

Lee McMillion: Inside LAPD D-Platoon (SWAT)

JON: My name is Jon Becker. For the past 4 decades, I've dedicated my life to protecting tactical operators. During this time, I've worked with many of the world's top law enforcement and military units.

As a result, I've had the privilege of working with the amazing leaders who take teams into the world's most dangerous situations. The goal of this Podcast is to share their stories in hopes of making us all better leaders, better thinkers, and better people. Welcome to The Debrief.

My guest today is Lieutenant Lee McMillion. Lee is currently one of the 2 lieutenants leading the Los Angeles Police Department's Metropolitan Division D Platoon. Which is better known as LAPD S.W.A.T. In total, Lee has spent 33 years as a Los Angeles policeman, of which 23 years have been spent at Metro, 21 with D Platoon. Lee is one of only 3 men to have ever served at all possible ranks at D Platoon, officer plus one, sergeant, and lieutenant. Lee, I appreciate you joining me on The Debrief.

LEE: Thank you, Jon. It's my pleasure to be here.

JON: Let's start with your history, let's go back to kind of where, where you started when your career started with the LAPD.

LEE: So, I started in the police academy when I was 21 years old. That was May of 1988. After the police academy, my first patrol assignment was Rampart Division. Then I went to Southeast Division, I was there for almost 4 years. I did a very brief stint as a farm's instructor. I won't get into how I had to navigated that into my career path to keep my P3 stripes to remain eligible to get to Metro Division.

JON: Fair enough.

LEE: And then, I went to Metro Division in April of 1994. Two years later, I went through S.W.A.T. Selection. And, then after an assignment to SWAT, I was in the platoon for 11 years. And the back 5 of those, correction, on the back 4 of those, I was an Element Leader.

JON: Ok and then at that point, what happened, did you promote or rotate out or-

LEE: I did. So, it was summer of 2007, I made sergeant, I went to 77th Division where I spent about 19 months. And then just, as good fortune has it, I was able to come back to S.W.A.T. as a sergeant or a squad leader.

JON: Got it. And then how long were you there the second time?

LEE: So, I was a sergeant in S.W.A.T. for a little under 4 years, when I just took the lieutenant's test, and my number came up. So, I made lieutenant in October of 2012. And then, I was gone for about 2 and a half years before once again, the stars aligned. And, I'll have to say that each time I left S.W.A.T. and promoted out, I never expected to be able to come back.

JON: Why?

LEE: You just have to be good, in your mind it's that Pyramid Structure, where like, there are less positions the higher you go into the ranks structure. So, when you promote out, you have to be good with never ever coming back, and just finding another career path. And there's plenty of great or job opportunities in the LAPD. And I was going to find my way into other career opportunities, but just as good fortune and cosmic energy have it, I was able to come back. Not only as a sergeant but also as a lieutenant.

JON: So, why don't we talk a little about the history of D Platoon. I think everybody's familiar with LA S.W.A.T., but like, from a history standpoint. When did D Platoon start?

LEE: So, LAPD S.W.A.T. started in, well the first roll call was actually in December 1966. So, it had been on back in the 1965 riots in Los Angeles. It had been after the Charles Whitman incident, which was I believe, the summer 1966.

JON: In the Texas Tower.

LEE: And so, there were these increasingly provocative police incidents where the law enforcement community realize there would need to be enhancement of tactical proficiency and resources to handle these. So again, it was December of 1966 was the first roll call. Although, we say 1967 is our anniversary year, it was late in December and don't want to eat up that whole year. So, it was a part-time platoon for nearly 5 years until 1971. During the part-time period, there were a 176 personnel, men who rotated through the platoon. And it was a part-time assignment as I said, so you could be a Hollywood detective, or you could be a patrol cop in, just any division. And those personnel would get together for a couple days, every month, and train in what they were still figuring out where their responsibilities are in their squad. And if you figure the personnel, we had Korean War vets. It was during the Vietnam Era, so there were Vietnam vets. There might even be a World War II vet in there, that would've been quite tenured on the department at the time. And then after some

successes, specifically there was the Black Panther incident in 1969. And then in November of '71, S.W.A.T. came to Metro Division as a proper Platoon, with the designator D Platoon. So, and that's where we've been ever since.

JON: So, in '71, that's the point where it becomes a full-time assignment and has stood up as, as a full-time team.

LEE: Correct.

JON: Ok. How big was it prior to that? Like how many, how many personnel?

LEE: So as a part-time team, it was 10, correction, it was 4 squads of 10 each.

JON: Ok. So about 40?

LEE: Yeah about 40, four squads, 10 each. And then when it came to Metro as D Platoon, about the first couple of deployments that remained 4 squads, 10 each. And then soon thereafter, bumped to 6 squads of 10 each, so 60 officers. And that's our structure today.

JON: Ok-

LEE: Sixty officers. We actually have 7 sergeants. Six of those sergeants are squad leaders, as I mentioned, the 6, 10 officer squads. And then we have an additional administrative sergeant position. And they can rotate through if a sergeant is injured on-duty or goes on vacation. Somebody can back up the squad and handle admin. And then there are 2 lieutenants. The 2 lieutenants are myself and my partner is Reuben Lopez. And after an incident in 2005, is when they expanded that structure. So just be, greater lieutenant coverage. And, bottom line is just one guy can't stay awake that much.

JON: Yeah, it's fair. So, 1971, the unit becomes a full-time unit. By then, the Black Panther shootout was in 1969?

LEE: Correct.

JON: So '69 is Black Panther shootout, '71 the team becomes full-time, '74 the SLA shootout occurs.

LEE: Yes.

JON: Ok. Just kind of pre, pre-fulltime and then post-fulltime, SLA happens. And that's kind of the Genesis of the team as most people see it.

LEE: Correct. So, when it was a part-time team, there were, there were various successes at different deployments. And one of the bigger, more prominent was obviously the Black Panther incident in 1969. So actually, if you look at our, at our emblem we got, it's the eagle holding the lightning bolt and a banner. And the banner has a 41 and a 54 on it. So, the 41 is, stands for 41st and Central, which is the intersection of the Black Panther incident in 1969. And then if we're going to talk about the SLA incident in 1974, and that was the 54th and Compton. So just a 2 significant landmark incidents with success and brought notoriety to the team. And also, fostered that confidence with the chain of command, that this is a team that can handle these sorts of incidences. And, it just furthered de-evolutioned.

