

The Debrief Mike Hillman EP. 6

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 in 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.

JON: This is the first in a 2-part series with Mike Hillman. Mike is a legend in the tactical community with a list of career accomplishments that would take a Podcast of their own. But as a brief bio, Mike was one of the original founders of the LAPD SWAT, a deputy chief in LAPD, the assistant sheriff in Orange County, California, and an assistant chief of police for the Los Angeles Port Police. He was one of the founders of the National Tactical Officers Association, and is a nationally recognized expert on leadership, crisis management, critical incident management, special operations, and a wide variety of other subjects. For this first episode, we're going to look back on the history and origins of SWAT, talk about how it has evolved over time, the founding of the National Tactical Officers Association, and look at the current challenges being faced by SWAT teams. For the second episode, we will explore Mike's views on leadership, critical incident management, tactical decision-making, and the role of SWAT in the modern tactical environment. Mike, thank you so much for joining me today, I appreciate you being here.

MIKE: Jon, thank you very much. And if I can go back, there are no experts in this business of SWAT. We're all students of the problem. Any day that we stop, and we start rewarding ourselves because we've got all the answers, we're headed for disaster.

JON: That's a fair point. Why don't we, to start, let's go back to the beginning of your career and kind of walk through. You know, it's- Your career started at a critical time in the evolution of SWAT. And you were present for a lot of the events that gave rise to this. So, I would love to just kind of walk through the history, and parallel that to your career, if you wouldn't mind. So where does it start?

MIKE: Well, you know, the '60s were a tumultuous time as they are now, of course. And the history repeats itself. But in 1963 after I got out of high school, I went into the Army. Then got out of the Army, and I went into the Los Angeles Police Department in 1966 on my birthday. And it was

something that I had wanted to do for some time. I was very impressed with the Los Angeles Police Department. In 1966 we'd just finished up with the first 1965 Watts riots. And because I grew up in Los Angeles, I had a chance to see how the Los Angeles Police Department performed. And I was very impressed with it. I had a very strong interest in tactics. Coming out of the Army, I was very interested in what LAPD had to offer. And when I got out of the academy, I found myself like every other recruit, doing the various things that a young police officer would be able to do to help learn their career.

When Rampart opened, we opened Rampart and I went into patrol, and ultimately went to traffic enforcement division. And that was probably right about the 1969 timeframe when I had a chance to really get exposed to what the Black Panther Party was involved in. Then again, there were ambushes of police officers that were taking place. Unfortunately, not much has changed since then. But at the time it was something, it was a high priority for all of us in law enforcement. And then along came the opportunity to be able to go to what was described then, as a fulltime special weapons and tactics team. It wasn't a platoon then. But there were other 4 plank holders and forefathers that were involved in the parttime team. In 1970, when I was ultimately selected to Metro, we started with a fulltime special weapons and tactics platoon that ultimately started off with a little less than 60 people. And I was fortunate enough to be a team leader at that particular time.

JON: So, you were P3 at that point?

MIKE: It was P3 plus 1, which was an enhanced position of the patrol officer position, and it was a leadership role.

JON: And you came in literally as the platoon became a fulltime element was when you arrived. You were selected into that first group.

MIKE: I came in as a P3 when I came into Metro. Then ultimately, the platoon had started under Bob Smithson. And I was promoted to a 3 plus 1, which put me in charge of, at that time we called them an element, which was a 5-person element. Two elements constituted a squad of 12 people with a supervisor.

JON: So that's 1971.

MIKE: Yes, it is.

JON: And then '72 kind of begins the modern terrorism age with the Munich Massacre, and the beginning of evolution of hostage-taking as a methodology of business for terrorists.

MIKE: Yes. Internationally, the Munich Olympics was obviously a benchmark, and there was a lot of lessons learned out of that. We had transportation of hostages, we had busses involved. We had multiple locations that were involved and now we call them complex-coordinated type of attacks. But at that particular time that was something that was relatively new. And I describe the '70s, at least in my career, as kind of in dealing with SWAT as pretty much the benchmark of some of the things that we started to do in terms of SWAT. We relied very heavily on the United States Marine Corps to be able to have us be able to become familiar with sophisticated firearms training. And sophisticated firearms training was basically pistol-craft and the use of rifles as well as movement. Building-entry was something that was left to us.

The Marines were not too much into that at that particular time. But what we saw is in the '70s, in the early '70s, we had- In Los Angeles, we had a, gosh a- Mike Edwards, who was a police officer who was kidnapped and killed. He worked 77th Division. We had at the time, just after the SLA shooting in May of '74, we ended up experiencing a helicopter crash that killed one of our commanders because we were learning how to be able to shoot out of the helicopter. And that was a piece of technical technology that we were looking at because we were dealing with the aftermath of the Hanafi Muslim incident that took place in Washington, DC, which represented a high-rise type of capability. You got to remember that going back to August of 1966, we had the Charles Whitman incident that took place in-

JON: The Texas Tower in Austin.

