

**THE TRIALS AND
TRIBULATIONS OF BECOMING
A SWAT COMMANDER**

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TRIBULATIONS OF BECOMING
A SWAT COMMANDER**

By

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With a Foreword by

Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona, M.D.

United States Surgeon General



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*This book is dedicated to those SWAT officers
who have paid the ultimate price while serving their
communities. May they never be forgotten.*

FOREWORD

As we enter the new millennium and reflect on the evolution of special weapons and tactics through the almost five decades of its existence, it is apparent that SWAT has established itself as an essential element of law enforcement. In each decade, we have built on past experiences, refined our training and embraced emerging technology so as to continue to be able to meet the contemporary high-risk challenges that are thrust upon us. We have done so successfully and without choice, since SWAT is the final barrier between good and evil in our society.

Through these five decades not only has the science of SWAT evolved, but so has its unique culture. A culture characterized by the utmost pride, professionalism, integrity, perseverance, honesty, and leadership in all our endeavors. The rites of passage into the SWAT fraternity are long, arduous, and desirable, but attainable by only a few. Once attained, the new tactical athlete or SWAT operator enters this new “brotherhood,” with its own language, humor, rituals, unsurpassed camaraderie, and dedication to duty.

Thus begins the transit through the SWAT pipeline, where novice operators progress to senior operators over many years. We stand on the shoulders of several “giants” in SWAT, who as our founders and early leaders were entrusted-

ed with our destiny. One of those who has been a friend and mentor to us all is Captain (ret.) John Kolman, formerly of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and founder and first Director of the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA). John, having published one of the first SWAT textbooks in 1982, now brings forth a unique publication that not only captures the substantive information required by new SWAT commanders, but also its culture. New SWAT commanders that may not have benefitted from coming through the ranks and SWAT pipeline could be at a considerable disadvantage as they accept command. In a manner not previously used for SWAT education and training, John introduces the officer to substantive information, culture, and a methodology to approach various missions. Each chapter builds on the previous one and allows the hypothetical characters passing through each chapter to evolve in knowledge, judgment, and maturity. Interestingly, although a valuable asset to any SWAT school, including commanders, I believe that the seasoned operator will find this publication an entertaining and informative review.

Aside from this novel approach, the reader will also benefit from the many years of cumulative SWAT experience that John brings to the pages. Read it at least once. Few people can capture the wisdom of SWAT in such an articulate and engaging manner.

Deputy Sheriff Richard Carmona
Pima County Sheriff's Department, Tucson, Arizona
SWAT Team Leader and Training Officer
July 2002

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Shortly after this foreword was written, Deputy Sheriff Richard Carmona became Vice Admiral Richard Carmona, the United States Surgeon General.

PREFACE

Almost one hundred years ago, *The Defence of Duffer's Drift* first appeared in the British *United Service Magazine*.¹ Captain E. D. Swinton's captivating and often humorous story of a fictitious junior lieutenant charged with the responsibility of defending a shallow river crossing, or drift, during the Boer War (1899–1902) in South Africa, quickly became popular with military educators throughout the world. Swinton's clever use of a succession of dreams from which the lieutenant gained valuable insight into what was required to successfully defend the drift prompted me to use the same approach in writing *The Trials and Tribulations of Becoming a SWAT Commander*. In light of the long-standing bond that exists between military and law enforcement special operations personnel, it seemed appropriate that Captain Swinton's classic work should be the inspiration for my own efforts.

Although some circumstances of the incidents discussed have been exaggerated for emphasis, this text is based upon common sense, my own experiences, as well as those related to me by others within the field of tactical operations. There

1. E. D. Swinton, *The Defence of Duffer's Drift* (Wayne, New Jersey: Avery Publishing Group Inc., 1986), p. vii.

are undoubtedly those who will believe the principles addressed here are no longer contemporary, and that the sophistication of today's criminals requires less tactical consideration and more technology. While it is true that technology often plays an important role in the tactical operations of today, it has been my experience that successful resolution of critical incidents is most often the result of basic concepts and principles implemented by knowledgeable, experienced, and well-trained personnel under the direction of decisive leaders. It is important to recognize that technology is not a substitute for experienced, carefully selected, and properly trained personnel at both the command and operational levels. By the same token, the basic and advanced skills of team members should never be allowed to deteriorate in favor of placing increased emphasis on technology. Unquestionably, appropriate technology is a valuable tool, but it is not a panacea. Experience has confirmed that basic concepts and principles are timeless, and will remain relevant as long as the need exists for their application.

Without a doubt, some of the material contained within this book will be judged to be controversial, and some may question that what is described herein could ever happen within their departments. To those who truly believe this, I would submit that your departments are the exception, rather than the rule, and you are indeed fortunate. On the other hand, many who read it will wonder if the personalities and circumstances addressed in the text were borrowed from their own departments or agencies. In other words, as the saying goes, "Only the names have been changed." This belief is not coincidental. Instead, it is a testimonial to the need for departments to provide or obtain contemporary, appropriate training for *both* command and operational per-

sonnel, so that working together, they can effectively manage and resolve critical incidents with minimal risk to everyone involved.