JON: Yeah 'cause I mean '74, well even in '71 the team becomes full-time. This is so a pretty radical idea. Like this is, this is not like LAPD literally coined the term S.W.A.T. This is such a radical idea to have a, a special weapons and tactics team, especially a full-time weapons and tactics team. Talk a little bit about the origin. So, it was Jeff Rogers and Daryl Gates, if I remember correctly, who coined the phrase?

LEE: So, I know Daryl Gates was an inspector in 19-, you know December of '66 when this whole thing started. So obviously he was a very prominent chief of ours for 13 years. But, before he had promoted to that rank, he had this concept of a police unit with enhanced capability. Just watching the, the trends in law enforcement and the increased danger provocative nature of them and so, what are we going to do to prepare for when it hits Los Angeles. So yes, S.W.A.T. was the brainchild of Daryl Gates, then inspector. And he was actually the driver for Chief Parker at the time. And then, then obviously, as he promoted to the rank of Chief, then the Platoon had wide support throughout the chain of command, because he is now the Chief. And it was his concept. I know there is some, I would say conflict, disagreement, but there-, the overall premises that the S.W.A.T. started with the LAPD. And they maybe other law enforcement entities out there, I'm not going to arrogantly state that it started with us and that's the way it is. You know there are 17,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States. So, if one of them had a variation on the theme, and just didn't call it S.W.A.T. at the time, I'd certainly give them credit for, for what they've done. But, for bringing the terms special weapons and tactics, and attaching that to a police unit that's a full-time team, I believe that credit does go to the LAPD.

JON: Yeah. I think, I think from a historical context, right so so, you look at Black Panther, and put Black Panther in greater context. Right at that

point, you're having weather underground, and you know events where police cars are being blown up, there's a lot of civil unrest, Watts riots. Internationally, you have the Munich Massacre, you have hostage-takings, like it just, it kind of sets up this environment where you know, you look at Munich and law enforcement quickly realizes that, there can be problems here that we're not prepared for.

LEE: Correct.

JON: And and so it makes sense why they would look at it and say, yeah, we need to do something else. Looking back at the history also, talk about the effect about the '84 Olympics, because that seems to be the point in the U.S. where S.W.A.T. really explodes onto the scene, and you see the teams popping up all over the place.

LEE: Right. So, as you said, it was after the Munich incident at the Olympics. And then when the city of Los Angeles received the Olympic award for the 1984 games is in couple years prior to that, that Daryl Gates and other government officials determined that if something like this could possibly occur in the city of Los Angeles, what are we going to do to prepare for it. And that's when LAPD squad did all the outreach. So, a lot of our personnel, you talked about Jeff Rogers and Mike Hillman, Al Preciado, Ron McCarthy. A lot have traveled to international agencies that had experience with counterterror operations. And then that's when our platoon went from a tactical team that was making entries but not necessarily hostage-rescue capable to a full-blown hostage-rescue capable resources.

JON: Yeah 'cause, again in context that, that is kind of the terrorist *acca de jour* for the late 1970s, is seize a bunch of people somewhere, demand the release of you know, a group of prisoners somewhere. And then try to negotiate your way or sneak your way out of it. As as you know that's the point also that it shifts for the hostage-takers, because you have 22 SASs, the Princess Game in London, the Inte Bure', you have GIGN in Baron, that there's a series of catastrophic failures of hostage-takers where the teams start to figure it out. And they begin how to deal with hostage-takers. And all of a sudden it goes from their negotiating to their, you know, dying in the airplane because the team has built you know, a strategy. So as as you guys tried to reach out, you were reaching out to to which teams. Like which European teams' kind of laid that foundation?

LEE: So it it yes, European teams moreover, our own U.S. Army and our U.S. Navy. And then so, very close relationships with them. And then from

there I would say um Jesuine initially, GIGN, the SAS, and we've kept a lot of those relationships over the years.

JON: Yeah, it seems, somebody who's worked with D Platoon for a long time, and kind of been with the Platoon. There, you are more connected internationally I think, than a lot of other units. And there is more of an information exchange that takes place.

LEE: Yes. I actually keep a lot of correspondence with our resources in the U.K., in France, actually as far as Dubai, and in Norway, Delta Norse, I'll have frequent communications with all those teams.

JON: Yeah but, especially when you look at L.A. as a potential stage for an attack. It seems like most of the tactics develop both good guy and bad guy tactics developed in Europe the Middle East. And then kind of you know, make their way to U.S. soil on both sides of the equation.

LEE: Right.

JON: So, it, it's probably helpful for you guys to maintain those relationships and understand how the tactics are revolving, I would imagine.

LEE: Absolutely. And real time debriefs. An incident occurs in Paris, we have resources that are sending us information about you know, what occurred. And obviously, there's a lot of confidentiality to it.

JON: Sure.

LEE: But, we've got very good communications so that we can learn from their successes and challenges and the like.

JON: So talk to me about the current configuration of the team, how big is it? You know, what's the overall structure look like today.

LEE: So, our structure hasn't changed since I'll say mid '72, early 72ish. If we became full-time member of '71. So shortly thereafter, we were 6 squads of 10 each. Each 10-officer squad is divided into 2 5-officer elements. So, if we talk about ranks, and I don't want to get like, too weird on the rank structured chart. But we have 48 police officer 3s. We have 12 P3 plus 1, which are element leaders. So, if you go do the math, we have 6 squads divided into 2 5-men elements. Right. You have 12 element leaders. And then each of those squads is run by a sergeant or a squad leader. So, we have 6 sergeants that are actual squad leaders. Then we have that admin position that can backfill, and then 2 lieutenants.

JON: Two lieutenants rotating responsibility overtime.

LEE: Yes. So Reuben and I, for the most part, we are exactly 50/50. We'll handle off-hour standby or on-duty incidents every other night, every other weekend. So that at the end of the year, we're both up the exact same amount of time.

JON: And I think that, one of the things I think that's unique about D Platoon, and also... You have complete responsibility for the tactical problem in the city of Los Angeles. There is no, there's no "phone home" for you guys. It is your problem ultimately, right?

