest the company also recommend a good rifle and 40/hold. I also wonder if there's opportunity to add more than two slots. I imagine that you can just buy another and install them side by side, just wanted to suggest it.

Individual Score 4.59
Tested by a member from New Jersey
Tester 4 of 8

I recently tested the 37/40mm Double Side Saddle-Barrel mount and overall, I've been very impressed with it. Installation was straightforward and took less than a minute. It

MEMBER TESTED & RECOMMENDED

RATING SCALE

1 POOR | 2 FAIR | 3 AVERAGE | 4 VERY GOOD | 5 EXCELLENT

To read complete reviews, visit ntoa.org

Editor's Note: A Word of Caution - It is an unfortunate reality of modern commerce that anything from golf clubs to tactical gear is susceptible to imitation and copyright infringement. NTOA members are reminded to exercise care when making purchases to ensure that products are authentic. Be wary of prices that are too good to be true, and consider patronizing vetted vendors, like those who advertise in *The Tactical Edge*.

MTRP field test results do not constitute an endorsement of any product on the part of the NTOA as an organization or entity. The NTOA does not independently verify the information submitted by field testers nor does the NTOA verify the representations and warranties of product manufacturers.

attaches securely using two screws, and the fit felt solid right away without requiring any special tools or complicated adjustments. Once mounted, it stayed firmly in place during use and didn't shift or rattle.

One of the standout features is its ambidextrous design. Whether you're running the launcher left- or right-handed, the saddle keeps the extra rounds easily accessible without getting in the way. The lightweight construction is another big plus — it adds convenient, onboard storage without noticeably increasing the overall weight or affecting balance.

In practical use, having two additional rounds mounted directly to the launcher is extremely convenient. It eliminates the need to fumble through pouches or pockets and keeps reloads simple and efficient. Importantly, the saddle did not affect the launcher's performance or shooting in any way. Accuracy and handling remained consistent.

The only real downside I noticed is that it makes the launcher a bit harder to store, especially in tighter cases or racks. The added width means you may need to adjust your storage solution slightly. That said, this is a minor trade-off considering the added convenience.

Overall, it's a well-designed, practical accessory that does exactly what it's supposed to do.

Individual Score 4.8

Tested by a police officer from South Dakota
Tester 5 of 8

One of the issues that every grenadier has during a deployment is where to carry munitions. The side saddle produced by Hurricane Butterfly was designed to help officers carry two munitions on the barrel in a manner that allows for quick access and easy identification. The side saddle can be attached directly to the barrel or to the picatinny rail depending on your options selected. It allows the operator to decide if the munitions are carried parallel to the barrel or perpendicular. I tried it in both positions and found that in the perpendicular configuration it took up a lot of my field of view while aiming down the sights. I changed it to the parallel configuration, and it allowed me to see better downrange. Reloading also was easier. The sidesaddle is built well and withstood numerous drops without any major damage, and retained the munitions. The ends of the munitions are exposed allowing quick munition identification, but it does allow the rounds to be damaged if dropped. I did run into an issue with the edges being squared off and getting caught on my gear when the launcher is slung. With the rounds on the barrel, it allowed me to change which shoulder I used without conflicting with my mask compared to other designs where the rounds are stored on the stock of the launcher. This is a very good option to carry extra rounds in a dependable, durable and adaptable manner.

Individual Score 4.8

Tested by a member from New York
Tester 6 of 8

I'm a big fan of this 40mm side saddle. I have it set up on our 40mm penn launcher and I plan to buy more. It fit a wide range of our munitions (def tec, sage and cts) and has adjustable retention as well. It can be mounted horizontal or vertical and has a nice lever to make install very easy. The materials are high quality. After testing this one, I plan to buy more for all our team's launchers.

Individual Score 4.25

Tested by a member from Rhode Island
Tester 7 of 8

Upon receiving the Hurricane Butterfly 37/40 MM Double Side Saddle Picatinny Mount, I began installing it on my department's 40MM ALS ALSTAC 40 less-lethal launcher. After about 10 minutes of fumbling with the screw posts

RATING SCALE

1 POOR | 2 FAIR | 3 AVERAGE | 4 VERY GOOD | 5 EXCELLENT

provided, the mount was installed and tightened without issue. After taking the mount off our launcher and re-installing it, I am convinced my issues with the screw posts were much more due to operator error.

Once installed, I found the Hurricane Butterfly 37/40 MM Double Side Saddle Picatinny Mount to be very well manufactured. Our less lethal-launchers are secured in soft cases that are brought in and out by our patrol officers at the start and finish of their shifts. These cases and launchers take a beating whether in the patrol vehicle or in transition between shifts. Throughout this process, I saw no physical damage to the mount, the two projectiles it held, or the picatinny rail/launcher. Furthermore, I found this mount to still be rock solid after several weeks of hard usage amongst our patrol officers. At the end of this testing phase, the mount showed no sign of loosening on the rail and appeared to be performing as intended. I would highly recommend this mount for use with less-lethal launchers equipped with picatinny rails.

Individual Score 4.61
Tested by a member from Louisiana
Tester 8 of 8

I've been very impressed with the Hurricane Butterfly double side saddle mount. The material feels solid and well thought out. The mount attaches cleanly to the Picatinny rail and locks up tight without any wobble or play, which is exactly what you want in a piece of gear like this. I also like that it can be mounted vertically and horizontally by preference.

In use, it performs reliably and keeps the rounds secure while still allowing quick access when needed. The profile is streamlined and doesn't feel bulky on the platform, which helps maintain good balance and handling. Obviously, it is very lightweight. Fit and finish are clean, and it holds up well under regular range use.

If I had one upgrade request, it would be increasing the capacity to hold three rounds instead of two. The current setup works well, but an extra round on board would make this system even more practical without significantly impacting size.

Overall, this is a dependable, well-built mount that does exactly what it's designed to do. With a three-round option in the future, it would be close to perfect. Even with it being a two-round mount, I would gladly equip my personnel with them.



OVERALL SCORE: 4.65

Echelon 4.0FC

Springfield Armory
springfieldarmory.com

Individual Score 4.95
Tested by a police officer from Illinois
Tester 1 of 3

The Springfield Echelon 4.0FC 9x19mm is their compact slide on a full-size frame, giving the handgun 17- or 20-round capability. The full-size grip fit my hand well and without the pinky finger dangle that some compact frames have. The texture was rough enough to maintain grip with sweaty hands as well as gloves but was not too rough. I especially liked the slide serrations and flairs and found them beneficial for press checks as well as slide lock reloads. It came for testing with a mounted Vortex Defender-ST. The compact dust cover was adequate for full size weapon lights. I also carried the Echelon 4.0FC daily as my off-duty concealed firearm and found the weight and size comfortable.

For testing, I removed as much oil as I could with Lucas Oil Gun Cleaner to simulate harsh conditions. During testing, over 500 various rounds were put through the weapon including typical duty rounds (Speer Gold Dot, Speer G2, Federal HST) as well as practice rounds in 115 up to 147 grain. No malfunctions were observed with any of the rounds, including firing dominant and weak hand. The red dot sight stayed snug and no loosening or shift was noticed. The one negative I found was when ungloved, the trigger / trigger safety, although smooth faced and comfortable during dry fire, were sharp when firing causing some

JN TACTICAL®



















WWW.JNTACTICAL.COM

MADE IN USA





discomfort when the round counts increased. In addition to the 500 rounds live, an additional 500 rounds dry fire with Mantis were done, for over 1,000 trigger pulls total.

I ended testing with several drop tests from shoulder height with a primed brass loaded in the chamber. No misfires were noted despite the gun striking the ground in different directions. I would recommend this firearm as an exceptional duty weapon without being too big, and perfect for plainclothes wear as well.

Individual Score 4.65

Tested by a member from Pennsylvania
Tester 2 of 3

This gun has a 4" upper and full size lower, think Glock 45, which is one of my favorite carry guns so it has a high standard to live up to. The gun came in a soft case with two magazines. Both are 17-round mags but one has a +3 extension installed from the factory, a spare +3 extension if you wish to convert the 17-round flush mag to be a 20-round one, two different backstrap options, and the Echelon with a factory installed Vortex Defender-ST 3 MOA red dot. In the box there was also an assortment of posts and screws for use if the user wants to switch out the optic for another one.

