



# PAULDING COUNTY (GA) SO SWAT TEAM

BY CHAD HUNTON

**P**aulding County, Ga., is 313 square miles located approximately 35 miles west of Atlanta and home to a population of more than 144,000. Paulding is part of the metropolitan Atlanta area and is the 14<sup>th</sup> largest county in Georgia. In the mid-1990s, the county started growing into a bedroom community for commuters; in the early 2000s it was listed as the seventh fastest-growing county in the nation. The Paulding County Sheriff's Office, with Sheriff Gary Gulledge at the helm, now employs 200 sworn deputies, 35 sworn detention officers and 35 civilian staff members.

**HISTORY**

In the early stages of the SWAT unit's formation plan in the fall of 1998, the patrol division responded to a domestic call that evolved into a hostage situation. Cobb County Sheriff's Office, now our sister agency team, responded to assist. This event spurred the team to be realized more quickly. Sheriff Bruce Harris, ret., and Chief Deputy Colonel Jim Walker (then lieutenant and team commander) started

training the selected 14 deputies who volunteered for the unit, then called the Special Response Team (SRT). The SRT trained for nine months with the assistance of the Cobb County Sheriff's Office Tactical Operations Unit, conducting a basic tactical operations school and cross training together. Our team was put into service in October 1999. That same month we had our first call out with a barricaded gunman. The team was able to resolve the

situation peacefully and the suspect was taken into custody.

During the team's formative years we used duty gear consisting of Glock model 17 9mm pistols, a 37mm gas launcher and .308 long rifles with surplus items acquired through the state.

In 2003, the team was put to the test on a domestic call out which turned into an active shooter situation. The incident was resolved with no major injuries to any deputies, one innocent driver sustaining a non-life-threatening gunshot and the suspect being injured and taken into custody.

Also in 2003, the team started competing in the Georgia Police and Fire Games SWAT Competition. We placed second that year and came back in 2004 to win first place. We continued to compete for several



years, placing third in 2005 and second in 2006 and 2009. (The competition has not taken place in several years due to low participation.)

In 2005 the team, along with other deputies in our agency, responded to the call for assistance in Jefferson Parish, La., during Hurricane Katrina. We deployed to “Operation Big Easy” and, helped in advance by our county’s citizens, we were prepared to be self-sustaining for 14 days. We carried donations of non-perishable items from citizens for use during our deployment and the items we did not utilize were donated to the locals in Jefferson Parish.

## PRESENT

Today the team has 33 members with a commander, assistant commander, team leaders and assistant team leaders for entry and snipers. We also have a quartermaster, tactical dispatcher, doctor and a paramedic, with K9 and CNT elements as well. The SWAT team is part time and on call 24/7.

The Paulding County Sheriff’s Office K9 division is attached to the team and all three current handlers are prior team members. They are trained in our tactics, meet our course requirements and are equipped to assist. The sheriff’s office has also implemented a six-member crisis negotiation team which responds to calls for service with the team.

Since 1999 the team has averaged 12 to 15 call outs per year. The sheriff’s office uses a threat assessment form to help determine the use of the team for high-risk warrants, search warrants and narcotics operations.

Deputies interested in joining the team must complete an established and proven assessment which includes

several in-depth and challenging tasks. They must pass an internal review of their personnel file as well as an oral board, followed by a physical fitness test consisting of push-ups, sit-ups, bench press and one-mile run. Applicants must also score 90 percent or higher on the GA POST-approved pistol course, a stress shoot scenario, a 100-yard fireman’s carry, shoothouse entry with precision shooting, obstacle course and a four-mile rough terrain march with 40-pound rucksack and long gun. All team members must maintain the physical fitness standards by passing a PT test twice a year.

