

# LOS ANGELES POLICE COMMISSION

## INVESTIGATION OF THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS SELECTION PROCESS



Conducted by the

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

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**I. BACKGROUND**

The Los Angeles Police Department's Metropolitan Division, also known as Metro, is an elite division that is responsible for a variety of specialized assignments. Metro is divided into nine platoons, which are primarily responsible for crime suppression, focusing on the reduction of violent crimes throughout the City. Other assignments include high-risk barricaded situations, stakeouts, dignitary (VIP) security, and warrant service. Additionally, Metro provides training to Department personnel for mobile field force tactics and assists criminal investigators in solving major crimes.

Metropolitan's Special Weapons and Tactics platoon, or SWAT, provides the Department with 24-hour coverage necessary for immediate response to barricaded suspects and high-risk incidents. SWAT operations generally require rapid deployment, the element of surprise, leading-edge tactics and planning. SWAT also employs extensive use of crisis negotiation techniques in an attempt to resolve barricaded, hostage, and potential suicide-related situations.

In July 2015, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) began an inspection of the selection and training process for assignment to SWAT. In an effort to fully evaluate this process, the OIG observed and evaluated all phases of the orientation and selection process for the 2016 SWAT School.

During this review, the OIG did not identify any major issues or concerns with the selection and training process for new SWAT members. However, the OIG noted areas within the selection process that could be improved, which are identified as recommendations within this report.

**II. SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS SELECTION INVESTIGATION**

The SWAT selection process began with an orientation class where all interested candidates were briefed on the course and the Department's expectations. The candidates were advised of the rigors of a 14-week curriculum designed to identify the few officers able to meet the exacting standards of SWAT. Before the course began, these candidates were provided an opportunity to improve their marksmanship skills in an optional shooting clinic.

The OIG examined each training module in an effort to assess the efficacy of the training and determine the fairness of the evaluation process. The OIG therefore attended the orientations, the shooting clinic, and all phases of the 14-week selection process. The OIG also reviewed all documents and evaluations related to the selection process and had discussions with the SWAT training cadre as well as the unit's leadership during the entire process.

**a. Orientation**

In July and August 2015, the Department posted information regarding an opportunity to apply for SWAT in the near future with the formal selection process scheduled to begin in the Fall of 2015. On August 12, 2015, the Department scheduled two orientations for interested candidates.

The candidates were shown a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation detailing institutional and historical perspectives of SWAT, the application and selection process, the physical fitness requirements, including outlining the Physical Fitness Qualification (PFQ) and the Obstacle Course (OB). Candidates were counseled to prepare for the oral interview phase of the selection process and were informed that work history, disciplinary background, and driving record would be evaluated and factored into the formal selection process.

The Department emphasized that candidates should be prepared for the rigors of the firearm's phase of the selection process. Because the first step of the selection process was to demonstrate marksmanship proficiency on the Department's 40 round Bonus Qualification Course, candidates were strongly encouraged to attend upcoming shooting clinics facilitated by the SWAT firearms cadre.

Candidates were made aware of the two phases of SWAT School. Phase I was attending the 14-week SWAT School. If candidates successfully completed Phase I, they would be assigned to SWAT for a six-month evaluation period, referred to as Phase II.<sup>1,2</sup>

#### **b. SWAT Shooting Clinic**

Every candidate was offered an opportunity to attend a four-hour shooting clinic hosted by the SWAT firearms cadre.<sup>3</sup> There were two such clinics scheduled on September 22, 2015, and September 24, 2015.

These shooting clinics focused on the elements of marksmanship, weapon manipulation, trigger control, and sight alignment/sight picture. Each candidate used their regular duty weapon and were given equal time with an instructor, regardless of their shooting ability. At the conclusion of the training, the candidates were afforded the opportunity to familiarize themselves with and shoot the SWAT pistol qualification courses free of time limits and turning targets.

#### **c. Selection Process**

On October 2, 2015, the Department posted an official announcement that positions were now available within SWAT and that the official selection process was now open for qualified candidates.<sup>4</sup> Sixty-six candidates met the minimum requirements and were scheduled for the Department's Bonus Qualification Course with their primary duty weapon.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that an officer could graduate from the SWAT School but not be selected for placement in SWAT if there were no vacancies. In this case, officers would be assigned to another Metropolitan platoon.

<sup>2</sup> This is effectively a probationary period, a term that Employee Relations Group prohibits Metropolitan Division from using in place of Phase II.

<sup>3</sup> Eighty-seven interested candidates participated in the pre-selection shooting clinic.