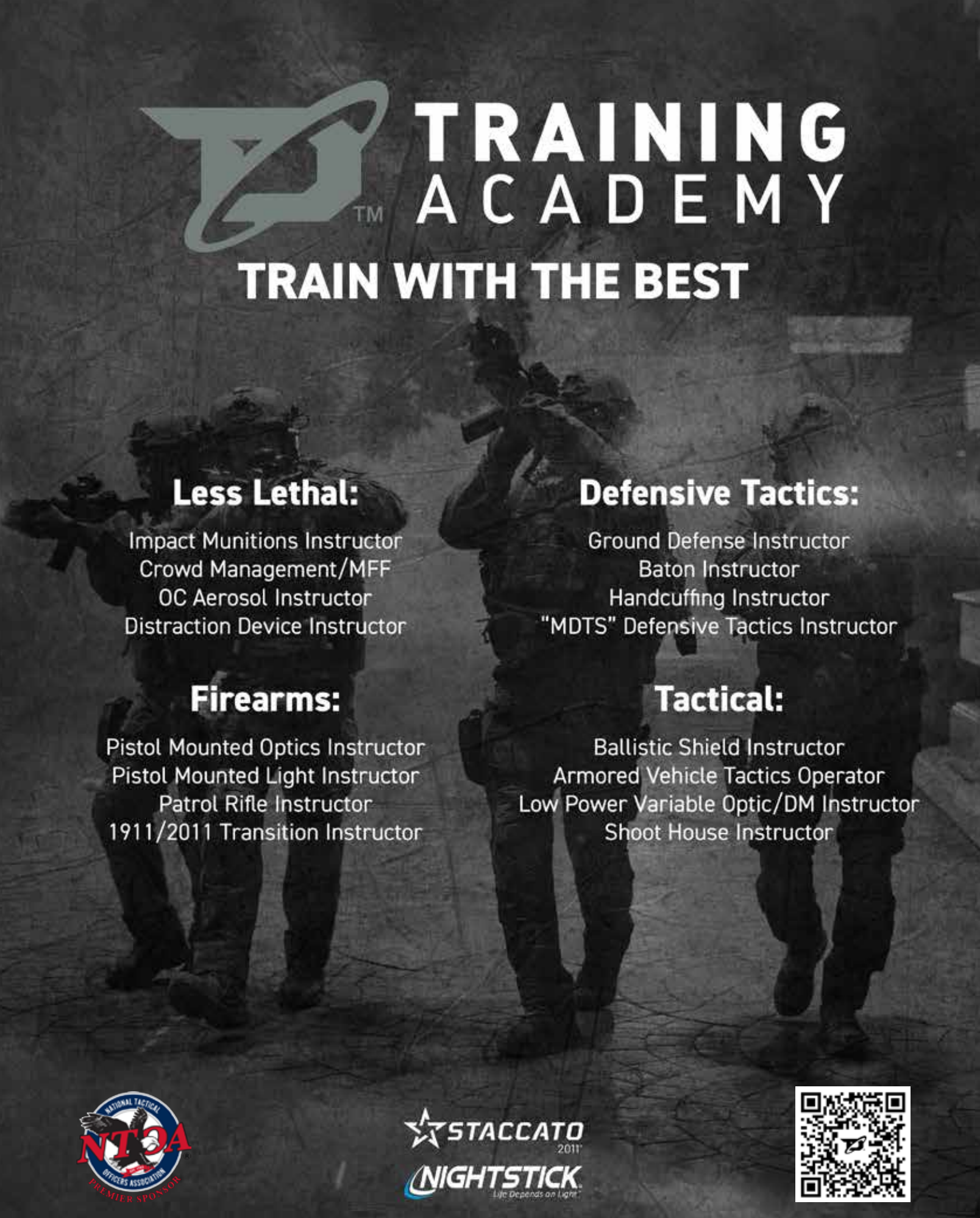
Due to the abnormally cold and snowy weather we were experiencing I spent an abnormal amount of time dry firing the gun and doing reload/malfunction drills. I also changed the backstrap to the slimmer one, which made the gun point a little more natural for me. I ran the gun in a modified Safariland Sig P320 holster that is set up for a Walther PDP. While I don't condone modified holsters for duty use when model specific holsters exist, which is the case with both the PDP and Echelon, this fits a specific need that I could not otherwise achieve. Due to being a right-handed shooter, I do not generally get excited about ambidextrous features in a handgun. But in this case, I found the ambidextrous magazine release to be very useful in weak hand manipulation reloads as I did not have to break my grip to drop a magazine or use my support hand before reaching for a fresh magazine. While on the topic of controls I found that the slide release was a little on the small side and became a little bit of a hit or miss until I got a bit more practice in.

After a break from some of the weather, I finally got out to the range. The first magazine was fired from the 15-yard line to verify zero which in my case was about 2" high. A quick adjustment of the optic and I was off to the races. A 10-round group at 25 yards to check the guns accuracy yielded about a 2.5" group which shocked me, because in the 10-degree weather I was out in shooting I had already lost feeling in my hands, but this gun didn't seem to care much. Before frostbite would set in, I moved up closer and ran a few drills to see how the gun handled recoil at speed. After a few bill drills, speeding up the pace each time, the optic turned off and ended the range trip. This was the only failure experienced during the entire review period and approximately 700 rounds through the gun and is not even gun related. Back at home, after a quick battery change, the optic was back up and running.

The next range trip was indoors, with a summer-like temperature in comparison. I started off with another 10-round group from the 25-yard line and got similar results with a group of about 2.25" this time. For the next 500 rounds or so I settled into a groove running various speed drills from low ready and holstered positions. Last 100 rounds or so were all shot off hand and again I was pleasantly surprised by how much I like the ambidextrous magazine release.

My final observations of the gun: I loved it. When I got this gun to review, I thought, the Echelon has way too much to live up to trying to basically be a Glock 45, but it surprised me how much I like it in comparison. The recoil has a quick sharp snap and the return to zero is excellent. While I did at first try to drive the gun back down like you would with a Glock I was over driving it, and by letting it go through its recoil cycle the gun would just naturally land back on target without extra effort. While I found the slide release to be a learning curve to manipulate, due to its small size, this is the first gun that I got slide lock on an empty magazine every single time.

The Echelon is not without its faults though, all of which are non-functional items but more so my personal preferences. I am not a fan of U notched rear sights, but I do like that they are metal verses plastic sights that come on most guns. The optic cut on the slide being universal leaves a gap at the front and rear of the included Vortex, which has a delta point pro foot print being the longest one on the market that I am aware of, but the lack of a tight optic pocket caused no issues with the gun holding zero and I was made aware that there are a few companies making adapters to fill in the gaps for each footprint. I believe the sharp recoil is due to the gun being over sprung for full power loads, which for duty use is fine but, in my case, I will be ordering a few different recoil spring weights to tune the recoil. Lastly, the grip, while it feels really good in hand in my opinion, could be a lot more aggressive as it feels like I had to reposition the gun after a full mag. This gun is great for duty or personal use and I would have no hesitation recommending it.


TRAINING
ACADEMY
TM
TRAIN WITH THE BEST
Less Lethal:
Impact Munitions Instructor
Crowd Management/MFF
OC Aerosol Instructor
Distraction Device Instructor
Defensive Tactics:
Ground Defense Instructor
Baton Instructor
Handcuffing Instructor
"MDTS" Defensive Tactics Instructor
Firearms:
Pistol Mounted Optics Instructor
Pistol Mounted Light Instructor
Patrol Rifle Instructor
1911/2011 Transition Instructor
Tactical:
Ballistic Shield Instructor
Armored Vehicle Tactics Operator
Low Power Variable Optic/DM Instructor
Shoot House Instructor
NTOA
PREMIER SPONSOR
STACCATO
2011
NIGHTSTICK
Life Depends on Light

NTOA MEMBER TESTED and RECOMMENDED®

RATING SCALE

1 POOR | 2 FAIR | 3 AVERAGE | 4 VERY GOOD | 5 EXCELLENT

Individual Score 4.35

Tested by a member from Pennsylvania

Tester 3 of 3

The Springfield Echelon 4.0FC is a 9mm striker-fired handgun that features an ambidextrous slide catch and magazine release, along with adjustable back straps. The gun comes with two magazines, one 18-rounder and one 20-rounder, along with a floor plate to make the 18-round into a 20-rounder. The gun also came with the Vortex Defender ST already mounted. The form factor is similar to that of the Glock 45, with a 4-inch barrel and "full-size" frame.

The gun's frame has moderately aggressive stippling that definitely works but is still comfortable to carry concealed against your skin; not as rough as a SandW MP 2.0, but not as smooth as a Glock Gen 5. The frame itself is also more ergonomic and curvier than your stock Glock frame, and I found myself using the large backstrap as it seemed to accommodate my grip a little better. Additionally, the trigger guard is undercut, and there is added stippling along the bottom of the trigger guard; common aftermarket work that many do to Glock frames to aid in grip. The magazine release is exposed on both the left and right sides and can be depressed from either side without having to switch the button around. It does feel somewhat cheap compared to magazine releases on other guns, but it works. The slide catch is ambidextrous, albeit small; in fact, it is my single complaint with this gun. Although it does function to both lock the slide back and release it from either side, it is much harder to actuate both up and down than the vast majority of striker-fired 9mm handguns on the market. There is an after-market solution to this, which I plan to add to the gun to fix this issue. Consistent training to activate the slide catch certainly helps, but if I could change one thing, it would be to make it larger. Shooters with small hands will struggle with this small slide catch.

The slide features quite aggressive serrations along the front and back of the slide, and I experienced no issues cycling the slide or conducting press checks. The red dot mounting system on the Echelon appears to be a well-thought-out feature that involves various pieces that are added or subtracted to the optic cut to accommodate various optic footprints. The mounted Defender ST sits low, and I experienced no issues with the mounting system over 800 rounds. I am interested to see how this solution holds up at 8,000-10,000 rounds, as the optic doesn't make contact on its front or rear portions of the slide, and there is space between the bottom of the optic and the slide.

The magazines functioned without issue and dropped freely with the 18 and 20 rounders, both loaded and unloaded. No malfunctions occurred over the 800 rounds I fired through the gun, and thus, no issues with the magazines were identified. I did not clean or lubricate the firearm since taking it out of the box, and do not plan to until the gun eventually starts to malfunction. I anticipate the gun will have a boringly exceptional level of reliability compared to most modern striker-fired handguns.

