



2019

2019 SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIT YEAR END REVIEW

Sergeant Drew Gerring
Special Operations Unit
Alamance Narcotics
Enforcement Team

BURLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT
267 WEST FRONT STREET
BURLINGTON, NC 27215



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PURPOSE

Authors note:

Throughout the document, the terms Special Operation Unit and Alamance Narcotics Enforcement Team (ANET) are used interchangeably. When the name Special Operation Unit is utilized, the author is referring specifically to BPD personnel and equipment. When the term ANET is used, the author is referring to the combined entities of all the partnering agencies that make up ANET including the BPD personnel and equipment

Implementation of the Special Assignment

The Special Operations Unit's primary function is to investigate narcotics violations. These investigations consist of street-level drug dealers, citizen complaints of drug dealing in neighborhoods, and high-level narcotic trafficking. The distribution of illegal drugs is lucrative, and the cash-only business draws a wide array of other violent crimes. These crimes consist of robberies, homicides, prostitution, and larcenies. All of the offenses listed above occurred within the city last year and many were tied to drug use or drug sales.

Need for the Special Assignment to Continue

Narcotics sales are often a primary source of income for violent organized crime groups, such as street gangs and cartels. While the Special Operations Unit focuses on narcotics investigations, oftentimes, these investigations identify violent offenders and organizations. The Special Operations Unit has been incorporated into the Alamance Narcotics Enforcement Team (ANET) and acts in conjunction with other law enforcement officers within Alamance County and across the state. In 2019 these trends continued, and ANET formed several partnerships with state and federal agencies to identify, target, and arrest significant drug traffickers and violent offenders within our community. These partnerships included the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (SBI), North Carolina Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the U.S. Postal Inspectors office (USPI). Several Investigations originating in Alamance County have identified organizations responsible for distributing illegal drugs not only within Alamance County and North Carolina but across the United States. By partnering with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, the Special Operations Unit has been able to expand the scope of investigations to impact violent criminal activity here in our community and elsewhere throughout the United States.

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

Prioritization of Calls and current staffing

The Special Operations Unit is primarily responsible for investigating all levels of narcotics complaints, which come from patrol officer referrals, citizen complaints, crime stoppers tips or reports, informant information, Burlington officer knowledge of drug offenders and dealers and referral information from other law enforcement agencies. In 2018 Special Operations prioritized their investigative resources into four categories; 1) drug-related overdose deaths, 2) violent criminal offenders, 3) narcotics trafficking, and 4) citizen's complaints. In 2019 these prioritizations remained the same.

In July 2019, Special Operations staffing was increased by one full-time investigator position, which had previously been vacant, bringing the total staffing to one Lieutenant, one Sergeant, three investigators, and one Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force Officer. Currently, Special Operations has one open investigator position due to departmental staffing issues.

Investigative efforts

ANET conducted several high-level narcotics investigations while targeting known violent offenders and addressing an array of community complaints in 2019. Each investigator has shown great strides in their job knowledge, skills, and abilities to conduct high-level proactive investigations. Investigators have learned many new techniques that are not commonly utilized by local law enforcement. Last year, Investigators in ANET participated in two major cases with the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) initiative and they are continuing to work those cases as we continue into 2020.

Despite personnel shortages, ANET investigators arrested, on average, more than one drug trafficker each week of the year. Additionally, investigators seized over 80 kilograms of cocaine and seized \$1,000,000 of drug trafficking proceeds that were forfeited by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

ZETX

In 2019 BPD purchased the ZETX program, which is a web-based phone toll analytical tool. The software is similar to the regularly used analytical software PLX but is geared towards the novice user. While ZETX does not have all the capabilities that PLX does, it automatically

formulates the most common reports used (top callers, call frequency, tower frequency, and others) that are necessary to assist with identifying where a suspect may be living, their co-conspirators, and other details that help with establishing a “pattern of life” for the suspect. The software also provides investigators the option of live tracking a suspect's phone ping. Most companies only send the coordinates (longitude and latitude) and the margin of error of where a suspect’s phone is. ZETX provides a feature where an investigator can automatically forward the phone pings from the phone company to ZETX and then ZETX will send the detective a link via email to their device that automatically maps the location of the device instantaneously. This tool alone saves investigators numerous hours of work during a prolonged investigation. This software has been an excellent addition to ANET and has provided investigators with a much-needed analytical tool in the absence of an intelligence analysis.