MIKE: The Texas Tower in Austin. And so, we were concerned on how we were going to deal with that situation. So, there was a lot of things that had taken place. Marcus Foster, who was a schoolboys superintendent up in Oakland, had been kidnapped and killed by the SLA. And one of the key factors in that whole period of time is because we'd finished up with the Black Panthers Party in '69, and we started to see ambushes of police officers were becoming much more prevalent. The SLA had planned an ambushed situation up in Concord. There had been shootings up there where they were taking vans and basically putting automatic weapons in the back of the van, and basically baiting in law enforcement to try to kill them. There was a lot of this type of activity.

So, what we were doing in SWAT at the time, was trying to develop tactics amongst ourselves that would bring us up to a state of where we could be able to counter those types of things. We've spent a lot of time training, and this goes to the issue of the reputation of SWAT. A lot of time training recruits, when they came into the department, when they would go through their last portion of their training at Universal Studios. And one of the pieces that really helped us in SWAT was to be able to build a rapport with the department. SWAT was new. SWAT was new, even you can go back to '66, '67. And it was relatively an anomaly at the time-

JON: It was revolutionary. It's the one-of-a-kind at that point.

MIKE: Well, it was. And in '70s, during the '70s period of time, we had to spend time internally and developing our own department into understanding what SWAT was in terms of a lifesaving organization. So, the '70s were really a benchmark. We were starting to learn what about, what we needed to do and where we needed to go.

JON: Were most of the missions set initially kind of counter ambush, counter, for lack of a better term, insurgency. More focused on that kind of Black Panther weather underground. Like, how do we counter ambush? And that was the initial mission set. When did that begin to change? Was it Munich or was it after that? You began to kind of broaden the scope.

MIKE: Munich certainly changed the paradigm a little bit. But to your point, at that time counter insurgency wasn't the term that we used. Counter ambush is what we were dealing with. And we were still dealing with the aftermath of the Black Panther Party. And one of the issues that we had to deal with, was that we had information in intelligence, that the Black Panthers were using storm drains to be able to navigate in the underground within the city. So, that they could be able to move unobserved, and to be able to deposit their weapons and that type of thing at that facility. So, we spent a lot of time in the storm drains, believe it or not, which today's HAZMAT environment would obviously not bode well.

JON: Sure.

MIKE: But when we got to the Munich Olympics, then we started to look at the different dynamics of what the terrorists had used. So, that '70s period was, obviously we were dealing with the anti-Vietnam issues, we were dealing with counter ambush, we were dealing with protests. But for the most part, SWAT was focused on counter ambush and also starting to deal with moving into the counter terrorism field. And that wasn't until the '80s.

JON: Interesting. So, during this period, if my memory serves me correctly from previous conversations, this is kind of when the CNT begins to develop for LAPD also. Right?

MIKE: Well, it was very interesting. The dog day afternoon that they came out with NYPD, it was 1976. That there was an opportunity to go back and take a look at what New York Police Department had been doing in terms of what was a completely new concept, hostage negotiations. And the concept of hostage negotiation in New York Police Department was that 2 individuals, Dr. Harvey Schlossberg and Frank Bolz, who both had- Both were NYPD personnel, but they had behavioral science degrees and they were psychologists. They started to look at being able to use communications to be able to help people that were in crises. Not only hostages but also to affect the safe release of a hostage and or a surrender of a suspect. We had the Stockholm incident that started to develop and so with the Stockholm Syndrome was part of that. So, we in LA were still looking at the methodologies that we're using for what we call a container callout type of environment to deal with SWAT. And one of the issues that became very apparent is that we use time, talk, and teargas, were the 3 primary issues-

JON: The 3 Ts.

MIKE: But at that time, that was what we had to deal with. And we thought, "Well, you know what? There could be something here that we ought to take a look at." And so, the LAPD did not want to become insular. We wanted to reach out. And so, I was fortunate and got a chance to go back to New York. And I took a look at essentially what Harvey and Frank were doing. And I thought, this is an incredible opportunity but here's the difference. NYPD had the ability to be able to draw from detectives and to create a negotiation component out of detectives, while their emergency services division would be the tactical operators. And so that they would respond to an incident that would involve a hostage situation to where they would take their negotiators and put them in the first place, and then bring in the tactical component. And then that there would be, that we would call now, an incident commander or, at that time, a tactical commander, would probably start to listen to what the negotiators would say in terms of what their progress would be. In the issue that I saw when I was back there, is that the negotiators would always want to say, "Just give me a little more time." Where at some particular point, windows of opportunity to be able to rescue a hostage are not always there. And so, that negotiators can go past windows of opportunity and miss an opportunity to be able to engage in the number one priority. That's lifesaving, get those hostages out. So, what the

issue was is they would then get in an intervention mode. Intervention would be the last piece that they would use. And there is always a disconnect. There was competition between negotiators and between tacticians.

JON: Sure.

MIKE: And so, when we had a chance to come back, and at that time, lieutenant Pat McKinley was the platoon commander. I explained to him that, I said, "You know, you might want to consider taking this negotiation concept and apply it to all barricaded suspects situations, where we can communicate with individuals' time talk. And to be able to get them to hopefully convince them to release the hostage or to come out. But we do not want to have a situation where we have to draw from other resources within the organization, because we have the talent pool here within SWAT D Platoon to be able to train our operators, and we would call them now, in a position to where we can train them as primary and secondary negotiators. But that's not all of it, we need to bring in a psychologist. And we had a huge behavioral science department within LAPD. We ended up taking psychologists. And we explained to them what we want to be able to do is train our personnel in communications to deal with individuals under stress, psychologically deranged individuals, and terrorists, you name it, the traditional type of criminals. And to be able to give them communications skills, to be able to overcome that type of action, and to be able to coordinate negotiations and tactics. So, the idea was verbal and physical tactics needed to be together.

