

## ***Jefferson Davis Parish, Louisiana, Sheriff's Office***

### ***General Officer Safety Submission, 2018***

The Jefferson Davis Parish Sheriff's Office is a parish/county law enforcement agency consisting of 81 full-time deputies, including patrol, detectives, communications, corrections, administration, tax and civil divisions, serving more than 31,400 citizens over 650 square miles of predominately rural, agricultural communities.

Sheriff Ivy Woods has dedicated himself to make sure he is doing everything possible for the safety and wellness of every member of this department and to ensure that each member goes home safely after each and every shift.

Every deputy assigned to patrol is issued soft, ballistic rifle-resistant body armor and are required, by policy, to wear it at all times while on duty. Every deputy is also provided with tourniquet kits and have been trained to use them. Deputies are issued a Glock, Model 22, 40 caliber handguns with tactical light and are also required to carry a department issued Taser and OC spray while on duty and have been trained to use them. Deputies are also required to wear body cameras while on duty. While on patrol, deputies also have with them ballistic helmets and face shields.

All patrol vehicles are equipped with 12 gauge shotguns, 5.56mm patrol rifles, basic first aid kits and NARCAN. Every patrol vehicle is also equipped with an in-car camera and a global positioning system which allows us to track their position should they need immediate assistance. Each patrol vehicle also has high-visibility reflective vests and deputies are required to wear them on sustained activity while outside of their patrol car.

Supervisor and assistant supervisor vehicles are additionally equipped with OC clear out canisters and gas masks for OC deployment, providing access to two of each per shift. Our agency also provides breaching tools such as prybars, sledge hammers and rams, as well as OC clear out canisters and flashbangs for secondary entry teams.

Funding to purchase equipment is provided for by a combination of grants and out of pocket departmental budgeting, which is supported by the parish tax base. Body armor, helmets and face shields were purchased in 2018 with the help of a grant. As a smaller agency, Sheriff Woods encourages regular and frequent networking, allowing us to save funds by borrowing and lending equipment and providing regular training sessions between various local agencies. Most of our training is provided for in-house, as our instructor regularly maintains up to date training to provide for our department, as well as other local agencies.

To further ensure officer safety, the department encourages all members of the agency, regardless of job or position requirements, to regularly participate in a variety of ongoing training exercises, practice and qualifications. This state training requirements dictate mandatory annual firearms and defensive tactics and police baton qualifications for patrol deputies. Sheriff Woods has taken this a step further to ensure that our department exceeds the state standards by allowing deputies and every member of every rank and division of the department, from line staff to command staff, including administration, to be allowed to participate in as much additional training, practice or range time available at any time during the year upon request of the department member and at the department's expense.

Active shooter incidents such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, in which 26 people were killed; the Inland Regional Center mass shooting in San Bernardino in 2015 that killed 14 and the

Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016 in which 49 people were killed, increased departmental awareness that no community, regardless of size, is immune to these types of incidents, as they could happen anywhere, at any time. As a strong tourism designation, located directly between New Orleans and Houston, TX, with immediate access to the I-10 corridor, we also recognized this increased the number of people attracted to the area. Sheriff Woods decided it was not only time to train our personnel, should such an event occur in our small community, but also to give deputies the best equipment available to ensure their safety.

Last fall, we held our first active shooter training exercise at the local high school for members of our agency, along with members of the city police department. We also invited members of the media to document the exercise. Photos and a descriptive article informing the public of the exercise and its purpose were printed in the local newspaper. The exercise was well-received, and the overall agency and community responded favorably to the project. Sheriff Woods recognized the importance of ongoing training, and felt it was beneficial to continue that training again this year, but on a grander scale.

We held a follow up exercise this past November at the local elementary school, and in addition to the city police department, we also invited first responder rescue teams from two local fire departments to also participate. As our agencies would naturally combine resources during an emergency of this nature and magnitude, we felt that conducting the tactical training exercise together in preparation for such an event was vital for the safety of our deputies, other first responders and the community.

Approximately two weeks before the exercise, we released a notification to the local newspaper announcing the exercise to the public. The editor of the paper also shared updates on the newspaper Facebook page, and we also posted the notification on our agency Facebook page. The response from the community was again highly positive. Although our area has never been faced with such a catastrophe, the community expressed appreciation that we were responding to the possibility of a threat in such a strong, proactive way.

The purpose of the exercise was to train our deputies, as well as members of accompanying agencies of varying experience levels, to work together during a critical emergency involving an active shooter. The exercise provided them with skills designed to save as many lives as possible, while providing maximum protection for law enforcement and first responders. In addition to patrol deputies and officers, other members of other department's divisions also participated, providing them with a broader understanding of a situation of this magnitude by giving them support roles in order to be a more versatile and valuable team asset in the event of a crisis.

Our departmental patrol commander has been, and regularly maintains his current certification as an Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Team (ALERRT) instructor since 2011, and based the training exercise on these tactics. The exercise began with a classroom session regarding the historical basis for first responder training specific to hostage/barricaded suspect and active shooter situations. This was followed by a series of practical drills designed to familiarized participants with a variety of basic necessary skills and potential encounters during an active shooter situation. The tactical portion featured an active shooter simulation in an undisclosed location of the school, with details unknown to participants.

