

Historical Overview of S.P.P.D. Tactical Units E.R.T./, S.W.A.T./, C.I.R.T. up until March 31, 2002

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The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) is a disciplined unit of volunteers officers trained in the use of specialized equipment and tactics and is capable of responding to occurrences that require exceptional skills and technical expertise to abate an incident with minimal use of personnel and force. CIRT responds to incidents where the personal safety and welfare of citizens or fellow officers is deemed critical as a result of threatening or aggressive action by an individual or group.

The first such type of unit was lead by Sgt. John Mercado and began in 1957. It was called the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) and consisted of six to eight patrolmen. Often referred to as "Mercado's Marauders", the unit was later augmented with two canines. They had access to (all weapons were always stored in the gun vault at headquarters) four .45 caliber Thompson sub-machine guns, six .30 caliber semi-auto rifles, and four .351 caliber sniper rifles which had no scopes, only iron sites. The unit was seldom used and had no formal training. No official records were ever kept as to whom the officers were, nor any incidents in which they were used.

The first S.P.P.D. Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team had its beginnings on Labor Day Weekend in August of 1968 after a gun was seen at a dance at Stem Hall. Then a disturbance and fight broke out with shots being fired at responding officers. It escalated and moved to the to the Summit-University area. When the riot situation concluded it resulted in 4 policemen shot, 20 policemen injured, 26 citizens arrested, 11 fires in Summit University neighborhood in ten hours and thousands of dollars property damage.

In response to that incident and similar incidents nationwide the first S.P.P.D. Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team was formed under the leadership of Captain D.R. Smith. SWAT was initially a Power Shift responsibility. This shift worked from 1800-0200 and 2000-0400. The fifteen selected, volunteer patrolmen had no formal training nor designated assignments at an actual incident. There was a verbal sanction from the chief but no written sanction within the department or city for its existence as a viable police unit. Most training and tactics were geared for civil disturbance and sniper incidents due to the Stem Hall incident and other incidents which had occurred around the nation. Most training was in-house and based on military tactics. The first recorded formal training occurred during the summer of 1972. Five men were sent for a one week F.B.I. school in Quantico, VA. This first SWAT team training recorded involved one Lieutenant, 13 Sergeants, and 6 Patrolmen. The normal response team consisted of a four man team. The leader was a Sergeant with one radio and an AR-15 rifle. Number two man was the marksman with an AR-15 rifle with a 3 power scope. Number three man was the observer with the second radio and armed with an M-1 carbine. The last officer was the rear guard who was armed with a 12 gauge shotgun.

During the years 1968 to 1976 SWAT/CIRT (later called the Critical Incident Response Team) was utilized in several different ways. Primarily what would occur is that there would be an incident requiring the support of SWAT personnel and only on duty SWAT members would respond. There were no provisions for a recall during this period so if there were no SWAT personnel on duty, then patrol officers handled the situation, or investigative personnel came to H.Q. and got the equipment. In either case there was much disorganization in settling an incident, such as the shooting of Ramsey County Deputy Roger Rosengren at St. Paul Ramsey Hospital. When a non-trained officer (not a member of the unit) retrieved one of the AR-15's from the vault, attempted to fire at the hostage taker with his doctor hostage. The weapon did not fire as the officer did not properly "charge" the weapon. A weapon's check the following day also revealed the weapon's three power scope was not in proper alignment. Thus the shot, if fired, may have struck the hostage, or nothing at all.

Initially during these years the equipment and weapons were kept in the third floor gun vault. The weapons were kept in two padded, plywood boxes. The weapons and equipment were transferred from the vault to a cruiser and back for each evening's tour of duty. When an assigned cruiser was attached to SWAT in 1972 the equipment was then kept in the cruiser and only the weapons were transferred for each tour. The cruiser was assigned primarily to the Power Shift, (squad 505) and when manpower permitted, to midnights, squad 704. If there were no SWAT members working, the cruiser stayed in the garage at Headquarters. In 1974, and 1975, after the Power Shift was disbanded, the cruiser was occasionally assigned on the street to non-SWAT officers. When that situation existed, the cruiser would be sent to the scene and working SWAT members would then also be sent to the scene. Generally the SWAT cruiser was assigned only when manpower permitted and it was assigned to at least one SWAT member. Problems arose as non qualified personnel would "re-sight" the weapons for themselves during the late night shifts.