The Defender ST red dot functioned as it should, with large tactile buttons for adjustment on either side; it was easy to adjust the dot in varying lighting conditions. Shooting while facing the sun was a non-issue as the dot got plenty bright. I experienced no issues with refresh rate or any glare from the optic, and found that the window was generous enough to track the dot within the window with ease. Additionally, the gun was dropped five times from about 6 feet onto carpet-covered concrete, and the dot did not lose zero or otherwise fail.

As for shooting, the gun shoots surprisingly nicely. While most stock guns are over-sprung in my opinion, and the Echelon is no different, the recoil impulse allowed for very consistent dot return; if you have shot a stock Walther PDP, the gun is not quite as snappy as the PDP, but does an excellent job returning without much input onto the frame, just like the PDP. The trigger is also tactile and has a shorter return than I would have expected, making it very easy to achieve faster splits. I noticed that I could accurately achieve the same splits with the Echelon that I do with my PDP Match pistol, with far less time behind the Echelon than on the PDP. Giving the gun to several experienced shooters who have not fired the Echelon, their experience was the same: very quick return without being very snappy.

The Echelon is compatible with some light-bearing Walther PDP holsters. Of the four PDP X300 holsters I own (Safariland 6360 RDS, Trex Ragnar, Ragnar SD, LAS Tanto), the Echelon worked for all of them as if they were made for the Echelon. I cannot speak for other holsters, as they were the only ones I had access to. I carried the Echelon concealed in the LAS Tanto AIWB for several days and found it very comfortable to carry. The stippling on the gun very well may be the "just right" of being beneficial to grip while being able to comfortably carry against bare skin.

Overall, I am extremely impressed by my experience with the Echelon 4.0FC. I was never a fan of the Springfield XD series of pistols, due to numerous features on the guns, but the Springfield Echelon is a different animal entirely. Its demonstrated reliability and versatility make it a great carry or duty gun, and the fact that it just shoots extremely well makes it a prospective competitor in the carry optics space. If you are a fan of the Walther PDP, you may actually prefer the Echelon, given its similar dot return while not being quite as snappy with the stock components.

I would recommend the Echelon 4.0FC to any officer looking for something different that offers a lot of features in one gun that most others fail to capture in one gun.



OVERALL SCORE: 4.69

Breaching Rescue Bar (B.R.B.)

Good Dude Concepts LLC
good-dude.com

Individual Score 5

Tested by a police officer from Louisiana
Tester 1 of 6

The Good Dude Concepts Breaching Rescue Bar (B.R.B.) is a compact, purpose-built tool designed to provide law enforcement and tactical operators with a reliable breaching option without the burden of full-size equipment.

One of the most notable features of the B.R.B. is its compact profile. The tool is lightweight and easily integrates into a tactical kit or everyday carry (EDC) setup without occupying excessive space. In environments where mobility and efficiency are critical, this is a significant advantage over larger breaching tools.

The B.R.B. performs exceptionally well across a variety of common entry points. During testing, it was used on multiple types of doors that would typically require a full-size Halligan tool. In each case, the tool allowed for quick and effective entry with minimal effort. In addition to door breaching, the pointed end of the B.R.B. proved highly effective for window defeat. It easily broke standard and tinted glass, making it a versatile option for multiple entry scenarios.

Durability is a standout characteristic of this tool. After undergoing repeated "torture testing," the B.R.B. showed no signs of structural failure or significant wear. With routine maintenance, it continues to maintain a like-new condition, reinforcing confidence in its long-term reliability.

In time-sensitive situations, such as active events, operators may not have immediate access to large breaching tools. The B.R.B. fills this gap by providing a dependable, on-person breaching capability. Its size and effectiveness make it a practical solution for both tactical teams and patrol-level personnel.

The Good Dude Concepts B.R.B. is a well-designed, durable and highly functional breaching tool. Its compact size, combined with its effectiveness on both doors and windows, makes it a valuable addition to any operator's kit. I strongly recommend it for law enforcement officers and deputies seeking a compact, reliable breaching option for both tactical and general duty use.

Individual Score 4.63

Tester 2 of 6
Tested by a member from California

The BRB is extremely well constructed. The tool is very versatile and provides various types of breaching methods. The tip can penetrate glass, the glass cutting edge can cut and pull out glass, and the pry end can easily breach standard interior doors. The edges of the tool have texture/kindling similar to a barbell, but the texture/kindling could have been more aggressive for better grip. The tool could be enhanced with gas shut off wrench cut outs on the frame of the tool, instead of holes for paracord.

Individual Score 4.89

Tester 3 of 6
Tested by a member from Illinois

This tool is unique and a perfect addition to your kit. It's small and compact but heavy enough to not be flimsy and weak. As a former firefighter, this tool combines several tools that were essential to the job and delivers them in a small package. Adding some grip tape to the handle would be a good idea so it doesn't slip while using gloves. The tool does have pre-drilled holes for wrapping in paracord, if you're into arts and crafts. The design is simple and clean and the pry bar portion easily fits into your vest without getting caught. The angle of the pry tip is enough to do the job but not so extreme that it's uncomfortable to carry. This tool should easily be able to pop interior residential doors.

Individual Score 4.73

Tested by a member from Maryland
Tester 4 of 6

The Good Dude Breaching Rescue Bar is easily one of the most solid tools to add to your kit or in your patrol vehicle for an emergency tool. The build quality is outstanding,

RATING SCALE

1 POOR | 2 FAIR | 3 AVERAGE | 4 VERY GOOD | 5 EXCELLENT

heavy-duty and well-balanced. The grip feels secure even with gloves on, and the bar has the leverage and strength you need.

What really stands out is how versatile it is. Whether you're prying doors or breaking vehicle windows, it performs exactly how you'd want it to. It's tough, dependable and built to take serious abuse without bending or failing.

You can tell a lot of thought went into the design. The weight and functionality all work together to make it a practical tool rather than just another bar. If you're in fire/rescue, tactical entry, or just want a serious breaching tool, this one is absolutely worth it. Highly recommend it.

Individual Score 4.57
Tested by a police officer from New Jersey
Tester 5 of 6

The Good Dude BRB is a great little tool to have. The spike for penetrating glass works very well and only takes a few strikes for a full puncture. The glass cutting tool also works very well and has a good ease of use. The prying tool is also very good for light breaching. After use on numerous doors and windshields, so far, the BRB is holding up well. Aside from the normal scratches and what not, the tool is good quality. The BRB also can be used in other applications such as cutting wired glass as well. Overall, the BRB is a great tool for a great value. The size makes it a little difficult for everyday carry but for specific jobs or incidents, it's perfect for quick access in a vehicle. Weight wise, the BRB is light but feels good in your hand during use. It does not feel flimsy and its construction is well done. Overall, for tactical or rescue work, the BRB is an amazing tool to have due to its versatility.

Individual Score 4.33
Tested by a member from Pennsylvania
Tester 6 of 6

I had an opportunity to work with the Good Dude Concepts B.R.B. over the past few weeks, and it has proven to be quite impressive. Before receiving the bar, I was skeptical of what kind of breaching capabilities it would have because of its size and leverage concerns. Those concerns were thrown aside as soon as I received the bar and handled it for the first time. Small but mighty is the perfect way to summarize it.

As a breacher, one of the first things I wanted to do was put this tool to work. I was able to easily seat the bar in several frames with no additional tools needed to hammer it home. I was able to separate the frame from the locking mechanism, often with ease, simply by using my body weight. The bar did not bend, wiggle or give at all from the force I applied. The glass ripper profile worked as expected while breaking/cutting vehicle glass. The bonus was its effectiveness against wired glass in security doors.

You will need to invest the additional money for the pouch if you plan on running this with your kit, as you may start to get some spurs and scrapes in the bar that will rip and tear at your gear. This won't be as much of an issue if you aren't training with the tool often and keep it tucked away in a patrol bag for emergency use. I did notice some slipping after getting the bar wet. There are pre-drilled holes for a paracord wrap, but I did not wrap mine. I did not have the Cerakote finish model but assume they addressed some slippage issues there.

The BRB is well built and the guys over at Good Dude clearly put the time in to make sure it was operationally ready. This needs to be an addition to your kit or active shooter/patrol bag.



OVERALL SCORE: 4.68

TA70

Nextorch USA
nextorch.com

Individual Score 4.85
Tested by a police officer from California
Tester 1 of 3

I've been carrying and using the TA70 flashlight for a while now, and honestly it's become one of my favorite EDC lights. The brightness is amazing, it throws a strong beam that's perfect for outdoor use, nighttime walks and everyday tasks around the house or garage.

One thing I really like is how solid and well-built it feels. The aluminum body is tough, doesn't feel cheap, and has held up great even when I've dropped it or tossed it in a bag.

The controls are intuitive, too. I love that it has different modes (including a quick access strobe), and the lock mode is super useful to prevent accidental turn-ons in my pocket. Charging is super easy with USB-C just plug it in and go.

