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The Cover: During the dog days of summer, a police K-9 shares an ice cream cone with a youngster. Photo courtesy of Joe Riplinger, Norfolk, Virginia, Police Department.

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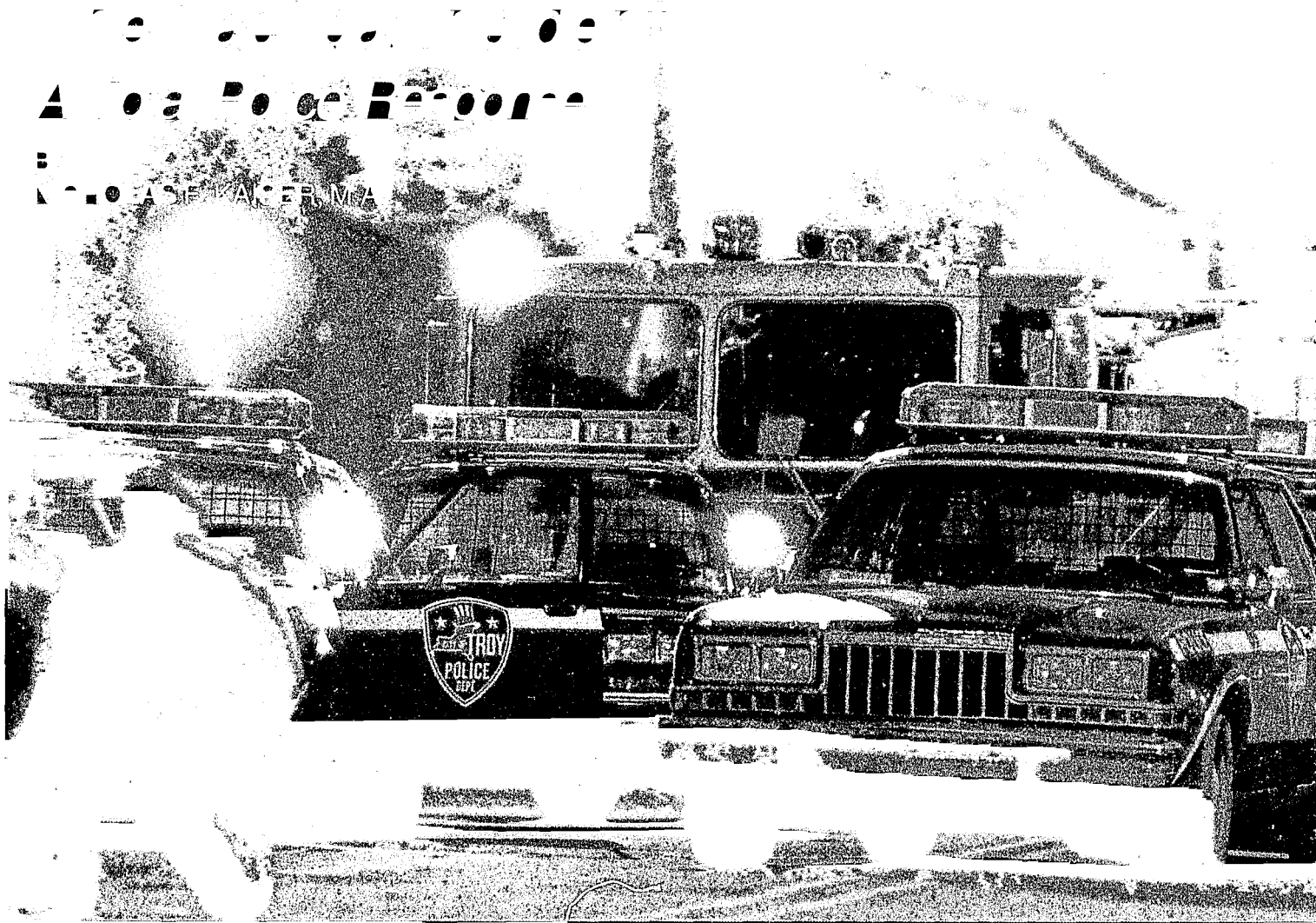
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With the advent of police tactical units, police managers needed to consider new organizational structures within their departments. Accordingly, the development and testing of policies and procedures, along with opening new lines of authority and communications, became necessary. In fact, individual units adopted policies written especially for them. These individualized policies outlined how each unit