J.A.K.

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- Vice Admiral Richard Carmona, M.D., United States Surgeon General and former full-time Deputy Sheriff/SWAT Team Leader for the Pima County, Arizona, Sheriff's Department.
- Deputy Chief Michael R. Hillmann, Los Angeles Police Department.
- Commander Charles "Sid" Heal, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.
- Lieutenant Phillip C. Hansen, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.
- Sergeant (retired) Ronald M. McCarthy, Los Angeles Police Department.
- Sergeant (retired) Gary J. Rovarino, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

The insightful comments and suggestions of these men, based as they were upon decades of collective tactical experience, were of great assistance.

Acknowledgment is also given to Mr. Dick Kramer, renowned for his depictions of law enforcement and military operations and activities, who granted permission to include

reproductions of several of his prints within this publication.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and recognize my wife, Janice, who as always was not only a source of encouragement and inspiration, but also typed and proofed the manuscript.

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LIEUTENANT BERNARD M. OVERSIGHT

During his nine-year tenure with the Amazing Police Department,² Lieutenant Bernard M. Oversight rose to his present rank with meteoric speed. Well-educated, ambitious, and articulate, he impressed his superiors almost from the first day he entered the Department. While undergoing basic training at the Police Academy, Recruit Oversight's ability to follow instructions to the letter, impeccable appearance, and intelligent responses to staff inquiries, quickly distinguished him from his classmates. Although lacking military experience, he adjusted surprisingly well to the regimen and discipline of academy life. As basic training progressed, however, Recruit Oversight exhibited signs of inflexibility and indifference toward his peers. Nonetheless, his more-visible positive attributes prompted the staff to overlook these shortcomings. Ultimately, Recruit Oversight graduated from the Academy at the top of his class. Recruit Oversight had become Police Officer Oversight.

Following graduation from the Academy, Officer Oversight was assigned to one of the Police Department's patrol stations, where his efforts were directed and evaluated

2. A fictitious medium-size, full-service police department.

by an experienced field training officer (FTO). During his one-year probationary period, Officer Oversight was exposed to many of the situations and problems confronting the contemporary police officer. Under the mature and discerning eye of his FTO, Officer Oversight began to develop insight and proficiency.

Although his FTO rated him above average in all areas evaluated, Officer Oversight was rated especially high in his ability to relate to the public. His communications skills had proved valuable on many occasions in defusing potentially volatile situations. However, in his final evaluation interview, Officer Oversight was urged to be more flexible in his approach to problem-solving. His FTO conceded that Officer Oversight was commendably analytical, but often reluctant to consider other options once he had decided on a course of action. It was during this interview that Officer Oversight revealed his ambitious promotional plans. After a maximum of three years as a patrol officer, he would seek out and solicit highly visible assignments in order to better display his many talents and attributes. He would study for and participate in any promotional examination for which he was qualified. Furthermore, in an effort to develop diversified experience, whenever possible he would remain at each assignment only long enough to gain a working understanding of the operation. His promotional plan called for elevation to the next higher rank in three-year maximum increments—officer to sergeant, sergeant to lieutenant, and so on. He was cautioned by his FTO that this plan might be overly ambitious, and that he should not be so concerned about promotion that he neglected developing a broad foundation of experience upon which to base his future decisions as a supervisor. He emphasized the importance of a strong patrol background and its influence on all other areas of involve-

ment. In concluding the interview, he expressed the belief that in the long run doing a consistently good job was the best way to ensure superiors recognized his abilities and promotability. Officer Oversight thanked him for his frankness, but privately believed his FTO lacked the initiative and desire to attain higher rank himself.

Upon successfully completing his probationary period, Officer Oversight remained a patrol officer for an additional six months. Then, when the station's community relations officer retired, Officer Oversight was selected to replace him because of his already documented skills in relating positively with the public. Officer Oversight quickly established himself and gained the confidence of community leaders. Attesting to his performance were numerous commendations received from various factions of the community.

Immediately following his first anniversary as community relations officer, the Department announced a promotional examination for the position of sergeant. Officer Oversight attained the highest score on the examination and was promoted a short time later—well within the three-year attainment period he had set for himself. Notwithstanding Department policy, which required all newly promoted sergeants to first be assigned to a patrol station, Sergeant Oversight was transferred to Assistant Chief Sylvester Cuning's office as his administrative aide. Sergeant Oversight lobbied for this high-profile position because he believed it would enhance his future promotability and help develop a better understanding of Department and municipal politics. He was supported in his lobbying efforts by prominent and influential community leaders, who contacted the Chief of Police on his behalf. The Assistant Chief at first opposed the selection of Sergeant Oversight, but at the insistence of the Chief of Police agreed to give him an oppor-