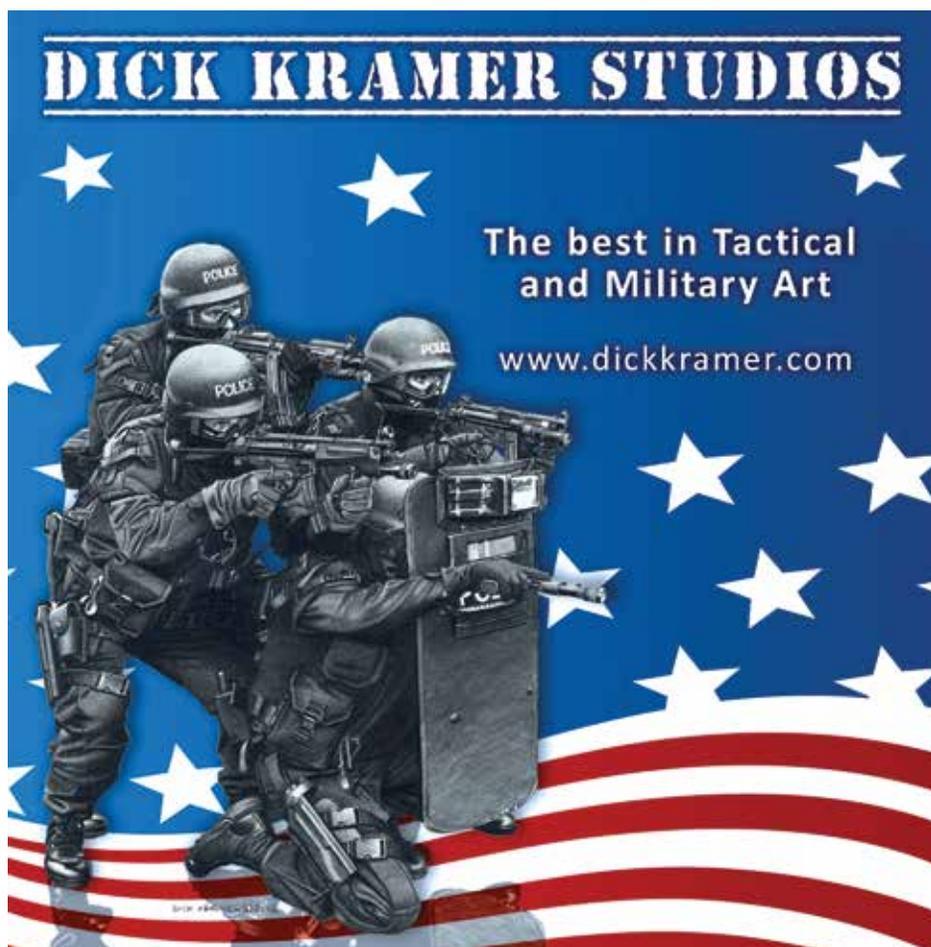
Our training site has a five-bedroom live fire shoothouse, obstacle course, rappel tower, 200-yard rifle

range, 25-yard pistol range and a breaching house.

## EQUIPMENT

Our first purchases were heavy vests, helmets, night vision and assault guns to provide the team members with a greater level of protection when responding to incidents. Additionally, we purchased .308-caliber (Winchester and Remington) rifles with scoped platforms and state-of-the-art night vision so that our snipers were able to work in low-light conditions.

The team has come a long way. As we have grown, our equipment and technology have grown as well. We currently have two robots, updated



night vision, M4 platforms (Colt and Bushmasters), .308 DPMS (SASS), Glock 18s and 21SFs, explosives, distraction devices, chemical munitions, less-lethal weapons and munitions, electronic devices for cameras and listening equipment.

The team's vehicles include an F350 unmarked assault van, an F450 box truck and a 4-by-8 enclosed trailer for equipment. The sheriff's office also has a number of ATVs, motorcycles and four-wheelers used for search and rescue missions.

Sheriff Gullede and Chief Deputy Colonel Jim Walker have continued to allow the team to grow and become better trained and equipped. Our community supports us and those with whom we have contact know we are here to protect and serve with honor.

Our team emblem depicts a shield and an eagle holding a rifle. The shield represents our purpose to shield our community from the criminal element, and the eagle represents each member making the commitment to the unit with honor, strength and integrity.

The rifle shows our commitment to be

prepared and able to defend innocent citizens and ourselves if necessary. Each member signs our mission statement and is held to live by it. Our motto is, "Respect all, fear none." ▀

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



**Major Chad Hunton** has been with Paulding County Sheriff's Office for almost 16 years. He has worked in detention, patrol, crime suppression unit, training, warrants

and civil division. He has served as a patrol sergeant, assistant training director, director of training, warrants and civil division commander and he currently serves as the jail administrator. Major Hunton is the SWAT commander and the honor guard commander, basic instructor, firearms instructor, chemical and diversionary device instructor, explosive breacher and is rappel master-certified.