RECAP OF PREVIOUS YEARS RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Fill at least one vacant position in Special Operations. **Completed- an additional investigator was added in July.**
- 2) Provide ANET with a full-time intelligence analyst to assist with investigations and case management. Request participating agencies in ANET to pay the analyst salary. **Completed- assigned an analyst from BPD to work daily with the unit. However, other agencies have not assisted with the salary of this employee.**
- 3) Purchase technology to assist with cell phone location abilities, "Cell Hawk" or "ZETX" **Completed-ZETX purchased.**
- 4) Increase the vehicle leasing program to the entire fleet. **Not completed due to budget constraints.**
- 5) Purchase drones and finalize drone policy for the Police Department. **Completed- two drones were purchased, and the policy was implemented.**
- 6) Continue our commitment to providing a TFO to the Drug Enforcement Agency. **Completed- we supply DEA with one full time employee.**
- 7) Continue assignment of single-purpose drug canine to the unit. **Completed K-9 Shadow is assigned to ANET.**
- 8) Continue and expand upon wire intercepts to dismantle drug trafficking organizations. **Completed- ANET continues to investigate high level drug dealers.**

9) Encouragement of career development for officers/supervisors. **Not completed- No officer requested a career development in 2019**

REPORT DATA

2019 Stats

In June of 2019 ANET eliminated non-essential categories that were being tracked in 2018 such as undercover buys, training hours, and search warrants. Below are the major categories tracked by ANET after June 2019.

Cocaine Seized: 81 Kilograms

Trafficking Narcotics Arrests: 78

Heroin Seized: 196 Grams

Marijuana Seized: 18 pounds

Scheduled Prescription Medication Seized: 354 Dosage Units U.S. Currency Seized: \$1,051,462.00

In 2018 ANET investigated 136 cases and in 2019 144 cases. In 2019 ANET cleared by arrest (CBA) 284 cases which includes cases from 2018 that were still open for investigation. The status of cases assigned are cleared by arrest, closed/cleared, exceptionally cleared, inactive, open, unfounded, and warrants obtained.

