

Explosive Breaching!

by Scott Fees, Region II

As I watched the breaking news coverage in April of the mass murder of 32 students on the campus of Virginia Tech, I was immediately reminded of an incident that occurred in my city on August 20, 1986 when a disgruntled postal worker shot and killed 14 co-workers, wounded 7, then turned the gun on himself. That post office massacre is still one of the largest mass murders in U.S. history, is the biggest post office massacre in history, and one that coined the phrase, 'going postal'.

A lot has changed in the world since that day. In our state alone, we have seen this incident bring our city and state into the national spotlight, as well as the Oklahoma City bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in which 169 people were killed.

During the post office massacre, our police department's tactical unit responded, faced with an overwhelming incident. What began as what we now call an "active shooter" incident, quickly turned into what was believed to be a hostage situation. Responding officers secured the area and command personnel began to formulate a rescue operation. One option was to make entry through double steel doors on the southeast side of the post office, however, those doors had been chained shut by the killer. The Edmond Police Department Bomb Squad was deployed and an explosive breach was considered, but not implemented. Eventually, the call was concluded when tactical officers entered the post office and discovered the suspect lying dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to his head.



Had an explosive breach been utilized that day, many things could have - and probably would have - gone wrong. Our squad had limited training with explosive breaching operations, but a breaching program was not established and department policies did not address the option of utilizing such tactics. Therefore, conducting explosive breaching operations under those circumstances would have been dangerous not only for hostages and suspects, but also the tactical officers. Additionally, the City and the department would have been exposed to unwanted liabilities.



In the years since, our department has made dramatic improvements in preparation for response to many tactical scenarios. Initially, our department had to overcome the "won't happen here again" mentality. In the immediate aftermath of the post office incident, our tactical unit developed into a highly trained unit, but was eventually disbanded due to political concerns. However, administrations changed and the importance of a well-equipped, well-trained tactical unit was once again made a priority.



Currently, the Edmond Police Department has a 24-member Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) team, supported by a 10-person Negotiations Unit, complemented by a 6-member Bomb Squad. As part of the tactical response, our Bomb Squad deploys with SWAT at the onset of all tactical callouts. The Bomb Squad provides operational support with the Remotec F6A robot, allowing SWAT and Negotiators a platform for video surveillance, communications links and a delivery system for throw phones, chemical agents and less-than-lethal munitions.