

OpTac International News Bulletin

Law Enforcement Response to Hostage Rescue

SWAT teams in collaboration with first responding patrol officers play an integral role in the success or failure of incidents involving the rescue of hostages. However, patrol officers are rarely trained and many tactical teams are insufficiently trained to resolve these dangerous events effectively. This edition of the **OpTac International News Bulletin** presents three recent incidents in which hostages were killed by first responding law enforcement officers and/or tactical team members during attempted rescues. Our intent is to present the complexities of hostage rescue, and not, to assign blame or attribute fault to individuals or organizations.

In Stockton, California, responding law enforcement officers, to include SWAT team members, fired over 600 rounds at an SUV, which had fled the scene of a bank robbery. The vehicle contained three suspects and three hostages when it left the bank; however, one hostage was thrown from the vehicle and another jumped out in order to escape her captors during the police pursuit. Two suspects and a hostage were killed by police bullets penetrating the inside compartment of the SUV (10 rounds struck the hostage). A third suspect survived in the vehicle by using the hostage as a shield against police gunfire. A total of 32 police officers fired their weapons according to a Police Foundation report.

In Poco Rivera, California, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Deputies shot and killed a hostage during a standoff with a wanted parolee who was also killed in the confrontation. The suspect was being pursued on foot through a neighborhood by deputies and a parole officer before he broke into a home. He began firing his weapon at LASO Deputies after they opened the front door of the residence to rescue several people inside. The deputies then retreated and returned fire. One deputy fired two additional rounds, which struck the misidentified hostage when he came to the front door. The suspect was later killed by LASO SWAT officers when they entered the residence to rescue one remaining hostage.

Man Haron Monis, a Muslim extremist, took 18 people hostage inside a cafe in Sydney, Australia. He subsequently shot and killed one of the hostages, thereby precipitating an immediate tactical entry. A government inquest revealed that of the five shots fired by Monis, only one impacted a hostage. While members of the police tactical team shot and killed the suspect, they also shot and killed one of the female hostages. The inquest found that she "was struck by six fragments of a police bullet or bullets." Police bullets also struck three other hostages and one tactical team member (in the face).

A concerted response on the part of first responding patrol officers and SWAT teams to incidents involving the rescue of hostages is required in order to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. As such, organizational conditions relating to the selection, training, and equipping of all police personnel is essential. Otherwise, these dangerous missions are destined to fail in spite of highly motivated and well-intentioned law enforcement officers.