

# The Role of the Law Enforcement Tactics Branch in Enabling Protection During Crisis

*By Chief Master Sergeant Scott M. Henshaw (Retired)*

## Critical Incidents

Sadly, names like Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and Parkland have become synonymous with tragedy. But, active shooters do not exclusively target learning institutions. The Century Aurora 16 movie theater, Aurora, Colorado; the Pulse nightclub, Orlando, Florida; the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival, Las Vegas, Nevada; and the Sutherland Springs First Baptist Church, Sutherland Springs, Texas, also fell victim to these primal predators, who were hunting for soft targets with masses of people unable to effectively oppose them. Even military installations with robust force protection measures in place are not immune to active shooters. Attacks on Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington; the Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.; the Naval Air Station Pensacola, Pensacola, Florida; and Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, collectively left 21 innocent people dead and another 39 injured. And Fort Cavazos (formerly Fort Hood), Texas, experienced two separate active shooter incidents; those two shooters were responsible for 16 deaths and 43 injuries. Crises like active shooter incidents not only result in catastrophic losses of life but, when the military is targeted, can also compromise our Nation's ability to achieve strategic objectives. And unfortunately, active shooter incidents show no signs of decline.

In 2022, 50 active shooter incidents occurred across the United States. This number represents a 66.7 percent increase compared to 2018.<sup>1</sup> In one of those incidents, an active shooter entered the Robb Elementary School, Uvalde, Texas, and killed 21 people, seriously injuring another 17. Of those killed, 19 were children ranging from 9 to 11 years of age. The 77-minute delay between the on-scene arrival of the first officers and neutralization of the shooter made this incident even more tragic. The delay ultimately contributed to a more significant loss of life. The U.S. Army Installation Management Command (IMCOM) subsequently distributed a summary of the Department of Justice critical incident review,<sup>2</sup> which is a comprehensive analysis of the overall law enforcement response in Uvalde. IMCOM recommended that all garrison leaders read and understand the Robb Elementary School critical incident review to "better understand their roles and responsibilities in building installation resilience to disruption and attack."<sup>3</sup> Among other findings, IMCOM stated that responses to active shooter incidents call for "precise and swift movement."<sup>4</sup>

## Special Reaction Teams

The Robb Elementary School active shooter incident ended when three members of a U.S. Border Patrol tactical

team, followed by deputies from two local sheriffs' offices, pushed past more than 300 other officers on the scene, entered the school, and killed the shooter. Assigned to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Border Patrol tactical teams provide immediate-response capabilities for high-risk incidents that require specialized skills and tactics. While civilian law enforcement agencies may have "tactical teams" with various other names, most possess a special weapons and tactics team capability. The Military Police Corps Regiment has tactical teams with the same capabilities; these teams are known as special reaction teams (SRTs).

SRT members are specially trained, armed, and equipped military police Soldiers and civilians who are responsible for responding to and resolving high-risk incidents. They serve as the commander's principal rapid-response force in the event of a significant disruption on an installation. SRTs can effectively resolve crises that would otherwise exceed the capabilities of traditional law enforcement personnel. Examples of these critical situations include, but are not limited to, active shooter threats, barricaded subjects, threatened suicides, high-risk warrant services, sniper incidents, drug raids, hostage situations, and acts of terrorism. SRTs are among the Army's most highly trained, technical law enforcement assets. The primary characteristic that distinguishes SRT members from other military police personnel is the concentration of effort; SRTs focus solely on tactical solutions, seeking out opportunity within the chaos created by crisis.