Equipment in the unmarked unit was a 24" x 24" x 40" plywood box, which contained one .223 cal. AR-15 with 3x scope (which was the dedicated sniper weapon), one .30 cal. M-1 Carbine, one 12 gauge Winchester Model 1200 shotgun, two .38 cal. revolvers, ammunition, tear gas and smoke canisters. The Thompson submachine guns were traded for the AR-15's in 1971. The "almost exclusive" use of the SWAT cruiser was for "squad backup" during the entire period 1968 to 1976. There was never a full/entire team recall during the period. Some of this "lack of usage" was due to the resourcefulness of the street officers, and some was due to leadership's hesitancy to use the unit, but I feel it was mostly due to lack of understanding by officers and leadership as to the capability and guidelines for usage of the unit.

I joined SWAT during the summer of 1972. There was little training which occurred and the few times it transpired it took place during the normal work shift, and led by the officer themselves. We used our normal leather gear; I was given a used, one piece, blue jump suit by another officer to wear. We had to furnish all our own gear except for the long-guns. There was no body armor, except a few pieces of old metal plate armor designed for shrapnel.

On November 12, 1973, there was a restructure of SWAT. This was the first 'organized' attempt to have a viable, officially recognized unit. This action was deemed necessary for several reasons and the objective was to restructure and solidify the SWAT Team. Some of the reasons were that the Power Shift was becoming diluted due to manpower shifting within the Department. Team

deterioration had become evident due to Departmental transfers and lack of leadership and direction within the unit. A need for increased training, discipline and uniformity of dress was identified.

In the spring of 1974 the selection and training of the unit was officially begun, and the unit was renamed the Critical Incident Response Unit or C.I.R.T. The philosophy to be followed was that the new unit was to receive official identification within the Department as a viable unit. It was not to be considered an "elite" unit. The Departmental mandate defined the mission to be "tactics with tact". All training was to be documented and complete records retained. The areas of training were to be in hostage, barricaded suspects, and sniper/anti-sniper. Individual marksmen were identified with the primary emphasis to be in the sniper/anti-sniper area, probably due to past experiences. Twenty volunteer patrolmen were selected to join the team, under Lt. John Nord. This new team, wearing one piece, blue jump suits (affectionately known as Jiffy-lube suits) and cloth ball caps was named the Critical Incident Response Team. Total team equipment inventory for the team consisted of: eleven sets of body armor, three .223 Cal. AR-15 rifles with 3x scopes, twelve .30 Cal. M-1 carbines, six 12 gauge Winchester model 1200 riot guns, three 37 mm gas gun kits, and one homemade periscope. The four .351 caliber rifles and the last six .30 cal carbines were traded in 1984 for three .223 caliber Smith and Wesson sniper rifles with bull barrels and 4-12X Burris scopes in 1985. There was no personal body armor, and only four sets of very heavy body armor which had only metal plating, and no firepower rating was available. Usually this armor was left at headquarters, as it was too heavy to operate in while wearing. Only later (1979), when modern Kevlar body armor was available, was body armor regularly used by the entry officers. Eight .308 caliber sniper rifles with Leupold 12 x 20 scopes were purchased in 1995 for the marksmen of the unit.