<sup>4</sup> The announcement states: All applicants must have a minimum of four years of service with the LAPD prior to being assigned to Metro (three of which must be in a patrol or an assignment which qualifies for uniform incentive

#### **d. Shooting Qualification**

On September 19, 2015, the first step of the selection began at the Davis Training Center for the Department's 40-round Bonus Qualification Course, which was supervised and scored by Firearms and Tactics Section, Training Division. Of the 66 candidates, 4 (6 %) withdrew prior to the bonus qualification. Of the remaining 62 candidates, 5 (8 %) failed to shoot the minimum score of 300; 39 (63 %) scored between 300 and 359; 4 (6.5 %) scored between 360 and 364; and finally, 14 (22.5 %) scored over 365. Training Division's minimum bonus score that allows sworn personnel to attend the 1911 pistol transition school is 365.<sup>5</sup>

The OIG discovered that the Department has conflicting minimum standards to transition into the 1911 pistol platform. The Office of the Chief of Police (OCOP) Notice, September 17, 2010-EXPANSION OF 1911 PISTOL PROGRAM, requires an "Expert Rating" (380 or better) on the Bonus Qualification Course to be eligible for the transition. However, the Training Order from In-Service Training, Training Division, dated January 11, 2016, which cites the OCOP NOTICE, states an employee must achieve a bonus qualification score of 365 to qualify for the 1911 pistol. The Department was not able to reconcile the difference between Training Division's order and the OCOP Notice. In fact, Training Division currently posts the OCOP's 2010 Notice on its website. Furthermore, the SWAT selection phase for the bonus qualification only required a minimum score of 300, despite the fact that the first week of SWAT School is a 1911 transition school.

#### **e. PFQ/Pistol Manipulations/OB Course**

Following the shooting qualification, officers were then tested on pistol manipulations, the PFQ and the OB Course. Of the remaining 49 officers, 2 failed the PFQ, 3 failed the pistol manipulations test, and 1 failed the OB Course.<sup>6</sup>

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pay such as; GED, VCTF, SEU, PCU, etc.). All Police Officers III or Police Officers II who meet the requirements listed on the advertisement are encouraged to apply. However, a Police Officer II applicant must be on the Department's Police Officer III Eligibility List at the time of application. All applicants must achieve passing scores in the Shooting Bonus Qualification session as scheduled by Metro SWAT, SWAT PFQ, SWAT Obstacle Course, and Weapon Manipulation in order to be scheduled for an interview.

<sup>5</sup> The 1911 is a single action semi-automatic pistol, which must be cocked in order to fire. The LAPD carries the pistol in Condition 1-"cocked and locked." The first week of SWAT School is the 1911 pistol transition school. By the end of the week, candidates must qualify on two courses of fire with a minimum 90 percent accuracy on the 1911 pistol platform.

<sup>6</sup> After the Bonus Qualification, there were 5 failures to qualify and 8 withdrawals, leaving 49 candidates in the process.

#### **f. Oral Interview and Personnel Package Review**

After successfully completing the PFQ, obstacle course, and the pistol manipulations test, 43 officers moved on to the oral interview process. Personnel Division approved questions and briefed each of the interviewers on the rules governing these oral interviews. A Los Angeles Police Department SWAT Supervisor and SWAT Supervisors from Burbank Police Department, Glendale Police Department, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department's Special Enforcement Bureau made up the interviewing board. At the conclusion of the interviews, 31 of the 43 candidates were rated outstanding and proceeded to the background phase of the selection process.<sup>7,8</sup>

#### **g. SWAT School and Final Selection**

On December 30, 2015, OIG personnel attended a meeting with Department personnel to oversee the final discussions for the candidates who would be selected for the 2016 SWAT School.<sup>9</sup> The factors discussed for each candidate included "team diversity," "language skills," "shooting ability," "work ethic," "leadership," "ability to process and follow directions," and any disciplinary classification that would disqualify a candidate.

On January 25, 2016, 20 candidates started the 14-week SWAT School. The OIG made weekly visits to the training and reviewed the weekly evaluation sheets, EMPLOYEE COMMENT SHEET (LAPD Form 01.77.00), and other related records. After 14-weeks of training, eight officers graduated to Phase II of the SWAT selection process. On October 30, 2016, seven officers completed Phase II of SWAT selection; however, one officer did not meet the performance benchmarks and was deselected.

During the OIG's observation of the 14-week SWAT School, it was determined that SWAT's specialized training exposes team members to potential hazards or danger. Training that incorporates movement drills with live fire, noise/flash diversion devices, and other tactical operations demand the highest awareness to safety. Movement in any number of tactical configurations may include specialized vehicles and helicopters. Safety is central and fundamental to training and real life scenarios.

The OIG reviewed documents in which the Department identified several weapon-related violations during the 14-week SWAT School. These violations included: (1) failure to engage

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<sup>7</sup> OIG personnel reviewed all of the interview packages to include TEAMS reports and interview notes. No discrepancies or issues were noted.

<sup>8</sup> Although the OIG was invited to sit in on the oral examination of each candidate, this Office declined the invitation, as it was determined to be an undue burden on the candidates.