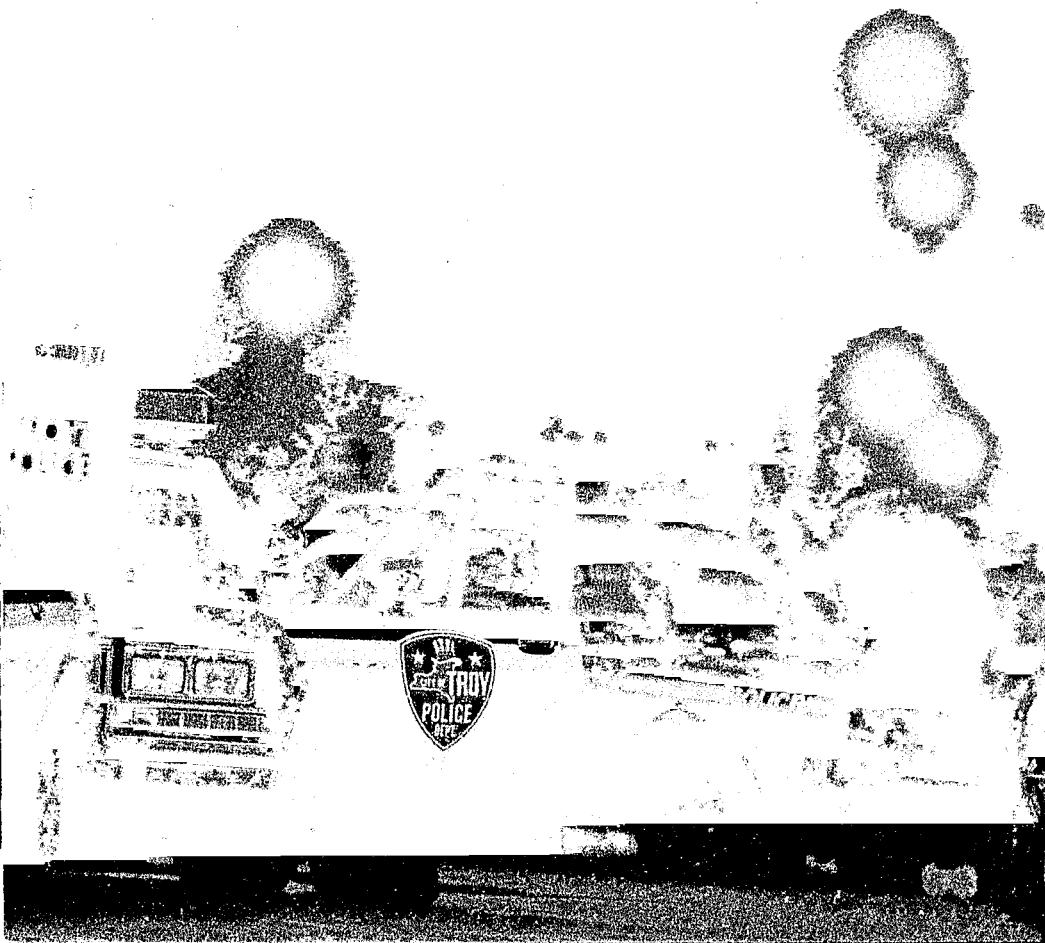
would and could function. Specialization became the case in point.

Today, tactical units remain vital to any department's response to a critical situation. However, they cannot operate within a vacuum and depend on the support of other units. The critical situation requires all police units to work as one, not as individual entities.

Attaining this teamwork is essential to successfully contain a

crisis situation. One way is to implement Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and policies that foster teamwork through a properly guided training program, briefings, and a sensitivity to feedback.

Initiating these policies and SOPs alleviates or eliminates many of the problems managers encounter. For example, when an SOP clearly defines who has authority over the scene of an incident, and this is reinforced during training,



authority probably will not be questioned during an actual crisis situation.¹ In the same way, establishing a team concept helps to minimize jealousy on the part of nontactical officers.²

This article will discuss the importance of a coordinated response to crisis situations and the importance of each participating department in the incident. It will also discuss how training, initiating appropriate policies and procedures, feedback, and briefings can improve

a police department's total response to crisis situations.

TEAM RESPONSE TO A CRISIS

Communications Officers

The communications department is the initial point of contact in most crisis situations. In fact, the typical response begins with informing communications personnel, who then relay the facts to responding patrol units, inves-

tigators, tactical unit members, negotiators, and any other necessary personnel. The importance of clear, effective communication throughout the incident cannot be stressed enough. And, since most communication between units reacting to a critical incident is conducted through the communications officers, the role of this position in a crisis is essential to the team concept. In fact, most communication between units reacting to a critical incident is conducted through the communications officer.

Patrol Units

A responding patrol unit can resolve many calls before they escalate into a crisis situation. But, subsequent intelligence information and the use of proper containment procedures are essential should such a crisis emerge. An improper response by a responding unit could jeopardize the entire operation.