It seemed that after the initial purchase of equipment in 1974-75 till the middle to the late 1990's few budget monies were ever assigned to unit. Often the purchase of equipment and training was an exercise in creative accounting, inventive acquisition, and innovative 'horse trading'. Many times during my tenure as an officer, sergeant, and as one of the trainers we traded with other units or other police departments for supplies. Since the SPPD had the ability to make life sized "head pictures" to be used by snipers we would trade them for camo-stick and other items. We often traded the expertise gained by us with other departments. We were known to allow some of their officers to attend our monthly training in exchange for ammunition. From 1985 till 2001 each year SPPD-CIRT officers were moved to the top of the long waiting list for training in the regional FBI SWAT School due to horse-trading. The Lieutenant often referred to me as the "designated training whore" as my teaching abilities and time were traded for training slots, and I was very glad to do this as I could garner advanced training techniques and knowledge to be passed on to our CIRT/SWAT officers, as well as hone my own skills and knowledge. Twice each year four SPPD officers would attend the FBI Basic SWAT School in exchange for use of the fire department's rappelling tower, and the use/loan of this officer for the week to the FBI as one of the school's training cadre. The U.S. Army was glad to trade 4 spots in their military sniper school for the use of me as one of the instructors in the area of "urban sniping techniques". On another occasion a military unit had more ammunition than they needed or could use during their weeks training session. I and another CIRT officer were more than happy to assist the Guard unit, by relieving them of numerous cases of ammunition (with their permission). In fact, the old yellow cruiser "505" drove out the front gates of a military installation with the frame

nearly dragging the ground. We found that the white "operation scrubs" from S.P.R.H. made of Tivex were waterproof and could be used as snow camouflage. Once again somehow enough of the scrubs were deemed unusable by the hospital and donated to the Team.

Approx. 1978 or shortly thereafter it was decided to move to the "BDU's of the military for official CIRT uniforms. Due to the lingering anti-Vietnam war feelings it was deemed proper by the administration to dye them a dark blue so as to not appear "too military". These new uniforms could not be purchased through normal channels due to budget restraints and deficits. Thus two of us officers (I and Dan Harshman) drove up to Camp Ripley and purchased them at the PX under the auspices of an unknown major in the National Guard. One set per officer was then issued. Due to budget shortages, these uniforms were passed down from officer to officer as they were promoted and new officers came on board. This was because no replacement uniforms could be obtained, for there was no budget for it. It became a "badge of seniority" to have the old faded uniforms. It was not till approximately the late 1980's or 1990 that the team went to military green camouflage BDU's.

Throughout all of those shortages and lack of funding, C.I.R.T. has continued to pursue a high standard of professional excellence by having requirements which are to a higher standard than usual departmental regulations (both in our department and surrounding SWAT teams) in the areas of firearms, physical fitness, dedication, and discipline. Once a training date was selected, we trained regardless of the weather conditions. The team trained for a full ten hour day every three weeks in areas of open field search, high risk warrant service, barricaded suspect apprehension, hostage rescue, dignitary protection, mobile field force, active shooter response, first aid, defensive tactics, marksmanship, chemical munitions, less lethal munitions, vehicle takedowns, aircraft assaults and many other areas. CIRT was the first team in the upper Midwest to fully augment canines with swat tactics. The team was the first in the upper-Midwest to have mandatory physical fitness standards as well as increased weaponry standards for both selection and retention purposes. A failure to maintain the Unit's standards was grounds for removal from the Unit.

Realistic training included the use of cotton bullets, wax bullets, paint ball, and high stress instruction techniques. Often the same shooting scenario would be repeated numerous times. Once firing the weapon strong hand, again while firing the weapon weak hand, again with gas mask on, and again with gas mask and firing with the weapon in the weak hand. Sometimes the shooting scenario would be executed without gasmask, but in a tear gas environment.

The team took great pride in training in whatever weather occurred on the training day, regardless of the temperature or other conditions. The team trained in real life situations. This meant not only when raining, hot, or sub zero conditions, but with full body armor and helmets. I cannot recall of ever cancelling a training day due to conditions; but only if an actual call-out occurred. They have not only learned how to shoot, safely search and apprehend, but how to rappel down buildings, enter on upper story windows, insert via helicopter, and how to use flash-bangs, and explosives for entry if the situation demands.

