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**SWAT Operator**  
with Sgt. Glenn French

## Why your newest SWAT team member is a drone

The requirement for SWAT teams to seek a warrant for the use of drones is smart and good policy

Students and faculty at Texas A&M University recently showed off some of their newest drone designs currently under development.

In one demonstration, an assistant wearing Google Glass stands in front of a four-rotor drone and commands the unit to take off. The drone flies straight into the air. He commands the unit to turn right, then left. The drone follows his commands without hesitation or error. He tilts his head in various directions and the drone responds as directed. The student says "flip" and the drone somersaults in the air. It then lands and the demonstration is over.

And some police agencies are already using UAVs in limited ways.

### Potential for Saving Lives

It's obvious that drone use in law enforcement can be significant in saving the lives of both civilians and police officers. Drones could be used for disaster relief, search and rescue, and the like. But the use of UAVs ("drones") doesn't come without controversy.

Some citizens seek regulations for police use. Drone flights are tightly restricted to military and Customs and Border Protection that are permitted by the Federal Aviation Administration to fly unmanned aircraft on a daily basis within the country's borders.

However, Congress recently directed the FAA to gradually open the national airspace to public and commercial drone traffic in the coming years.

Drones can become a very useful tool in the SWAT operator's environment. These aircraft can operate with great precision — with the use of GPS — which can outperform the human hand. These UAVs can fly in small, confined areas such as homes and buildings.

A drone fitted with cameras can scout an objective where an armed assailant could be hiding or keeping hostages captive without endangering the SWAT officer. That same drone may deliver that same potentially violent criminal a cell phone to establish a link for police negotiators. While delivering that cell phone, the drone will gather intelligence on its adversary and his stronghold.

If negotiations should fail, the drone can then be sent back into the stronghold to deliver less lethal munitions in an attempt to resolve the crisis without harming the offender or risking harm to the SWAT officers. Some drone manufacturers are already looking at arming these [remote-controlled aircraft with non-lethal munitions](#).

A SWAT UAV could be outfitted with infrared cameras which would be a valuable asset to any tactical operation. Such a drone would have a significant advantage over its predecessor — the tactical robot — since it won't have to navigate stairs and other obstacles. In fact, one can easily envision airborne drones working side by side with tactical robots in hostile environments because the robot has breaching capabilities.

### Looking to the Future

Although the FAA still prohibits commercial use of drones, these small unmanned aircrafts can benefit private enterprise in many ways — [from farming surveys to aerial pipeline inspection](#) — and that will inevitably lead to greater popular acceptance of the technology.

When you consider the fact that a Domino's is seriously looking at [delivering pizzas with a fleet of UAVs](#) and the FAA has begun to study how they can be [used in movie-making](#) it is safe to say widespread use of UAVs in American airspace is inevitable. The pressure to adopt this technology is just too great — and comes from too many quarters — for any other possible outcome.

From the law enforcement perspective, we need to consider the potential for these devices, and begin setting up our policies and procedures for their increasing use in law enforcement scenarios.

Some states are looking at requiring a warrant for the use of drones by a law enforcement agency. The requirement for SWAT teams to seek a warrant for the use of drones while conducting business is smart and good policy. Drone use by law enforcement should be deployed under the same considerations as any other law enforcement resource.

#### About the author

Glenn French, a Sergeant with the Sterling Heights (Mich.) Police Department, has 22 years police experience and currently serves as the Team Commander for the Special Response Team, and Sergeant of the Sterling Heights Police Department Training Bureau. He has 14 years SWAT experience and served as a Sniper Team Leader, REACT Team Leader, and Explosive Breacher.

He is the author of the award-winning book "Police Tactical Life Saver" which has been named the 2012 Public Safety Writers Association Technical Manual of the year. Glenn is also the President of [www.tacticalifesaver.org](http://www.tacticalifesaver.org).

Glenn has instructed basic and advanced SWAT / Tactical officer courses, basic and advanced Sniper courses, Cold Weather / Winter Sniper Operations and Active Shooter Response courses, Tactical Lifesaver Course and others. Sgt French served in the U.S. Army. During his military tenure Sgt French gained valuable experience in C.Q.B., infantry tactics and explosive breaching operations.

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