

Increased Situational Awareness and Greater Standoff Distance During Tactical Operations



The cities of Kennewick, Richland and Pasco are part of the Tri-City metropolitan area, where the Columbia and Snake Rivers meet in southeastern Washington State. Combined, the metro area has a population of approximately 260,000. The Kennewick, Richland, and Pasco police departments, together with the Benton County Sheriff's Office, each contribute SWAT operators and tactical negotiators to the Tri-City Regional SWAT Team. The team consists of 24 operators and 8 negotiators, and it deploys to roughly 40 callouts every year. The most common activations involve barricaded subjects. However, the team also executes marijuana eradication missions, serves high-risk warrants, and provides dignitary protection. The team covers both Benton and Franklin Counties and serves as a backup for Yakima and Grant Counties in Washington, and Wallowa County in Oregon.

Commander Scott Child began his career with Kennewick PD in 1996, joined the Tri-City Regional SWAT Team in 1998 and worked as an operator on the team until 2002. Today, he serves as Kennewick's Incident Commander, a position that gives him responsibility for tactical decisions when the SWAT Team operates in the city of Kennewick's jurisdiction. Commander Child works closely with Sergeant Chris Guerrero, the current SWAT team Commander. Guerrero serves as the direct supervisor in the field, and he is responsible for passing intelligence to headquarters and for executing tactical orders.

In March 2010, the SWAT team secured a grant and purchased a Recon Scout® XT from

ReconRobotics. Prior to this time, the team used pole cameras and Remington Eyeballs to attempt to gain situational awareness during callouts. These devices provided only limited information, and the team was looking for a more reliable tool to deliver real-time intelligence and greater standoff distance.

"One of our biggest challenges is our ability to see inside of a building," said Child. "I was looking through a SWAT tactical magazine and saw an advertisement for a Recon Scout XT. We spoke to larger agencies who reported that the Recon Scout was a good tool. We also watched a video and saw how you can take it out of a pack, pull a pin, and throw it. The robot looked really rugged and could be easily deployed by our operators. Once we learned it was also used by the U.S. military, we knew that it was dependable and practical."

"During SWAT operations, we look for time, distance, and shielding (cover) from where a bad guy might be," Sgt. Guerrero added. "Having those extra eyes down the hallway or on a different floor provides us greater standoff distance and the time to react if something were to occur."

Some members of the team were skeptical of the XT at first, but were soon won over. "Once they saw the XT's capabilities—the IR and clarity of the screen are phenomenal—they realized the robot could keep them out of harm's way and enable them to get the mission accomplished," said Child. "We've all had close friends killed in this business, and any time we can limit the exposure of our officers is a really good thing."

The team currently trains with the Recon Scout XT on a rotational basis. "We train one month on barricaded situations, the next on warrant service, the next on hostage recovery, and then we have an open month," stated Child. "We use the robot on clearance movements throughout these scenarios. There isn't a need to have technical training. It's that easy to use."

Still, for those new to the SWAT team, getting acquainted with the robot is important. "We have a weeklong school for our new guys, and the Recon Scout XT is one of the pieces of technology that we cover so they are familiar with it," said Child. "We currently have four designated scouts and they are the ones always using the Recon Scout XT on callouts, but it is important for everyone on the team to know how to operate the device."

Today, the robot is a routine part of the team's operations. "The guys use it right off the bat on callouts now," stated Child. "It's almost like it is a living part of the team."

"It is one of the only pieces of technology that we always carry with us," added Guerrero. "It is part of our normal progression on most callouts."

Not long after they acquired the Recon Scout XT it played a critical role in the successful resolution of two SWAT operations.

A Dangerous, Barricaded Felon

Dispatch received a call that a woman had been held hostage in a trailer by her boyfriend, who was armed and was known to be a dangerous felon. She reported that he had been drinking and passed out. Once he passed out, she escaped to the neighbor's house and the police were called.

"We ended up with eight on-duty SWAT operators at the scene. Based on what the woman said and knowing his history, we figured he would be armed, probably with a gun," said Child. "The Police Chief



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had already authorized the use of a full team if it was needed to resolve the situation.”

The team attempted to communicate with the subject. “We had been hailing him for a while with no response,” stated Child. “We weren’t sure if the passed out story was a ploy or if he was possibly setting up for an ambush. He wouldn’t respond to us, and based on his history, we knew he was dangerous and that it could easily be a lethal situation.”

Child decided to deploy the Recon Scout XT into the home to assess the situation. The girlfriend had given the SWAT operators a key. A shielded team moved up, unlocked the door, and inserted the robot. They then backed off and began maneuvering the robot around the house, clearing rooms as it progressed. The operator eventually located the subject.