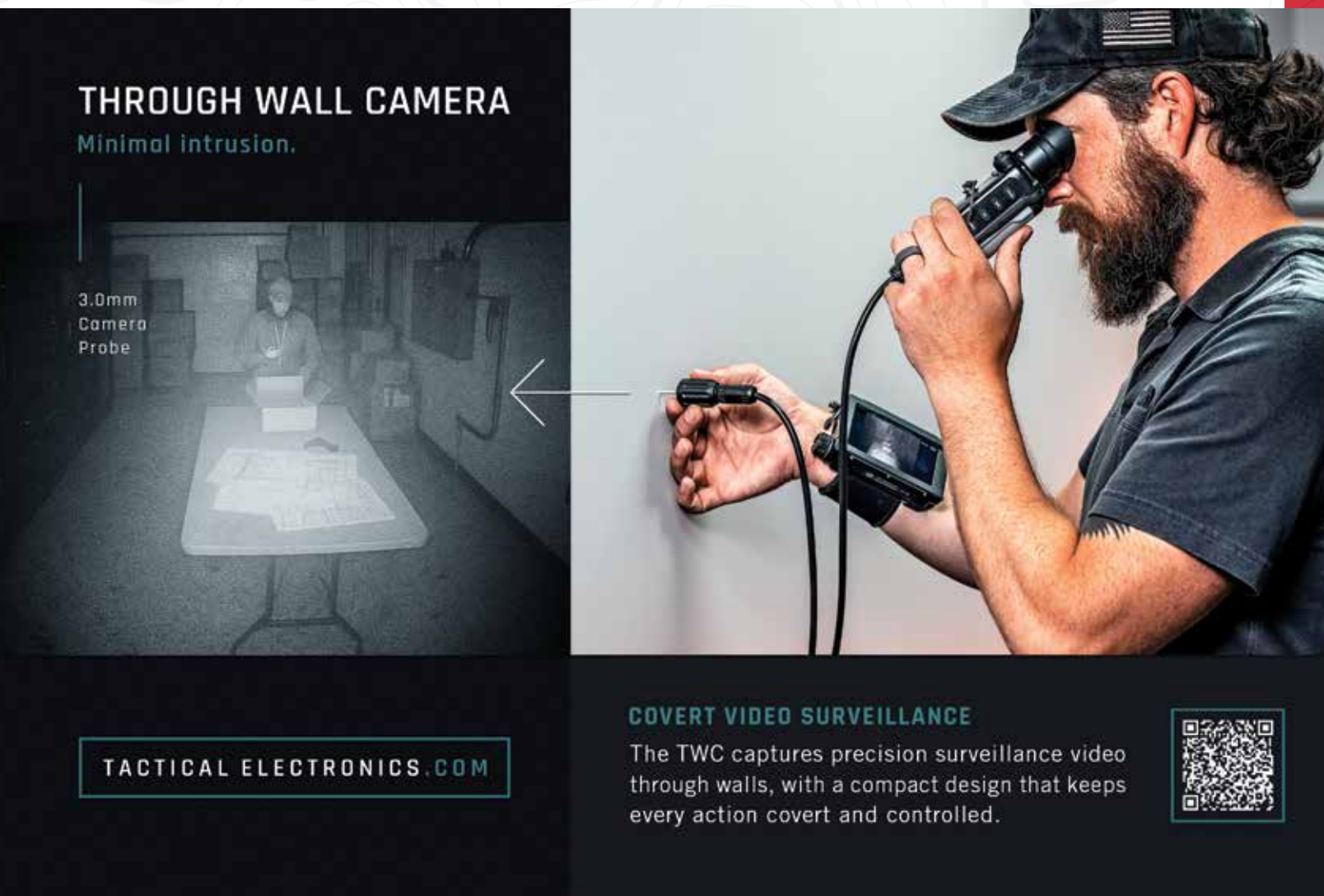
Battery life has been reliable; it lasts a long time on the lower modes, and even on higher power it performs well without overheating thanks to the smart heat management. The only downside of the flashlight is the heat that it produces when the light is on. If the light is being used for an extended time, it gets hot to the touch. Overall, it is a great flashlight which is durable and has different settings which is useful in different situations.

Individual Score 4.89
Tested by a member from Arkansas
Tester 2 of 3

First and foremost, this is a good light at a pretty good price. To me, it falls in a category with other EDC lights like the Streamlight Wedge and the Surefire Stiletto and has a similar price tag (MSRP $119.99). It doesn't feel as robust or tough as those lights, but for its intended purpose, I think it's tough enough. I didn't park an MRAP on it, but I tossed it around on concrete and asphalt, submerged it in water several times with it on and off for a couple minutes at a time, and broke some glass with the strike bezel. Aside from some cosmetic scratches, there was no damage and no issue.

The light has a mode switch with three modes: lock, duty and tactical. Lock is just that, keeps you from turning it on in your pocket. You can also tap the switch in this mode to see the battery indicator LED. Duty mode has three settings: low (28 lumens), medium (300 lumens) and high (1,300 lumens), with advertised run times of 30 hours, three hours and two hours, respectively. Tactical mode has momentary on with a light press of the switch or strobe with the switch clicked on, both advertised at 3,500 lumens and no advertised run time. I didn't check with a light meter, but tactical mode unleashed the power of the sun.

I fully charged the light as soon as it arrived and used it (played with it) daily for two weeks. During that time, I would turn it on duty-high (1,300 lumens) and start a timer. I'm currently over three hours in this mode that is advertised at two hours, not considering all the messing around and actually using it at work. The battery indicator is still put-







ting me in the 50%-75% charge range. That performance may not last long-term, but it wouldn't need to as the light charges on a USB-C cable and can be fully charged in about two hours from dead.

The tactical ring is comfortable to hold but feels a little big in my pocket. It is removeable and there is a supplied lanyard. The pocket clip is reversible, so it can be carried on either side with the ring on to suit the user. The advertised nano-ceramic strike bezel was a little disappointing as far as breaking glass, but I wouldn't want to get hit on the head with it. Granted, it's not the proper tool for that job. It had no issue with some old residential windows, but it struggled with auto glass. The tactical finger ring is polymer and flexes too much to get a solid hammer-fist grip to smash a windshield. I did get through a side window, but it took a few shots at it.

All in all, so far, great light at a good price. For its intended purpose, lighting, it works extremely well and has exceeded my expectations. I'd buy one and I may order some to outfit my unit at work.

Individual Score 4.31

Tested by a member from Pennsylvania
Tester 3 of 3

The Nextorch TA70 Ultra-Slim Tactical EDC flashlight is a handheld flashlight designed for pocket carry, using its attached pocket clip and ring. The housing and pocket clip are made of aluminum, while the ring is made of polymer. The light bulb is made of three in-line LEDs behind a layer of what appears to be tempered glass. The bulb is shrouded by the aluminum housing to protect the glass, and this shroud has four glass breaking contact points on it. At the end of the light opposite the LEDs is an intuitive and tactile activation switch, which lifts up to expose the USB-C charging port. Directly under the switch on the light's body is another switch, which offers three options: off, duty and tactical.

To say that this light is feature-rich would be an understatement. The combination of the pocket clip and ring allows for comfortable pocket carry while being able to quickly access and control the light using the ring. Given its slim nature, the light is very comfortable to hold, and the switch and mode selection are easy to access. Additionally, it's quick and easy to charge with the USB-C port, the same used by the majority of smartphones in 2026.

The mode selections for the light output are somewhat strange, and I found the number of options to be excessive. The off switch is crucial when pocket carrying, as accidental activation could leave you with a very hot pocket, something many of us have encountered when carrying high-power lights on a duty belt or in a pocket. The second mode, the "duty mode," offers a constant on after a solid tactile click, and momentary on with a soft click. Additionally, in duty mode, the light can be cycled through low, medium and high output. As for the tactical mode, it is momentary only and provides either high output after a soft click or a strobe function after a solid tactile click. As an EDC, I personally would prefer to forego the strobe function as it offers little functionality, and keep only the off and duty settings.

The LEDs on this light can get hot, so hot that they can burn a hole in your pocket if accidentally activated. However, the housing does an exceptional job at regulating the heat of the light, and it stays very cool when in use. The same cannot be said for many other lights of similar performance at a higher price point, including the Cloud Defensive MCH and the Streamlight Pro-tac 2.0; both offer similar performance, but get very hot with continuous use of high output. To test this, from a full charge, I left the light on the highest output setting until it eventually turned off at an impressive one hour and 52 minutes, and the housing remained at room temperature. Additionally, the LEDs did not glaze over from the heat, a common occurrence with Streamlight products when the lights are left on for a long period of time, which ultimately degrades the performance of the light. After the light turned off, I was able to turn it back on and still use it for some time before it would no longer activate. Once I was sure the battery was completely dead, the light took about two hours to reach a full charge using the included USB-C charging cord. The blue light next to the charging port indicates a full charge, it will appear red while charging.

To test durability, I dropped the light three times on asphalt from shoulder height (approximately 5.5 feet), and the light was completely fine, with little cosmetic damage and no effect on the light's performance. The light was also submerged in water for two hours with no issues, arguably exceeding its IP67 ingress protection rating. Lastly, the light was left at the bottom of a 12-inch layer of snow for six hours in 14 degrees Fahrenheit weather, after which it was powered on and performed as normal. Considering durability, this light outshines numerous high-end lights I have carried that have failed from drops, water exposure and extreme temperatures.

While I prefer lights to accept rechargeable 18650 or 18350 batteries, due to batteries often being the failure point for lights, the Nextorch TA70 has thus far demonstrated an exception to that preference. It's reassuring to carry a light that is almost boring due to its extreme reliability and consistent performance, and I confidently endorse this light the same as I endorse the workhorse Modlights and Streamlights that I carry regularly. If you're looking for a "Stiletto" style pocket light that simply always works, this is the light for you.

