

Sheriff's Dept. Response Team Trains For Special Operations

BY ERIC CARLSON

Last June, when an 18-year-old Shallotte man hijacked a taxi at gunpoint and fired more than 80 bullets during a three-hour standoff, Brunswick County Sheriff John Carr Davis had to call on a Wilmington Police SWAT team to help end the confrontation.

Last fall, sheriff's deputies helped apprehend a heavily armed escaped murderer who was cornered in the woods along the state line. But it was a specially trained and equipped team of South Carolina officers that stopped the flight of Garland Thomas Tedder.

Frustrated with the idea of having to call in outside help, a group of sheriff's detectives approached Davis with the idea of forming their own special unit to handle such situations. With the sheriff's approval, they began meeting and training and undergoing physical conditioning—much of it on their own time—to form what has come to be called the Emergency Response Team.

While drafting the unit's operating procedures, ERT leader Detective Mike Speck quickly realized that one of the most potentially dangerous situations county law enforcement personnel could face would be a hostile incident at the Brunswick Nuclear Plant. So he contacted plant security manager Phil Leslie, who immediately endorsed the ERT concept and agreed to let the team train at the plant.

Last week, the company went a step further in their support of the team and presented the sheriff with a \$6,000 check for the purchase of new, more powerful, 40-caliber semi-automatic handguns and ammunition for ERT training.

"I am very excited about our relationship with the team," Leslie told ERT members during a luncheon meeting at the plant last week. "We are obligated under federal law to defend the plant against acts of violence and terrorism. The sheriff's department will be the primary responders to any problems we have at Brunswick. So it's extremely important to have a team that is familiar with the plant layout and operations."

"We don't want radiation spewing out all over the countryside," he said.

Besides augmenting nuclear plant security, the ERT unit would also provide assistance to county and municipal law enforcement officers in situations that require special tactics and equipment. Speck said those might include the "high-risk apprehension of wanted felons and fugitives, hostage situations, surveillance, civil disturbances and drug operations."

The sheriff has funded memberships at the Oak Island Fitness Center to provide the team with additional physical conditioning. Members have undergone rigorous training in firearms use, building searches

and room clearing. Speck also plans to arrange special ERT training with experts in hostage negotiations and other police tactics.

The ERT unit has already proven its effectiveness in touchy law enforcement operations.

One night in late February, a Shallotte Point man kidnapped his 21-month-old daughter from his estranged wife and refused to come out of the woods near her home.

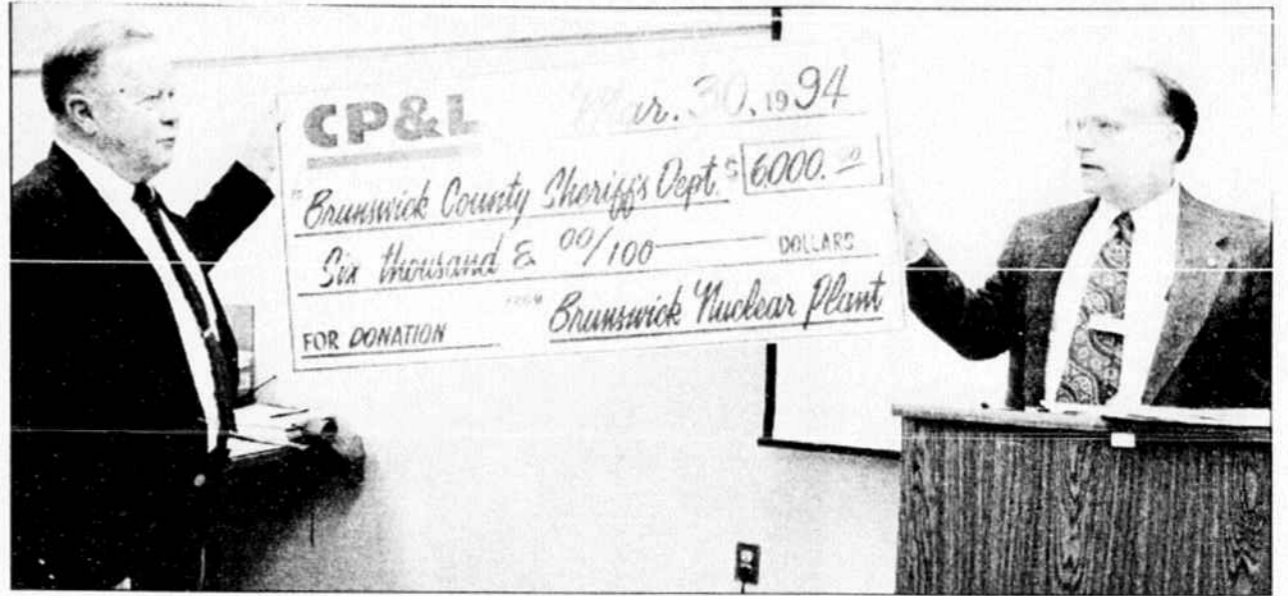
While ERT hostage negotiator Lt. David Crocker tried to talk the man into surrendering, other team members made their way through the trees and stationed themselves within striking distance of the pair.