“He was passed out on the couch. We ended up using the on-duty SWAT guys who were on scene and made entry,” said Child. “We cleared the entire house while the robot watched over him. We moved up and took him into custody after a short struggle. Next to him was an open-bladed knife.”

“If we had not had the Recon Scout XT, this would have been a full team callout,” said Child. “We would have deployed flash bangs and, if we did not get a response, likely caused damage to the property prior to making entry to elicit some sort of response. If we still had no response, we would have had to make entry without knowing what we would face inside.”

“Our officers definitely would have been in a big fight with him, if not a lethal fight, based on his criminal history,” remarked Guerrero.

Rescue Operations with a Barricaded Subject

The Tri-City team got another opportunity to use the Recon Scout XT during a high-risk warrant service.

“Our proactive street crime team had received some information about a guy who had warrants out for controlled substance possession/distribution and weapons violations,” said Child. “Two individuals exited the residence where the suspect was staying. The proactive team stopped the vehicle and when they attempted to have the passenger exit, he resisted and dove for his waistband. After taking him into custody, they discovered he had been going for a gun.”

The suspects turned out to be gang members from outside of the area. They did however provide information that the subject they were looking for was still inside the residence. Based on this information, the police were able to obtain a search warrant for the house. The proactive team surrounded the residence and called for the SWAT team due to a very high threat assessment.

“A female came out just as our team arrived,” stated Child. “She advised us that there were three or four kids inside as well as the suspect. We hailed and hailed and got no response from inside.

the residence.

“The robot was close enough to the door so we could remove the pillow,” stated Child. “We then used the robot to move further down the hallway. Shortly after that, the last guy came out of a back bedroom and we used the robot to follow him until he exited the house. We maintained visual on him with the robot until he was taken into custody. We kept the robot 5 to 10 feet in front of him as he backed out toward us. We were able to tell if he was armed, and you could see fairly well that he was not.”

Child credited the Recon Scout XT with providing the team with critical information.

“Knowing the layout of the residence allowed us to take the right number of people into the home to rescue the kids,” he said. “The more people you bring inside, the more noise you are going to make. Having kids in a residence puts a constraint on the tactics we can use to illicit a response. Flash bangs and gas could not be used. Being able to safely remove those kids while maintaining a visual on the threat areas was huge and critical to the success of this particular mission.”

Summary

Agency	Tri-City Regional SWAT Team - Kennewick PD, Pasco PD, Richland PD, and the Benton County Sheriff's Office
Population Served	260,000
Objective	Obtain a small, easy-to-use robot to increase team situational awareness and standoff distance
Solution	Purchase the Recon Scout XT kit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.2-lb robot is extremely compact – fits in a pocket or small pack • Provides valuable situational awareness • Lowers risks to operators, saves lives and time

With the approval of command, a small contingent approached the residence and inserted the Recon Scout XT. The robot soon located the kids in the living room.”

Using the Recon Scout XT, the team learned the general layout of the residence. “We used the robot to hold the bathroom and a hallway to the right of the entrance,” said Child. “You could see where the kids were laying under covers in the living room, so we knew how many guys we needed to get inside and recover them while covering all possible threats.”

The team made entry, recovered the kids, and brought them outside. They then began hailing again with the robot watching the bathroom and hallway.

“After hailing for a while, we saw the suspect come out of the bathroom and throw a pillow on top of the robot,” said Child. “Probably about five minutes after that, he came out. He exited the location and then resisted being taken into custody and had to be tased.”

The operation was not over for Child and his team, however. After apprehending the suspect, they learned that there was another unknown subject in

Technology and Tactics

The Tri-City Regional SWAT Team recognizes how technology, including the Recon Scout XT, can change and supplement their tactics and feed them vital information. “We’re continuing to integrate technology as we move forward and the bottom line is that it is making it safer for operators who are in harm’s way,” stated Child. “It is giving us real-time intelligence. It is safer for the officers and the suspects. It is literally our eyes and ears. Even if the robot gets taken out, that’s better than a person. You can’t find an easier, cost-friendly, rugged tool to use. We beat the tar out of ours and I’m surprised it has made it as long as it has. The callout stories above are just two examples of many success stories that we as a team have done while utilizing the Recon Scout XT. I cannot imagine not having this technology with us on all of our future missions. This is one piece of equipment that literally saves lives by keeping SWAT operators out of harm’s way while providing real-time intelligence that is used to end lethal situations.”