<sup>9</sup> The OIG was invited to the meeting to ensure transparency in the process. The OIG did not actively participate in the discussions that ultimately selected candidates for the SWAT School.

the safety switch on the shoulder weapon when transitioning to the pistol; (2) failure to properly move in a team configuration, compromising the safety of officers “down range”; (3) safety selector switch not engaged during tactical reloads; and (4) finger on the trigger during movement drills, and when sights were not on target.

When safety violations were observed, the training cadre immediately intervened and the deficiencies were documented. However, the OIG was unable to identify any guidelines or procedures for assessing these safety violations. The OIG noted that other agencies have standards for evaluating the severity or frequency of an officer’s safety violations within their firearms training. For example, other law enforcement agencies will dismiss a candidate for a single, serious violation, such as pointing a loaded pistol at anyone or a negligent discharge. Similarly, these same agencies will dismiss a candidate who has repeated violations of other safety rules.

#### **h. SWAT Sergeant Training**

The Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) states, “SWAT Team Operators and SWAT Supervisors/team leaders should not be deployed until successful completion of the POST-certified Basic SWAT Course or its equivalent as determined by the agency.”<sup>10</sup> Los Angeles Police Department SWAT Unit Supervisors satisfy this requirement by completing the Department’s 80-hour POST-certified course.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, a newly assigned sergeant assigned to SWAT receives “practical application in the field,” observing tenured SWAT Unit Supervisors, which is documented in the *SWAT Sergeant Call Out/Training Logs*.<sup>12</sup>

Currently three of the seven SWAT Sergeants have prior training and experience as SWAT operators. The OIG reviewed the TEAMS Reports for all SWAT Sergeants, which reflected, in all cases, that they were assigned to the SWAT Unit Supervisor position prior to receiving the 80-hour POST-certified course. The OIG was concerned about the delays between assignment date and the completion of training, which ranged between six months and seven years.

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<sup>10</sup> California Penal Code Section 13514.1 (*Amended by Stats. 2014, Ch. 668, Sec. 5. Effective January 1, 2015*), POST Administrative Manual, Section B, Regulation 1084; & SWAT Operational Guidelines & Standardized Training Recommendations, Section 10.1.1.

<sup>11</sup> LAPD’s most recent training was POST Course Control Number 1850-23000-0015.

<sup>12</sup> Los Angeles Police Department Report to the Board of Police Commissioners, Board of Inquiry into SWAT, dated January 5, 2008, Page 7, Recommendation No. 2.

### **i. Phase II of the Selection Process**

The OIG requested documentation for Phase II of the evaluation process. The OIG was informed that this phase includes continued formal training and “practical application in the field.”<sup>13</sup> During this six-month period, officers within this phase are expected to demonstrate core competencies for a SWAT operator.<sup>14</sup> During the orientation process, candidates were notified that their progress in this second phase would be evaluated against “special rating benchmarks” and documented in a “special standards based assessment report.”<sup>15</sup> During the OIG’s investigation, the Department was unable to provide documentation related to these benchmarks or assessment reports with the exception of EMPLOYEE COMMENT SHEET and a NOTICE TO CORRECT DEFICIENCIES (Form Gen. 78).

## **III. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The formal SWAT selection process began with 66 candidates, 20 of whom were chosen for the 14-week SWAT School. Of these 20, 8 candidates graduated and 6 were assigned to SWAT. At the conclusion of the investigation, the OIG met with Department personnel to discuss the findings of the SWAT selection process. As previously mentioned, the OIG noted no major issues or concerns. However, the OIG did identify several areas where SWAT Selection could be enhanced and these were conveyed to the Department.

In addition to the recommendations that have been communicated to the Department during this investigation, further OIG recommendations are listed below.

1. The OIG recommends that the Department establish a single policy for transition to the 1911 pistol platform.
2. The OIG recommends that SWAT establish standards for deselection of candidates based on weapon safety violations during the SWAT School.
3. The OIG recommends that the Department develop a training manual for Phase II SWAT Officers that would include, at minimum, standardized evaluation guidelines.

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<sup>13</sup> According to SWAT leadership, “practical application in the field” refers to the participation of Phase II SWAT Officers in responding to call-outs, high-risk search warrants, and any other tactical operations.

<sup>14</sup> The Metropolitan Division Special Weapons and Tactics Police Officer III Task List, dated September 2012, include 209 expected competencies over 28 pages. The OIG was informed that a similar Task & Competency List exists for each position in the Department.

<sup>15</sup> The OIG confirmed the existence of an LAPD STANDARDS BASED ASSESSMENT (FORM 01.87.00). This Form can be used to evaluate officers in one of four different categories: (1) Probationary, (2) Regular, (3) Transfer, and (4) Special.

4. The Department shall ensure that supervisors complete the 80-hour POST-certified SWAT course within six months of selection to the SWAT Unit Supervisor position.
5. The OIG recommends that the Department require SWAT Sergeants to attend tactical training for a specified number of hours to ensure that they possess the requisite expertise in SWAT tactical operations.