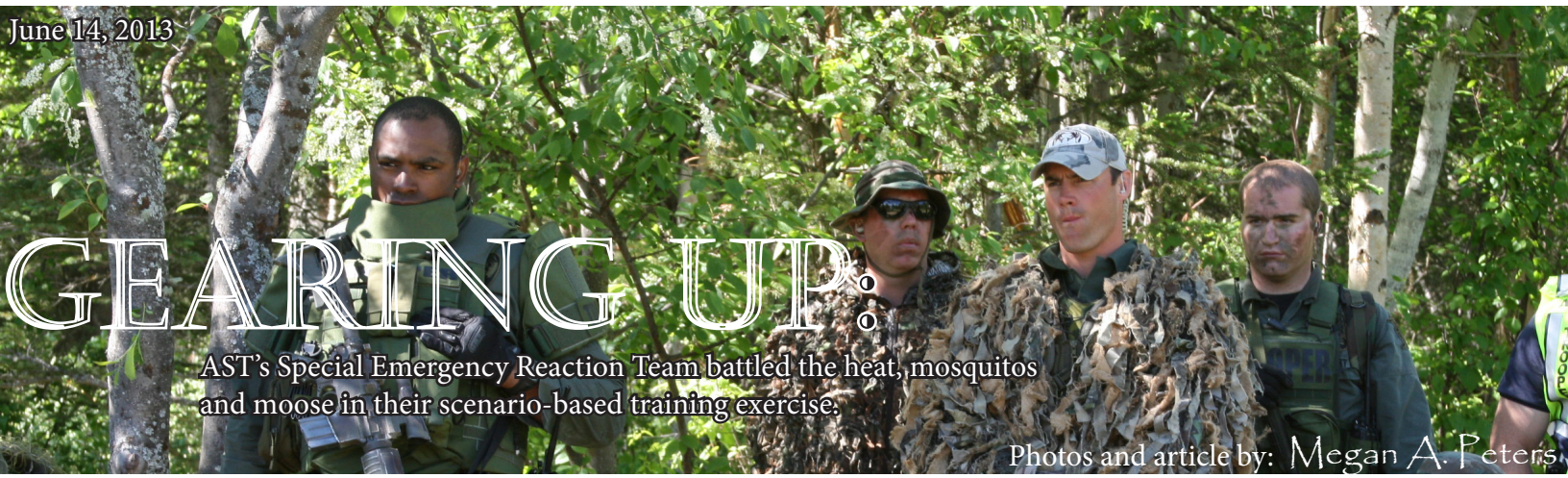

GEARING UP:

AST's Special Emergency Reaction Team battled the heat, mosquitos and moose in their scenario-based training exercise.

Photos and article by: Megan A. Peters

Bad guys Troopers Mulvaney and Altepeter shout at each other as SERT surrounds the house.

Sergeant Chad Goeden checked on SERT members positioned strategically around the Sutton home.

A newly acquired tactical response vehicle affords SERT members protection during hostile missions.

As the hot Alaska June sun provided perfect mosquito weather in Sutton, more than 30 troopers were hidden in the dense vegetation with guns pointed at a birdhouse-like home. Inside was a man with a pistol on his hip making demands over the phone to an AST negotiator and insisting everyone was fine for the moment. The training scenario was weeks in the making and all three elements of the Special Emergency Reaction Team (SERT) were at hand.

Prior to kicking off at 9:00 am, SERT members assembled for the mission briefing and the safety and ammo checks. As it was a training scenario, no live rounds were permitted in weapons utilized for the mission. Instead, simunitions were locked and loaded. Simunitions are rounds that are non-lethal and will likely cause no more than a welt on the person who is impacted by one. (Oddly enough, the role players acting as the bad guys weren't too keen on starting up the confrontations that would lead to their demise). Weapons operate in the same manner as if they do when loaded with actual ammunition which makes simunitions excellent for training.

The operation was designed to use as many tools possible that SERT members had access to, such as negotiators, robots, throw phone, Tactical Response Vehicles, and more, while troubleshooting different realistic challenges of the mission at hand. During part of the training one member was handed a note saying he suffered a bee sting and his throat was closing up. The man had to be safely extracted from his location without his team members giving away positioning and putting themselves in the potential line of fire. Over the radios you could hear an over-exerted SERT operative communicating his comrade's symptoms as he carried him stealthily through the brush and trees to the awaiting medic.

Real world emergencies cropped up during the half-day

long hostage scenario. At one point a proctor had to scramble away from the dangerous hoofs of a momma moose not happy to have anyone close to her baby. A short time later, a SERT member was removed from the exercise and brought to the hospital due to a heat injury. The trooper was a part of the entry team and in full tactical gear when he was overcome by the temperatures trying to approach 80 degrees. (He was treated and released from the emergency room after a few hours.)

At the end of the scenario one bad guy was dead, another was in cuffs and all the hostages were free. The scenario-based training mission was only one exercise during the 10-day long SERT summer school which ended June 13. It is the one time of year that all members of the three SERT elements from Fairbanks, the Mat-Su Valley and the Kenai Peninsula get together to train as a cohesive unit. Besides field exercises, SERT training involves class room time for chemical-munitions and time at the shooting range running courses, responding to decision targets and working on tactical marksmanship.

Above: SERT members, Troopers Joshua Rallo and Lucas Altepeter, discuss the exercise. Part way through the day, Rallo was given a note from proctors telling him that he had just suffered a bee sting and was having an allergic reaction with his airway constricting. His commrades had to carry him out to medics without giving away their position.

Below: Bad guy, Trooper Altepeter, is taken into custody after firing simunition rounds at SERT members. SERT returned fire and was able to get some information out of Trooper Altepeter before he "died". During training missions, troopers utilize non-lethal rounds which makes training as close to real life as possible. While simunition rounds are not lethal, they can cause a bit of pain, sometimes leaving a welt on the person who was shot.