JON: Yeah. Fusing the two, as opposed to having them separate disciplines.

MIKE: Precisely. And so, we brought them into D Platoon. Now since then, things have evolved. Mike Albanese has done a tremendous job and being able to carry on where some of us left off. But the issues we had, bilingual individuals now, we have investigators within, or detectives within D Platoon now that build that component. But the negotiation piece was a huge shift in that '70s period.

JON: Yeah. That was, at the time, not only SWAT as a concept revolutionary. But this whole, you know- Like, you go back to Munich, and kind of negotiation. And it wasn't- It kind of wasn't a thing. Right? Like, whoever ended up with the microphone was the guy who was having to negotiate. And it wasn't a discipline the way it was as you guys developed it.

MIKE: Absolutely, you're right on the money. And you sparked a comment, that it was a huge shift to paradigm. It was not well received initially within LAPD, because it was like, "Well, wait a minute. We're digressing through what our operations are." I became very adamant about it, and so did Pat McKinley. I said, "We're special weapons and tactics. Verbal tactics and physical tactics. And the priority is to save the lives of the hostages. And to avoid confrontation when we can."

JON: It's interesting. That's kind of a very advanced concept for that place and time. Like now, negotiation occurs, the 2 kind of views, and you're looking for windows. But at that time, that was a very different view of criminal behavior and the need for intervention. And so, I can see where there was probably somewhat, "What do you mean you're going to negotiate? Why are you going to talk to the guy?"

MIKE: Well, in that- There was a lot of controversy over that. There became the east coast and the west coast concept. And I always said that verbal and physical tactics need to go together. And I said, we will use verbal tactics to help reduce the potential threat to the hostages, gain the release of the hostages, and also the surrender of the suspect. But there may come a time where we have to use negotiations and manipulate subjects into a position where they can be neutralized to save the lives of the hostages. And we've done that.

JON: It is like that, there is that crossover between the two. And there is a point where, like there are some people you will not negotiate out. Right? Like, kind of the modern Islamist terrorists. You're not going to negotiate them out. They're there to die. And so, at that point, that communication becomes a means through which you can affectively rescue the hostages, even if that requires intervention, and facilitates intervention.

MIKE: Well, there's so many tactics that can come out of the negotiation process. And it starts off with the intelligence. And I mean, you look at the most recent incident that took place in Colleyville, Texas, to where the Jewish synagogue was taken over. And yet they had a landline phone where the suspect in this particular case, was positioned and was communicating, and basically had a camera in a position to where they could see him. And so, that there was a tremendous amount of intelligence that came out of that in a negotiation process. If you can use negotiations which has been done to be able to gather that intelligence so that tactically plans can be made to intervene, that's the best-case scenario. And not to move into the '80s, but when we got into the '80s, that's where we started to develop a tactical operation center concept to where we started taking the negotiators

and started to bring in intel using these snipers in Sierra positions to be able to gather intel; for the operators to be able to handle an extremist type of emergency assault if necessary.

JON: So, it's interesting. Because so even early on, you guys were looking this as a fused concept with an overarching mission not to tactically intervene. Well, I think that's one of the most interesting aspects of what you just said is, it was not, "Let's tactically intervene." The objective is to rescue the hostages. And there may be 10 paths to doing that. Intervention may be one of them.

MIKE: The objectives were to have the suspect release the hostages. And when you talk about the delivery of food, when you talk about the delivery of vehicles, what we started to see here is going back to Munich and going after- Going back to one of the incidents that I can recall specifically, and time will tell, to where we had to plan on, how would you deliver a vehicle if the individual demanded a vehicle for escape. Well, the decision is, we're not going to allow a suspect to go mobile. But we may have to manipulate him from the stronghold into a position to where they come outside, so that if we have to intervene, we can. But we need to be able to disable a vehicle, and we need to be able to handle vehicle assaults. And I'm kind of moving ahead out of the '70s.

JON: Yeah.

MIKE: But when we get into the '80s, the technology that started to develop on how we were going to deal with immobilizing a bus was very interesting. But before we got to that, then we started to develop tactics on vehicles assault processes. And that was huge coming out of the late '70s and going into the '80s.

JON: It's interesting, because I guess the next, you know- If you look at the history of SWAT, there's certain signposts on that road. Munich obviously, SLA being in one, Munich being in kind of the period that follows Munich, the hostage-taking period. And then, we kind of get to the '84 summer games. Right? In LA, that is a significant moment. Talk to me about the build up to the Olympics and the affect in had on you guys.