LEE: Right. We're the last line of defense. The city of Los Angeles is more than 468 square miles. There are 21 geographic control divisions. So, when something happens in a geographic division, it's actually the commanding officer of that division that is the incident commander. So, we support the incident commander, we provide its service. And everything that we do, I will, if our personnel or see the element leader and sergeant of our devising tactics officer downrange, they'll make me aware of what those are. And then I go see the incident commander, who's going to be that GEO Division commanding officer, and seek that incident commander's approval to implement those tactics.

JON: Got it. And just so my bre-, one of the things that, that I know about the team, but I know it's really fascinating, is your breadth of capabilities. You know, talk about the cadre system and kind of how you have built these individual silos of you know, excellence for lack of a better term.

LEE: So, when an officer first come into S.W.A.T., everyone is a general you know, entry team member, S.W.A.T. element member. And then after a year in the platoon, they can branch out and, obviously they have to prove their proficiency at the basics, and then they can specialize. And the specialties are crises negotiations, is something that our crises negotiators are outstanding. I will screen an incident where it seems like it's going to be quite challenging. And we'll get there and next thing I know, our negotiators will have this guy walking out handcuffed and apologizing. It's-, they're remarkable. So, crises negotiator is one of our primary categories along with, as-expected snipers, lead climbers. The city of Los Angeles has 52 miles of waterfront between the Port of Los Angeles on up through the coastline off to Venice Beach. And so, we have a tactical waterborne component that simply brings S.W.A.T. to the water. Everything that's expected with less lethal or diversionary devices or otherwise on land, just those members can do that in the water.

We have explosive breachers, we have firearms training cadre, we have weaponless defense, which also handles our chemical agent instructions for our personnel. And now we have a-, technology is used now more than ever. The robotics, pole cameras, we have a sUAS cadre as well, you know properly licensed FAA 107. And so those are, I think I hit all the categories. And then we work in 4-week deployment periods.

So, throughout those 4 weeks, our first week if-, we'll letter the weeks, right. The first week will be Week A, and B, C, and D. And if so, you do the math you know, 4-week cycles, 13 of them a year, 52 weeks a year, the math works out. So that first Week A is what we call our core week. And that's where all of our personnel work during those training days. And we do all of our firearm's training for the various weapons systems. We'll do the movement where the slow methodical heurist warrant, hostage-rescue dynamic, work under explosive breach. But those are our core skills that we do during our core week in Week A.

Then, then all those cadres that I mentioned, they have their various training days Weeks B, C, and D. So, snipers will shoot out of the helicopters every other Tuesday. They will be on the range or working some you know version of urban high, rural high, Talcon Place, UKD on every other Thursday. Our negotiators have a day in there, climbers have a day in there, explosive breachers whether they're building charges, or working with the platoon using charges and conjunction with movement. Technology, those, the personnel that make control of our robots work properly and enhancing their ability to maneuver those devices through every variety of terrain. Likewise, with the UAS personnel, our lead climbers, and then our medics. I forgot our medics. So, we have about 8 EMTs that are properly certified EMTs. But our medical package for the platoon actually comes from L.A. City Fire Department.

JON: Hmm, that's-

LEE: So, so after one of our element leaders was killed in a rescue effort in 2008, Randy Simmons in fact, that was 14 years ago yesterday February 7th of 2008. And we realized that we didn't have the medical support in in... I mean, to be honest, the medical support in that, would not have saved Randy's life. I was, he took a .380 on the bridge in the nose. But, we enhanced our ability to have medical support downrange with us. So, with this relationship with the L.A. City Fire Department and their paramedics.

So, in order to be, that's Tactical Emergency Support or TEMS is the acronym. And they will be at L.A. City Paramedic for at least 5 years. And

then, they will actually sign a waiver because there's that, you know the fire department isn't going to go where things haven't calm down. What lack of a better way of putting it. And so, they will sign a waiver saying, they will go wherever S.W.A.T. goes. And so, they're actually with our personnel on target. And they'll go through a 2-week S.W.A.T. package, they're not carrying guns, but they will learn to use our firearms so if one of us goes down, they can render it saved. They understand the gear, they wear very similar gear. So that they are around us and while they are watching our movement, and they're seeing all the different gear that we use so it's not completely foreign to them.

JON: Yes. So that they know effectively how to move with a stick and stay out of the way and you know, which way the guys are going to go, etcetera.

LEE: Absolutely. They're very well set. And then, but they'll also do a tactical medic course with L.A. County Sheriff's Department with their Air 5 guys-

JON: Yeah, yes-

LEE: Air 5 personnel ASD. And then after that, they come to us. And so right now, we have 8 in that cadre and 2 of them are on everything we do. So, whether it's pre-planned or spontaneous, they're on standby just like we are. They have take-home city cars just like we do. And they will, their phone will alert in the middle the night for an incident. And they will roll right into the jobsite just like our personnel. And they'll have their medical gear. And typically, they will be in what we call a MedCat, which is a Lenco BearCat, but for the most part, an armored ambulance. But it doesn't satisfy all the sanitarial requirements because of the you know, chewing tobacco and sunflower seeds.

JON: Yeah, it's armored, and S.W.A.T. guys are in it.

LEE: Yes. Yeah, but it carries the majority of our medical gear. So, they're in that onsite. And they're there to provide medical care for, not only our personnel but also victims and [inaudible 22:35] suspects.

JON: So, with 60 guys, not many cadres. I'm assuming guys will have multiple specialties then, like you may be a long-gun automatic. So, is there that kind of crossover in specialty?

LEE: Yes. So actually, when I was an Element Lead member, an Element Leader, I was a Sniper, climber, diver. So, I did those 3. Then when I came back as a sergeant, I was with those cadres as well because I had you know, obviously a deep understanding of any of those disciplines.

JON: Right, so then within a mission, if you get in an operation, you have you know x number of divers there for any operation, or you have x number of snipers, x number of climbers just by rotation of the platoon, you're going to have all of those specialties there, kind of whatever the operation is.

LEE: Correct. And, and when we also try to disperse those specialties throughout the elements and squads. So that depending on who's on standby, who's up for a barricade, that squad will have a cross-section of those skills.

JON: Got it. Talk to me about the typical D Platoon operator. Because one of the things that is striking when you interact with the platoon, is there is a lot of experience in D Platoon. I mean, it's not uncommon to meet somebody who's been an operator for 10, 15, 20 years, and has you know, hundreds or thousands of operations. So, what does kind of the average D Platoon operator look like?

