



PACIFIC COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Daniel C. Garcia

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PRESS RELEASE

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On May 11th of this year, law enforcement Officers from all over Pacific County responded in force to a report of an active shooter at the Ilwaco High School.

What followed was a coordinated response and massive building search that led to the best possible outcome. It was a hoax and no students or faculty were injured.

In the aftermath of this incident, first responders from all disciplines held several meetings to discuss the response and talk about what went well and areas that needed improvement. One of the questions from these meetings was asking about the ability of law enforcement to gain access to areas blocked by industrial doors that are designed to close and lock during an event like this.

In January of 2023, newly elected Pacific County Sheriff Daniel Garcia approved the creation of a Training Unit to acquire skillsets, develop and provide training in house and to other agencies within the County. This training unit had many objectives when it was formally created. One of those objectives was to find faster and more effective methods of defeating barriers that law enforcement Officers are likely to encounter in a school or other industrial building since its creation. This included commercial grade steel doors mounted on steel frames.

Our team searched law enforcement and firefighter sources for methods employed by agencies around the Country. Their objectives were to find methods that were fast, effective and able to be employed by any law enforcement Officer who has successfully completed the training.

In April of this year, Detective Cory Nacnac attended a breaching instructor course. With his completion of that course, he earned a certificate allowing him to train and certify other law enforcement Officers on breaching tactics, techniques, and procedures.

The training cadre then had the task of sharing this information with other law enforcement agencies in our area. They needed a venue and props that would be suitable for making a lot of noise and, well, breaking things. As luck would have it, they found that the Lebam School was slated for demolition. The Willapa Valley School District granted permission to use the school as a training site.

They still needed props to practice using the tools in a more controlled environment. They researched the cost of prop doors used by firefighters and the applicability for their purposes. The training doors are prohibitively expensive and are limited in application to just a small portion of the breaching tools Deputies are now trained to use. Deputy Alex Bennett, who recently graduated from the Basic Law Enforcement Academy, also happens to be a talented welder. He was able to build a training door that can handle some serious abuse for years to come.

With a venue selected and now having a prop that allows for dry runs, the next phase was to maximize the use of students' time while attending this training. This specific training was designed as a law enforcement Officer response to an active shooter threat. It made sense to incorporate other aspects of a call like this into the course of training. It was decided that the training would be offered on two separate days. Each day was broken into 3 four-hour blocks of instruction with agencies being given the option of what training their Officers would attend. Each training would be offered during each four-hour block giving students the ability to attend each course in one day or by attending one on the following Saturday.

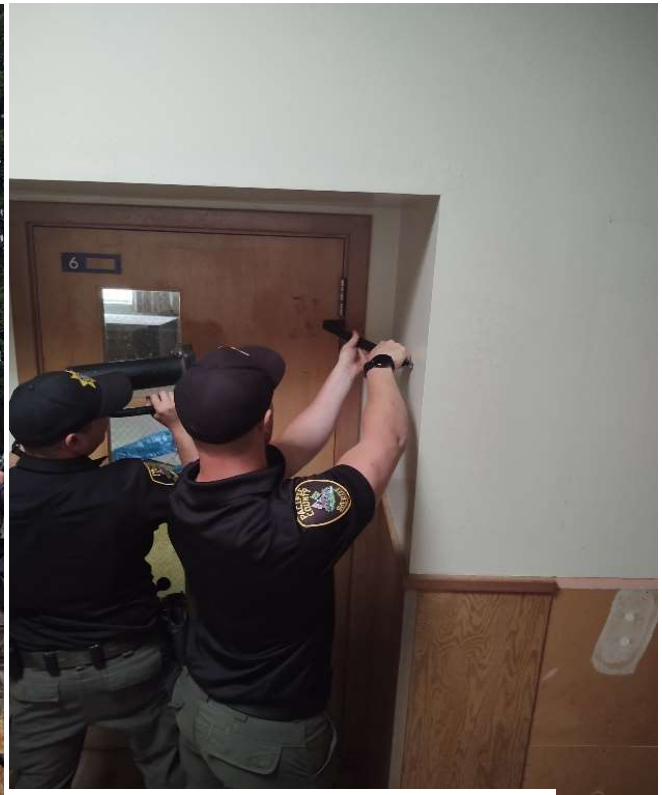
The courses that were offered were "breaching" (defeating barriers), room clearing and a "stop the bleed" course. It was offered over the course of back-to-back Saturdays. Invitations were sent out to every agency in Pacific County and those who operate within our County.

