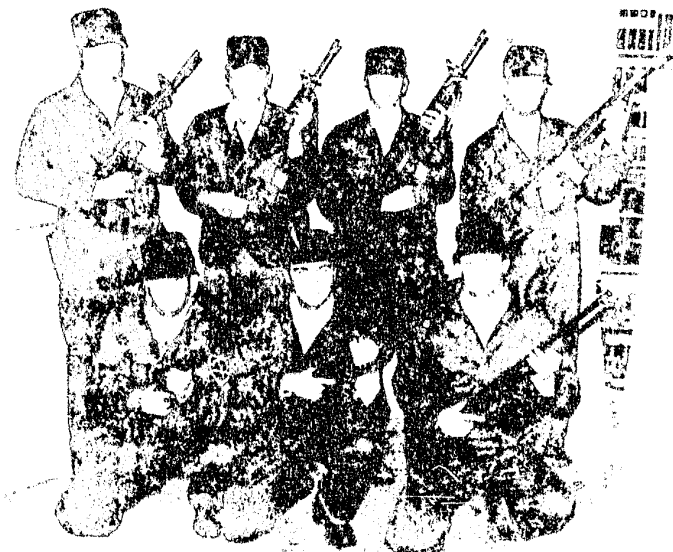


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Special Abilities for Special Needs—

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A TACTICAL OPERATIONS UNIT

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Like other medium-sized city police departments, Birmingham's has evolved over the past 100 years in response to the demands of an increas-

ingly mobile society. The advent of the automobile required the creation of specialized units to direct traffic, enforce the traffic laws, and investigate the inevitable accident. Of course, not all the new police functions were confined to traffic accident investigation. As society's norms and mores changed, so did criminal behavior. Police operations, therefore, were amended to counter new patterns of criminal activity. Highly mobile units, skilled in modern techniques and in the use of modern weapons and vehicles, were organized, trained, and employed for the first time.

During the early 1960's, a period characterized by rioting in Birmingham, the specialized unit concept reached its high watermark. As in most major cities, Birmingham community crises changed police organization in an evolutionary, but haphazard, manner. Many of the problems that surfaced were rooted in the proliferation of fragmented specialized enforcement units and the concomi-

tant distortion of effort and frustration of control which inevitably resulted. In the aggregate, the limited operational flexibility derived from these units had been gained at the expense of command control and efficiency.

The commander of the Uniformed Division, faced daily with the task of controlling and coordinating a vast array of small functional units operating in scattered locations throughout the city, initiated positive steps to secure a coordinated police effort. Staff meetings were held and ultimately resulted in the drafting of a plan for consolidating the various specialty units into a unified framework.

The command structure of the department wrestled with the problems of (1) decreasing the number of personnel assigned to special functions, (2) maintaining a unit large enough to deal with a number of varied responsibilities, (3) providing extensive training in several different function-

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to a small cadre of officers, and (4) avoiding the creation of an elitist attitude on the part of the personnel assigned to a tactical operations unit. Additionally, the Uniformed Division Commander wished to narrow the scope of his responsibilities and effectively place control and responsibility for such a unit in one subordinate individual.

Before any plan could be implemented, an analysis of the beat patrolman's function had to be made. The results of this study indicated that the patrolman's role and responsibility could be enlarged to incorporate many of the traditional specialty functions. Primary responsibility for all police service was, therefore, transferred to the beat officer.

To facilitate the transfer of more responsibilities to the beat officer, a new absolute field reporting system was instituted. The institution of these procedures gave the beat patrolman a challenge and, at the same time, reduced the manpower requirements in specialized enforcement units.

Prior to selecting Tactical Operations Unit (TOU) personnel, the exact nature of that unit's area of responsibility had to be defined. Functionally, it was to be the responsibility of the Uniformed Division Commander. The unit's mission was to augment the regular patrol force and reinforce line units in the accomplishment of their assigned duties. Secondary missions involved riot control, barricaded criminals, bomb disposal problems, and combatting snipers, as well as attending to a variety of other specialized areas of police operations. The TOU's separate existence insured the support of other divisions as it could be detached from regular assignments for special services without disrupting

regular Patrol Division duties and functions.

