Applying The Right Tactic

While most Active Shooter courses differ slightly in the specific tactics taught, all of them train patrol officers to recognize an Active Shooter situation and to rapidly take action to stop it without waiting for the arrival of SWAT teams. However, the use of rapid deployment tactics on a barricaded subject not actively harming people increases the risk of harm to all involved.

Applying The

Knowing "when" to apply a certain tactic is as important as knowing "how" to apply that tactic.

Law enforcement agencies across the U.S. have adopted their procedures and training to prepare their personnel to respond to potential Active Shooter events in their communities. Various training models are available to support these efforts.

The National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) offers a three-day Police Response to Active Shooter Instructor Course. The National Center for Biomedical Research and Training (NCBRT) at Louisiana State University (LSU) offers a three-day train the trainer for their Law Enforcement Active Shooter Emergency Response Course (LASER). NCBRT is a part of the National Domestic Preparedness Consortium. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) offer a five-day train

the trainer course in Active Shooter tactics through Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT).

While each of these courses differ in the specific tactics taught, common among them is training patrol officers to recognize an Active Shooter situation and to rapidly take action to stop it without waiting for the arrival of SWAT teams.
Is it an Active Shooter or a Barricaded Gunman?

BY STUART CAMERON

Enter Without Delay

Rapid deployment tactics are a departure from how tactical incidents have been addressed in the past, but an Active Shooter event is very unique and therefore the response to it must also be distinctive. These tactics gained widespread acceptance after the 1999 Columbine High School attack, when it was realized that delaying the response to an Active Shooter event is not a good tactic.

Rapid deployment tactics have proven effective in mitigating the harm caused once an Active Shooter event has begun. According to the FBI, in 57 percent of Active Shooter incidents, the police have arrived while the event was still underway.

Some shooters have committed suicide once they realized that police had arrived at the scene. This was the case during the attack on Virginia Tech in 2007. Seung-Hui Cho committed suicide in one of the classrooms of Norris Hall after law enforcement had entered the building in response to his attack.

In other incidents, the police have utilized rapid deployment tactics and stopped the shooter through the proactive application of force. At the Carthage, N.C. Pinelake Health and Rehabilitation Center in 2009, a rookie police officer used the rapid deployment tactics that he had been taught while in the police academy to stop an ongoing incident. Both the officer and suspect were wounded, but the attack was terminated.

The trend when solo police officers respond to Active Shooter events is clear. Seventy-five percent of the time officers responding alone must take action at Active Shooter events. One third of these officers are wounded during their response.

Active Shooter Versus Barricaded Gunman

It is of critical importance that when patrol officers are instructed to perform rapid deployment tactics that adequate stress is placed upon when these tactics should be employed. Law enforcement officers must clearly be instructed on the differences between an Active Shooter, someone who is currently engaged in using deadly force against individuals and must be stopped immediately to prevent greater harm, versus a gunman who has barricaded themselves, with or without hostages.

Generally, a subject is considered to be barricaded when he/she has isolated him/herself in a difficult-to-access location; he/she is or may be armed; and is threatening harm to others or to him/herself. When someone is barricaded and is holding someone against his/her will, threatening harm to him/her, the incident becomes a hostage barricade.

Historically, barricaded gunmen and hostage barricades have best been resolved using a slow and methodical effort involving a team of officers comprised of trained negotiators and SWAT personnel. A unified effort between the negotiators and SWAT officers has been proven to provide the best chance of bringing about a safe resolution during barricaded subject situations.

Negotiators can compile useful intelligence for the tactical team while speaking to the subject. The tactical team can initiate actions to help the hostage negotiators establish and maintain contact with the suspect, such as using public address systems or breaking windows on the building.

During the negotiation process, various surveillance tools such as cameras and robots can be employed to acquire information about the structure involved and specifically about where the suspect is located within the building. Family members or friends can be consulted regarding access to weapons and asked about the floor plan of the build-
ing. Tactical teams can utilize a variety of less-lethal options, such as tear gas, to attempt to compel the suspect to exit the location and surrender.

**Use Time to De-escalate**

The passage of time allows a gradual de-escalation of the situation; and for those who may be intoxicated, it allows time for them to sober up. The use of rapid deployment tactics on a barricaded subject not actively harming people increases the risk of harm to the subject, to the police officers, and to hostages should they be present. SWAT officers who respond to a traditional hostage barricade recognize that they must be prepared to engage in a hostage rescue should the hostage taker begin to harm the hostages.