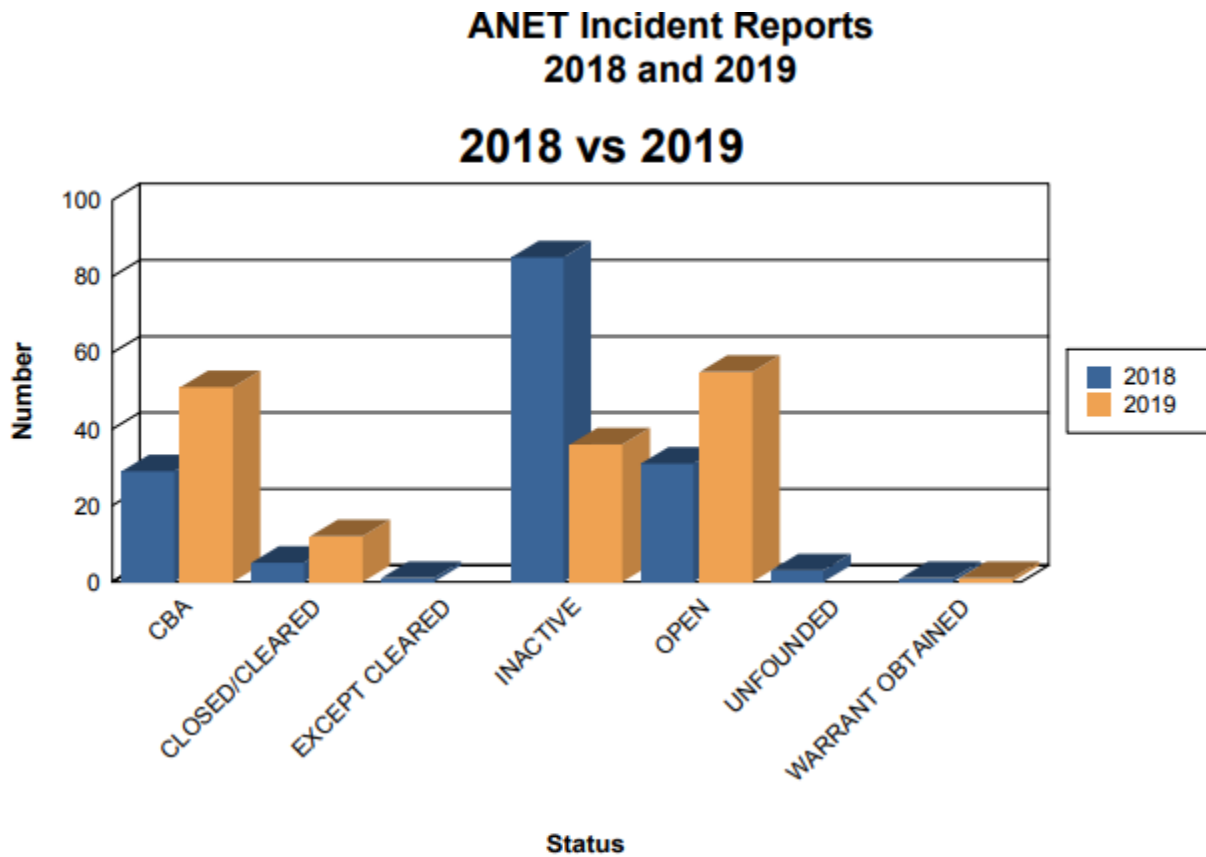
Total Cases Assigned 2018-2019

Incidents by Month Each Year

| | Total | 2018 | 2019 |
|------------------|-------|------|------|
| Total | 280 | 136 | 144 |
| January | 16 | 9 | 7 |
| February | 28 | 15 | 13 |
| March | 16 | 4 | 12 |
| April | 16 | 5 | 11 |
| May | 22 | 11 | 11 |
| June | 19 | 10 | 9 |
| July | 27 | 17 | 10 |
| August | 25 | 11 | 14 |
| September | 48 | 9 | 39 |
| October | 28 | 22 | 6 |
| November | 19 | 13 | 6 |
| December | 16 | 10 | 6 |

2018-2019 Case Clearance Rate Comparison

In June of 2019 ANET eliminated non-essential categories that were being tracked in 2018 such as undercover buys, training hours, and search warrants. Below are the major categories tracked by ANET after June 2019.



Status

| Status by Year | | | |
|-------------------------|-------|------|------|
| | Total | 2018 | 2019 |
| Total | 341 | 57 | 284 |
| CBA | 91 | 10 | 81 |
| CLOSED/CLEARED | 22 | 7 | 15 |
| EXCEPT CLEARED | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| INACTIVE | 141 | 7 | 134 |
| OPEN | 82 | 29 | 53 |
| UNFOUNDED | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| WARRANT OBTAINED | 2 | 1 | 1 |

FINDINGS

Prioritization of Community Complaints

During the last two years, ANET has developed a successful model for combating large scale drug trafficking and violent offenders. However, devoting time and personnel to handling low level drug complaints continues to be a challenge within the unit. The mission that has been set forth has such a broad scope it has been difficult to manage several of these lower-level investigations with the personnel provided. Due to the limited staffing, supervisory staff within ANET has transitioned to prioritizing these types of cases (lower level) by the amount of community impact they will have, the offender history, and the types of drugs they are selling. For example, complaints that originate in an area where a documented crime trend is occurring will take priority over a complaint that is in an area where the geographic statistics do not indicate there to be a progressive crime trend.

We also take into account the offender. A violent offender or someone with close associations with gangs will take priority over all other considerations. Lastly, supervisors consider the types of drugs that the offender is allegedly selling. Those who are selling fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine take priority over other street-level drugs and prescription medications. To speed up investigations into low level drug complaints, a new reporting procedure was implemented. Investigators are now utilizing the investigator dashboard, which allows the supervisors to track their case progression. While this method seems to be working thus far, we will continue to monitor the effectiveness and will determine if additional changes are needed.