A dispatch station was set up in another area on campus to simulate an incoming call involving a reported active shooter. Although all local agencies operate on their own independent channel, our department has access to several available frequencies. During a training activity such as this one, all participating members switch to the same internal channel. The simmunitions firearms and ammunition

and protective gear used during the exercise were provided by the city police department, on loan. Armed with this equipment, contact teams consisting of two to five members entered the live action zone.

Role players from the city fire and police departments played the parts of shooter, hostage/accomplice and victims. While following the sound of a pre-recorded track simulating a shooting situation, deputies traveled along the school corridor, past moulage stations depicting bleeding "victims," towards the threat. Teams ran through a variety of different scenarios, including hostage negotiations. When encountering the live action zone, participants faced a volatile shooter with a hostage/accomplice, exchanged gunfire and encountered simulation IEDs. Once the threat was neutralized, teams then returned to retrieve victims while providing firearm cover to first responders.

With each different scenario, participants recognized and discussed different challenges, weaknesses and issues they faced during the exercise. When running through for the next variation, they were able to correct those issues.

Like the first year, the exercise was overall widely well-received by all participants. It provided knowledge and practical experience for every deputy and officer, regardless of age, rank or years of experience, with a new confidence in themselves, and the tactics they learned and practiced to meet the threat to the best of his or her abilities in the event such an incident should arise. Those who had participated the previous year were able to share their knowledge and better guide and prepare others who were participating for the first time.

Some unique aspects of this training exercise included multi-agency participation, moulage stations, active shooter retaliation and ambush scenarios. Although most participants had previous training or experience working as a moving team, clearing a facility or simulated shooting, very few of them had ever experienced those combined elements in this type of exercise with members of other local agencies. By using various situational elements like placing "bleeding" victims (moulage stations) along the search, deputies and officers were able to experience the visual impact of seeing real people in distressed situations, while continuing towards the threat during a tense, uncertain and rapidly evolving event. Upon contact with the shooter, participants then faced different situations involving gunfire exchanges, a false hostage situation, negotiating with the shooter and the unexpected introduction of IEDs. Through every scenario, participants had to differentiate either to shoot or don't shoot.

We also had members of our department follow, or run ahead of, every team, taking photos and videos of the exercise. The purpose was to allow our instructor to later review the documented footage for further training purposes. By being able to review footage or look through still shot photos, he is able to closely identify individual or team mistakes and successes.

Because we are a small community, adequate manpower for a situation of this magnitude could prove to be a challenge for one agency alone. Working in unison with members of other agencies our deputies weren't closely familiar with was also challenging. By learning to work together, as well as providing training for first responders of different experience levels and members from other divisions, we were able to better pool our resources and create a stronger defense and protection team. By learning how to modify tactics for members of varying experiences to communicate clearly and work as a single unit, deputies can provide greater protection to team mates and victims.

None of the law enforcement participants had previously practiced exercises or drills involving "dead and/or bleeding" victims or aided first responders into a facility to rescue victims while a potential active shooter threat was still in the building. Participants said the introduction of the moulage element to this

year's exercise was a disturbing, but highly beneficial, addition. Although their brains told them there wouldn't obviously be shot and bleeding victims in a training scenario, their eyes shocked them into a reality they weren't expecting.

The introduction of IEDs, as well as how to respond when encountering one, was also a new experience for most of our participating deputies and officers. Our instructor taught practical methods to provide better self-protection from the potential impact of an IED blast.

Many participants were unprepared for the fast-pace of the exercise and felt overloaded trying to process all surrounding visual and audio information, while simultaneously dealing with threats. We learned that this caused some teams to slow down and a direct communication breakdown. Groups began separating as more experienced people sped up and less experienced, or slower members fell behind, causing failure to function as unit.

The goal for the project was not only to practice the tactical aspects of the exercise, but to also understand the importance of clear communication among entry teams. Deputies learned that if communication between team members is lost, especially in this type of exercise, areas lose coverage, team members are left behind and the whole entry breaks down. Deputies learned that strong communication equals greater officer safety.

The primary success of the program was providing deputies with the exposure to a fast-paced, multi-tasked emergency. It gave them a new-found confidence and a better idea of what to expect in the event of a real-life situation. Deputies learned that in a real-life incident, reactions are unpredictable. Some members might freeze up and become a liability, forcing the team to leave them behind, while others might pursue too aggressively into the situation without waiting for teammates. By repeatedly sending them through varying exercises, deputies learned how to work as a team, no matter who the members are. During this exercise, deputies also recognized their weaknesses and learned how to correct and overcome them.

At each debriefing following the training exercise, participating deputies and officers stated they now felt better prepared, trained and more confident to be successful, not only in active shooter incidents, but in other priority calls as well.

It should also be noted that the time dedicated during the exercise did go towards POST certification requirements for annual training hours, and participants received a certificate of completion.

The program, by design, was created to be performed by an agency of any size and experience level. It introduces basic concepts used by actual SWAT teams, such as communication, team movements, areas of coverage and threat eliminations and uses specialized equipment. It can be customized to be very simplistic or complex as required or needed, based on the size of the agency or experience level of team members.