



BASIC ELEMENTS OF A TACTICAL TEAM

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If you are considering starting a tactical team within your agency, here are some important elements to include from someone who knows.

Kentucky Tactical Officers' Association President Tony Cobaugh describes a tactical team as, "any team that is formed with a clear mission statement that they are going to handle high-risk warrant service, barricaded subjects, hostage rescue — and in these days and times — you should include active shooter situations. If that is in a clearly defined mission statement and that is what that team clearly understands as their mission those are the baseline things that we train for if you are going to be a tactical team."

Once that mission statement clearly is defined, Cobaugh identified four basic elements that create the structure of a developed team:

- Entry team
- Containment team
- Sniper team
- Medical support

"There is an entry team, which tends to be your most experienced and very best tactical operators," Cobaugh said. "That is, if there had to be a hostage rescue, that team commander knows that this group here, this entry element, that is who I am going to send in to take care of [it]."

Secondly, Cobaugh said there must be officers who begin containment of the situation.

"When you are talking about a barricaded situation, it all starts with patrol level. Some beat cop somewhere in some county or city in Kentucky gets sent somewhere and boy it goes sideways very quickly," he said. "Whether somebody takes a pot shot at them from a house or trailer or whatever, somebody starts getting cover and starts setting up the 360 degree containment around the structure.

"You have to have that and it has to be a very disciplined group," Cobaugh continued. "And in the systems that I am aware of, this is where the newest squad members start out."

Teams which employ snipers act as the third component, Cobaugh said. While the word sniper may tend to be politically incorrect in some areas of the state, Cobaugh said these men and women basically are precision long riflemen, an element that ranks with him as one of the most important on any tactical team.

"At any given moment, in the worst-case situation any of our minds could piece together — a hostage situation — someone presents themselves in a window, in a doorway; and the opportunity arises for that precision long rifleman to save that [hostage's] life," Cobaugh said. "That is, to me, the primary element within a SWAT team because they have to be such solid, precision riflemen."

Finally, the fourth element a tactical team needs is medical support, Cobaugh said. In Louisville, that team is called TEMS, the Tactical Emergency Medical Services unit. >>

TEMS began in 1992, and Cobaugh said its mission is two-fold: to protect and treat.

(See sidebar on tactical medics to the right)

"In Louisville, we have six medics," Cobaugh said. "Three of them are emergency room physicians and three of them are paramedics. They are not sworn, they do not carry weapons, however, they go through all of our schooling, all of our training and when we have firearms qualifications, they are required to fire the same weapons and qualify just as the SWAT officers are.

"The mindset is that if they are in a situation, sometimes every gun you can get down range to protect everybody is a good thing," Cobaugh continued. "They have been trained in those weapon systems and they know that under KRS they are allowed to defend themselves. If they access one of our SWAT weapons that they have been trained on and qualified on, they know that they are going to be covered if they need to use force to protect themselves or someone else."

As with most aspects of law enforcement, different agencies approach tactical medics in different ways. Some teams have their medics deputized for call-out purposes, Cobaugh said. Others will send current tactical team members for medical training. But regardless of how the medics are employed, Cobaugh said they are an essential part of keeping the officers safe and providing on-the-spot response to medical emergencies that occur on scene. ■