The most crucial moment of any critical situation is in the hands of the first officer on the scene.³ The objective of this officer is to isolate, analyze and contain the incident, request the tactical team if needed, and gather available intelligence. By initially assessing the scene with a concern for safety of citizens and officers, containing the subject(s) by establishing a preliminary inner perimeter, and gathering and relaying pertinent information, the first responding officer provides a vital link in the total police response to a critical situation.

Investigators

Usually, by the time the investigators arrive on the scene, the first

responding officers have already gathered the intelligence and have contained the incident. This information often deals with the types of weapons involved, the location of suspect(s), and whether there are hostages. Investigators, therefore, must receive this information from these officers and then interview possible witnesses to update the intelligence. This information must then be made available to the other units involved, particularly the tactical unit whose mission and plan may be extremely dependent upon such information. Tactical units should not be their own intelligence arm and, as such, should rely upon others charged with this responsibility.⁴

Tactical and Negotiation Personnel

Certainly, the tactical unit and the hostage negotiation team are integral parts of any police department's response to a crisis. The tactical unit's role is essential

should an incident escalate to a point wherein an organized assault may be needed. The same holds true for the hostage negotiation team. At this point in the crisis situation, all other units become dependent upon an organized assault unit working with an experienced negotiation team.

Of course, every police manager would prefer to resolve these situations through skilled negotiation leading to a surrender of all offenders, but many times this is not the case and a tactical assault becomes the only alternative. In such instances, the tactical unit's mission is to protect all involved and to arrest or neutralize the suspect(s). Even so, other members of the department should be familiar with how tactical units operate and of their limitations when implementing a coordinated assault.

K-9 Teams

K-9 teams have also proven themselves to be useful in tactical

situations.⁵ They can be used to locate barricaded suspects, as part of entry and arrest teams, as diversions, and as psychological threats.⁶ As with tactical units, other units must also be familiar with the use of K-9 teams so that the total police response can be effectively coordinated.

METHODS FOR IMPROVING TEAM RESPONSE

Training

Proper training provides the foundation upon which to build a formidable response to critical situations. In most departments, the tactical unit trains on a regular basis, sometimes with hostage negotiators, K-9 and other specialized units. Unfortunately, most departments do not involve patrol officers or investigators in this type of training. For tactical unit members, while the need for training with special tactical weapons and tools must not be underemphasized, training with other units that respond to crisis situations should also be on a regular basis. By involving these other units in the training program, proper responses can be ensured.

During training, the tactical unit should also demonstrate the use of various devices, such as diversionary devices, machine guns, and door-breaching, so that others may understand the benefits and limitations of each. As a result, the confidence of other officers in the tactical unit and in their equipment will be reinforced.

Inservice training, with a block of instruction on crisis situations, can also be useful. Depart-



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“
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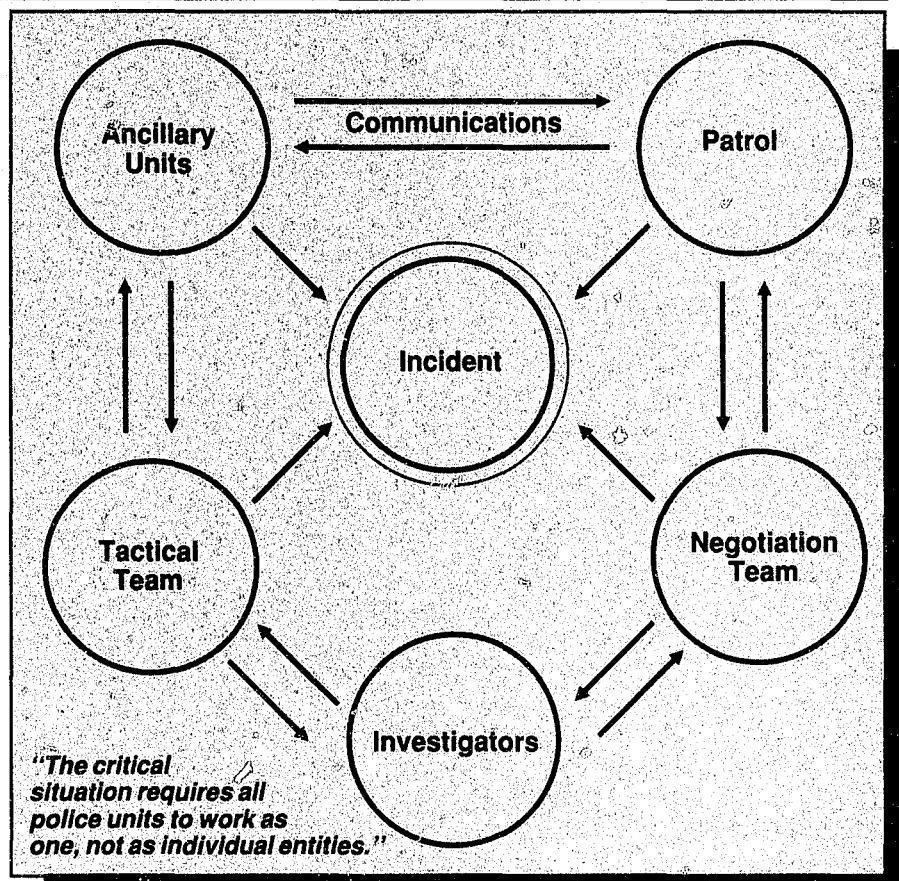
ments should consider involving all units in true-to-life scenario training at least twice a year. However, care should be taken to ensure that all officers understand the nature of their roles and how their performance relates to the others. Video tapes of these training sessions can be especially helpful.