MIKE: It was about 1979, it was just before the '80 period. And the Iranian Embassy had been taken over in Tehran, American Embassy. And there was a lot of interest in that particular incident as to how the United States was going to deal with it. And I remember getting a phone call because of some of the relationships that I had with some of the US Army Special Operations groups, which at that time were not considered that. But

were considered something less than Special Operations. And we were introduced to several people that came out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Colonel Charlie Beckwith and Blue Light. And because of the relationship that LAPD had with the sheriff's department, and the fact that we want to be able to start thinking about combining our resources of the Special Enforcement Bureau and LAPD because we got along very well; to be able to create a much larger tactical component. We got invited back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And kind of a "you show me your stuff, I'll show you, my stuff."

JON: Show and tell.

MIKE: And the first relationship started to develop about that time. And it was just a short period of time that we spent with them.

JON: And just for context, Colonel Beckwith is the- regarded as the founder of the first Special Forces Detachment or Delta.

MIKE: Right. And at the time the Seal Team 6 or DEVGRU as it's known now, was starting to spool up as well. So, then along came Desert One which was in the '80s right at that period of time, and the debacle that occurred in Desert One.

JON: Which was the failed attempt to rescue the Iranian hostages.

MIKE: And were killed. There were a couple of Americans and ultimately ended up leaving a helicopter, a C-130 over the middle of the Iranian desert. And it was a terrible situation. And it was really kind of an upcoming for, at that time, Delta Force. So, it was after that time probably in '81 where I spent quite a bit of my time. I was a lieutenant, or I might've still been a sergeant, I can't remember exactly what it was. Either a sergeant or a lieutenant. But Daryl Gates had said, "Whatever we need to do to keep America free and to work with those particular individuals, we're going to do." So, I found myself down in Fort Bragg spending quite a bit of time with Delta Force who were in the process of recuperating from the debacle that occurred in the desert. And there was a lot of, at that time, a lot of tactics and technology that started to come out of that period. Now you got to remember that we had the incident that occurred at Princess Gate that involved the SAS.

JON: 22 SAS.

MIKE: There was the incident that occurred with the Palestine Liberation Organization out in the middle of the desert that took over the airliners. There was the-

JON: Entebbe. Bern, Switzerland.

MIKE: Not only Entebbe but there was GSG 9. A lot of these special operations groups had started to develop about that particular time. And they were sharing tactics and technology with Delta at that time. And so, we ended up an LAPD being able to spend quite a bit of time in picking their brains. And I- To be honest with you, I came back with a mound of information to where I said, "Ok, now we've got negotiations, we've got tactics. Let's bring it together with the tactical operations center." And it was like, "What's that going to include?" Well, that means that we take Sierra positions, which at that time we called them Snipers, and use them to gather intel and to verify or refute information that was coming in from negotiations, so that we have the connection between the two. The negotiators say, "He's on the phone now. The snipers might be able to see that. Snipers might be able to see where the hostages are. We can start developing that kind of relationship coordinating it within the tactical operations center."

And I could see at the time it was going to require additional personnel, additional supervisors, because we had negotiation- crises negotiation team, supervisors that were trained, and we had SWAT supervisor that were trained. They were cross trained in each other's responsibilities. So that, on a particular call if you had a SWAT supervisor that was in charge of dealing with overall tactics, you would have the crisis negotiation- Another SWAT supervisor that might have crisis negotiation team training that would take their primary, secondary negotiator, the psychologists and the journalist, and start being able to develop and exchange of information along with the sniper coordinator. So, you had all kinds of components that were coming together. And the sophistication of what we were doing in the '80s became at that time cutting edge. We started to learn things that we've seen in the Army, known at that time as Hostage Rescue, we called it Crisis Entry.

And the involvement of Crisis Entry was something that as we started to shift in paradigm and we got more experienced up in a more modern area, it's changed since then how with limited penetration. But at the time, it was cutting edge type of actions. And then we started thinking about going back to the Munich timeframe. What about taking Sierra Positions and taking simultaneous snipers shoot at the same subject at the same time. Oh, that was new. That was called Coordinated Target Selection. And then based upon what we learned after the SLA shooting in the '80s, we needed to establish an exterior perimeter with around a particular target sight that

prevent suspects from escaping and would prevent them from moving about. So, we created what we would at that time we call the Support Line Tactics Concept, which came out of Ron McCarthy's hit, which ultimately involved a sniper position.

It was an overwatch and then we had contact teams. And if we had movement in a particular area while an incident was going on, we would move the contact team to be able to interdict it. So, all that was coming out of that '80s timeframe. Now some of the things that we were dealing with the '80s timeframe, was the development of Sound and Flash Diversionary Devices, which we really started to see develop. Commercially it became something. And I could give you a sidenote about one of the experiences that I had while I was down at Fort Bragg on that particular issue.

JON: Yeah, I would love to hear that.

MIKE: During the '80s, there was a- I'm going to start off with probably 1981 to about 1984 because these were the times, this was a period of time where we were leading up to the Olympics. And this is what I call a watershed moment for LAPD at the time, as well as LA County Sheriffs. Because we had to start developing much more, in terms of our skillset, to be able to deal with the potential of what we were looking back on with the Munich Olympic debacle that took place, where they had the transportation of hostages and the buses, aviation and snipers at midst, and all kinds of dynamics and lessons learned out of there; to prepare of what was going to happened and potentially with 1984.

