



York County Quick Response Team For Swat Digest

By John Pavoncello

When tactical situations arise in the boroughs and municipalities of York County, Pennsylvania, the members of the York County Quick Response Team (QRT) are called into action.

The team, made up of twenty-four officers from seven area police departments and the York County Sheriff's Office, and seven fellow officers who make up the Negotiation Unit, serve over 415,000 residents in 72 municipalities. Prior to its commission in November 2002, the York City Police department had their own team, formed in 1982, which provided the nucleus of the county team. The Pennsylvania State Police Special Response Team (SRT) provided tactical operations for most of the county before the inception of the team, but an extended response time, sometimes several hours, was the driving force behind the creation of the county team. The newly formed team went to the Baltimore City (MD) QRT team and then to Baltimore County (MD) QRT team school for training

The York QRT team holds tryouts twice a year for new operators. New recruits must fill out an application, be recommended by the chief of their department, pass a PT test, firearms qualifications, and written, psychological and oral examinations and pass a urine test. Upon completing the requirements, the highest ranked officers are chosen to fill any vacancies on the team. After selection, the officers must complete and pass the Baltimore County QRT School. If they fail, they must resign from the team and are welcome to re-apply. Once a member of the team, each officer must pass bi-annual PT tests, three weapons qualifications and maintain all other qualifications and certifications needed annually. Officers are required to qualify with each weapon used by the QRT team, strong/weak hand and with gas masks.

Officers are also required to remain certified for flash bang/noise diversion devices. While all officers are qualified to use diversion devices, one team member is solely dedicated to less lethal munitions. During barricaded subject callouts, the officer's sole responsibility is to handle all less lethal devices including gas, diversion devices and less lethal weapons, including 40mm sponge impact rounds.

Aside from their basic training at the Baltimore County QRT School, team members have been trained at specialized schools including Singleton International for instinctive combat shooting, lock-picking, WMD and Chemical weapons, tactical tracking with David Scott Donnelly, hostage rescue at Blackwater USA and a variety of schools provided by Archangel Group.



Weapons and Gear

Each QRT team member carries his department issued sidearm, either a Glock or Sig Sauer pistol in .40 S&W. Each handgun is mounted with a tactical light.

The team also utilizes several long guns, Heckler and Koch UMP 40 sub-machine guns, Colt M4 .223 rifles with 14" barrels, and Colt Commando .223 rifles with 11" barrels. All long guns are topped with an EOTech sighting system and SureFire lights.

The York QRT team incorporates a four-man sniper team. The snipers currently use custom built rifles with a Remington 700 action and a Hart barrel in Winchester

308 caliber, topped with Leopold 4.5x14 scopes for their long range work. The snipers utilize a Federal Match 168gr. boat-tail bullet. The team recently acquisitioned an ArmaLite AR-50, 50 caliber weapon system using Leopold 8.5x25 optics. To qualify to be a sniper, an officer must be on the team for at least three years as an entry team member, pass written and oral exams and pass shooting qualification. The snipers attend Basic and Advanced Sniper course at Operational Tactics, Inc. in Hagerstown, MD., and serve as the intelligence gathering extension of the team.

Each QRT officer is equipped with Protect Tactical body armor, Kevlar helmet, Motorola Tactical Boom-mike encrypted communication system, night vision goggles and a NBC rated gas mask. Full chemical and biological suits and SCBA packs are also available for operator use.

Gone are the days of peering around corners with hand-held mirrors. The team recently acquired the Remington Eye Ball system, a wireless camera and microphone system that can be rolled into rooms and tossed through windows. The Eye Ball allows officers an advantage in many tactical situations by providing them with a visual and audio "picture" of a room about to be entered. Search Cam's search poles are also used.

The York QRT entry teams are firm believers in the use of bunkers, specifically,



Protech Entry One Ballistic Body Shields (Level IIIA) and a Protech NATO Shield (Level IV). The team is based around the bunker; the first officer through the door carries one. The bunkers are normally teamed with a cover officer, armed with H&K UMP 40 or a Colt M4 depending on the call-out. The team utilizes one bunker/cover team per floor during high risk warrant searches. Use of the bunkers has already saved one team member. During a May 2005 five hour standoff, the 26 year old suspect fired a .25 cal pistol through a window at officers during negotiations. The round struck the bunker carried by York City Police Cpl. Bart Seelig at a level where it would have hit Seelig in the chest or head. The bunker was replaced at no charge by Protech and is now housed in the Police Heritage Museum in York City.

Vehicles

The York QRT team utilizes several vehicles including a rapid response van which transports six initial team members to the scene as the remainder of the team gathers and organizes. An oversized equipment van carries all equipment the entire team may need on a call-out. The team also has a Peacekeeper armored vehicle and is supported by the York County Mobile Operations Center, a specialized bus with communication and computer equipment.

The team is also utilizing the PA National Guard from Ft. Indiantown Gap for air support from helicopters. Helicopters are available to the team anytime, but are mostly used for rural operations, tracking and fugitive searches and night ops.



Putting it all together

The York County Quick Response Team is a professionally structured team that has proven capable of ending tense situations and saving lives. Command structure for the team includes an overall team commander, tactical and negotiation team commanders, a tactical team leader, two assistant team leaders for the entry teams and a sniper team leader.

The basic entry team is composed of a bunker-cover package, one or more “hands-man” who is responsible for cuffing and searching suspects, an assistant team leader and a medic. The York QRT team is supported by medics from York Hospital’s Medic 97 unit. The five medics have been trained through a Tactical Medic course and, while unarmed, are outfitted with the same body armor and equipment used by the entry teams.

The York County Negotiations Unit is the QRT teams’ primary link to the suspect during barricaded subject incidents. The seven members of the negotiation team attempt to communicate with barricaded suspects and end the situation before escalation where the tactical team would need to make forced entry. Two members of the Negotiation Unit also are on-scene standby during high risk warrant searches, in case a subject takes a hostage and the incident becomes a barricade. The Negotiation Unit’s goal is to persuade subjects to give up peacefully without a shot fired or a force entry by the QRT team. The unit attempts to make contact with the subject via land-line or cell phone, or may have the QRT team deploy a throw phone. Negotiations are based out of the Mobile Operations Center vehicle which has monitors and communications equipment that ties directly into the Negotiation Unit’s specialized gear.

Application to the negotiation team is similar to the QRT team with the addition of a practical exercise. Training is provided by the Public Agency Training Council (PATC), the only certified training available to negotiation teams. Negotiators also attend Class-A wire tap training by the Pennsylvania State Police so that they can utilize phone lines and recording devices. Negotiators also receive up-to-date, annual mental health training that includes discussion of mental symptoms and medications so that the negotiators can identify a subject's mental state.

The York County QRT team answers an average of 23 calls yearly, 8-10 barricaded subjects and 10-15 high risk

warrant searches. As an all volunteer unit, the York County Quick Response Team trains together monthly. In the days of shrinking municipal budgets, local police chiefs that have realized the importance of having a tactical option, continue to support the volunteer team both financially and by allowing officers time for monthly and advanced training.



