

SWAT Operator

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Boston bombings: IED recognition for patrol officers

Even as we struggle to get a grip on the active shooter problem another tactical challenge is about to overwhelm us

Apr 17, 2013

Lessons learned in the “sandbox” in terms of IED recognition may be useful to American Law Enforcement. You may find the following information useful but please be sure to follow your agencies policies, procedures, and training for IED response.

As was tragically demonstrated in Boston on Monday, large sporting events are soft targets. This is not news to U.S. Law Enforcement. Even as we struggle to get a grip on the active shooter problem, another tactical challenge is about to overwhelm us.

You uniformed officers and sergeants are America’s front line and first defense. The Federal agencies have done a great job since 9/11 keeping terrorism at bay and I expect that will continue. However, this bombing in Boston and the trend of violent active shooters is unfortunately just the beginning of what’s to come.

Since 9/11, some law enforcement trainers have been attempting to bring a military mindset to the officers working the streets. We need to transform you college graduates into the mindset of us military veterans. This mindset is very complex; we must be professional cops but at a flip of the switch we need to transition to a combat soldier.

The good news is that men with a combat edge and educated from a university make for an incredible fighting machine. Our combat veterans have learned a lot fighting terrorist overseas.

The unfortunate reality is those battles will most likely start being waged in our cities. That leaves us uniformed officers with the awesome responsibility of combating terrorist on our lands to keep our women and children safe.

I am prepared for that battle. Are you?

These cowardly terrorists should grow a set, and fight us law enforcement officers face to face and leave our women and children alone.

What to Know About IEDs

Improvised explosive devices are the use of a “homemade” bomb or destructive device which can destroy, incapacitate, harass, or distract, used by criminals, vandals, terrorists, and suicide bombers.

Because they are improvised, IEDs can come in many forms, ranging from a small pipe bomb to a sophisticated device capable of causing massive damage and loss of life. IEDs can be carried or delivered in a vehicle, put in place, or thrown by a person, delivered in a package or concealed on the street as we witnessed Monday.

IEDs come in many shapes and forms, only limited by the bombers imagination. Most share a common set of components that consist of the casing or package, initiating system, and a main charge. Packaging can be a vehicle, a pack of cigarettes, pop cans, back packs and vests.

Initiating systems set off the main charge to make it detonate. Items such as a cell phone or a toy car remote control are commonly used. The initiator almost always includes a blasting cap and batteries as a power source for the detonator. Any type of battery can be used such as a 9-volt, AA, or car batteries.

Initiating systems are triggered in three ways:

- 1. Over time:** Timed I.E.Ds are designed to function after a preset delay, allowing the enemy to make his escape or to target his victims.
- 2. On command:** Command initiated IEDs allow the bomber to choose the optimal moment of initiation. They are normally used against targets that are in transit, or where a routine pattern has been established. The most common types of command initiated methods are with wires or radio controlled devices, such as cordless telephones and remote car door openers.
- 3. Victim:** Victim actuated IEDs are initiated by the actions of the victim(s). There are various types of initiation devices to include pull or trip, pressure, pressure release, movement-sensitive, light-sensitive, proximity, and electronic switches.

IED Deployment Techniques

IEDs can be disguised in a variety of things such as trash cans, boxes, backpacks, and placed anywhere potential targets appear. Multiple IEDs have also been linked together with detonation cord or electrical wire so that all charges detonate simultaneously, with the goal to achieve simultaneous explosions.

Bombers often use secondary devices and multiple explosions to further their impact of terrorism by increasing the numbers of victims. Your situational awareness must be at

its highest level if you respond to such an event. Bombers are known to use gunfire, small bombs, and other distraction tactics to bait additional victims into the kill zone of a second explosive device.

When you respond, slow your physical actions to the speed no faster than your mind can process the information your senses are absorbing. Scan the crowd, look for additional threats, scan the crowd more and look for potential secondary devices.

Scan the crowd again, look, listen and follow your instincts. That's what great street cops do on a daily basis so don't go screaming on your radio like a banshee out of control. This achieves nothing. Remember, this is a combat game of chess.

Your opponent wants you to get sucked into the mindset of that screaming patrolman so that he can kill you, too. We must still do our jobs: Triage victims, coordinate EMS response, establish crime scenes, crowd control just to mention a few. The key now is to conduct police operations with the mindset that our military combat warriors do in the sandbox.

