

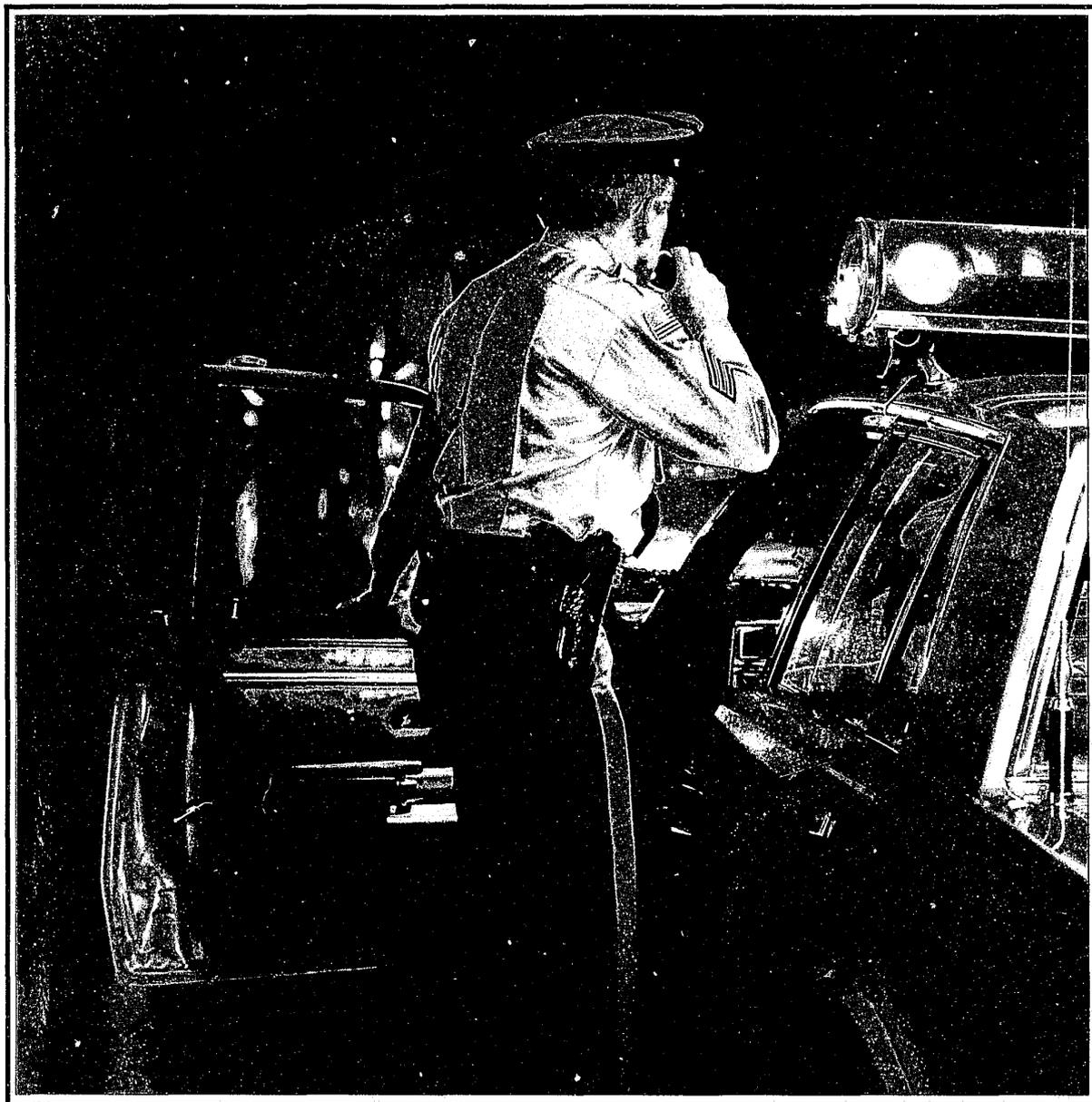
U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation



AUGUST 1995

# **FBI Law Enforcement**

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## **Communication Security**



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# FBI Law Enforcement

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# Tactical Surveillance With a Twist

156777

By MICHAEL J. HANNA  
and RONALD P. MATTIOLI

Consider the following scenario. The police chief in a medium-sized city receives a phone call at 3 a.m. The desk sergeant on the line informs the chief that the mayor and her family have been taken hostage in their home during a bungled burglary attempt. The burglars fired shots at arriving patrol units, and the situation is deteriorating quickly. The Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team trained for such an event has been activated by the shift commander and is expected on location in 15 minutes.

The chief hurries to the scene and finds the SWAT team in position. Officers have erected police barricades to protect and restrain reporters and onlookers. Time drags as the hostage negotiator contacts the burglars and opens a dialogue. Six hours later, the criminals surrender and release the hostages.

