

# Gaining Situational Awareness During a Hostage Rescue Operation

Las Cruces lies on the banks of the Rio Grande River in southern New Mexico. Home to New Mexico State University, the city boasts a population north of 100,000 and covers over 76 square miles of Dona Ana County. The Las Cruces Police Department has an allocated strength of 191 sworn officers and is the second largest municipal police department in New Mexico. The LCPD is diverse and made up of several sections and specialized units, including a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team.

Sergeant Ralph Monget has served the Las Cruces Police Department for over 21 years as a Uniformed Patrol Officer, Criminal Investigator, Uniform Patrol Sergeant, and Criminal Investigations Sergeant. He has also been a member of the SWAT Team for 18 years, serving as an Entry Team Member, Team Leader, and Team Commander.

The SWAT team is currently broken down into two 10-man squads that serve on a weekly rotational basis. In the event of a callout, all team members respond. In addition to requisite tactical skills, many team members also hold additional certifications.

"I have team members who are certified tactical instructors and firearms instructors," stated Monget. "I also have a tactical medic and other members are trained in force on force, less lethal, chemical and defensive tactics."

The team serves beyond Las Cruces as a response team for the New Mexico State Police Tactical team.

"We assist them with callouts in the southern part of the state, from the Arizona border to the west and the Texas border in the east. We also have Memorandums of Understanding with several other area departments and federal agencies, assisting when needed," said Monget.

## A New Tactical Tool

In September 2011, Las Cruces SWAT purchased a Recon Scout® IR from ReconRobotics.

"We purchased the micro-robot for its ease of use, portability, and reliability in gathering intelligence that was crucial during an operation," stated Monget. "Once we acquired the robot, our first impressions were great. Team members liked the fact that it was easy to deploy."

Monget and his team have two 10-hour training sessions every month. "In each session we try to implement some type of scenario-based training," said Monget. "Team members are then able to utilize all of our equipment, including the Recon Scout, as if they were on an actual callout."

"We mostly use the robot on barricaded subject calls," elaborated Monget. "Whenever we deploy a throw phone or want to see inside of a location, the robot is tossed in as soon as possible to start getting the intelligence we need. Our team has around 35 to 40 callouts a year and most of those callouts are barricaded subjects, so the robot is used almost every time we go out."

One particular barricaded subject story stands out in Monget's mind. The callout demonstrated how the Recon Scout IR fit into the SWAT team's tactics and helped safely resolve the situation. — *continued next page*



## Summary

<b>Agency</b>	Las Cruces Police Department – Las Cruces, New Mexico
<b>Population Served</b>	100,000+
<b>Objective</b>	Obtain a tactical micro-robot to gain situational awareness and greater standoff distances during tactical operations
<b>Solution</b>	Purchase a Recon Scout® IR kit <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides operators with critical intelligence during operations</li><li>• 1.2-lb robot is lightweight and can be thrown 120 feet or dropped 30 feet</li><li>• Infrared capability allows robot to see in complete darkness</li></ul>

## The Baby, the Bullet, and the Barricaded Subject

In September of 2012, a call came in about a domestic disturbance. Officers responded and found that the father had locked the mother out of the second story apartment, keeping an 8-month-old boy inside with him.

“The man had a history of domestics with the police department and the couple had an ongoing custody battle,” relayed Monget. “He yelled that he would kill her if she came back to the apartment. We were told he had a gun and, as patrol arrived at the scene, neighbors reportedly heard a gunshot from the apartment.”

The Las Cruces SWAT team was already assembled at an event and was called to respond to the barricaded subject situation at the apartment complex. The apartment in question was a two-bedroom apartment with one bathroom.

“We set up long-range marksman and attempted to get a view into the apartment,” says Monget. “A breaching team had prepped an explosive charge for use on the front door of the apartment. It was to be the last resort if we felt we had to breach to rescue the infant hostage.”

Negotiators were brought to the scene and were able to get in contact with the suspect, but he would either not speak or hang up very quickly. During one of the calls, the negotiator heard an infant crying in the background.

The SWAT team broke a window to left of the front door and threw in the Recon Scout IR and a negotiator throw phone.

“The robot immediately showed us that the suspect had barricaded the front door with multiple objects and a long pole wedged against the opposite wall,” said Monget. “The robot also allowed us to clear multiple rooms and determine the exact location of the suspect and the child. The robot was very quiet—the suspect did not notice it moving around the apartment. The video was also very clear.”

The team first used the robot to clear the front room and kitchen area. They then moved on to the bathroom. The first bedroom cleared was the child's, and the only light in the room was from outdoor streetlights, and the windows were draped at the time.

“We moved the Recon Scout IR into the room and even though it was very dark, the infrared capability allowed us to confirm no one was present,” recalled Monget. “The signal was very clear. We then maneuvered the robot to the master bedroom. The door was cracked a little bit, but we could not push it open with the robot.”

Armed with the knowledge the Recon Scout had provided, Monget and his team knew how to successfully breach the door. Keeping the robot focused on the master bedroom door, Monget and his team made entry.

“We quickly made entry into the master bedroom and found the suspect lying on top of the child,” said Monget. “The team grabbed the man and brought him into custody. It also was able to rescue the 8-month-old and remove him from the apartment.”

A gun was later found in the bathtub under some towels. One round had been shot into the wall. The subject was charged with kidnapping, intentional child abuse, domestic violence, and several other charges. The child was unharmed, save for a lot of crying due to the stressful situation.

Reflecting on the callout, Monget had some thoughts on the Recon Scout IR.

“Without it, we would have gone in blind and not known anything about the inside of the apartment, including obstructions to entry or the location of the suspect or hostage,” stated Monget. “It is a great tool to have in your bag and we continue to use it on all callouts. You need to have a robot in your arsenal. If not, you are behind the power curve. Our Recon Scout IR has paid for itself many times over.”