Multiple locations are common with IED bombers so command officers must be mindful of their resources and put a plan into action immediately after the first explosion, to maintain safety in other areas of your city.

Vehicle Borne IEDs and Suicide VBIEDs

A VBIED is a parked vehicle in a high traffic area with the intent of causing the most damage. An SVBIED is when the driver is willing to give their own life in the process of detonating his explosives. SVBIEDs are very hard to detect and stop because the bomber is mobile and is able to choose his time, place and victims at will. This unpredictability makes them difficult to identify.

Suicide Bombers Personal Borne IEDS (PBIED) commonly attack with an explosive vest, belt, or baggage attached to their person. When the charges used by bombers are properly packaged and concealed, a suicide bomber could carry up to 45 pounds of explosives.

However, most suicide belts are designed to hold smaller amounts, up to 12 pounds and incorporate fragment materials into the design of these belts and vests.

Indicators of a potential PBIED attack can include persons attempting to circumvent a security checkpoint or gate at a sporting event, those wearing too much clothing for the weather conditions, or a person with suspicious bulges in his or her clothing.

Suicide Bomber Countering Techniques

Some guidelines to counter the suicide bomber include:

1. Evacuate the area immediately. Safe distances will depend on the amount of explosives carried by the bomber and the amount and type of fragmentation used. More space is better.
2. Close and negotiate tactics should never be attempted, since suicide bombers are usually trained to avoid surrender at all costs. You will end up a victim.
3. A cell phone or radio controlled initiator could be used in the event that the bomber is incapacitated or hesitates. This tactic requires a second perpetrator to initiate the device.
4. The use of deadly force is a tactical conundrum for a uniformed officer. The problems are many and the wrong decision can be catastrophic. Taking a shot may eliminate the threat.

However, it may set off the explosive and cost innocent lives. Only you with the real time intelligence can decide which path to travel. One thing is for sure: Don't let a bomber flee from the scene.

If deadly force is taken, be mindful that a bullet impact may initiate or detonate the explosive charge. Deadly force on the suspect should only be undertaken from cover. A trained police sniper will need to achieve an instantaneous non reflex kill shot. The same can be achieved with a patrol rifle however, it's much more challenging. Training with your weapons and knowing you and your rifles limitations will be significant in the decision making process.

5. If the suspect is neutralized and there is no explosion try and fix the bomber in place and request E.O.D. to render the explosive charge safe. Try not to go hands on with the bomber.

The 5 Cs

1. Confirm it is an IED
2. Clear the area at least 300 meters or more as needed
3. Cordon off the area
4. Call the bomb squad and establish incident command
5. Control traffic from entering the area to include both vehicle and pedestrian traffic

If you encounter an IED, the 5-Cs are a simple set of rules to help you navigate the challenge. Always respond with your agencies policies, procedures and training guidelines.

- 1. Confirm:** From a safe distance, look for IED indicators. Use optics to aid your attempt. Then call for a bomb squad. Here's the obvious: don't handle the object.
- 2. Clear:** evacuate the area to a safe distance. Provide adequate distance and cover so to remove potential victims from the danger area. Visually sweep the area for any

secondary device or even the bomber for that matter. Once the scene is safe, question, search, and detain people as needed.

3. Cordon: establish an inner and outer perimeter to prevent vehicle and foot traffic from approaching the device.

4. Call: call the bomb squad. Be mindful that if you find an IED, it may be bait for a larger device.

5. Control: control the area until the bomb squad arrives. Set up an entry control point for all first responders. Do not let others go forward to check out or inspect the device. Make contingency plans for secondary or multiple coordinated attacks.

Post blast response is an entirely different topic but I would like to press upon you the need for uniformed officers to get combat casualty training and to carry a tourniquet, and combat gauze on duty at all times.

The Boston bombing occurred when the runners had a large amount of medical support staff already on hand volunteering with the marathon. If this type of bombing would have occurred outside a stadium or in a crowded mall, you cops will need to triage victims with amputations and massive hemorrhage.

About the author

Glenn French, a retired Sergeant with the Sterling Heights (Mich.) Police Department, has 24 years police experience and served as the Team Commander for the Special Response Team, and supervisor of the Sterling Heights Police Department Training Bureau. He has 16 years SWAT experience and also served as a Sniper Team Leader, REACT Team Leader, and Explosive Breacher.