At 7:00 a.m. on August 5th, the training unit met at the Lebam School and set everything up for the day ahead. At 8:00 a.m., law enforcement Officers from the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Parks and Deputies from the Pacific County Sheriff's Office arrived for the first course of the day. All were agencies who responded to the hoax call at the Ilwaco High School on May 11th.

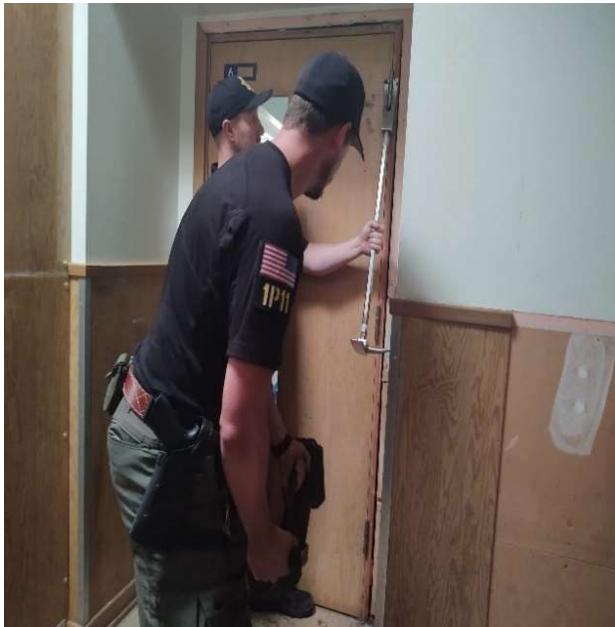
Outside instructor availability prevented the stop the bleed course from happening on the first day, but the instructors took advantage of the extra time by offering up more training than had been planned on the breacher and room clearing courses.



Ramming the prop door



Clearing Door Trim



Ripping the first hinge



A breached hinge

Detective Nacnac lead the mechanical breaching course with introductions into various tools, their proper applications and the pros and cons associated with each one. Several items covered were already familiar to those present. Tools like the rams and the Halligan (a staple in firehouses around the Nation) were explained and demonstrated with each student having an opportunity to employ them on the barriers they were designed to defeat.

One of the new methods introduced and now in our inventory is ballistic breaching. While traditionally a method employed by tactical teams, the application of this tool is well within the capabilities of patrol Deputies and Officers. Due to the potential risks involved, this platform was scrutinized heavily by the training cadre and the Sheriff's Office Administration. Had there been an actual shooter as reported in the call on May 11th, every second could represent a life lost. If a tactical team is an hour away on a good day, we can't afford to wait that long.

A principal advantage of this tool is the speed in which it can defeat commercial or otherwise hardened doors. In the hands of a new student, a commercial grade door can be breached in less than one minute while the Halligan tool requires two Officers and can take well over five minutes. Then there's the consideration of how much energy was expended while using both tools. Ballistic breaching allows the operator to use very little energy so on the other side of the door, they are not worn out, and are prepared to address a threat or to conduct follow on breaches. After five minutes of using the Halligan, Officers showed a higher amount of fatigue than those using this new (to us) method of entry.



