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EXPLOSIVE BARRICADE IN
PHILADELPHIA

Training for tactical bus interdiction

By George Holt

Buses of all kinds — transit, school or cross-country — operate in almost every law enforcement agency's jurisdiction. Therefore, the likelihood of an incident that requires a tactical response occurring on a bus exists in almost every jurisdiction. We, as operators, have a responsibility to the communities we serve to be prepared to respond. This article offers some basic guidelines for conducting training on tactical bus interdiction.

As an instructor who has trained hundreds of operators from dozens of law enforcement and military teams all across America on this subject, I know there are several different approaches to making tactical entry onto a bus during a critical incident. Therefore, this article will not get into the intricacies of tactical bus interdiction. Instead, the focus here will be on training. The principles are general enough to apply to whichever philosophy your team adheres to, yet detailed enough to be of some real value.

Although critical incidents on buses do not occur often, the stakes are very high when they do. Incidents of this type almost always involve a barricaded subject with hostages. The amount of manpower, coordination and resources needed to effectively respond to these incidents only serve to make a difficult task even more challenging. We must set aside a sufficient amount of our precious training time to train on this subject. Your team will see that the time spent on training to "take down" a bus will serve you well when the time comes to train for, or actually conduct, tubular assaults on both trains and airplanes. The interiors of all three of these types of conveyances are similar, so many of the same principles apply to all three.

In preparing to train for tactical bus interdiction, make contact with the entities that operate buses in your area. The local school districts and transit authorities are usually willing to cooperate with requests to train on their buses and with their personnel. I recommend requesting that a



mechanic, rather than a driver, bring the bus to the training area. Mechanics can answer all of your questions about the hydraulic, electrical and fuel systems, as well as how to operate the interior controls. Most drivers don't have that sort of extensive knowledge.

Once you've determined the makes and models of buses that run through your jurisdiction, study them and list the advantages and disadvantages of each. Note the entry points, visibility both in and out, blind spots, "cone of concealment" issues, composition of windows and doors, emergency exits and disablement points. It would be a good idea to assign a team member to become your resident bus "expert." It will be his or her responsibility to study and compile the schematics and other miscellaneous information on each type of bus in a "bus book," which should be stored in a central location and updated as needed.

I would also encourage you to seek outside input when developing your particular methodology. Even if you already

follow a certain philosophy, you owe it to your community, your department, your team and yourself to stay open to other ideas. Attend formal training sessions put on by professional and reputable trainers. Include tactical bus interdiction in your cross-training sessions with outside agencies. It is likely that both teams will benefit from the experience.

When the time comes for you to board a bus in an actual scenario — and we do train for *when*, not *if* — you will still need to bring out an identical bus to a secured location nearby to rehearse your operation. By following the above guidelines, however, boarding that "practice bus" during an incident should be more of a refresher than an eye-opener.

Remember, if you stay ready, you won't have to get ready. ◀

About the author

George Holt is a 15-year veteran of law enforcement. He is currently an officer with the Los Angeles Airport PD and is a retired sergeant from the Los Angeles Housing Authority PD. Holt has been assigned as SWAT team leader, narcotics/gang intelligence detective and as accreditation manager, responsible for policy development and review in accordance with CALEA standards. While assigned to the patrol division, he oversaw the creation, development and implementation of a directed enforcement unit that operated exclusively in the Watts area of Los Angeles. He was awarded his agency's Police Star Medal twice for heroism and bravery in the line of duty.

In addition to his duties in law enforcement, Holt has trained thousands of police and military personnel worldwide. He is co-founder of SGI (Solutions Group International) and serves as its director of training. He can be reached at SWATinstructor@msn.com.

Photo courtesy of Christine K. Nilsson.