LEE: So, average age in our platoon, I believe is right about 40, go minus or plus a year or 2 on that. But right about 40 years old. Before someone goes through selection, they're probably going to have anywhere from 8 to 12 years on the LAPD. And when personnel come into our platoon, especially with just enjoying the operational tempo and the type of work and the camaraderie, personnel stay a long time. I don't, in fact I would say 80 percent of our personnel stay about 10 years.

JON: Ok. Well, which you know from an experience standpoint, you know, somebody at D Platoon and who's been there for 10 years, that's hundreds of operations. And it's hundreds of hours of training, thousands of hours of training. Like you just start to raise the expertise of the organization, which if they didn't stay that longer you had a rotation, wouldn't happen.

LEE: Correct. But if you also- So talk about experience, so Operational Tempo, we do about, as of recent, we do about a 120, 125 spontaneous incidents a year. So, and then we'll do probably 30 or 35 pre-plans. And the pre-plan is typically warrant services. So, if you figure that an officer is going to get 150 incidents, or the platoon will get 150 deployments per year. And an officer makes let's say, even a third of those, right? That's a good 50 per year, right?

So, if you do 10 years in the platoon, and on a low end you'll make a third of those incidents, you got 500.

JON: Five hundred operations is an amazing tactical experience, especially in a modern environment where there are not many full-time teams. And even the ones that do, don't have that many operations.

LEE: Right, right.

JON: So, what is the process to activate S.W.A.T.?

LEE: So perfect timing for this question because the other thing I was going to say is that, having many correspondents with a lot of different teams will see the different teams have different, criteria for deployment. So, when our officers, I say we have 150 different deployments a year, and 125 spontaneous, 25 or so pre-planned, that there is, there's certain criteria's that needs to be met for us to even move that monstrous machine of LAPD S.W.A.T. So, let's talk about a spontaneous incident.

A spontaneous incident would be, we'll go with just the groundwork of just an armed barricaded suspect. Right? And so, the 4 criteria: crimes got to be committed, suspects believed to be armed, he's in a position of advantage... And that position of advantage, we used that term because that could be anywhere. That could be in the middle of a field of grass, that could be in a home, that can be in a vehicle. He has, he's in a position that gives him a tactical advantage. And you can define that however you want. And then the final thing is the refusal to submit. So, the officers have to try to communicate in some way, like no answer at all can be a refusal to submit. But at least we have to try to get that person to arrest.

JON: Got it.

LEE: So, with those 4 criteria having been met, and I'll just give an example of, if I'm on standby, and my city phone rings at 2 o'clock in the morning, I'll go down to my desk at the end of the hallway, and I've got my little screening sheet. And I use that because, if I'm up at 2 o'clock in the morning, my brain's a little foggy, these are good prompts for me to make sure that I'm answering all the questions. And so, when did that question originate. Has it been going on for 5 minutes or has it been going on for 2 hours? And what's the criminal history of the suspect, what's the target location. And specifics, not just the address. Is it 8 unit in a 300-unit apartment building, is it a single-family residence, detached garage? And so, I get some specifics about that.

Obviously, weaponry, efforts to communicate, what's the nature of the dialogue? And then once I confirm that we have a crime-committed ... submit, then I notify my commanding officer. And so, my commanding

officer has to approve my deployment of our personnel. Now the only time I will send our personnel immediately upon getting the screening is if there is, if it's a hostage incident, life in the balance-

JON: Sure.

LEE: And then when I notify the chain of command, it's more of a notification. By me clearly, no one's going to say, no you shouldn't go there. Right?

JON: Yeah, yeah. When someone's holding a hostage, you know. Let me make 7 phone calls, and 45 minutes from now, I'll get your rights-

LEE: Yeah, yeah. So we can... At the risk of stating the obvious, right so, if it's a hostage incident, I'll send personnel immediately. And then notify the chain of command, we'll get that machine moving much more quickly.

JON: Got it. And your personnel are city car, everything like they're leaving from their home to the location. They're not coming together and having to you know, mobilize and all that, right?

LEE: That's correct. So, if it's not duty-incident, we're likely, there's you know there's a good cross-section of us, are training at a venue somewhere and they can just entrail and figure it out and we'll just all go there together. If it is off hours, then we have a standby list of 16 for tactics, another 2 for negotiations of primary and secondary negotiator. And the unique thing about our negotiations, excuse me, our negotiations profile, is that those are actually S.W.A.T. officers. We don't have a separate cadre of negotiators who are you know, just negotiators and never working with S.W.A.T. These are actually S.W.A.T. cops. And in fact, through our selection of process, our selection is a 12-week course. And the first 8 week are where the real testing takes place. And the back 4 weeks of those 12 weeks, are what I call enrichment. And one of those weeks in the back 4 is a 40-hour crises negotiations course.

JON: Oh ok.

LEE: Every single one of our personnel goes through a CNT course, Crises Negotiations Training. And so, they all have a baseline knowledge of crises negotiations, and you know, the things to say, things not to say. And-

JON: Which may be more important.

LEE: Yes, yeah. It's all about what you say, it's all what you're not saying is what matters. So, the logo throughout this crisis negotiations course, and then those after you finish that for one year in the platoon, and prove

you're, that you're comfortable in all that different aspects of baseline S.W.A.T. stuff. You can specialize in negotiator. So, 22 of our 60 are negotiators. So, when we roll out-

JON: So, a third of the platoon.

LEE: Yes.

JON: Yeah, almost half of the operator-level platoon.

LEE: Correct. And, and then they'll get enhanced training, and you know, they'll attend different symposiums, and they have, you know, every deployment period, they'll have their training days where they can debrief incidents that occurred elsewhere or debrief an incident that we experienced. We have behavior science doctors that are attached to us. So, when we send out a crisis negotiations package, and I'm getting really deep into CNT right now.

JON: Yeah, that's ok though.

LEE: But I'll come back into it. That we have a BSS doctor with us. So, they're not actually doing the negotiating, negotiating is all with our primary and secondary negotiator. We have a supervisor that oversees it. But the BSS doc can look at or listen to the nature of the dialog and maybe, we know, we then some things what the suspect is saying that may help our negotiators in connecting.

JON: Yeah, I think one of the things that, one of the misconceptions about S.W.A.T. teams, especially larger agencies like yours is that, you know, S.W.A.T. is just a bunch of trained killers that are going to go out and deal with them tactically. I think one of the most striking things about your platoon, is the emphasis on crises negotiations. It's the emphasis on, you know, surrounding callout. And it's really, it's a total resolution approach. It's not simply, we get there, and everything goes tactical.