SIMUNITION®



TRAINING FOR THE REAL WORLD®

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT **SIMUNITION.COM**

LESSONS LEARNED FROM



THE DEBRIEF

BY JON BECKER

CAKE, NOT ICING

WHAT WE'RE GETTING WRONG ABOUT PERFORMANCE

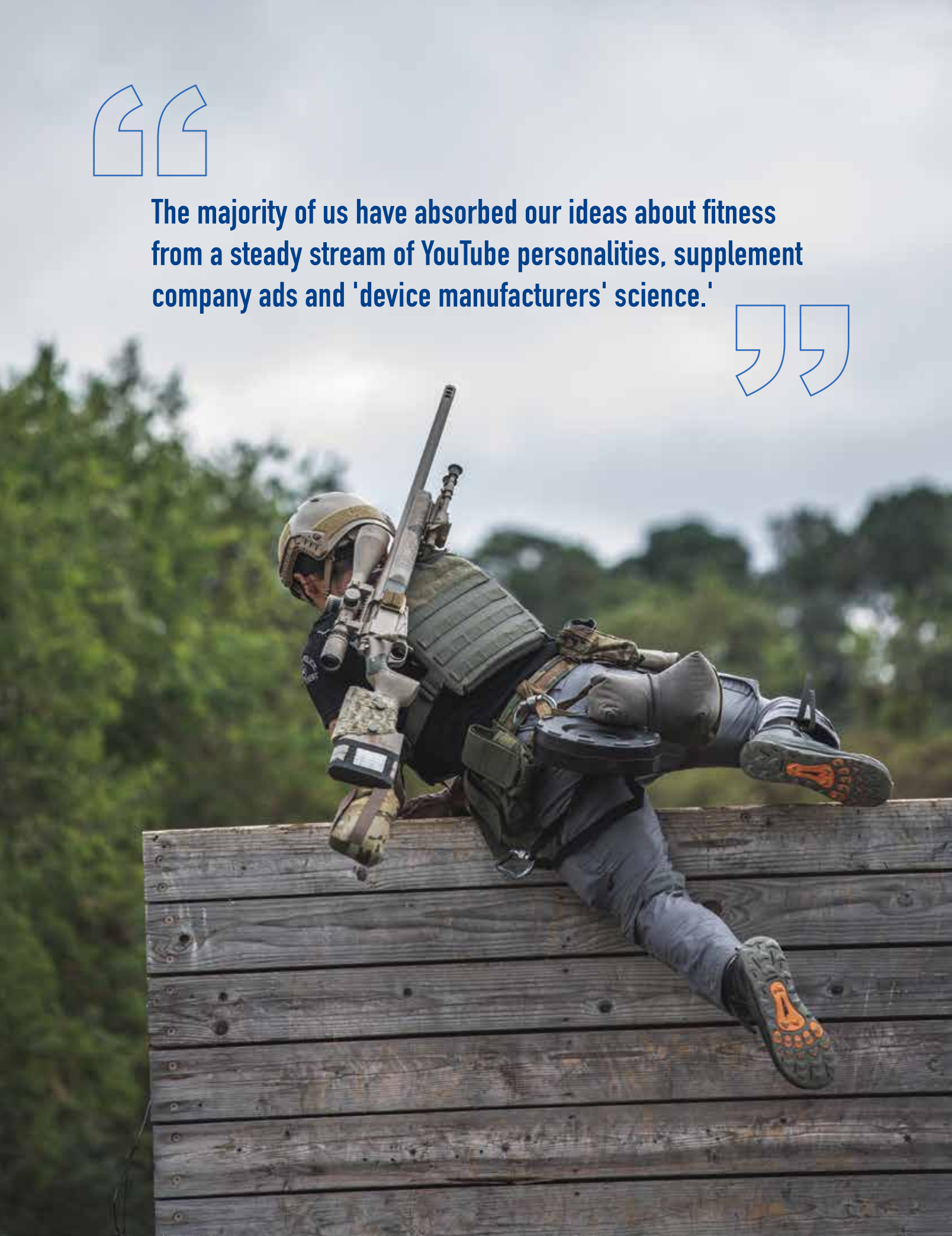
I recently spent some time with a group of friends who are all members of different tactical teams. Over lunch, the conversation turned to the inevitable discussion about the various nutritional supplements, peptide stacks and "other supplements" they were each using to achieve peak performance. As I listened to their discussion about HRV, peptide viability and which influencers they trusted, it struck me that virtually all of them were some combination of sleep deprived, injured from workouts or training, and/or seriously over-worked and over-stressed.

This conversation got me thinking. What constitutes good physical fitness for a tactical operator? The majority of us have absorbed our ideas about fitness from a steady stream of YouTube personalities, supplement company ads and "device manufacturers' science." I started to realize that these sources all have a structural incentive that runs counter to providing good information. Any YouTube channel or "influencer" that just says "eat well, sleep enough and exercise normally" will never get clicks. As a result, the content cycle forces them to constantly produce the next thing: the new supplement, the new protocol, the new gimmick or the new device. Over time, this has driven most of us to believe that real physical performance is built on weird, novel things. The problem is that the real experts who actually work with elite units completely disagree with this approach.

The conversation with my friends sent me back through my interviews with four performance experts I have spoken with on The Debrief: Dr. Nathalie Pattyn (Episode 66), Kelly Starrett (Episode 30), Casey Glass (Episode 51) and Dr. Brittany Loney (Episode 42). Between them, they have worked with the world's most elite tactical units, special operations forces, astronauts and pilots. What struck me was how much they agreed on, and how much of that agreement cuts directly against what the current health and fitness boom is selling to operators.

There are a lot of reasons to build physical fitness. Performance, longevity, aesthetics, mental health. For a tactical team member, two reasons matter most. The first is the obvious one: the ability to do the required tasks. Climbing caving ladders, running under load, carrying a wounded teammate, breaching a door, etc. The second is less obvious and arguably more important. Physical fitness is the foundation that keeps your heart rate low under stress and preserves access to your higher cognitive functions when you need to make complicated, life-and-death decisions. An operator who is physically maxed out is also cognitively maxed out because decision-making is the first thing to degrade.

Of course, a full discussion of what builds tactical physical performance, nutrition, sleep, training, mental health,



The majority of us have absorbed our ideas about fitness from a steady stream of YouTube personalities, supplement company ads and 'device manufacturers' science.'

all of it, is beyond the scope of a single column. But the gap between what the experts say and what the fitness boom sells is worth examining directly. This article is about that gap. More specifically, it's about the five things that I think many teams may be getting wrong about building tactical physical performance based on my interviews with the experts.

1. Seeking marginal gains at the expense of foundation

The current health and fitness boom is structured around marginal gains. The HRV monitor that promises to optimize your recovery. The peptide stack that promises to enhance your performance. The breathwork app that promises to lower your resting heart rate. Each of these tools is sold on the promise that it will give you a small but meaningful edge. And in fairness, each of them can, under the right circumstances.

The problem is they provide very small gains and only under the right circumstances. Marginal gains tools work when the foundation is solid. They produce small improvements on top of a robust base. But they do nothing meaningful for an operator whose foundation is broken. Or, even worse, they distract us from the things that really matter with a promise of a magic elixir.

No one I have interviewed makes this case more strongly than Dr. Nathalie Pattyn. Pattyn is an MD/PhD who has worked with some of the world's most elite teams (e.g. SOF operators, astronauts and fighter pilots) in the world's most challenging environments (space, war and the Antarctic). Her job is ensuring that her clients perform at the highest possible levels in their mission-critical roles despite a harsh environment. When I asked her what she would do if she were given a tactical team and full authority to build their performance program, she gave a simple answer. She would start with what she calls the four pillars of health: nutrition, sleep, physical activity and mental health. She would refuse to talk about anything else until the four pillars were solid.

> "PHYSICAL FITNESS IS THE FOUNDATION THAT KEEPS YOUR HEART RATE LOW UNDER STRESS AND PRESERVES ACCESS TO YOUR HIGHER COGNITIVE FUNCTIONS WHEN YOU NEED TO MAKE COMPLICATED, LIFE-AND-DEATH DECISIONS."

Her frustration with the marginal gains industry was visible. "My job as a scientist is to generate knowledge," she said, "and I feel like there's no point in generating more knowledge because the knowledge we already have about human performance and human functioning is not being applied. So why would we bother investigating new techniques to enhance performance when we don't even cover the basics?"

The metaphor she returned to was about cake. The four pillars are the cake. Everything else is icing. "Stop asking me about icing on the cake," she told me. "We have no cake. If people don't sleep well, if they don't train well physically, if they are not well fed, if they don't rest, there's no point investigating some fancy headband that will trigger specific brain wave to enhance recovery because your basics aren't there."

The picture this produces in practice is the one I saw at lunch with my tactical friends. Operators who can name three peptides off the top of their heads, but who slept four hours the previous night and are running their body on Monster energy drinks and coffee. Operators who can debate the relative merits of two different HRV monitors but who haven't sat down to a good meal in a week. Operators who are spending real money on supplements while running a chronic caloric deficit and undereating protein by 60%. The icing is being applied carefully, but the cake is completely missing.