Special Operations Unit to Alamance Narcotic Enforcement Team (ANET)

In 2019 the BPD was budgeted for one Lieutenant, one Sergeant, five investigators (two vacant), and one DEA task force officer assigned to ANET as the Special Operations Unit. The Special Operations Unit was the title for the unit when only BPD officers conducted narcotics enforcement in Burlington. BPD entered into a partnership with all local agencies and assigned BPD personnel to work in a cooperative effort with all the participating agencies. The agencies are united under a common purpose and a common goal. The BPD is committed to collaborative enforcement and the progressive principles of ANET and reflected the commitment by changing the name of the Special Operations Unit to ANET on the BPD organizational chart.

Intel Analyst

The 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports both identified the need for a full-time intelligence analyst position linked to ANET. This goal was partly accomplished in 2019 with the hiring of an intelligence analysis who was assigned to CAU with their secondary focus as ANET. Due to time limitations imposed on the position, it did not fulfill the needs of the investigators. The part-time person did not have the availability to be on site enough to obtain the knowledge needed to fully investigate the cases. As discussed in the 2018 report, an agreement was arranged between supervisors in ANET and the DEA Resident Agent in Charge to allow the intelligence analyst access to their office and databases. It was also arranged for the intelligence analysis to receive extensive on the job training by working on other cases that were occurring in the DEA office, but with the understanding that ANET cases would always take priority.

This arrangement was ideal for several reasons. First, it allowed access to the administrative subpoena authority of the federal government, allowing for quicker returns of phone tolls and other administrative subpoena powers that local law enforcement in North Carolina do not have authority to administer. Secondly, it allowed access to all DEA databases, some of which the BPD currently uses but with annual fees. With access to these databases through DEA, some of these reoccurring fees could possibly be eliminated from the BPD budget. Thirdly, the intelligence analyst will benefit from the partnership and would be trained by some of the better drug analysis in the state. Unfortunately, specialized training was never completed, and the original intelligence analyst resigned to take a federal job in another state.

During this growing phase, it became apparent that the current model was not working. Multiple supervisors are sharing a single employee, and those supervisors have different experiences and thoughts on what the analyst's job and role should be. The set up was not only unfair to the employee, but also did not benefit the investigators they were hired to assist. The knowledge and skill set for an analyst in ANET are similar but different from what other analysts in the Burlington Police Department Crime Analysis Unit (CAU) do.

To be successful in ANET, the analyst must become just as integrated into the cases as the investigators themselves. They must know the history of the suspect, the names and addresses of family members, associates, and friends. They must also know the locations of places they frequent, cars they drive, and a plethora of other valuable information that is obtained periodically throughout each day the investigation is occurring. All these facts are essential when conducting phone toll analysis, identifying replacement phones, and identifying other members of a drug trafficking organization. While this has been explained to the staff in CAU, they have not personally experienced these types of investigations and therefore their understanding of the time and commitment it takes to be successful is lost in translation.

Moving forward into 2020, I would recommend that any analyst assigned to ANET be placed under the direct supervision of the ANET lieutenant. I would also recommend that we re-institute the training program with DEA. I would estimate that it will take approximately three months of on the job training with expert analyst to train our new employee properly.

Additional investigator to the DEA taskforce.

Keeping and maintaining our successful partnership with DEA is invaluable. They have purchased equipment and have paid the majority of the bills associated with our high-level targets. Because of that, I believe there is a need to expand our partnership with DEA. I would recommend selecting a second Task Force Officer and assign them full time to the DEA. Currently, our DEA TFO is at their five-year specialized division tenure limit.

Personnel shortage

We currently have six fulltime and three part-time investigators assigned to ANET which is not sufficient to continue with our current mission. This is a significant decrease from previous years. In 2019 ANET lost two full-time partners, Graham (which is temporary) and Gibsonville (which is now part-time) because of personnel shortages within their agencies. Multiple requests from outside agencies have been made for additional personnel. However, these requests have not been filled. Because of the lack of staff, we have stretched our resources to their limit, and our investigations have slowed significantly. Currently, the unit is capable of working approximately two to three investigations at a time, which is a significant drop off from previous years where the group had the capability to adequately work five or more investigations simultaneously. We will continue to work with our BPD administrators and other administrators within the MOU in the hope of receiving increased staffing.

Drones

The BPD utilizes unmanned aircraft systems (drones) to improve the safety of the citizens of Burlington and other public safety employees. Additionally, drones are utilized to improve the capabilities of police officers conducting criminal investigations. A drone is a remote-controlled flying aircraft owned by the Burlington Police Department that is operated by a properly licensed pilot employed by the Burlington Police Department.