LEE: Absolutely. So, I've kind of derailed what the original question was. What do we do when we go to an incident? And you're right, we go straight to the jobsite. We don't rally it at the command and gather gear and go. So, everybody has their gear with them. We have support personnel in our vault, where we grab our armor and truck, and everything goes to the field. And then onto your statement about this resolving incident in the least manner confrontation as possible. So, there is a, it frustrates me, there is a common perception that when S.W.A.T. response to an incident that there's going to be significant property damage. And that there's going to be-

LEE: Yes, good time to laugh.

JON: Going to show up, going to break everything.

LEE: And probably going to shoot everybody. And then, before the brass cools on the deck, we're going to get in our cars and drive away. And nothing can be further from the truth. And I'll talk about the stats of our platoon. I'm actually very proud of them, that we started keeping a database back in 2013. And so, we've captured absolutely all of our deployments. And since 2013, I think we're at about 1150 incidents. And so, if I talk about those 1150 incidents, we use force any kind all the way down to wristlock twist lock in less than 8 percent of the incidents.

JON: Wow.

LEE: We use deadly force in less than 1 point 4 percent of the incidents.

JON: See, I think that is, I think that if the average person knew that statistics it would stagger. Because I do think there's this impression like, oh yeah everybody's going to get shot... So, one and a half percent incidents in deadly force.

LEE: Less than. Less than 1 and a half percent. And obviously, we can thank Hollywood and all that fantastic footage of movie scenes, of all that destruction and-

JON: Yeah, 85 movies that have been made about your platoon. Two TV shows, yeah you know, yeah. They've done a great job. The disinformation campaigns.

LEE: Absolutely wrong. Yeah, yeah. Absolutely false. It doesn't happen that way. And all that credit for the, our low statistics of uses of force, and uses of deadly force, that goes to our personnel and their commitment to resolving these incidences, least confrontation matter as possible, crisis negotiators. And especially since about 2016, what really helped us is, all the technology. Whether the use of robots, pole cams, UASs, those help us search without exposing our personnel. It just makes us safer for everybody, makes it safer for us, makes it safer for the suspect. So, we keep on refining our systems, and we keep reducing the need to use force. And the big catch phrase, and you know probably the last couple years is de-escalation. And it's something we've been doing forever. But there's also different tools we are adding to our toolbox that assist in that. And so, it's a constant pursuit to handle the more provocative incidents and the least confrontation matter possible.

JON: Yeah, it's interesting because in talking with you and talking with the guys from the platoon. The emphasis seems to be on slowing the entire thing down. Right, the guy is emotional, he's made bad decisions, he's in a bad place. And the sooner he gets into a confrontation- You know, one of my friends said a long time ago, Hale, he said a long time ago- You know when you're in a tactical situation, they have made so many bad choices in their lifetime, that the sheriff's department in his case is at their house with the S.W.A.T. team knocking down the door. Right. If you give him 30 seconds to make the right decision, they're probably not going to make the right one. And it's interesting because as you talk through it, you know, its crisis negotiation, it's getting technology in, it's slowing the whole thing down and delaying this moment when an officer is engaging with the suspect. And trying to prevent that from ever happening. Which I think is another thing that Hollywood has created kind of this fictitious myth for that is like, here they go, here they're going the right way, it's just not the case.

LEE: Right, and and- So like for, I'll speak for the LAPD, we're the last line of defense. So, if we don't fix the problem, no one is going to. But I think what's lost in all of that is we're a life-saving organization. And people look at what S.W.A.T. does. They look at armored vehicles, they look at snipers, and they look at all these things that they like to translate into while they are going hurt people significantly or kill them. But as last line of defense, we need those things, but we're also a life-saving organization and clearly there are statistics to prove it.

JON: Yeah, it's interesting, its discussion of militarization of law enforcement, and military and S.W.A.T. specifically. And one of the things that people key on is armored vehicles. And it's always struck me as one of the crazy thoughts, because without an armored vehicle, that's a lethal force engagement. Right. If you put an officer there without an armored vehicle, the suspect is shooting at an officer he may hit. And there is no, there's no chance for resolution at that point. Right, you're going to attack for resolution. Whereas with armor, you are, all those things are putting a margin of safety between the suspect and the operator.

LEE: So that actually brings up a great topic of these, well I call landmark incidents that have promoted our evolutions. So, we talk about the '84 Olympics, and taking that step from you know, traditional entry teams and some enhanced capability to like, full-blown hostage-rescue capable. Then our tactics adjusted, I'm going to say in the late 90s, one of our element leaders **Ken Vachard** was on staff at Blackwater. And what I like about Blackwater was they would have tactical law enforcement teach law

enforcement, and military teach military because of crossover for, we'll say, rules of engagement.

Not necessarily the same but the tactics of eliminated penetration rather than running walls. And that really changed the profile of our tactic. So, it's a landmark of evolutionary timeframe in our platoon. Then we'll get to 2002, now we get to armor. And armor changed the way that we deployed. When I was a young S.W.A.T. cop, we literally had like, we were called the Tomato Van. It was, it actually looked like a van you'd see in the middle of the road selling tomatoes in the back. And I had a gas leak inside, so if you ride around on it too long, you'd get a headache. And, and now all of a sudden, we have armor. And so today, we have a bear, which is like, on a freightliner frame. And just a big, big a-

JON: Big bear?

LEE: Big enormous, armored vehicle. We have 4 Bearcats. Then we have 2 armored Excursions. And so, with a fleet of armor, we can park where we need to, and you're right. It is actually de-escalating because we are in a better tactical position, and we've had more than one incident where our personnel had been shot at in the vehicle and hadn't return fire.

JON: Yeah, but if they had not been in the vehicle, they would have no choice-

LEE: They would have been forced to return fire. Yes. But you have to defend your life and the lives of, you know, the citizens, your teammates and all of that. So, and I'm not saying that we're going to allow our suspects to shoot at our armor unendingly.

JON: Of course, yeah.

LEE: But if we can reposition, and we can take them into custody without, the certainty we do. And that's-

JON: I think also, you know, one of my favorite sayings is the whole points of special tactics, is to put the suspect in a position where resistance is futile, and surrender is likely.

LEE: Well said.