The varied nature of the missions and responsibilities assigned the Tactical Operations Unit, of necessity, required an investigation of how best to economize the forces available to it. Economy of forces, particularly in a period of increasing personnel costs, requires police administrators to constantly review and evaluate specialized units to avoid unnecessary expense and duplication of effort in their operation. At the same time, a force sufficient to meet all reasonably anticipated needs must be maintained.

The Birmingham Tactical Operations Unit was task organized and designed to minimize these potential administrative pitfalls. All TOU personnel were cross-trained in each of the groups' specialty areas. Whether his task is to isolate or assault a sniper, each team member received sufficient cross-training to enable him to assume the duties of any other should that teammate become a casualty. This training progressed to the state that should the need arise any member could assume the duties and responsibilities of team leader.

Recent events mandate that urban police departments be prepared to react with properly trained and equipped personnel to disturbances involving snipers, riots, bombs, and barricaded criminals. However, the majority of police agencies, due to a limited amount of resources, cannot bear the cost of specialty training for every police officer. It was because of the costs involved that the Birmingham Police Department ultimately decided to confine its specialty training efforts to a small cadre of 10 officers concentrated under a unified command structure termed the Tactical Operations Unit.



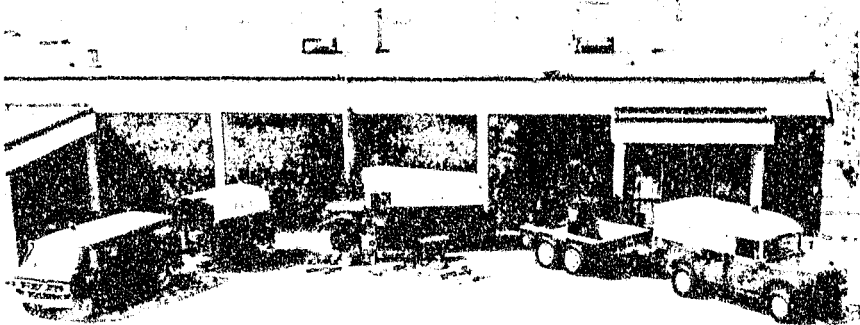
Chief James C. Parsons

Operational Flexibility

As recommended by authoritative guidelines, flexibility is the TOU's hallmark. The specialty units that were combined to form the unit provided the department, at the on-set, with a cadre of officers trained in advanced police functions and techniques. Under the single command of the Tactical Operations Unit Commander, who provided a direct link, heretofore missing, between the Uniformed Division Commander and the specialist officers, the unit was task organized into various elements, each under the direct control of a sergeant or lieutenant.

Bomb disposal duties were organized into a seven-man squad within the TOU. Each member of the squad has attended the Hazardous Devices School in Huntsville, Ala., and has received the best training available to law enforcement officers in this field. The squad has been provided with the finest equipment available and undergoes periodic retraining sessions to maintain their professional edge. As a consequence of its bomb disposal squad's skilled level, the Birmingham department now furnishes bomb dis-

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Bomb disposal equipment used by seven-man TOU squad.

positional assistance for a seven-county region.

The solo motorcycle element of the TOU is primarily responsible for enforcement of moving violations. It also conducts special assignments involving escort duty, saturation patrols, large parades, and traffic control at football games. Additionally, its personnel are trained in the use of sophisticated radar equipment for highway patrol.

The canine units, of which there are 11, are organized as a distinct element of the Tactical Operations Unit. These units are employed in searches and saturation patrols in high crime areas. The entire canine element undergoes periodic retraining at the direction of its training officer. It is planned that the canine units be trained additionally in explosives and narcotics detection.

For antisniper and barricaded criminal operations, the entire TOU is task organized into five seven-man teams. The first two teams introduced into a critical area are organized as an isolation element and an assault element. The first of these to be inserted into the critical area is the isolation element which is composed of two antisniper teams—each team contains a countersniper and his spotter. These countersniper teams provide 360-degree surveillance of the objective area and restrict the sniper's movements by pinning him down with gunfire and by physical occupation of buildings adjacent to him.

The second group is the assault element which is organized into three teams: the search team, the close support team, and the general support team. The assault team conducts the search of the objective building and neutralizes the threat posed by a barricaded criminal or sniper. The remaining TOU teams are held in reserve for any contingency.