The BPD purchased two drones in 2019, and the policy for the drones went into effect during the summer of 2019. One drone was assigned to ANET and the second to the Criminal Investigations Division. In June 2019 ANET began deploying the drone during field operations. In the latter half of 2019, the drone was deployed 159 times, which is an average of 6 times per week. We have found that the drone is a valuable asset that allows for surveillance units to be

more conservative and not take as many risks that could compromise the surveillance operation.

The current drone we are utilizing does not have zoom capabilities, and we have found that it is one of the functions that would be helpful during our operations. I would recommend that we purchase a new drone with zoom capabilities. I would also recommend that ANET retain the current drone that is already in place. Currently, the drone operator can launch the drone from their vehicle in a matter of minutes upon the request from a supervisor. However, the drone only allows for approximately 30 minutes of flight time. During long term surveillance operations, the drone operator has to land the drone, replace the battery, and re-launch. We have also learned that during long term surveillance operations, especially during the summer, that the drone can become overheated which automatically temporarily disables the unit.

Adding a second drone to our fleet will allow for the operator or his designee to utilize two drones in sequence with no reduction in coverage. The operator or his designee would launch one drone until the battery level is depleted, but before returning the drone to the launch area, the operator or his designee would launch the second drone so that consistent surveillance can be maintained. After the second drone has obtained a surveillance position, the operator or his designee will return the original drone to the launch area where the battery can be replaced and allow for sufficient downtime for it to cool.

Transitioning fleet vehicles to lease vehicles

In 2018, the need was realized for BPD to transition the ANET vehicle fleet from department-owned to a lease vehicle program. This program allows for officers to switch out their surveillance vehicles when needed. Currently, we have three lease vehicles and three fleet (BPD owned) vehicles assigned to ANET. I would suggest that we transition the oldest of the fleet vehicles (Unit #1216, blue Honda Civic) to a lease vehicle. This vehicle has been assigned to Special Operations for several years and is the most recognizable of all of our current vehicles. Because the vehicle is so noticeable to a wide variety of our local targets the vehicle is not currently useful for surveillance. If an additional lease vehicle is not an option during the upcoming year, Unit #1216 will need to be painted or wrapped a different color.

Career Development

In 2019 there were no employee career developments completed in ANET for any of the BPD staff. However, there was a temporary placement of a supervisor for a very short period of time (16 hours). Career development, especially for supervision within the unit, will become critical over the next 12-24 months. Currently, there is not a Sergeant within the agency that has a high level of experience in drug investigations. To ensure that the Unit continues to move in a

productive direction, we must begin succession planning and training now. In 2020, BPD should invest in identifying potential candidates who would be interested in a supervisory role within ANET. After these individuals are identified, we should work with their chain of command to set up some shadowing opportunities during opportune times.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE REVIEW

Policy/MOU

A review of the MOU and Policies was conducted during this review process. I found no additions or amendments that needed to be addressed at this time.

Staff Inspection

Based on the staff inspection completed in 2019, several recommendations were completed. ANET filled one of two vacant positions, completed Drug Enforcement for Patrol Officers Training (DEPOT) for BPD officers and other agencies to enhance skills for conducting low level narcotics investigation, utilized asset forfeiture money to design and purchase new office equipment for ANET, and continued monthly meetings with the MOU agency heads to provide updates on investigations, encourage staffing increases and ensure a high level of collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS For 2020

2020 Recommendations

- 1) Change the name from Special Operations to Alamance Narcotics Enforcement Team on our organizational chart.
- 2) Assign a full-time analyst to ANET under the supervision of the ANET Lieutenant.
- 3) Purchase a second drone to utilize during drug investigations when investigators are unable to get visibility without being noticed.
- 4) Fill the vacant investigator position in Special Operations and add an additional TFO to the DEA for training and transitioning purposes.
- 5) Transition unit #1216 to a spare vehicle, and budget for another leased vehicle.

- 6) Continue to encourage career development for officers and supervisors.
- 7) Evaluate new reporting requirements and evaluate the success of the program.
- 8) Continue the funding of ZETX during the fiscal year of 2020.