JON: So, the suspect is now in a position. When you're in armor, you know, you don't have to be a math major to figure, you're probably not going to win the gunfight. The more distance you place between you and the suspect, the more the suspect has to come to a realization that like, I may not win here. I'm probably not going to win. As soon as he gets to,

I'm not going to win, then he's making a decision. But as long as he thinks he may win, and if it is an immediate face to face confrontation, then he's not going to win long term, but he has a chance of winning initial engagements. So, I think that, you know, the ability to again slow everything down, separate your personnel from the suspect. But it's also I think, like you know, you talk about the platoon not returning fire in a situation where they could've certainly. I think that goes into selection too, right? A lot of it is who you pick, and their ability to make those decisions on the fly.

LEE: Yes. And so, talked about the tenure of our personnel, right? You know, we're 40 plus, minus years old. That before you go for the selection, you're likely to have 12 years of street experience as a police officer. You're seasoned, you know how to handle these tenuous incidents in the field. You know how to talk to people. You know how to de-escalate. And so those are the people we're hiring. And then, I've been asked in more than one occasion, you know what, who you're looking for when you are looking for a S.W.A.T. cop. What's the profile, what's the personality?

And and, so just to tell a quick story, back in October of 2010 in HRT, you know FBI in Quantico was running selection. So, we had a great relationship with them, and I went back and joined for their, for their selection. And part of that was, so they would wake up bright and early the first day and they would do all this physical, you know, test. And then as the day evolved, as I got with her, there was a psychologist, psychiatrist, psychologist I believe moderating. His last name is Middleton. So, Doc Middleton is a, he's kinda just standing back, and he's kinda just watching the personalities of the different personnel, selectees and how they're interacting. And some have a conversation with him, and so he says, yeah so obviously the first thing we do is put them through all of these strenuous physical tests and ensure that they're prepared physically for this. He says, at about noon today just sit them down in a room today. They're going to take a raw IQ test. And based on their scores of the raw IQ test, I will give you 80 percent certainty, who is going to make it to Day 2 and who's going to be done.

JON: Man, that's a bold prediction.

LEE: And yes. And so, then they went on to explain that when you, when somebody does very well on a raw IQ test, that someone who- One is, he's done some research, he or she, has done the research and understands the job that they're applying for, so their prepared for it. It also enhances their ability to multi-task, problem-solve, be resourceful, think innovatively, and-

JON: Pay attention to detail.

LEE: Yes. And adjust to the terrain as things change. And, and he says, then later on we'll do a personality test. You know, Myers-Briggs and I guess, some people speak of the pros and cons of that. So, I won't get into whether you're a florist or a field Marshall, or otherwise.

JON: Yeah, whatever.

LEE: But, and those change from year to year anyway with life experience and formal education, and all that. But the raw IQ piece really stuck with me. And so, you ask me who we're looking for in a S.W.A.T. cop. I want to be smart. And once they're smart, you can build everything else off of that. Because you'll see that they understand their job-taskings and they're going to be committed to it. And they're going to understand the organization. And then as they come into the platoon, then it's our responsibility to expose them to the culture of our platoon, and our drive for professionalism. And then they assimilate into that as well. And then they also are going to, we need to create an environment where they feel safe and you know, I could talk about, you know, a book by Daniel Coyle. Culture Code, where our personnel need to feel safe to work in this environment. And where they can feel safe to come to work, they can challenge the norms, they can bring innovation-

JON: Take risks.

LEE: Feel safe to, we'll say, fail forward. Do you use the phrase? So, all of that goes into the personality of the person we're looking for. And then whether it's a, we want a broad cross-section of life experiences as well. Because I continued to talk about crisis negotiations and how much that assists us in resolving these provocative incidences. And those broad life experiences are going to help them communicate and understand as they are working through an incident where... I'll say, just because you can, just because you're justified in using deadly force or force of any kind, doesn't mean you should. Right? So, if there are more innovative ways for us to solve a problem, then that's what we're doing. Then those are the people we want to hire.

JON: Yeah, because we're realistically lethal engagement, is not good for anybody. Especially now. Right? It's not, it's bad for the suspect obviously because he's going to lose the gunfight. But it's also bad for the officer, it's bad for the department, it's bad for the platoon. It's like, there's no- I think there's this misconception that, you know, special tactic teams like, want to go out and oh, you know, they want to go kill people and realistically, having

spent around 25 years around S.W.A.T. teams, there is no lethal engagement where everybody walks away happy.

LEE: You're absolutely correct.

JON: Everybody's a loser. Yeah, how do you- You have a slightly older platoon in kind of the typical S.W.A.T. team. You have probably, you know "smarter than the average bear" operator. How do you maintain very high standards while managing all these A-typed personalities?

LEE: I wish I had the answer to that question. So, if you consider, obviously what we want, we want freethinkers. We want like, smart, innovative. And then we assimilate them into the tradition and culture of our platoon, which is to constantly evolve a better way to do things in a, with less and less confrontation. So, when you assimilate them into our culture, and then I'll promote another book here, is James Kerr wrote *Legacy*, about the New Zealand All Blacks.

JON: Oh, that's true. Ok.

LEE: In this book, it talks about how, when they bring someone into their team, how they make them, they are immediately educated about the traditions and the Ethos of that team and that culture. And so, when, when you bring people in, and maybe they, well S.W.A.T.s a cool job and I'm going to go through the selection, and then they're going to get through selection. But then they realize that this is a life-saving organization. And I need to be a part of this very honorable team that strives to accomplish exactly that, saving lives. So, then we're also going to promote their free thought.

And so, as these, these younger generation with a different perspective on resources and innovation in a different way to maybe, approach a challenge, then we will encourage them to, to present that. And some of them work, and some of them don't. But I never want to stymie the, the innovative drive of our personnel. So, I need, right now we're running selection. We're in Week 4 of the 12 weeks. And we've got 12 personnel. And we did a lot of testing in the front end. And all of our hope is that all 12 are going to graduate. And that they're going to assimilate into the platoon. And they will be successful and productive, and contributive team members. And I want them to understand immediately what they're getting into. And I also want them to understand that we're looking to them to be the next generation of innovation, so that we can continue to, not only keep our stats but improve on those stats of the force of any kind less than 8 percent of the incidents of deadly force which is less than one-fourth percent of the

incidences. We, we can improve on that. But how are we going to do it? And those are the personnel we're hiring.