All Tactical Operations Unit personnel have been exposed to intensive training for operations in a built-up urban area. This training includes regular military maneuvers, specially modified for police purposes, extensive firearms training, and tactical exercises in multifloored structures, including rappelling. In order to assure the rapid placement of isolation and assault teams in congested urban areas, plans are being made to conduct

rappelling exercises from helicopters onto obstructed rooftops.

All antisniper and civil disturbance equipment is maintained at a centrally located headquarters. This insures the maintenance of continuous security of all weapons and equipment and provides a secure assembly area for all Tactical Operations Unit personnel. It is the location where all personnel assemble when called to duty in an emergency situation and where briefings and assignments are made.

The unit is now in the process of conducting an analysis of all key terrain features in the Birmingham area to provide advance knowledge of certain locations which have great potential for occupation by snipers. For purposes of antisniper operations a key terrain feature is defined as any building or installation which, if held or occupied by a sniper or snipers, would serve to put the TOU at a tactical disadvantage. A terrain analysis involves the extensive use of aerial photographs taken from both perpendicular and oblique angles. The aim is to provide a contingency plan of attack for every key terrain feature within the Birmingham area. The data with respect to each location in such an analysis include, but are not limited to, the following: identification

Members of the TOU canine unit are shown during a retraining session.



of all covered avenues of approach, exit points from the building, the location and range to adjacent dominating terrain features, floor plans, likely entry points for assault units, information regarding a sniper's possible targets of opportunity, locations for the placement of countersniper teams, locations of preassault assembly areas, medevac points, and location of power plants within the objective building. In short, every effort is made to provide antismiper personnel with as much advance knowledge of an objective as possible.

Training for Tactical Unit Operations

Physical conditioning, mental discipline, and training in tactical operations are prerequisites for success of personnel in the unit. The aim of the unit's training program is to instill confidence in each officer rather than to develop an elitist attitude so prevalent and so undesirable in many specialized units. To this end controlled coordinated operations, gunfire discipline, and self-control are heavily stressed. This policy has been established in the belief that unless the special resources available to tactical units are employed with the utmost professional skill short-run goals may be achieved at the expense of long-term alienation of the community.

All members of the TOU are required to meet minimum physical standards and are tested quarterly in order to maintain membership. The examination consists of four trials: a mile run in 8 minutes or less, 20 continuous push-ups, 30 continuous situps, and 10 leg raises. In addition to the physical standards, each officer has for some time participated in the advanced karate program at the gym in the TOU's headquarters.

Proficiency in the use of the variety of offensive and defensive weapons, as well as in operating the department's

special vehicles, is a requirement. Weekend marksmanship training is conducted on a semiannual basis at nearby military installations. In addition, countersniper isolation teams are required to have advanced marksmanship training.

Abandoned multifloored structures provide the unit with a training site for the building searching and clearing exercises incident to its operations. These exercises are intended to provide all personnel with the most realistic settings for gaining experience in all facets of countersniper and barricaded-criminal operations.

Fast, efficient communication is imperative in the effective deployment of unit personnel at the scene of operations. Each member of the unit has multichannel portable radios, in addition to regular police band radios, in their vehicles. During an emergency requiring tactical operations, one communication channel is assigned for the exclusive use of the unit. This allows the unit to function without interference from the routine business of the department, while at the same time maintaining communication with police headquarters.

The personnel of the TOU are furnished blue coveralls and baseball-type caps for a work and training uniform. A special patch was designed for this unit to be worn on the work uniform, as well as the regular police uniform. The members of the unit take great pride in this symbol, and it adds much to the esprit de corps of the unit.

Summary

Based on the Birmingham experience, the following are suggestions for success with a Tactical Operations Unit:

1. Select mature individuals with initiative for the Tactical Operations Unit. Psychiatric examinations, if available, may



Rappelling from buildings (as shown) is included in the intensive training of all TOU personnel.

prove helpful in selecting men with the finest emotional and mental traits.

2. Speed and accuracy in gathering and dispensing information to meet a crisis is essential. An analytical capability should be developed to assemble intelligence and assess results of operations.

3. Provide written policy and guidelines to govern deployment, behavior, and activities of the unit.

1. In training and in performance, emphasize the restraint required of law enforcement in a democracy to avoid it and TOU gaining a "Gestapo" image.

5. Provide the best equipment and training available.

6. Review constantly, with a total command staff, this special enforcement unit's operations, to assess its departmental worth and its acceptance by the community.



END