All this training and the high standards were due to those high standards set by the first officers developing the unit. I can recall Deputy Chief Brown commenting to me on the firing line at

Camp Ripley. It was raining heavily; the snipers were still firing at targets 400 and 500 yards out, and making successful head shots. He said, "I think you guys are a bit nuts. There is a fine line between dedication and dumb, don't you think you should call it a day? ". One of the men responded; "Just as soon as we finish qualifying sir. Besides, this is a good challenge, anyone can hit when the weather is nice."

The team's assigned vehicles have grown from one two-door 1971 dodge sedan to four dedicated vehicles including a transport van, equipment truck, command post, and an armored rescue vehicle. Each officer is now supplied with individual ballistic armor, helmet, radio, and weaponry. (This is quite a difference from the initial blue jump suit, cloth ball cap, and a six shot revolver and no radio, nor body armor or long gun.)

Over the years the 36 volunteers, including one Commander, seven Sergeants, and twenty-eight officers responded to numerous calls for service. There were no operational records kept from 1973-1975. From 1976 till 1979 only twelve call outs required the services of C.I.R.T. These call backs were all for barricaded suspect or sniper situations. In 1987 "high risk warrant service" was added to the skills of the C.I.R.T officers, thus the calls for service increased during the 1980's to a total of 181 call outs. During the decade of the 1990's a total of 671 calls for service were requested of C.I.R.T. Over the years the unit has been involved in open field and house to house searches for known murders and those who have shot at and those who have murdered police officers. They have been on call and have responded to calls for service at all hours of the day and night. They live, eat, and sleep with their pagers next to them. They missed family gatherings and little league games in order to protect and serve the public, no matter what the call for service happened to be.

From 1975 to 2000, the Team received two Unit Letters of Commendation and several Letters of Recognition for successful operations. During this time, the men and women of C.I.R.T. accumulated a total of sixty-seven class C Commendations, seven class B Commendations, and eight class A Commendations. The teams members have been promoted in rank so often, that membership is sought by some, and deemed necessary by others as a prerequisite for promotion. The team's commanders to date have been Sgt./Lt. John Nord, Lt. Larry McDonald, Lt. Joe Polski, Lt. Greg Pye, and Lt. Joe Neuberger. The most notable Executive Officer was Sgt. Jim Charmoli who was instrumental in setting and maintaining training standards.

C.I.R.T has been honored by the Special Operations and Training Association, which is a 550 member organization of tactical teams and officers from a five state area. C.I.R.T. was selected as the "SWAT Team of the Year" in 1996 and again in 1998. Also in 1998, a member of the Team, Officer Mike Ardolf, was selected as "SWAT Officer of the Year", by S.O.T.A.. In 2001, Sgt. Darryl Schmidt was recognized with the "Lifetime Achievement Award" for service and training in the SWAT community.

The Team answered the call to service 965 times from 1976 thru March 2002 to assist in situations when requested by street officers or investigators. Due to the training, expertise, and professionalism of C.I.R.T., the unit has resolved all situations without harm to any citizen or police officers. We were forced to shoot and kill only one individual and in a separate incident to wound a second suspect. This armed suspect had already received three volleys of teargas into

the room in which he had barricaded himself. He then kept screaming, "You better bring two body bags, one for the point man and one for me, because I am not going to be taken alive". The suspect was taken wounded, but alive. On that day, after all of the threats had been issued by the suspect, I witnessed six different officers volunteer to take the point position, as they did not wish for harm to come to their comrades. This type of bravery was demonstrated oftentimes while making final plans for final entry to get a suspect.

This record of these officers is incredible!

The officers of S.W.A.T / C.I.R.T. strove to exemplify the Special Operations Training Association's motto, "Do what is Just and Fear Nothing".

You are the best and I am proud to have been one of you.
With Respect and Honor,

Sgt. Darryl E. Schmidt, ret.
SPPD (1971-2002)
SWAT 1972-1973
CIRT 1973-2002
707 missions (1973-2002)