JON: Yeah. So, it is this, this Japanese of a notion called Kaizen which is like, this idea that you are constantly improving. Continuous improvement, continuously addressing the weakness of the organization, either to bring in other people for improving culture, for improving training. And it sounds like that's kind of in the heart of everything you're doing. It's like everything can always get a little bit better.

LEE: Yes. In fact, Kaizen is constant methodical. So, there's a constant methodical drive to improve.

JON: Yeah. Talk to me, so so the culture obviously of the team is essential in that, and I'm a big fan of culture as a concept. I think that is ultimately what drives our behavior is is, this notion that, I always tell the story like you have, you and your friends have a culture when you play poker? And you and your parents have a culture when you go to church. And those 2 cultures are completely different. And there aren't necessarily written rules but it's very clear to you that some behaviors are not acceptable at one versus the other.

LEE: Well said.

JON: And, and when, when you are bringing people into your culture and educating them, you're setting expectations, you're setting warrants. Right. But you're also setting and understanding of the relationship between people. How do you maintain, for lack of a better term, a familial environment? Right? Because tactical units are obviously the guys who are very closely bonded. There's close relationships. How do you maintain that closeness, and still maintain standards? And people's needs to meet standards.

LEE: So, the good thing is that when we select personnel, and they're going to go through selection and... Well, we select personnel to start our course, then they're going to go through selection. There's a personality in them that makes them want to be the part of a team. Right? We're hiring smart individuals but not to be individuals. They need to be a part of the team. They need to be competent and be able to stand out and do what's right all the time. But they also need to be- There's a drive in that personality to want to be a contributive, member of the team. And the team needs the support of the team. And the fact that, when some of our personnel, we're involved in a lot of stuff. And some of our guys are going to get significantly injured. And there's a drive for them to want to come back, because they

want to be a part of the team. They want to come back to contribute. They want the team to know that they still want to be there and still contribute to the team. So, whether it's something that I can do, or that supervision can do, to ensure that, that people continue to contribute to this team.

I think the bigger part of it is, that the team takes care of that. That, that's the team's culture that we have element leaders. That, that lead their personnel and keep them engaged in the need to be a member of a team, and to contribute to the team. And the term I use is, and I don't mean it in a sexist way at all but say take care of the men next to you better than yourself. Right? I can use those terms man or woman but, and in fact all the guys probably getting tired of hearing me say it. But I'll say, take care of the men next to you more than yourself. Because if somebody's take- If you're taking care of somebody else, somebody's also taking care of you. And if your only concern is taking care of yourself, then this is the wrong place for you. I don't need you in this platoon so you could only take care of yourself. Go find another job where you can just do your thing.

JON: It's interesting because when you think about that culture, that's going to carry over very well when you have an incident where somebody is injured, you have a shooting, whatever. How, as a leader of a unit that is engaging, and has shootings and recently had somebody shot. How do you manage that, the load on the individual that occurs when an event like that occurs?

LEE: That's another question that I wish I had the answer to. We got a lot of tenure in our platoon. We've got, literally generations of you know, some older personnel that have been through some things. And they're going to respond differently than someone who is influenced from other things, that maybe you and I don't understand.

So, I'll, I can talk about one of our guys, you know, I won't name names here. But uh, Dan Sanchez, he just retired this week. And Dan did almost 22 years with our platoon. And people ask me to describe Dan. Dan wants, his life is drink coffee, chew tobacco, read the bible, Cross fit workouts, be around his family and go to S.W.A.T. barricades. Six things. Simple. And then we have other personnel that are, they're constantly swiping the internet. They're looking for, you know that dopamine hit of likes from strangers. The things that I will never understand, and I'm not going to try to understand it. But they just have different influences that are going to impact the way they respond to different significant events. And so, when you've got that somebody that's swiping different blog sites and see

whatever people are saying that they're completely disconnected from our platoon. But maybe they are making a comment that-

JON: Yeah. The Monday Morning Quarterback.

LEE: And I don't even know those comments exist that I'm not the guy who's going on those blogs. So, it's you know, it's literally generational. You've got a younger group of guys that are coming up through our platoon now that are influenced by things. And social media, that our more tenured guys just aren't paying attention to.

JON: Yeah. It's interesting because the- You know, historically, your job has happened, not not in secret, but largely out of the public view. Right? Like S.W.A.T. incident, what happened, you report it in the news. And unless it went, you know, particularly well, particularly bad, it didn't get a lot of coverage. And there was no, you know, no aftereffects. Now everything is videotaped, between body-worn cameras, and people with cell phones. Everybody is, is you know, a tactical genius that is going to critique the team's every action. That's gotta put a load on the individual operators.

LEE: It does. And and, I think it more the younger generation that's actually watching all of that stuff. But another frustration for me, will be that some personnel feel a need to post things online that don't need to be online. That, there's this need to share when-

JON: No, it's the dopamine hit. Everybody looks at me, I want you know.

LEE: I'm trying to be kind.

JON: Tell me you like me.

LEE: Yeah. So, my frustration is when things get posted that don't need to be posted that... Yeah, you're right, that dopamine hit of likes. But you, you actually just said it, a couple sentences ago about, what happened to staying in the shadows and being the quiet professional with the heart of a servant. And, in fact we were having a conversation about social media and posts that maybe should not be, should not have been posted by a particular platoon member that's now retired. And, in the office with some of our guys and a, babbling a little bit because I don't want to be, I'm trying to dance around this...

But I love our statement with one of our element leaders. And he said, I didn't know that there was an expiration date on humility. And he was talking about, we were talking about this younger generation that hasn't known life without social media. And so, now you have this generation that

is so polled to social media that they just, they don't know the difference like, what do you mean I can't post that. And so, when it's something, it's so organic to you, when you've grown up with social media, now you're an adult and more social media. But how do we... So, it's like, people were making excuses, well they just don't know the difference. So yeah, they're going to post stuff, and that's just what they do. But if the postings aren't humble and professional, then why are we doing it. So, I didn't know there was an expiration date on humility.

And so that, that promoting the, in fact I would love to have it as an interview question for selectees. That, would you still want to come to our platoon if you could never tell anyone that you worked here. If you had to just... I'm a cop in the city of Los Angeles, and never tell anybody that you work for LAPD S.W.A.T., would you want to still be here. That's the person I want. I want someone that's willing to go the extra mile, stay in the shadows, have the heart of a servant, and just provide that service to the city of L.A. without any personal acknowledgement.