The mission of the Advanced Law Enforcement Training Division, U.S. Army Military Police School (USAMPS), Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, is to "provide subject matter expertise and specialized training in advanced law enforcement and antiterrorism tactics, techniques, and procedures [TTP] supporting all Services within the Department of Defense and select civilian law enforcement agencies with resident and mobile training team capabilities."<sup>5</sup> The Law Enforcement Tactics Branch of the Advanced Law Enforcement Training Division is solely responsible for training SRT members. All Law Enforcement Tactics Branch cadre members (consisting of Soldiers, Marines, Airmen, and Army civilians) possess extensive training and operational experience. They are true subject matter experts who teach sound, doctrine-based TTP. In addition, they continuously examine data collected from civilian and partner nation counterparts to develop and refine the training. The end state of the training must employ best police practices, exceed industry standards and, most importantly, produce SRT members who can enable protection in crisis.

The SRT course focuses on close-combat marksmanship, breaching methods, vehicle interdictions, room entry, and building-clearing TTP. While the course includes limited classroom instruction, most training time is spent on the ground, honing skills through countless repetitions of learned TTP. Students spend time in live-fire shoot houses (with as many as five team members in the same room), engaging photo-realistic targets. All TTP are further reinforced and tested under force-on-force conditions, with each mission progressively escalating in scope and difficulty. This scenario-based training builds resistance to stress and bolsters critical thinking and decision making.

### **SRT Support for the Military Police Corps Regiment Motto**

Aligned with the Military Police Corps Regiment motto of *Assist, Protect, Defend*, SRT members apply tactical solutions to enable protection in crisis.

#### ***Assist***

SRTs assist assigned military police personnel through the training they can provide. They represent the resident subject matter expertise in weapons employment and tactical movement within any organization. Simply put, SRT members can better educate formations on fundamental and advanced levels of shoot, move, and communicate actions. (If any of the first police officers on the scene at the Robb Elementary School had received SRT training, the outcome may have been dramatically different and more lives may have been saved.) An aspect of the training that is often overlooked is that it also enhances the mental preparedness of responding patrols. Moving toward the sound of gunfire is nearly impossible without the appropriate training and mental preparedness. Law enforcement personnel responding to crises require a high level of confidence in their own skills as well as the collective skills of the other first responders. SRT course graduates-turned-trainers push well past “confidence” and train to maintain a mindset of complete dominance. This gross overmatch mentality was evident during yet another tragedy—but with a much different outcome than those in the examples previously mentioned.

On 27 March 2023, an active shooter entered the Covenant School in Nashville, Tennessee, and, before law enforcement personnel could arrive on the scene, fired 178 rounds from a rifle and pistol, killing three children and three adults. Due to traffic conditions, it took 11 minutes for the first patrols to respond to the incident. However, from the first officers’ arrival to neutralization of the shooter, only 3 minutes lapsed. That’s worth repeating—*only 3 minutes!* Upon their arrival, officers Rex Engelbert and Michael Collazo entered the school but did not hear gunshots or know the location of the shooter. They began systematically clearing rooms. Once they heard shots fired, they immediately moved to the second floor, past other officers, and killed the shooter. As recorded by body cameras, officers Engelbert and Collazo never stopped moving toward the sound of gunfire.<sup>6</sup> Their actions were a direct result of the training they had received and the mental preparedness they possessed. That body camera footage represents the standard for active

shooter responses and should be required viewing for all law enforcement officers. It also illustrates the type of training that SRT members have received and can, in turn, provide to others.

#### ***Protect***

SRTs protect military police patrols with their enhanced patrol response capabilities. Whether assigned to a full- or part-time team, SRT members also perform patrol duties with other military police Soldiers and civilian police officers. When properly employed and supported, a single SRT member offers capabilities above and beyond what multiple patrols can provide—and, at the very least, are a force multiplier. Through superior ballistic protection, SRT-trained individuals can arrive at a crisis with improved survivability for themselves and others. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ), which is responsible for measuring and rating ballistic protection levels provided by various products, has assigned typical body armor worn by patrols NIJ ratings of Handgun (HG) 1 or HG 2. These vests can defeat pistol ammunition ranging from 9 millimeters to .357 Magnum (HG 1) and 9 millimeters to .44 Magnum (HG 2).<sup>7</sup> During the 50 active shooter incidents that took place in 2022, 26 rifles were used by the shooters.<sup>8</sup> A single SRT member can bring to bear a ballistic shield that provides an NIJ rating of Rifle 2, which is capable of defeating 5.56-millimeter and 7.62-millimeter ammunition.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting here that one of the reasons for the delay in neutralizing the active shooter at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde was that initial responders would only advance toward the gunfire with a ballistic shield, which was unavailable. Not only can SRT members protect other first responders with a shield, but they are also trained to accurately engage and neutralize threats while doing so.