2. Not allowing for recovery in training, work or life

Modern life is hectic at best. Everyone has too many things to do, too little time to do it and way too many things clamoring for our limited attention span. The result is that we are all over stimulated, overworked and over stressed. This results in a huge silent recovery epidemic that is even worse in law enforcement. Pattyn tells a story about a zebra that, more than any other illustration in any of my interviews, captures this problem:

> A zebra grazing on the African savanna sees a lion approach. The zebra runs. Its body activates a stress response that has evolved over millions of years for exactly this situation. Blood is diverted to the brain, heart and muscles. Heart rate and blood pressure climb. Breathing accelerates. Non-essential systems like digestion, reproduction and immune function shut down. Anything that is not directly relevant to survival in the next few minutes is temporarily suspended while the body throws everything it has into outrunning the lion.
>
> The zebra either escapes or it becomes lunch for the lions. If it escapes, the chase is over in just a few minutes. The stress response deactivates, digestion resumes and the zebra goes back to grazing. Its body goes back into a rest state, refills its resources and ensures it is ready for the next lion. "That is peak

performance," Pattyn explained. "It's throwing everything in and sacrificing everything else that doesn't matter in the next half hour. By definition, it is unsustainable. If you take lab animals and you submit them to that kind of stress reaction repeatedly without deactivating, they die very quickly because it's unsustainable for the body."

Her diagnosis of the problem with modern life follows the zebra. "We are a society that is constantly surfing on that stress reaction. Just look at the news. Everything is an emergency. Everything is crisis management." Tactical operators live this even more acutely than the general population. The radio could go off at any moment, the phone could ring with a callout, or the next email could be the one that ends the shift 12 hours late. The body never gets the signal that the chase is over, and it instead remains over-modulated all the time.

The obvious result is a gradual breakdown of the body due to the absence of a recovery state and rest. A less obvious cost of chronic activation is what Pattyn calls rigidification. The body adapts to constant stress activation by blunting its stress response. The operator who lives at maximum activation cannot ramp up further when the real call comes. The crisis response the operator depends on for survival is the same response that has been gradually worn down by years of inadequate deactivation. "If you're constantly jogging, you will lose the ability to run really fast when you need to," Pattyn said.

The same physiology applies to physical training. Casey Glass spent 11 years as a special operations strength and conditioning coach and now runs Warfighter Health and Performance, where she translates her SOF experience for law enforcement. Glass makes a structural point that matters for the LE audience. SOF deploys and recovers in cycles; recovery is built into the institutional rhythm. Law enforcement is deployed every day. The recovery cycle SOF takes for granted does not exist.

The principles of recovery matter more for law enforcement operators, not less. Glass frames the underlying physiology as a water bottle. Each operator has a fixed-size container for weekly recoverable energy. The size of that bottle is determined by sleep, food and life stress. The training stress that gets poured into the bottle has to fit inside it. Pour too much in and you do not get adaptation. You get overflow, which manifests as injury, illness and chronic soreness. Recovery is what determines the size of the bottle. Without recovery, no amount of training produces adaptation.

The implication is that rest, distinct from sleep, is itself a foundational practice. Rest is what allows the autonomic nervous system to deactivate during waking hours. "There has to be something between being busy and being asleep," Pattyn said. "You need moments to rest."

Pattyn's definition of rest is simple: deliberately being idle. It is not measured, it is not goal-oriented and it cannot be optimized. The moment you start tracking it, posting about it, or trying to make it productive, it is no longer rest. The commute that used to be downtime, half-listening to the radio, has now become work time filled with audiobooks and conference calls. The lunch that used to be a meal has become a transition between meetings. The result is we never deactivate during the day and consequently struggle to deactivate at night.

Recovery is not the absence of work; it is its own foundational practice that requires the right conditions for the autonomic nervous system to deactivate. Anyone who does not build this in, in workouts, in work and in life, is forcing their body to live in a state it was never designed for and setting themselves up for failure.

3. Training for peak performance and not for robustness

Professional athletes train for peak performance. This is because they have a known event on a known date that they must prepare for. They periodize their training, taper into the event, peak on the day and then recover afterward. Their training programs are built around this event because they can be. By contrast, tactical team members face an entirely different problem. There is no known event, there is no known date, and there is no recovery window scheduled afterward, because there is no "afterward." The modern law enforcement tactical operator has to be ready for an unknown demand, of unknown duration, at any time, in any condition, and ready again the next day. This requires different preparation and renders many of the modern YouTube influencer approaches destructive for tactical use.

Pattyn captures the distinction with an automobile metaphor. "We have to stop wanting to make people very fancy Formula 1 cars that need massive pit stop crews and which drive 0.01% of the time," she told me. "What you need in a tactical operator is not a Formula 1 race car. What you need is a versatile, super robust Hummer-type vehicle that will go through any terrain, carry whatever you need to carry at that time, and never fail. That is robustness."

The Formula 1 car, like the professional athlete, is built for peak performance and is fragile by design. The Hummer is built for something different; it is less impressive on a track but ready when the call comes. The training program that produces a professional athlete, applied to an operator with no event date, produces soreness, fatigue and injury without producing the adaptation desired. The very thing training was supposed to provide, readiness, is the thing it eroded.

Pattyn draws one more distinction that matters here. Before we talk about resilience, we have to talk about robustness. "Resilience is how fast do you get back on your feet

after having been knocked down," she explained. "But the first question is how come you were knocked down? Was this preventable?" Robustness is how many punches you can take before you get knocked down. Resilience is how fast you get up if it happens and resilience without robustness is just a constant cycle of injury and recovery. Robustness is what prevents the injury in the first place. The correct approach is to train to be the Hummer. Instead of training for peak performance, we must train for robustness and reliability across different conditions.

Glass adds one more principle that makes the system work in practice: auto-regulation. Programming should flex with daily readiness, not lock to a fixed percentage of one-rep max. The session that was supposed to be hard becomes moderate if the operator is depleted. The session that was supposed to be moderate becomes hard if they are fresh. The body, not the program, drives the daily load. Auto-regulation is what allows training to fit inside the water bottle rather than overflow it.

4. Trading movement quality for single-muscle strength

Most people were taught to think about fitness in terms of muscles or muscle groups. Biceps v. delts or chest, back, legs, etc. As a result, they measure progress by how much weight they can move on isolated exercises. Bench press, pull downs or bicep curls — the whole framework assumes that fitness is the sum of strong muscles, and that the way to build fit operators is to make each muscle stronger.

Kelly Starrett, a doctor of physical therapy who has worked with elite tactical units and professional sports teams, argues that this entire framework is the wrong approach. In his view, the body is wired for movement, not for muscles. Performance is the product of access to position and the ability to deliver force effectively in that position. Fitness is not the size of any individual muscle but the ability to apply force or work when needed. Yet most people train for single muscle strength rather than effective application of force and give no thought to range of motion, power and speed. The bicep curl that built your arm size did not build the shoulder extension that you need to climb over a fence. In fact, no amount of strength compensates for lost range of motion.

Starrett's framework names seven archetype shapes, four for the shoulders and three for the hips, that together encompass every position the body needs to access. Shoulders: overhead (arms locked out above the head), press (elbow behind the ribcage, the bottom of a push-up), hang (elbow behind the body at chest height, the deadlift set-up), and front rack (arm holding a load in front of the body, like the catch of a clean). Hips: squat (which includes the hip hinge), pistol (single-leg bent under the body with the other leg extended forward), and lunge.

The trade-off the title of this section discusses is the one most people make without even realizing it. They spend their gym time chasing bench press numbers and squat PRs while quietly losing the ability to put their arms over their head, sit on the ground or lunge into a full range of motion. The strength numbers go up but their movement quality goes down. By the time they are 40, the strength they built no longer compensates for the movement they lost. The result, as Starrett told me, is bleak: "Eighty percent of Marine Force Recon retires on full disability. We can do better."

The corrective approach in Starrett's view begins with reframing what training is for. The point of training is to identify what your body can and cannot do, restore the positions your job demands, and then build durability across the ranges of motion you need. Strength in his view is a byproduct of movement quality, not its substitute. The operator who can access all seven shapes, under load, under fatigue, under speed, is far more operationally capable than the operator who can bench six plates but cannot put their arms over their head.

Starrett's reframe of pain also belongs here. Most operators treat pain as a medical problem: If it hurts, go to the doctor; if it doesn't hurt yet, ignore it. Operators wait until they cannot do their job, by which point the damage requires surgery. The better frame, Starrett argues, is that pain is a request for change. A check engine light, not a medical emergency. Treated early, it is solvable. Ignored, it becomes catastrophic.

Beyond designing strength work around range of motion, Starrett gives three practical prescriptions. Sit on the ground 30 minutes a day, in any position (cross-legged, kneeling, side-saddle) while watching television or answering email.

> **" THE TRAINING PROGRAM THAT PRODUCES A PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE, APPLIED TO AN OPERATOR WITH NO EVENT DATE, PRODUCES SORENESS, FATIGUE AND INJURY WITHOUT PRODUCING THE ADAPTATION DESIRED. "**

This restores the hip mobility most adults have lost, without equipment. Walk 30 to 60 minutes a day, five days a week, for the aerobic base most operators are missing. Hang from a bar daily, working up to three minutes total. For operators who work in body armor, this single practice does more for the neck, back and shoulders than anything else.

Of course, none of these practices builds a bigger bench press but all of them build the durable, movement-capable operator the job actually requires. Starrett's example of what he is trying to build captures the contrast with the strength-focused gym model and aligns with Pattyn's view exactly even if the car is different. "I want your body to be that Toyota Hilux that's in every austere environment. That is your body. That goes 100 miles an hour, and you can roll it down a cliff. That's really what I'm interested in building." The vehicle that goes anywhere, carries anything, takes a beating and keeps running.



5. Overlooking organizational culture

The first four errors are rooted in individual training decisions. But the fifth is structural, and it is the one that determines whether any of the others can be fixed in a durable way.