"We were in position and waiting for a signal to jump him. But we

wanted to make sure the little girl didn't get hurt," Speck said after the man finally agreed to give up.

Less than a month later, the ERT team had to fire tear gas into a Leland mobile home where a man armed with a shotgun was holding his wife and daughter hostage. Team members stormed into the trailer and forced their way into a closet where the man was holding the child. No one was injured in the incident.

"I'm very proud of these guys," Sheriff Davis said last week. "They've done a lot of this on their own time. They have put in countless hours. I didn't realize how advanced they were until those two hostage situations. They did a wonderful job."



SHERIFF JOHN DAVIS (left) accepts a gift of \$6,000 from the Carolina Power and Light Co. from Phil Leslie, security manager at the Brunswick Nuclear Plant last week to help train and equip the sheriff's department Emergency Response Team. The newly formed unit will be called upon to aid in hostage negotiations, fugitive apprehensions, drug searches and security problems at the nuclear plant.

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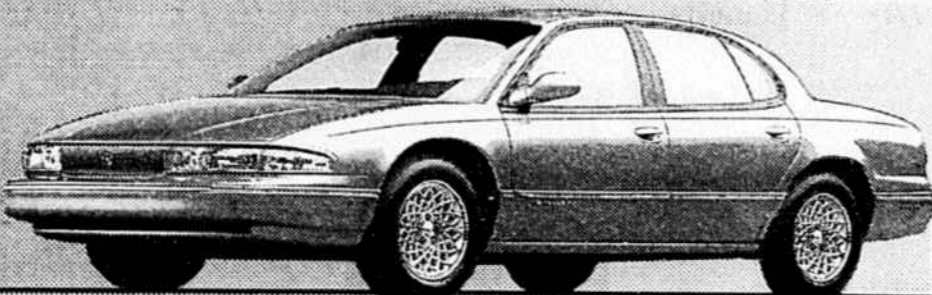
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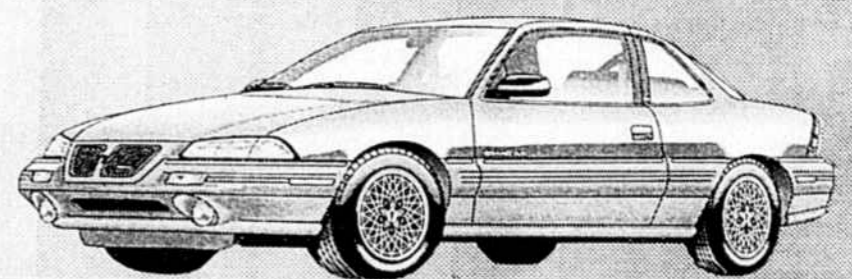
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