So, I found myself down at Fort Bragg and I found myself working with just absolutely the most incredibly brilliant individuals and tacticians that anyone could ever have. I mean, it just was so impressive. But it was interesting going back to the GSG 9 hostage rescue incident, an organization or commercial manufacture known as Shermilee, out of the UK, developed a sound and flash diversionary device that they had used to stun, they were called stun grenades then.

They were used to stun the suspects and the terrorists at that time so that they're risking force on the airplane. But anyhow, cutting it short. So, now I find myself at Fort Bragg, and the Army is going to develop and build their own diversionary type devices. So, I was invited into a room by one of the Army engineers' EOD techs. And he says, "Ok so, now we're going to show you how to build flash bangs." I said, "Oh, this is going to be good, because I can take that back to LAPD." So, we started off taking in a table. There

was a variety of tools. There was an M116/A1 hand grenade simulator which had a pull striker on it.

JON: French infused.

MIKE: Made out of cardboard. And there was an M201/A1 second and a half Bouchon type of fuse that was sitting there. And there was a hot glue gun and there was a small little three-eighth-inch drill bit.

JON: What could go wrong?

MIKE: So, I'm just looking at these items and there's 5 or 6 other individuals who's sitting there. There's a guy from SAS that's sitting there, and I'm here. And 2 or 3 other Army guys. He says, "Now very carefully, you want to tap this upside down to get the cardboard and the powder, which is aluminum powder down at the bottom. It's the very sensitive, it's flash powder." Which as soon as he said flash powder, I immediately went, "This is dangerous."

JON: Oh, yeah.

MIKE: And the next thing he said, "You're going to take this three-eighth-inch drill and you're going to carefully keyword, carefully-

JON: Don't make a spark, don't cause any static.

MIKE: Push a drill, a small hole in the cardboard. To which I find myself doing, and everybody else is doing. But everybody else is kind of looking at everybody else like, is this really happening. So, finally we do that, and next we take the 201/A1 fuse and we put it in the side of the cardboard and take the hot glue gun and hot glue around it. And hence, you have a flash bang. So-

JON: And one of 2 ways. You either get a flash bang, or you get a flash and a bang.

MIKE: So, I had all my fingers.

JON: You got the flash bang.

MIKE: And when we came back, I ended up talking to Arleigh McCree, rest his soul who at that time was our bomb tech. And he said, "You did what?" I said, "This is what we did." But eventually, we had them build us flash bangs, that were made just exactly like that. And that was the precursor to the commercially made ones now. There was all kind of problems with it because they would frag and the Bouchon would cause injury, things of this nature.

JON: Yeah. They would launch the Bouchon secondary at the time.

MIKE: But that particular piece of it was something that we took and prepared for the '84 Summer Olympics. So, the next thing that we came up with is, how are we going to disable a bus if a bus has demanded Allah Munich. So, the FBI Hostage Rescue Team had started to develop in 1981. And they basically went through the same measurements and processes that we did in terms of learning and bringing in various expertise. And one of the individuals that I found very insightful was an HRT operator that was a bomb tech by the name of Jaime Atherton. So, Jaime Atherton from FBI came out here and worked with Arleigh McCree and Ron Molle in developing a technique on dealing with buses. And so, we ordered up for the period of the Olympics well in advance of 3 Crown Coach school buses.

Now Crown Coach was an old-style school bus. Diesel, back window came up, drum brakes, etc. So, the technique that we came up with, is that we were going to disable the vehicle if we had to, and still create where we can use speed, surprise, and diversion to be able to get on a bus. Some type of charge that would prevent the vehicle from moving and essentially stop it. So, we took- Not we but the bomb techs took about 400 grains of det cord, put it around the inside of the drum brakes and basically serrated the castle nuts for the front hubs. So that, you can take that and tie it into the back with the window and put det cord around the back window to be able to create a shooting port in the back window. And then command detonate that with a remote device. And I had the privilege of watching that, in watching the front wheels come off of the Crown-

JON: Literally, the wheels coming off the bus.

MIKE: The Crown Coach type of bus is very impressive, because that bus immediately will stop. Now Mike Albanese who was a sergeant at the time did a tremendous job of being able to take the side of that bus and replace all of the safety glass with tempered glass. So, that you could hit the glass and it would clear out. So, that now what we were practicing was a bus assault. So, the bus assault, if we could get individuals that would come out in the open, if we were not able to take a coordinated target selection piece of it, they would get onto a bus or get on one of these buses. We could essentially be able to stop that bus or prevent it from leaving by blowing the front wheels off, and then it would be approached from the back with essentially assault force complex or component. And assault force would come up on the side with ladders that were cut down, so that they would have shooting ports. And at the same time, have a rescue component in the front of the bus. Well, that's what we did prior to '84. Well then, because

we had basic access to the United States military, to HRT, to a lot of other resources, DARPA who was a Defense Advance Research Agency, came out with a concept that they called Surrogate Travel. And at that time, I had transferred as a lieutenant to Anti-terrorist Division to develop the intelligence component to support SWAT within the tactical operations center. And so, I had access to this Surrogate Travel piece.