The four errors all share something. They are mistakes operators make about their own training and their own bodies. They also are mistakes that operators cannot fully solve on their own, because the conditions that produce them are largely outside the operator's control. This is the reason that teams have so many of their members on injury status, that team members medically retire, that they are physically broken and that recruitment numbers have been declining for a decade among tactical units. The culture around tactical teams is too focused on the organization's needs and not focused enough on individual team members' health and wellness.

When I asked Pattyn what she would do as the team physician for a tactical unit, her first answer had nothing to do with sleep, training, or nutrition. It was about leadership and culture. "Before I try to implement whatever it is … on

an individual or team level, I have to make sure that I have a system in place," she told me. "There's no point telling people to sleep enough if their work regimen implies 80-hour working weeks because they're understaffed."

This is the structural problem only the organization can solve. Operators cannot sleep if the schedule does not permit it, cannot recover if they deploy every shift, cannot deactivate if the operational tempo never stops and cannot maintain movement quality without time to practice it. The individual can do everything right and still fail, because the system breaks the foundation faster than any individual practice can rebuild it.

This is not a new theme in this column. I have written before about how the same cultural failures prevent the prevention of traumatic brain injury (*The Tactical Edge,* Winter and Spring 2025) and undermine the practice of stress inoculation (*The Tactical Edge*, Fall 2024). The pattern is consistent across all three problems, and the root cause is the same in each case: organizations under-resource the unit and the work that produces durable operators, then act surprised when their operators are not durable.

The leader who absorbs every operational request, finds a way to staff every mission and makes the system work no matter how broken it is, is actually teaching the organization that the foundations do not need to be protected. The leader who refuses missions when staffing is inadequate, who puts the team on red status when foundations are compromised and who makes the systemic problem visible to leadership, is the leader who actually protects the operators.

Pattyn's most uncomfortable statement is one I have not been able to stop thinking about since I heard it: "If you never say no, you're part of the problem." There is no neutral position. There is no middle ground. The leader who never refuses a mission is teaching the organization that the current operational tempo is sustainable, even when it is not. The leader who never says no is, by default, part of the system that breaks operators down.

> "THE LEADER WHO REFUSES MISSIONS WHEN STAFFING IS INADEQUATE, WHO PUTS THE TEAM ON RED STATUS WHEN FOUNDATIONS ARE COMPROMISED AND WHO MAKES THE SYSTEMIC PROBLEM VISIBLE TO LEADERSHIP, IS THE LEADER WHO ACTUALLY PROTECTS THE OPERATORS."

The cultural shift required is significant. It means leaders who measure their success not by how many missions they execute this quarter but by how many operators they keep operationally ready over years and decades. It means cultures that value rest and recovery as much as effort. It means measuring training success not by total volume but by adaptation and durability. It also means refusing to fill an under-resourced position with the willpower of the operators who remain, because doing so destroys them.

None of this is what the YouTube fitness ecosystem sells and the supplement industry markets. A unit's culture either protects the foundations or breaks them. There is no neutral ground.

Conclusion

The wellness industry has trained all of us to think that performance comes from the next supplement, the next protocol, the next device. The experts who work with elite tactical units tell a different story. They advocate training for robustness, letting recovery do the work that effort cannot, training for movement, focusing on foundation practices and building a culture that protects them.

To achieve this, a fundamental mindset shift has to occur. Ian Carver, a strength and conditioning coach, author and retired SWAT commander who has spent years working at the intersection of these two worlds, puts it this way: "Much of the solution to these issues lies in self-awareness and the understanding that in order to be a top performer in this profession, the human body must be nourished, trained and provided adequate recovery in the most optimal means, as often as possible. Care should be taken as to where information is obtained and whether it's vetted and what legitimate training and supplementation protocols are followed. Rest days between training sessions are not a suggestion, they are a necessity."

As Carver puts it bluntly, "You can't expect to look and operate like a Ferrari if you're peeing in the gas tank and running the engine in the red all day." So, the next time you find yourself in a conversation about HRV monitors and peptide stacks, ask yourself the harder question: Do I have a well-built cake? If the honest answer is no, then stop focusing on the icing and build the cake.

About the author

Jon Becker is the founder/CEO of Aardvark Tactical and host of The Debrief with Jon Becker, a long-format podcast focusing on tactical leadership. He is also an attorney admitted for practice in California. He can be reached at jbecker@aardvarktactical.com.


MONADNOCK®
RIOT GEAR
WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED
☑ RIOT SUITS
☑ SHIELDS
☑ HELMETS
☑ RESTRAINTS
☑ BATONS
☑ TRAINING
NATIONAL TACTICAL OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
NTOA
PREMIER SPONSOR
DEFENSE-TECHNOLOGY.COM | 800.347.1200
2025 © SAFARILAND, LLC
DEFENSE TECHNOLOGY®

The Tactical Edge
Submission Guidelines

The Tactical Edge welcomes submissions from NTOA members and selected non-members. Authors should follow these guidelines:

• Please submit an original manuscript via email to editor@ntoa.org. Complete contact information should be provided. Submissions should include author photo and a brief bio.

• Articles are evaluated by an editorial review board. The NTOA reserves the right to edit all articles for clarity or length, as well as punctuation, spelling, grammar, syntax and other word usage. Articles are edited to meet NTOA style guidelines, found in the Associated Press Stylebook and Chicago Manual of Style.

• The NTOA will not publish articles that are advertorial in nature and promote the author's company or product.

• Digital photos must be a minimum of 300 dpi resolution and at least 3x5 inches. Please include captions.

Article submissions should be emailed to editor@ntoa.org. Contact Mary Heins at 800-279-9127, ext. 6 with questions.

Visit ntoa.org/tacticaledge for the complete submission guidelines.

For membership information and all other NTOA business, call (800) 279-9127. *The Tactical Edge*, (ISSN 1083-0871) is owned published four times a year (February, May, August, and November) by the National Tactical Officers Association, 5510 Cherokee Ave., Ste 300, #1475, Alexandria, VA 22312. *The Tactical Edge* is mailed from Alexandria, VA and additional mailing offices. Dues are $50 ($35 digital) per year for U.S./Canada/ Foreign individual, $55 (print) for Canada, $40 ($25 digital) for retired, $35 (digital only) for Fire/EMS, $50 (digital only) for associate, $450 for U.S./Canada agency/team membership and $500 for Foreign agency/ team membership. Memberships include the subscription of *The Tactical Edge*. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to: The National Tactical Officers Association, 5510 Cherokee Ave., Ste 300, #1475, Alexandria, VA 22312. Periodical postage paid at Alexandria, VA, and additional entry offices. All contents of *The Tactical Edge* copyright © by the National Tactical Officers Association. All rights reserved. No portion of *The Tactical Edge* may be reproduced without prior written permission from the NTOA.

NTOA Founder
Capt. John Kolman (ret.), Los Angeles County SD

NTOA Staff

Executive Director	Thor Eells
Chief Operating Officer	Don Kester
Director of Training	Steve Mescan
Program Managers	Wayne DuBois Laura Gerhart Buck Rogers Jeff Selleg Ashley Sutton Tobie Weberg
Senior Instructors	Chris Eklund Dan Murphy
Editor	Mary Heins
Marketing Director	Corey Luby
Training Coordinators	Brandy Barrowcliff Christina Brooks Justin Lapaglia Jenn Selleg Maria Weberg
Membership Services	Danielle Mudrock
Accounting	Rick Brzozowski
Design	Lodging Media
Publisher	Anro, Inc.

Corporate Officers

Chairman of the Board	Capt. Luke Sherman (ret.) Tulsa (OK) PD
Secretary	Lt. Matt Hardesty (ret.) Seminole County (FL) SO
Treasurer	Det. Jason Behun Cape Coral (FL) PD

Regional Directors

Eastern Region
Det. Jason Behun, Cape Coral (FL) PD
Lt. Matt Hardesty (ret.), Seminole County (FL) SO
Major Theodore Golden, DeKalb County (GA) PD

Central Region
Chief Bart Branyon, Kansas Alcohol Beverage Control
Sgt. Dan Wesolowski (ret.), Milwaukee (WI) PD
Capt. Luke Sherman (ret.), Tulsa (OK) PD

Western Region
Lt. Patrick Hilliker, Pima County (AZ) SD
Cmdr. Fred Meyer (ret.), Greeley (CO) PD
Lt. Nicholas Alamshaw, Scottsdale (AZ) PD

Directors Emeritus
Chief Phil Hansen (ret.), Santa Maria (CA) PD
Lt. Brock Simon (ret.), LA County (CA) SD

TEMS Section Chair Emeritus
Dr. Richard Carmona, 17th U.S. Surgeon General

Section Chairpersons

Behavioral Sciences	LaMaurice Gardner, Psy.D.
Canine	Vacant
Chaplaincy	Rev. Rick Iannucci (ret.) U.S. Marshals Service
Crisis Negotiations	Lt. Patrick Doering (ret.) Lake Saint Louis (MO) PD
Corrections	Robert Sorensen (ret.) Federal Bureau of Prisons
Defense Tactics	Sgt. George Ryan Los Angeles (CA) PD
Explosive/EOD	Officer Tom Lynch (ret.) Philadelphia (PA) PD
Firearms	Lt. Jonathan Bigelow Orlando (FL) PD
Intelligence/Terrorism	Lt. Dan Colasanto Garland (TX) PD
Legal	Attorney Eric P. Daigle Daigle Law Group
Less-Lethal	Lt. David Pearson (ret.) Ft. Collins (CO) PD
Multi-jurisdictional SWAT	Sgt. Jason Pepper Elko (NV) PD
Patrol	Officer Chris Periatt (ret.) Saint Clair Shores (MI) PD
Physical Fitness	Greg Amundson Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (GA)
Public Order	Capt. Spencer Fomby (ret.) Boise (ID) PD
Sniper	Sgt. Gar Haugo Fort Collins (CO) PD
Strategy Development	Vacant
Tactical Command	Vacant
Tactical Emergency Medical Support (TEMS)	Jason R. Pickett, MD Austin/Travis County (TX) EMS
Technology	Capt. Mark Pergola Seminole County (FL) SO

DISCLAIMER - Articles that appear in *The Tactical Edge* are for informational purposes only. The nature of the content of all of the articles is intended to provide NTOA members with accurate information in regard to the subject matter covered. However, some of the articles and product reviews contain authors' opinions which may not reflect a position considered or adopted by the National Tactical Officers Association. Articles are published with the understanding that the NTOA is not engaged in rendering legal advice, or tactical advice in the abstract. The tactical principles and suggestions set forth in the articles contained in the publication cannot possibly address every conceivable circumstance that could be encountered during an operation. Therefore the law enforcement officer must rely on his or her past training, experience and applicable governing law in deciding on the appropriate tactical response in any given situation.