Policies and Procedures

Many departments lack comprehensive policies for the coordination of tactical operations. Therefore, departments should specify policies, SOPs, and procedures for tactical situations, such as the division of labor between each unit and how individual units fit into the entire plan. In addition, since lines of authority may change at the scene of a critical incident, a written policy covering this area would effectively coordinate the operation and avoid confusion as to who is in command. These principles regarding command should be clearly stated in the department's SOPs and reinforced in training and debriefings.

Outside Feedback

Being sensitive to constructive criticism from sources outside the department can be useful in formulating an objective plan for improvement. For example, almost without exception, crises capture the media's attention. In fact, the media often will initiate a series of editorials as to how the incident might have been handled better. In this case, it is important to not become defensive and to remain as objective as possible in order to respond carefully to each commentary. Many times, useful informa-



tion can be obtained from such editorials and can be used in future training.

Briefings and Debriefings

Each critical incident must be viewed as an opportunity to learn and to prepare for the next event. Briefings and debriefings, in particular, can be very effective in this regard and can also help to solidify cooperation among various units. Even though incidents occur without warning, thereby eliminating a complete, formal briefing, all officers should be briefed whenever possible in order to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings. For example, perimeter personnel should be advised of the tactical

unit's intention to use diversionary devices so that their use would not be misinterpreted as unfriendly fire.

Accordingly, not only must the tactical unit debrief after each encounter, but everyone involved, such as patrol officers, investigators, K-9, and communications officers, should also participate in debriefings. When these debriefings take place, officers should discuss what went wrong and, equally as important, what went right during a critical incident. Even though strong emotions may arise, such as anger or fear, the end result will ultimately be objective learning.

The normal course of events at a debriefing usually includes recognizing problems and successes,



Photo courtesy of
The Troy Record

Photo courtesy of
John Carl D'Annibale/*Albany Times Union*



“ Departments should consider involving all units in true-to-life scenario training at least twice a year. ”

admitting any problems internally, admitting the problem to others, and developing a solution. This can be difficult, because the tendency to blame others or oneself is hard to resist. But, objectivity and an emphasis on learning will result in a successful debriefing in most cases. Then, the various units should examine the overall plan and each officer involved must identify any mistakes. Finally, all the involved units should determine how to better handle the problems that arose during this particular critical incident should they reoccur.

CONCLUSION

Increased specialization in police departments across the country enables them to respond to

unusual situations with more expertise. However, there are still instances where cooperation erodes at the scene of a crisis situation. But, with a specific departmental plan that includes established policies and SOPs, police departments can avoid disadvantages of this nature and can develop and use their various skills to the fullest.

As time passes, the introduction of new technologies will bring even more increased specialization to law enforcement. Therefore, it has become more important that each specialty work cooperatively with others in the pursuit of law enforcement goals. Only through teamwork and close cooperation between all law enforcement specialties can law enforcement

agencies successfully conclude crisis situations.

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Footnotes

¹ James W. Stevens and David W. Mackenna, "Assignment and Coordination of Tactical Units," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, vol. 58, No. 3, March 1989, pp. 2-9.

² Ibid.

³ John T. Dolan and G. Dwayne Fuselier, "A Guide for First Responders to Hostage Situations," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, vol. 58, No. 4, April 1989, pp. 9-13.

⁴ Captain Wade Y. Ishimoto, "Intelligence Support of SWAT Operations," *The Tactical Edge*, vol. 2, No. 1, Winter 1984, pp. 7-11.

⁵ VanNess H. Bogardus, III, "The Application of K-9's to SWAT Operations," *The Tactical Edge*, vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 1983, pp. 19-22.

⁶ Donn Kraemer, "The Application of Police Canines to Tactical Operations," *The Tactical Edge*, vol. 5, No. 1, Winter 1987, pp. 39-41.