Well in 1983, there was probably close to 500 Department of Defense personnel. They came out and took thousands of photographs of UCLA, USC, and all of the venues. And they would take photographs of the building from the ground, from afar, to each door, to the locking mechanism, to the windows. So that today, when you go on a virtual tour of a house, you go in that virtual tour of that house where it all consists and runs without any particular interruption at all. Well, this Surrogate Travel piece came in a pretty substantial sized container. There were 2 or 3 different TV sets where you have one monitor that would show you the overview of the location. You'd be tied into a joystick along with another piece over here that would have about the size of a 33 and a third record, which I just dated myself, that would be in a large CD or a DVD.

JON: Yeah, it's like the old that-

MIKE: Record.

JON: Yeah, they were like video disk.

MIKE: Well, it was a large video disk. But it was the size of a 33 and a third record. And you would take that, and you would be able to manipulate that. And you can basically look at a door, you could look at the hinges, you would look at how the door opens, you would see it open, you could walk inside. It would be essentially what we have today as a modern-day version. Well, that was state of the art then. So-

JON: So that's Google Map's virtual home tour in 1981 before anybody is thinking. I mean, it's-

MIKE: It's started to develop in '81 and became a reality in '83 because we were using it.

JON: But it's just crazy to think like- You said several things there that you kind of passed over as part of the story, but you're talking about the birth of flash bangs in law enforcement.

MIKE: Oh yeah.

JON: The Arleigh McCree being, if not the foremost law enforcement bomb expert in the country, certainly one of them. The foundations of the Langford versus Gates suit which is the Seminole decision using flash bangs.

MIKE: Well, we didn't even discuss that one.

JON: Yeah. And then pre-scouting locations, pre-practicing tactics. I mean, so much regarded today as modern, and then this is just what we do, you guys were doing literally for the first time.

MIKE: Well, we- At that time, this was all cutting edge.

JON: Oh yeah.

MIKE: And you know going back to the Hanafi Muslim incident that took place in Washington, DC, where we had 2 high-rise buildings that were taken over at the top levels by the Hanafi Muslims at 2 different locations. We were trying to figure out how we were going to be able to essentially put assault components on each one of the buildings to be able to rescue hostages because they were separated. And so, that they were separated across an alley. And so, there was training that we basically engaged in where we put ladders across an alley that was probably close to 5, 6 hundred feet off the ground, where we had operators that would have to carry explosive charges across to another building. And we were at that time looking at-

You know we had a - it wasn't even a UH-1. It was a smaller helicopter that we were looking at to where we started to engage in fast-roping and using that technique to be able to insert personnel or extract them off a top of a building. We went back to the Vietnam Era and used spy rings to start training our people if we had to put them on a building or if we had to get them off, we can put them on spy rings and pull them off the building. So, all of that was state-of-the-art. And some of the technology that we started to garner from the military is 45 caliber suppressed weapons to where you could use that to take out streetlights or engage in being able to have a sniper that wouldn't compromise an entry because you couldn't hear it, to be able to take out some sort of a terrorist that would be a sentry guarding a compound.

JON: So, the beginning of suppressed weapons in law enforcement.

MIKE: And so all of this was- You know at the time, this was all state-of-the-art.

JON: What I think is really interesting here is that, like all of these things, suppressed weapons, aerial insertion, climbing cadres-

MIKE: And extractions. And aerial extractions.

JON: Aerial extractions. Things that are today regarded as *de rigueur*. You had to solve for the '84 Summer Olympic games between you and the sheriff's department. You had to have a solution for every nightmare you guys could come up with. And in the process, like literally triggered things that happened in the industries. Flash bangs as an industry developed largely because of those initial four As.

MIKE: They did. And they- It was quite a process with the development of flash bangs. Sid Heal did a tremendous job of writing the doctrine of how to be able to deal with flash and sound diversionary devices. But in that '80s timeframe, John Coleman who retired from the sheriff's department and was in SEB, the Special Enforcement Bureau. He basically started the National Tactical Officers Association, and that was about in '82. And his vision at the time was to bring tactical operators from all over the United States together to share experiences because no one particular entity had all the answers. And it's very interesting in this business in law enforcement, you can become very insular. And you need to be looking outward and being able to be much more collaborative. And either collaborate or you die, either one.

You have to be able to see what other people are doing. And maybe you take the best from what they have and what didn't work so well and be able to combine it. So, the '80s were really a watershed moment. And it wasn't, you know after the '84 Olympics when I started to promote up the ranks, that I finally came back to develop our Special Operations Bureau to where I was able to really have now influence over our aviation's component, our Special Weapons and Tactics component to be able to help merge them together. So, today we have a very close working relationship with our aviation and SWAT components, and our canines. I mean, you look at canines, the processes in the '80s, we started to move canines into D Platoon. It wasn't until later on that they became less than an anomaly to where canines were used to a search- to assist in searches, the use of breaching, explosive breaching. We had an opportunity to go to work in an off-duty capacity to help train the special response teams for the Department of Energy. Those are the groups that provide the security for the various nuclear sites. And tremendous technology came out of that. We were able to come up with the first 2 armored vehicles, V-100s that were provided to the LAPD. In the '80s we had the Rock Houses that we were dealing with. We were reusing extraordinary means to be able to get into

the Rock Houses. *Extraordinary means*, means that we were either using bar poles or we were taking and penetrating the location with a V-100 that had a long pole on it, that ultimately was used to be able to take apart a house.

