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ADVANCED LAW ENFORCEMENT RAPID RESPONSE TRAINING

The ammunition pellets, made from colored soap balls, are hard and, when launched from a gun, produce a stinging sensation similar to fingers flicking the skin.

This is how Officer Sue Taylor of the Texas State University Police Department remembers portions of the simulation she participated in.

These simulations were conducted in the on-campus Hines Academic Center during a two-day basic active shooter response course sponsored by the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center at Texas State University (ALERRT).

A police issued bullet proof vest, belt and a (dismantled) gun in its holster: that's what Taylor and other ALERRT program participants wore throughout the simulations to create a more realistic feel.

Taylor said she participated in the various 20-minute scenarios that played out in Hines, sometimes as an officer, other times acting as a wounded victim, hostage, civilian – even a suspect.

Throughout the multiple active shooter simulations, there could be numerous hostages in a room. The shooter could be posing as a civilian, or they could seemingly appear out of nowhere.

The scenarios and techniques used during the training range in number and severity - law enforcement never knows what they're going to get into, Taylor said.

"You gotta handle the situation," she said. "... They make it as realistic as possible."

To make the simulations even more realistic, colored soap is used. Taylor said she and the other participants had to clean up the colored soap mess they had made in Hines after the training.

Clad in uniform, earpiece and all, Texas State UPD Officer Christopher Wooten completed two of ALERRT's active shooter trainings in April on the program's property near the San Marcos-based Gary Job Corps.

This ever changing, high-tech facility provided opportunities for Wooten and close to 40 others from around the country to learn how to mentally and physically prepare for active shooter situations in both a classroom and real world settings.

"(T)here's a technical way to how you do it, but they show you how to do it," Wooten said.

At any given time, the rooms in ALERRT's specially-designed simulation building can change, much like the actions of an active shooter.

Areas of the building can even prevent bullets from piercing through.

"We are probably among the best customers of McCoy Building Supply because we teach them how to break windows," says Diana Hendricks, ALERRT's communication director.

Taylor said the training builds on what law enforcement officers already know.

And what these officers have learned since ALERRT's founding in 2002 was that although this kind of training was reserved for SWAT, those members aren't always the first people on the scene.

There aren't many signs alerting the public to the program's multi-million dollar training facility. ALERRT's office off Wonder World stays hidden as well.

A small stuffed bear in a police uniform greets office visitors from inside a Texas State mug on a desk, symbolizing the program's partnership between the university, San Marcos Police Department and the Hays County Sheriff's Office.

ALERRT was established to address the need for active shooter response training for first responders, says Hendricks.

Hendricks says coordinated efforts began in 1966 with the clock tower shootings on the University of Texas at Austin grounds. Two Austin Police Department officers, Houston McCoy and Ramiro Martinez, climbed to the top of the tower to stop the shooter.

At the time, the City of Austin, like many other U.S. cities, didn't have a specialized unit to deploy in response to active shooters. The weapons APD officers had been issued were ineffective against a sniper, and so was the sparse technology used.

Following the shootings, some law enforcement agencies from around the nation agreed there was a need for special teams and tactics to prevent and confront active shooters. The shootings spurred some U.S. police departments to form SWAT teams or similar groups.

Flash forward to 1999. Two high school students murdered 12 of their fellow students and one teacher and injured numerous others at Columbine High School.

A week after the Columbine shootings, Hendricks says a boy took a gun to school in Wimberley.

Hendricks says ALERRT helps law enforcement learn from history and not to second guess.

"Our dream was we were gonna give this training to people who didn't have full-time SWAT teams and couldn't otherwise afford good training..." she says.

ALERRT has used more than \$30 million of state and federal funds to train about 50,000 officers to date at no cost to participants, and its curriculum has grown from a basic shooter response course to include seven courses.

Last year ALERRT partnered with the FBI, and the White House named its response to active shooters program the FBI's national standard. Cities like New York, Houston, and San Antonio, among others, have also made this program their standard.

The two-story simulation house, which sits on ALERRT's 96 acres of land donated by the U.S. Department of Labor, is expected to see 30,000 officers in fiscal year 2015, Hendricks says.

"(W)e're really lucky, because really at the end of the day, we know we've done something that made a difference in someone's life," she says.

"We are probably among the best customers of McCoy Building Supply because we break windows."

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