

PLAYING IT OUT TO THE VERY LAST DETAIL/

McAllister Fire Station

In Memory of
Fire Chief Robert A. McAllister
Senior Master Sergeant (Retired)
Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi
One of the Air Force's Most Decorated Firefighters

COLUMBUS AFB COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Columbus Air Force Base (AFB), located north of Columbus, Mississippi—two hours west of Birmingham, Alabama, is one of three pilot training schools for the U.S. Air Force. Columbus AFB recently conducted a real-live enactment of an active shooter exercise that included their new VESTA® call handling system. The exercise was all-inclusive to bring in every detail and aspect of emergency response, beginning with the shooter and first response, then bringing in the coroner, and finally subsequent criminal investigation.

The drill included 9-1-1 calls made to the Columbus AFB VESTA® call handling solution so that the system and its functions were fully utilized and tested. "We conduct quarterly real-live enactment exercises," says Linc Weinrich, the Assistant Chief of Fire Prevention for the base's Fire and Emergency Services. "The real-world enactment ensures we have our act together and are ready should an actual event occur."

For the recent exercise, one dispatcher was on duty. There was an active shooter in a wing of the headquarters building. Immediately, 9-1-1 calls came in and the simulation began. Security forces were dispatched to mitigate the shooter. Once the shooter was mitigated, medical personnel were brought in to treat the injured.

A second shooter then tried to hijack an aircraft and even more 9-1-1 calls came in. At that point, security were sent to the aircraft to talk the shooter out of the airplane while other security forces were in the same room with the 9-1-1 dispatcher monitoring medical needs of personnel in the aircraft hangar with the shooter. As a secondary sweep, Fire and EMS were called in to triage the patients and get them to medical facilities.

And the enactment didn't stop there. "A large incident doesn't cease when the shooter is removed," said Weinrich. "We bring in the coroner to remove the bodies. The FBI and OSI (Air Force Of-

fice of Special Investigations) come in to investigate the crime scene. The Chaplin is brought in to counsel families who have lost loved ones in the incident. People experience trauma, so we bring in the team for traumatic response." This is where all the training comes together and why it is necessary to play it out to the very last detail," added Weinrich.

As for the VESTA system, all calls were answered; no calls were lost. "The system performed unlike any I have worked with," said Weinrich. "Everything is available at your fingertips. Everything is recorded, date and time stamped and the ANI/ALI (Automatic Number Identification/Automatic Location Identification) is imbedded into the recording. We used the instant recall recording for the Emergency Operations Center so they had the exact transcript of what happened so there is no third-party information or miscommunication."

Weinrich also stated that one of the critical components in an investigation for an incident like the one enacted is to have the original ANI/ALI to turn over for criminal prosecution. "That information is captured in the VESTA system and easily retrieved," said Weinrich.

From a system administration perspective, Weinrich said having a user interface that is easily customized to accommodate the dispatcher's needs gives an additional level of flexibility. "If we have to make changes, I can do it myself," said Weinrich. "With certain elements, I can even do it live while we are still taking calls."

Originally assigned to Columbus AFB in 1996 while on active duty, Mr. Weinrich returned as a Staff Sergeant after serving in Korea and retired from active duty in 2003 when he moved to Civil Service. All in all, Weinrich sees the VESTA system as a true command and control solution. Thank you to everyone at Columbus AFB for ensuring we are connected when it matters most.