JON: That's I think, is another one of those moments that kind of inflected the entire industry. Right? Because prior to that, everybody was using the old bread trucks, like the SWAT TV show. You know, where they had the bread truck. And the V-100 as far as I know, is not the earliest deployment of armor by a special tactics team. It's certainly one of the earliest deployments. And tell me a little bit of about kind of the environment of the War on Drugs and this fortification. The idea behind fortifying houses so you can get rid of evidence and kind of the tactics that evolved from there.

MIKE: Let me go back, Jon, for just a second and touch on a couple of things. You know, everything we've talked about now has not come about without the risk of failure. And the risk of failure means that there are some things that we learn the hard way. You mentioned the Langford versus Gates when we started the use of flash bangs. Well unfortunately, there was a flash bang that was used that ultimately caused the demise of a female on a high-risk warrant service.

JON: Deloris Langford.

MIKE: And so, the evolution of all of this going back to- It was a week after the Symbionese Liberation Army incident at 54th and Compton where we were pushing and shooting out of a helicopter because of what happened at Texas Tower and so forth. And we all ultimately ended up killing a commander out of it because we were operating without the expertise of what we were starting to develop on our own that later came about from the United States military. And so that, some of this de-militarization nonsense has come out, has been something that I totally disagree with it, because the technology, the tactics, and the ability for us to save lives of individuals is a result of our relationship with the United States military.

JON: A hundred percent. And what's interesting is throughout my career, I started work in 1987. And so, I've kind of been a witness to a lot of this evolution and fortunately have known a lot of you guys for a long time. There's this notion that all of a sudden, the military said, "Oh hey, here's tactics." And that has not been the case. It has been this give and take between the military and law enforcement- Like I can remember when we first became involved with DoD was for United Children Somalia. And the way I got involved was the sheriff's department pulled me in to meet with

the Marine Corps. The conversation started with, what is non-lethal. You know, how do we do riot-control. And so, you had the exact opposite. You had the US military going into these environments whether it was Somalia or later in Afghanistan, where they had a multi-threat environment, it was not what DoD was built for, and they had to figure out tactics. And frequently, the way they figured out tactics was they embedded with law enforcement and said, "Show us how this happens."

MIKE: You know, you're absolutely right. You just spread another thought. This was when Jeff Rogers and I were working together. He was my lieutenant, and I was his sergeant working for him that- Originally, we started off with we went to the United States Marine Corps in Camp Pendleton to have them help us with education, what we call now, IEDs and things of this nature, pistol craft and rifle, and shooting skills. And later on, the Special Operations Training group out of the United States Marine Corps came to LAPD and said, "Hey, we're going to go into an extremist environment and have to start doing house-to-house types of searches. Show us how to do entries." And so, we started off with entries, and we started off working with them. But going back to this '80s timeframe, one of the- I mentioned that it was not without some errors that took place along the way. One of the things that came out of the '80s is that we worked very closely in developing this Crisis Entry, or Hostage Rescue Tactics, where we flood location with personnel using speed, surprise, and diversion. That unfortunately, took off and became the norm for a while. So that, when we started getting into this Rock House business that you mentioned to where we started seeing the destruction of evidence, narcotics, and things of this nature, that using speed, surprise, and diversion in a crisis entry, was something that was being used not only by us, but by a lot of different agencies because it became the norm. After-

JON: Dynamic entry was, that's just how you did it.

MIKE: But at that time, we still called it crisis entry and it became dynamic entry. And as a result of that, a lot of people got hurt. And we started to re-examine the fact that, "Wait a minute. Why are we having to do this and putting ourselves at risk, when we're going after narcotics? When there's other ways of doing it to be less confrontational?" So, I think that Lee McMillion probably had a chance to describe the limited penetration concept that started to redevelop some of that crisis entry. And now we have the contain and call-out, and we have the breach and delay, and limited penetration skills that we started to develop now. But in the '80s, this was something where we really started to pick up on that. The use of TEMS,

Tactical Emergency Medicine, the NTOA was starting to bring all of these skillsets together. We were doing a lot of aviation insertion extraction work with light observation style helicopters and so forth. And it became quite an industry.

JON: So, talk to me a little bit about the early NTOA. John Coleman founds it. From my recollection shortly after there, I think of NTOA, I think of John Coleman, you, and Ron McCarthy as kind of the, at least from here, the prime movers. Who was there initially? And who kind of built it up to what it was?

MIKE: John Coleman and Janice Coleman, husband and wife, built that whole organization. Ron and I, Jeff Rogers, and you because you were involved in bringing a lot of the technology together, were very instrumental in being able to help the NTOA get off the ground. When we started that particular process, you know, my role was to provide the training and the curriculum for the yearly 5 days, and to be able to get the venue. I mean we had to rely on a variety of different venues. We used San Diego, we used Albuquerque, New Mexico, we used, I'm trying to think where else that we used. But primarily the early days, those were the 2 entities that were willing to support us. And it was interesting because in the early days, I go back to San Diego. If it were not for decision-makers at the highest level supporting the NTOA, I do not know where we would be today.