A student practicing ballistic breaching on the prop door



Detective Nacnac demonstrating on an interior school door



Detective Nacnac instructing students on the importance of knocking and announcing prior to breaching the door



A student searching for the correct angle under the supervision of Detective Nacnac



The aftermath of a ballistic breach on a commercial door hinge

Detective Nacnac was asked why providing this training to area law enforcement was so high on his priority list.

“Breaching tools are commonplace in law enforcement inventories, but many police agencies rarely train their patrol officers in their use. I’ve seen countless examples of the negative ramifications from this lack of training. Most famously, Uvalde. There are also a number of local examples within Pacific County and our surrounding Counties. If we issue a tool, I think it’s important that our local Deputies and Officers know how to use them properly and that we share that training with every agency in the County to better serve our community”.

Sergeants Nick Zimmerman and Kyle Pettit led the room clearing portion of the training. During this training, students were presented with a variety of skillsets. State, County and Municipal agencies often use different language when communicating on scenes. Standardized communication in a crisis can mitigate a number of potential issues for units working together from various agencies.

Here, students were shown how to effectively communicate locations on structures to other students using terminology that is simple, clear and concise. Students were also taught how to determine the type of response necessary based on information received enroute to a call and observations made on scene. The type of response can differ from an immediate entry to a slow and deliberate approach depending on all information gathered at the scene.

Following the class portion of the course, students were then guided through a series of exercises that presented them with a variety of scenarios they might encounter while entering a structure and searching a building. Simunition weapons were used to give the students a more realistic “feel” for the scenarios they participated in. Simunition weapons fire a paint projectile from a weapon platform similar to what law enforcement carries on patrol. These will not cause significant injury, but are definitely not pleasant when on the receiving end. Protective gear is worn to protect sensitive areas.



Students clearing a large school room.



Students clearing a hallway between classrooms under the instruction of PCSO Sgts. Zimmerman and Pettit.

“Whenever law enforcement are required to enter a building or residence, they face an inherent disadvantage” according to Sergeant Zimmerman. “Much like when playing hide and seek as kids, those who are hiding usually know where the seeker is before they find the person hiding. Most individuals who intend to do someone harm, do so when given the opportunity. Teaching and practicing solid foundational principals for room clearing serves to mitigate the disadvantage faced by law enforcement and minimize the opportunity for violent action against innocents, suspects and law enforcement”.

Sergeant Pettit added that “it is crucial for law enforcement to train and be efficient when room clearing. Our training teaches law enforcement how to safely and effectively search buildings and rooms for known and unknown threats. There are many things done differently and there are far more challenges in close quarter encounters that law enforcement does not encounter on a static range. Most notably are the various angles and opposing potential threats”.

Students were given opportunities to practice communication and identify non-threats and threats during the course of this training. They were also given instruction in mid-scenario and at the end of scenarios to discuss what went into decision making and forced to think through each evolution of the movement. Being able to articulate why a turn was made or how a room was cleared gives students the chance to work through each situation in a manner that is always improving. The goal is to encourage critical thinking through every obstacle they could encounter in real life.

On the final day of training, a paramedic from the Raymond Fire Department taught a class on how to treat patients with traumatic injuries. While this was focused primarily on the scenarios presented, the skillsets translate to almost every call that first responders handle.

After the class, students were given a tour of the ambulance and shown where items are stowed so that if they are sent after a piece of life saving equipment, they know where to find it. Students were also encouraged to visit other Fire Departments in the area and ask for similar “tours” of apparatus specific to each area.

A huge thank you to the Raymond Fire Department for providing superior training in the “stop the bleed” course and thanks also goes out to the agencies that were able to participate in this training. Officers from Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Parks and the Raymond Police Department took part in both training weekends.

This training is for a day that we all pray will never happen again. In the event that it does, we will not rise to the occasion, we will default to the level of our training and how often we practice. The training cadre at the Pacific County Sheriff’s Office is working hard to think outside the box to get better tools and training available for all law enforcement in our County.

When we say that we will make entry and vigorously address any threat to our children or our community, you can bet that we’re training hard every day to back up that promise.