The chief's foresight in establishing a departmental emergency team paid off. The SWAT team contained a volatile event and saved lives; the department showed professionalism that likely earned some good press and a large measure of gratitude from the mayor. But would the department have fared as well if, instead of a hostage situation, the



problem had been a serial killer or rapist, an armed robber, or another career criminal randomly terrorizing the town?

Just as agencies should have a SWAT team available to react to explosive events, they also should have at their disposal a Tactical Surveillance Team (TST) dedicated to

stopping violent or chronic offenders. Physical surveillance is one of the oldest and most effective weapons in the police arsenal. Police departments used surveillance units with great success in the 1970s and 1980s, but today's personnel shortages, coupled with the intensive drain of resources to fight the drug

epidemic, have eliminated most crime surveillance units. Unfortunately, however, the criminals once targeted by those units continue to proliferate. The TST could be the remedy for the future.



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*Mr. Mattioli, a retired commander of the Michigan State Police East Tawas Post, now works in private industry.*

Like SWAT teams, TSTs receive special training. They can be activated for emergencies or for long-term investigations. The officers staffing these crews may be from different agencies, and comparable to SWAT officers, normally are free to perform regular duties. Similar to SWAT units, they allow law enforcement to deliver a systematic response to events that demand immediate attention.

### **A TST Model**

In late 1990, a large county north of Detroit, Michigan, was experiencing an epidemic of Part I offenses.<sup>1</sup> Most of the major crime surveillance teams in the State had been disbanded due to budget shortfalls. The 24 police agencies in the county, including the sheriff's office and a post of the Michigan State Police, needed to find an effective tool for combating the serious crime epidemic.

Fortunately, the agencies had a long history of cooperation. Many had participated in task force efforts in the past, and two full-time multijurisdictional concept teams—one for drugs and one for auto thefts—already were operating in the county. The district detective commander of the State police, experienced in surveillance and task force work, decided to capitalize on the cooperative nature of the law enforcement agencies in the county by forming a part-time tactical surveillance team.

First, he prepared a written plan for the team. The plan included a statement of needs, goals, required training, target selection criteria, benefits to individual departments, equipment needs, liability issues,

and jurisdictional questions, as well as a suggested set of standardized forms. After the plan was presented at a monthly chiefs meeting, 95 percent of the chiefs in the county agreed to participate.

Each department was encouraged to assign at least one officer to the surveillance team. Severely understaffed agencies that could not provide surveillance personnel contributed administrative services, vehicles, equipment, or cash resources. The commander assigned a detective sergeant from the State police to spearhead the street-level effort.

### **Target Selection Criteria**

A committee comprised of officers and officials from several of the participating agencies determined the criteria for selecting criminals to surveil. The team's services could be requested by any police officer within the jurisdictional limits of the team. To make the request, the officer simply filled out a form that justified the surveillance and described the suspect, attaching a photograph, if available, and submitted the form to the Executive Board. The Executive Board then met to review each request and to determine whether to activate the team.

Only criminals known or believed to be active in Part I crimes would be considered for targeting. Organized crime, drugs, and auto theft were excluded from the TST's purview because of other ongoing team efforts in those areas. Keeping the TST separate from the other teams eliminated confusion and fostered cooperation among teams. Because of limited resources, if simultaneous requests for team activation

occurred, priority would be granted based on the frequency of the crimes committed and the potential for violence.

### Training

To maximize the effectiveness of the team, TST members needed to be trained uniformly. Officers attended 2 days of formal classroom instruction, which covered the basic techniques involved in fixed and moving (on foot or in automobiles) surveillance. The classroom training was followed by a week of working with one of the operating surveillance teams to give TST members practical experience.

### Equipment

Agencies provided their TST officers with communications equipment—a mobile radio and a handheld unit capable of communicating on a common frequency with other team members. The team received permission to use an existing mutual-aid channel during surveillance operations; because the team operated only on a part-time basis, no special channel was necessary. Although the little-used frequency was not secure, the team learned specialized radio codes to minimize the problem.