Unlike the spontaneous application of rapid deployment tactics, however, there is often time for the SWAT team to develop a plan for the hostage rescue prior to initiating it. Frequently the SWAT team may also have enough time to practice the hostage rescue plan, but the overall goal is similar to the goal of a rapid deployment, preventing someone from actively harming people.

The formulation of a plan, the use of specially trained operators who possess specialized equipment and the opportunity to practice the plan, combined with the use of gathered intelligence regarding weapons possessed by the suspect and the building layout, increases the odds of a successful outcome during a hostage rescue.

**Prepare for Sudden Transition**

There are times when hostage barricades will suddenly transition into Active Shooting scenarios with little warning. This can occur before SWAT officers have arrived on the scene and made preparations for a hostage rescue. Such was the case with the Nickel Mines one-room school house shooting in 2006. Charles Roberts had taken 10 young Amish students hostage in the small school house. After barricading the doors and windows, Roberts suddenly began to shoot the girls. Ultimately, he shot all 10 girls, killing five of them. He then committed suicide before officers could enter the building.

The slow and deliberate method used during a barricade allows the negotiators to potentially develop a rapport with the suspect. During this period, information can be gleaned about the suspect, his/her state of mind, and the overall situation. Research can be done on the suspect’s background to enhance the negotiation process. This data would also be useful to the tactical team should they be required to act to resolve the situation.

A well-coordinated law enforcement response to a barricade will involve a cohesive effort between negotiators and the tactical team members, not an adversarial one. Historically, the productive use of time during this process works to the advantage of the police. It levels the playing field, allowing time for planning and deliberation, rather than spontaneous action.

**Wrong Tactics for the Problem**

The application of rapid deployment techniques during a barricaded gunman or hostage barricade can have very negative consequences. Officers who receive rapid deployment training should be specifically instructed when these tactics should be applied and concrete examples should be cited. Often the distinction between a barricaded gunman or hostage barricade and an Active Shooter event may not be an easy determination for the initial responding police officers.

For example, if someone who has taken a hostage fires a single shot at police officers on the perimeter and then ceases fire, the
event should still be considered a barricaded gunman despite the fact that shots have been fired by the suspect. The goal of an Active Shooter is generally to shoot as many victims as possible. Rapid action is essential to mitigate the casualties. Rapid deployment tactics are a necessary reaction to an extreme situation.

Delaying action does not work to law enforcement’s advantage; it affords the attacker with more time to inflict harm. Applying rapid deployment tactics to a hostage taker who occasionally fires a shot at police would not be appropriate. Just like every tool in a toolbox has its function, rapid deployment tactics must only be applied during true Active Shooter situations. Misapplication of these tactics will generally lessen the chance of a successful outcome.

**When is as Important as How**

Officers must leave rapid deployment training with a clear understanding of how to apply the tactics that they have been taught and an equally clear understanding of when to apply the tactics. Active Shooter events have grown in complexity. The June 2013 attack in Santa Monica, Calif. highlights this complexity. The subject involved apparently killed two family members, set their residence on fire, and then began a mobile Active Shooter attack.

According to FBI data, only 20 percent of Active Shooters go mobile, moving from one location to another after the attack has begun. During the Santa Monica attack, the subject fired on cars and a municipal bus while on the move. He carjacked a vehicle while continuing the attack, eventually ending up at a college. After shooting people outside on the college campus, the subject entered the library building while continuing to fire his weapon.

Police officers utilized the rapid deployment concept, all the while undoubtedly facing numerous conflicting reports of multiple attackers at various locations throughout the city. Responding officers should expect to base their decisions on limited and at times conflicting information, while working to apply the correct tactics. Continual re-evaluation must be conducted to ensure that the proper tactics are applied to the specific incident at hand.

Delaying action during an Active Shooter event will most likely increase the amount of harm that the attacker can inflict, while taking spontaneous action to resolve a barricaded subject with or without hostages, unless the hostages are being actively harmed, will generally increase the risk of injury to the hostage, the police and the suspect.

Training patrol officers to rapidly act during an Active Shooter event is the right tactic. However, the use of these tactics must be limited to the appropriate situation. The intent of rapid deployment training is not to rapidly act at all tactical situations, but rather to apply them only to those incidents that fit within the Active Shooter definition.

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