JON: I agree, yeah.

MIKE: Because- And I left out Florida, we went to Hollywood, Florida on one occasion. But in San Diego, San Diego Sherriff's Department provided us all the aircraft and their facilities and provided all their personnel. In Albuquerque a private vendor provided us with an aircraft. DOE provided us with a venue. In Hollywood, Florida they did the same thing. And a lot of these agencies had administrators and decision makers, chiefs and sheriffs, who were putting their careers at risk. And San Bernardino County Sheriffs, they gave us a helicopter and a pilot to be able to support the training. Nowhere else in the law enforcement community could any of this taken place without the support of all of that. And John Coleman made all of that happen.

JON: Yeah. It's interesting because I remember very early in my career. NTOA became the catalyst through which everybody grew. Like I can remember, if you advertise in NTOA's magazine, you have to page your ad words on, you never got the magazine. And I don't know if it was the first civilian of NTOA, but it definitely was early. And I can remember every

issue, reading cover to cover, and it was debriefs, and it was tactics. It was the channel through which the community shared information. And you can watch the community elevate through the magazine, through the conference, through LAPD. LA Sheriffs going out and doing training. For me, that was the point where it kind of caught fire nationwide.

MIKE: It did. And the whole focus of what we were trying to bring together was this collaboration number one. But the true skillset of a good tactician is not fighting the last war or fighting the last incident but looking forward. Now you have to look at some of the successes and lessons learned from what happened before. And building a, what I would call a tactical considerations file to where you as an experienced operator can go back to, in my case, I can go back to the '60s and I can pull up everything from the FBI Florida incident to the GSG9 operations, to any of the major incidences; Princess Gates, any of the incidents that we happened in LA. I can pull up pieces from it. And if I see similarities, I'm able to say, "Ok, now this is what's an anomaly. This is what's a similarity, this is what worked well. This is what didn't." I mean those kind of- That kind of experience level is what John Coleman was trying to inculcate into the community by having debriefs. So, that you may not agree with everything that was done. But by the same token, you didn't have to agree with it. This is what happened.

JON: Yeah. It's interesting because debriefs have always been a thing in the military to look back at an event; and evaluate tactics and evaluate what happened and try to learn as many lessons as you could. What I think changed with NTOA was the concept, that you weren't only looking at your own debriefs, you were looking at everybody else's. And I don't know when John saw it. He may have seen it from the beginning but this idea that a tactical commander, a tactical operator is using paradigms to make decisions.

MIKE: Correct.

JON: Right? And those paradigms- You don't have to live through that event to be able to utilize that paradigm. Right? That's like basic- Somewhere in the past millions of years ago, some guy found a rattlesnake and tried to pick it up and got bit. And everybody since then, "Yeah, don't pick up a rattlesnake." But-

MIKE: That's correct. That's a good analogy.

JON: But you know, not everybody had to go get bit. And I think that one of the things that NTOA did especially early on was, you know it was like, "Hey, Mike found a rattlesnake. Mike picked it up, it bit him. Don't pick up

rattlesnakes.” And that was the thing that I really love early on is the depths of debriefs. And honestly, that was the genesis for our tactical lecture series. Was as a kid growing up in the industry, going to debrief after debrief after debrief with our teams, and realizing as you walked away like, “Oh, I know not to pick up rattlesnakes.” And then you have all those paradigms, you have that rolodex that now you look at it and you’re like, “Aah, it’s not a rattlesnake but it’s snake-shaped- ”

MIKE: Well, you know that’s really a good point. And it goes to the issue of, what makes a good SWAT operator. And thinking back when I was brought into SWAT, it was, “Do you have an interest?” “Yes, I do.” “Can you run, and do pull-ups and push-ups?” “Yeah, I can.” “Can you shoot?” “Yeah, I can do that too.” “Can you think?” “I can do that.” Now today is a result of the ‘80s. Jeff Rogers had taken the selection process from Delta, from SEALs, from HRT. We sent officers back to the hostage rescue team to participate, and their selection standards. And today, we have got the best operators that any agency could ever have. And the state of preparedness for these individuals where they don’t pick up rattlesnakes and they learn very quickly, and they’re looking ahead and they’re forward-leaning, they look around corners. When I say look around corners, I’m talking about thinking ahead and coming up with new dynamics and tactics.

The state of the people that we have today is phenomenal. It’s because of the selection process, you get what you select. And I’m sure that some others that you may interview will talk about the selection process for D Platoon within LAPD. And it’s very, very stringent. And it’s been highly contested as a result of it. But today it’s produced the best individuals you could ever have. When I was a deputy chief there, and I had those individuals under my command, I’ve never worried about anything or any decisions that they were going to make.

JON: But a lot of that evolved from all this work that was done early on. I think that’s a good place for us to stop our first conversation. And lay a foundation for our second conversation. Mike, I really appreciate you taking the time to sit down with me.

MIKE: Well, thank you Jon, for at least, you putting the effort to be able to share some of the experiences. I really appreciate it.

JON: My pleasure.