The NTOA has taken reasonable care in sourcing and presenting the information contained in *The Tactical Edge*, but accepts no responsibility for any physical or emotional injury, damages of any kind, financial, or other loss or damage. There is no promise or warranty, either expressed or implied regarding the content of any published submission appearing in *The Tactical Edge*.



BECOME A MEMBER

FOR ONLY $35

WHY JOIN THE NTOA?

- **Seamless Transition to Law Enforcement:** Leverage your military skills in a tactical law enforcement environment.
- **Elite Training Opportunities:** Access cutting-edge training, tactics, and resources to stay at the top of your game.
- **Networking & Career Advancement:** Connect with law enforcement professionals and tactical teams nationwide.
- **Mission-Driven Community:** Continue serving with a purpose in a high-impact role.
- **Exclusive Member Benefits:** Gain access to tactical resources, The Tactical Edge publication, conferences, free webinars, NTOA Academy, and much more.
- **NTOA Tactical Response and Operations Standards:** Incorporating TEMS into the current NTOA TROS reflects leadership's duty to mitigate the foreseeable consequences of the law enforcement mission.

TEMS TRAINING

- **Enhance Your Tactical Skillset:** Learn lifesaving medical techniques tailored for high-risk operations.
- **Bridge the Gap Between Medicine & Tactics:** Provide critical care in austere, high-threat environments.
- **Increase Your Operational Value:** Become a force multiplier on SWAT, tactical teams, and law enforcement units.
- **Certifications & Career Boost:** Gain specialized qualifications that open doors in law enforcement, EMS, and private security.
- **Save Lives in Critical Situations:** Be prepared to treat casualties during active shooter incidents, hostage rescues, and other high-risk missions.

SCAN
TO JOIN THE ELITE RANKS OF THE NTOA!

ntoa.org/membership

Unlock exclusive training resources, expert insights, and member-only benefits designed to elevate your tactical expertise to the next level.

5.11 TACTICAL - CV2

BRINC DRONES - 57

COMBINED SYSTEMS, INC. - 17

DEFENSE TECHNOLOGY - 13, 79, 93, CV3

FIRST TACTICAL - 37

GENTEX CORPORATION - 51

HECKLER & KOCH - 31

HOGUE INC - 33

HORNADY - 43

HURRICANE BUTTERFLY - 91

ICOR TECHNOLOGY, INC. - 45

J&N TACTICAL - 77

LENCO ARMORED VEHICLES - 1

MICROTECH KNIVES - 7

MISSION FIRST TACTICAL - 70

POINT BLANK ENTERPRISES - 19, 55, CV4

RESCUE PHONE - 65

SIMUNITION - 85

SKYDIO - 73

STOPBOX USA - 64

STREAMLIGHT, INC. - 48

TACTICAL ELECTRONICS - 83

TERRADYNE ARMORED VEHICLES - 5

THE SAFARILAND GROUP - 9

TYR TACTICAL - 61

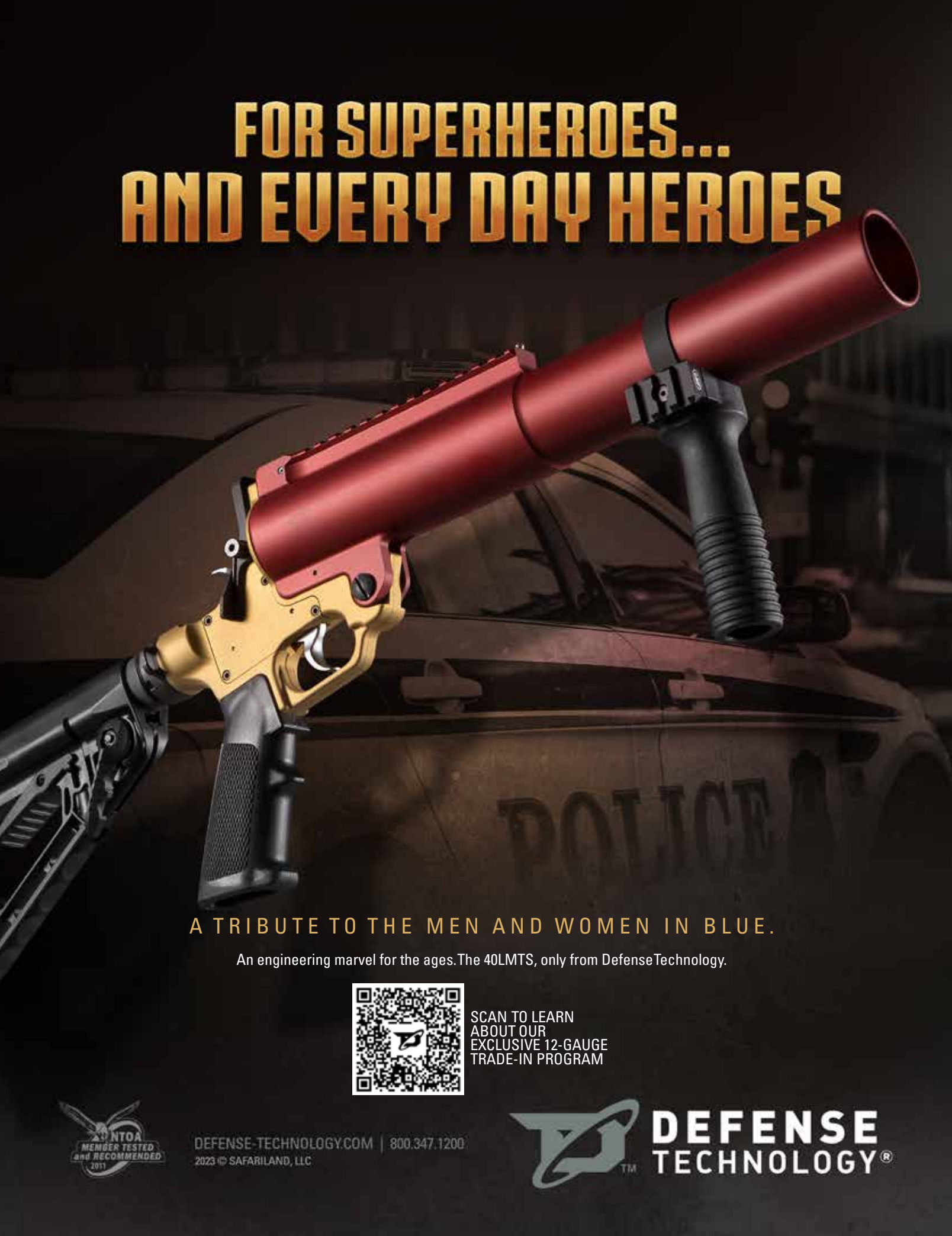


SHARE YOUR EXPERTISE

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WRITING OPPORTUNITIES, PLEASE CONTACT EDITOR@NTOA.ORG

THE TACTICAL EDGE
A CALL FOR ARTICLES

FOR SUPERHEROES...
AND EVERY DAY HEROES



A TRIBUTE TO THE MEN AND WOMEN IN BLUE.

An engineering marvel for the ages. The 40LMTS, only from Defense Technology.

SCAN TO LEARN
ABOUT OUR
EXCLUSIVE 12-GAUGE
TRADE-IN PROGRAM

NTOA MEMBER TESTED and RECOMMENDED 2011

DEFENSE-TECHNOLOGY.COM | 800.347.1200

2023 © SAFARILAND, LLC

DEFENSE TECHNOLOGY®

FITS THE BODY. FREES THE MIND.

BALLISTIC SOFT ARMOR







FITS THE BODY.
FREES THE MIND.

Feel unparalleled comfort with uncompromising protection with Point Blank Enterprises new ELITE Kevlar EXO™ soft body armor systems.

LEVEL IIIA

LEVEL II

EXO Flex
Female Shape

Curves around the female form with no underarm or waistline bulky feel. Contours the curved apex area conforming with the shape and form of your torso.

ELITE Kevlar EXO

FEEL THE FUTURE OF BODY ARMOR

ELITE-EXO.COM

Point Blank BODY ARMOR

PARACLETE PROVEN UNDER FIRE

MADE WITH ARCLIN Kevlar EXO IN THE U.S.A.