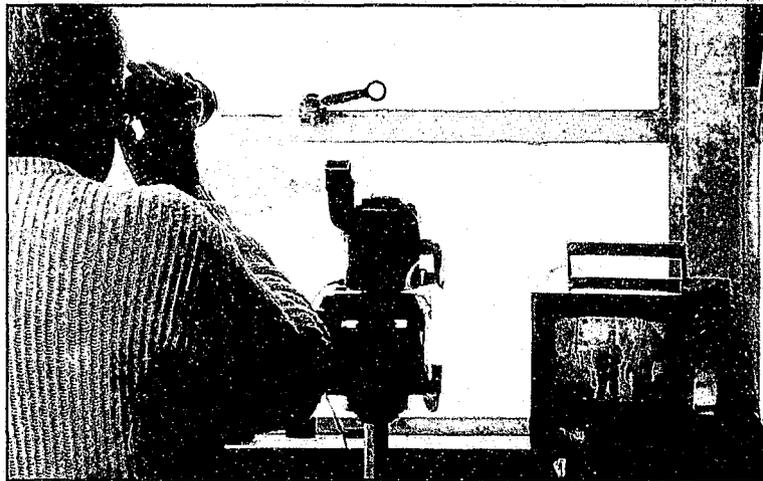
Unmarked cars represent one of the most important pieces of equipment for any surveillance team. Because vehicles might need to be changed frequently to avoid detection, team members approached used car dealerships in their jurisdictions to explore the possibility of borrowing cars. Most dealers readily accommodated the team, as long as the officer's department agreed to carry insurance on

the vehicles. The team also had a few unmarked department-owned cars and forfeiture vehicles available for its use.

Participating departments provided their officers with other basic equipment, such as binoculars, tape recorders, and cameras. More sophisticated items—including bumper beepers, audio and video transmitters, and night scopes—could be borrowed from other agencies as needed.

### Jurisdiction and Liability

From the outset, the surveillance team's organizers wanted to ensure that the team did not encounter problems with jurisdiction or liability. To ensure blanket jurisdiction, a State police officer participated on the team whenever possible. In addition, the county sheriff deputized all TST members to provide countywide jurisdiction for limited operations when no State police officers were available.



**“Physical surveillance is one of the oldest and most effective weapons in the police arsenal.”**

With respect to liability, the participating police chiefs agreed that each agency would be responsible for the actions of its own officers. Because assignment to the TST represented merely an extension of the officer's duties across jurisdictional lines, no problems with this arrangement were encountered.

### Standardization of Forms

The surveillance team used standardized surveillance requests, field notes, quick-check license plate recall forms, and other record-keeping materials. Criminal intelligence gathered from surveillance activity was centralized in the TST coordinator's computer and disseminated under existing State police policies. For purposes of prosecution, a complete, offense-related information package was prepared and provided to the investigators responsible for taking the case through the judicial system.

Each agency agreed to handle the paperwork for crimes occurring within its jurisdiction, even if no members of that agency were present during the arrest. The team reached the consensus that responsibility for court histories and material other than personal reports would place an unfair burden on a team member from an outside jurisdiction who simply had been an eyewitness.

### Results

The TST achieved almost immediate success. On its first night, the team arrested a homicide suspect. A few weeks later, the team's surveillance resulted in the recovery of more than \$60,000 in cash taken during a robbery. Two predatory criminals who had stolen over \$100,000 from their victims were arrested a short time after that. Clearly, these results validated the team and the part-time multijurisdictional concept.

The team's successes also contradicted the common belief among police administrators that surveillance is too costly to implement. To the contrary, tactical surveillance eliminated days and weeks of fruitless attempts by detectives to prove cases through reactive investigatory methods.

By training and working together, officers and investigators assigned to the TST developed a strong network. They began to communicate regularly on other, non-TST matters, which improved intelligence operations for all agencies involved.

Taxpayers were undoubtedly the biggest winners. With the TST in place, their police departments could afford to muster critical

personnel resources to counter chronic and dangerous offenders. The planned, tactical approach helped ensure that precious time and money would not be wasted on dead-end investigations and random stakeouts.

### Conclusion

The part-time multijurisdictional Tactical Surveillance Team allows even the smallest police agencies in the county to counteract crimes perpetrated by known chronic or violent offenders. By sharing personnel and equipment, the surveillance team can be assembled on demand to deal with particular problems. Like members of other emergency response teams, TST officers can respond to immediate, specific needs and then be free to return to regular duties when the TST assignment ends.

Participation ensures that agencies have the resources available to handle active criminals without adding to personnel rosters, taxing their budgets, or requesting assistance from higher levels of government. Further, multiagency cooperation in one area fosters an enhanced criminal intelligence network in other areas that frequently leads to quicker identification and arrest of criminal suspects. Working together, the police agencies participating on the Tactical Surveillance Team make the streets safer for citizens in all of their jurisdictions. ♦

### Endnote

Part I offenses, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program, include the violent crimes of murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault and the property crimes of arson, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and larceny-theft.

## Law Enforcement on the Internet



To take advantage of the many resources available on the Internet, the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* has driven onto the information superhighway. We invite you to ride along by communicating with us via e-mail. Our Internet address is:

**fbileb@justice.usdoj.gov**

We would like to know your thoughts on contemporary law enforcement issues. We welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions. Please include your name, title, and agency on all e-mail messages. Remember,

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