Another capability that SRT members offer to enable protection in crisis is accessibility. Closing and locking doors is standard procedure during active shooter incidents. If the shooter is on the other side of those doors and responding military police personnel do not have immediate access to keys, then they must move past the doors. SRT members, on the other hand, can use several methods to breach locked doors, allowing immediate access to those areas. This saves precious time for clearing the threshold and moving to dominant positions before the shooter can recover.

#### ***Defend***

SRTs defend the “effectiveness and survivability of mission-related military and nonmilitary personnel, equipment, facilities, information, and infrastructure.”<sup>10</sup> The U.S. Army Military Police Corps Regiment is manned, equipped, and trained to provide flexible and tailorable support to joint force commanders. This support directly enables warfighters to achieve tactical, operational, and strategic objectives. Within multidomain operations, military police personnel execute three distinct disciplines—police operations, detention operations, and security and mobility support. SRTs act as force multipliers throughout the range of these disciplines. For more than 248 years, the Marechaussee Corps and provost marshals and, more recently, the Military

Police Corps Regiment, have enforced the law, secured rear areas, and afforded freedom of movement during almost every major conflict, from the Revolutionary War to the Global War on Terrorism.

## Conclusion

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*, states that “The foundation of protection starts with the individual Soldier.”<sup>11</sup> Within the Military Police Corps Regiment, SRTs are the foundation of protection during crisis. Compared to the rest of the Military Police Corps Regiment they are better trained, equipped, and postured and they possess a mindset of complete domination. Therefore, they can provide an enhanced response for countering an adversary’s undesirable actions. In preparing for a crisis, Soldiers have repeatedly heard, “You’ll never rise to the occasion and will always default to your training.” SRT members know that disputing this axiom is nothing more than a tactical fantasy.

### Endnotes:



<sup>1</sup>“Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2022,” U.S. Department of Justice, 2023, <<https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2022-042623.pdf/view>>, accessed on 8 July 2024.

<sup>2</sup>“DOJ Critical Incident Review: Active Shooter at Robb Elementary School, Uvalde, TX,” Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services, Washington, D.C., 2024, <<https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/content.ashx/cops-r1141-pub.pdf>>, accessed on 22 July 2024.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>“Advanced Law Enforcement Training Division,” USAMPS website, 2024, <<https://home.army.mil/wood/units-tenants/USAMPS/courses/advanced-law-enforcement-training-division>>, accessed on 8 July 2024.

<sup>6</sup>Dan Marco, “Nashville PD’s Response to the Covenant School Active Shooter was ‘By the Numbers,’” *Police1*, 28 March 2023, <<https://www.police1.com/active-shooter/articles/nashville-pds-response-to-the-covenant-school-active-shooter-was-by-the-numbers-1HDA18PV63fLCEKP/>>, accessed on 8 July 2024.

<sup>7</sup>“Standard Protection Levels, Specification for NIJ Ballistic Protection Levels and Associated Test Threats,” NIJ, October 2023, <<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/307347.pdf>>, accessed on 8 July 2024.

<sup>8</sup>“Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2022.”

<sup>9</sup>“Standard Protection Levels.”

<sup>10</sup>ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 1 January 2024.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

---

*U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Henshaw (Retired) served 24 years in the security forces (military police) career field. He is a training instructor for the Advanced Law Enforcement Training Division, USAMPS. He holds a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice from Drury University, Springfield, Missouri.*