JON: That's fantastic. I think... Why don't we move on to the, kind of final. I've got a series of rapid-fire questions for you, you know, 10 words or less, or you know, short-sentence answers. And just, kind of see what you, just see what your, see what your thoughts are. What is your most important habit?

LEE: I don't think I can... How about quirk?

JON: A fine line, yeah. I happen to quirk. That's kind of the opposite sighs of-

LEE: So, something that I'll do every day, is I do one Cross fit type work out for every day of the year. And this is just a personal discipline thing. So, if I miss a day, I got to make it up. If I miss 3 days, I've got to...

JON: It going to be an ugly Sunday. Yeah, yeah.

LEE: My daughter's actually taken to that as well. So, it just shows that discipline, that daily discipline. And uh yeah, I'm going to sacrifice maybe some quality for quantity. But, but it keeps you on track. It keeps you from going too far, too long without working out.

JON: Yeah, that's actually a really interesting way to look at that. I like that. What in your opinion, what is the difference between a leader and a manager?

LEE: So, a leader is going to, foster loyalty and commitment to the completion of goals for the embetterment of the team. Where a manager, a manager is going to measure with these, with various metrics that are quantifiable and impersonal.

JON: Got it. What, what's the best book you've read on leadership?

LEE: I keep going to, Daniel Coyle and Culture Code. I think that we've, I've had some personnel issues in the platoon. And I wonder what has prompted that. And is there something that I can do. And, and that book talks about how you need to create an environment where your personnel to feel safe. Safe to challenge the norms, safe to come to work and bring innovation, safe to fail forward. I know there's a lot of great books on leadership. And I've read a bunch but for some reason, that's always in the front of my head.

JON: What do you think is the most important characteristic of an effective leader is?

LEE: Selflessness. I think that if you're selfless that your team know that your team knows that you are there for them not yourself. And if you're selfless, that you're also committed to the technical knowledge, the tactical knowledge, all of to preparing yourself to serve your team as a effectively as possible.

JON: I love that answer. What's your current favorite online resource, website, or podcast?

LEE: So, there's like professional and personal, right? So professionally, pretty simple, Gordon Graham, Lexipol, Police One, Case Law, you know, The Fourth Amendment... All of the things we need to know so that we do it right because the public deserves that. And then personally, YouTube. Right? I mean, if I'm fixing something on my motorbike, I go to YouTube. If I have to change a garbage disposal and I'm not quite certain what to do with that, YouTube.

JON: I love it. No, that's a fair point. You obviously have a lot of responsibilities. One of 2 lieutenants over at LAPD squad. You have a lot of responsibilities in any given point, your responsibility for the tactical instances in the city. What keeps you awake at night?

LEE: It's wondering what we're not prepared for. If there's all these things that are happening around the world, and I think, as I mentioned we got great relationships with the variety of teams around the globe. So staying

connected, and what are they doing that we need to look to. But what is the incident that comes to Los Angeles, and when it lands, we're not prepared.

JON: Ok Lee, final question. What's the most profound memory of your career?

LEE: So that's tough to just narrow it down to one. I mean when we talk about, you know, when Randy was killed, or when R.J. was killed, or Louie died. And how it re-calibrates how you take care of your personnel. But if I'm going to say something that's had an impact on my career that took it in a direction that I didn't see coming, I'm going to talk about a failed rescue effort on July 10th of 2005. And, after that rescue effort, I... A little bit revealing here. I questioned if I was the right guy to remain as an element leader in S.W.A.T. And so, it was after that incident that I took the sergeant's test.

Before that, I was going to be, Lee McMillion, S.W.A.T. Element Leader for you know, a bunch of decades and then retire, and that would be the end of it. But that, having that incident in back of my head and wondering if, you know, am I the right guy. I figured I'll make sergeant. I'll go back to patrol; I'll be a patrol sergeant and do my career there. And just a, and just live out the rest of my LAPD career. You know, just doing regular police work. It's an honorable thing to do. And patrol needs good sergeants, and I wanted to be a good sergeant. But just with good timing and cosmic energy, I was able to come back to S.W.A.T.

In fact, my partner now, Reuben Lopez was the lieutenant in S.W.A.T. at the time, he's the one that hired me back as a sergeant. And then as I was back as a sergeant, I just kind of the next natural step would've been to take the lieutenant's test, and I did. And then, so I went back out. And then our commanding officer was Ed Procob. And he hired me back as a S.W.A.T. lieutenant. And I think that, that one incident, not only did I learned an awful lot about myself and priorities, but it took my career in a different path that I had no intention of going the morning of that event. But the evening of that event, you start thinking of maybe some other things that you should be doing.

JON: Do you mind sharing what happened?

LEE: So, it was a father who was holding his daughter hostage. And he had actually assumed the *non de plume* of Tony Montana from Scarface. So, he would only respond to our negotiators, you know, as for Tony or Mr. Montana. He had an office in a used car lot that had the desk set up like Scarface in the movie and a monitor behind him, with the split-screen and

all these surveillance cameras. One of our Sierra teams was looking in through a window. At one point, he took a poster and put Scarface poster over the window. And ultimately, he came out to where I had the emergency rescue team on the back side. And he came out holding Suzie in one arm and a reached for his pistol. And then one of the, our guys in the hatch of the armored vehicle tried to resolve through, to shooting him but it was a missed shot. And then, he ultimately ran back in the office with his daughter, shooting back at us.

So, as we went to affect that rescue, one of our guys, Dan Sanchez was shot in the shoulder. He was reaching for a flashbang, and actually took one in his shoulder. I mean, completely noble, he continued on and pulled the flashbang in one of the rooms. And with Bob Gallegos, Jr., Bill Casey, there was as I mentioned Dan Sanchez, Eddie Perez. Another element leader was Rick Gonzaldo. But ultimately, Suzie Pena, 19 months old, was killed. And, absolutely horrific. And just, those are the things that help you re-calibrate. One of you guys got shot, failed rescue effort, what could I have done differently. And is this the right place for me.

JON: I think this is a fantastic place for us to stop. And I appreciate you sharing with us. Lee, I so appreciate you coming on and being on The Debrief with us. Thank you so much.

LEE: I thank you so much. It's absolutely my honor.

JON: I appreciate you.