After Action Review of EOC Practicum

## Description

 On April 9, 2009 I was given the opportunity to observe the Gregg County Emergency Operations Center in Longview, Texas, during one of its operational drills. The following description of events unfolding outline the operations of this training drill and were not a real threat to the citizens of Gregg County or Longview, Texas.

The day’s operations began as 0900 with the county’s new Code Red System alerting essential personnel of an incident. The day’s scenario centered around an eco-terrorist attack affecting one of the city’s water treatment facilities, hostages were taken and police were called to respond and immediately setup a local incident command. Calls went out for a SWAT response.

At 0906, a large explosion was reported of an unknown substance. It was later confirmed by a response unit to be 1500 gallons of anhydrous ammonia, GIS was used to determine the affected areas and actions were taken to shut down Interstate 20 along the southern end of the affected area. A simulated traffic reroute was performed by ground units.

Negotiations continued with the terrorists who later read a manifesto to officials stating their demands along with a million dollar ransom. As directed, law enforcement withdrew their highly visible presence and setup a unified command at a location close to the event, but outside of any threat. As per the terrorist demands, the finance section chief set into motion a plan to secure funds for a ransom from a local bank.

At 1100 a truck was located by Sabine River authorities with a hose in the water upstream from the water treatment facility. It was unclear of any further details so a Sheriff’s office deputy was dispatched to assess the situation. Due to possible contamination and reports of foul odors in the water, the water supply for the south half of the city was cut off. The use of PODs for water were considered and given a timetable. The deputy reported his finding of the truck to his superiors, which warranted a call to the Barksdale AFB bomb squad from Shreveport, Louisiana.

At 1230, food was delivered to the terrorists in exchange for a few hostages. The SWAT team utilized an armored vehicle to safely deliver the goods within the water treatment compound. The responding UXO team from Barksdale secured the tanker truck found on the river and verified the vessel was empty. The incident command for the river called on a response unit to assist in testing the water for further contamination.

At 200, the SWAT teams observing the water treatment facility deemed it necessary to enter the facility and neutralize any further threats. Entry was made by 2 squads, freeing the remaining hostages and apprehending 2 terrorists.

At 215, water testing confirmed the tanker truck had not contaminated the city’s water supply and the terrorists’ threats on further polluting the water supply system were neutralized. The Public Information Officer alerted the media to spread the word to area citizens that the water system was safe and to let their water run for a fixed period of time before drinking. Due to the timely response of the agencies involved, it was decided that PODs were not needed for this event.

## Reflection

 After seeing first-hand the methods described throughout my MEMS coursework and seeing the ICS put to use I have gained a better understanding of the efficiency of such a system. I can now better conceptualize the roles and duties of each position within an EOC as well as realize how smooth such a problematic situation can go once all of the key players are onboard with such a response framework.

 Reading and reviewing concepts and ideas can only take you so far. When I began to see real people doing real jobs in a clearly defined manner that was in agreement with all that I just learned, the “light bulb” really did turn on. Having never served or visited a live, working EOC, it could be daunting to the uninitiated, but somehow I felt right at home with the understanding and concepts taught through my MEMS curriculum. I knew exactly all the roles that were present and understood the duties involved with each section.

 I feel that having had the MEMS training I have a better idea of how decisions are made and plans organized and executed. If ever faced with a situation where I must act as an Incident Commander, I know full well how to utilize the ICS to maintain control and organization through a trying event. The ideas and concepts gleaned from the Basic MEMS qualification may seem foreign at first, but they make perfect sense once a MEMS student has seen them applied in the “grand picture”. I believe my studies through the MEMS course has made me better equipped to face challenging situations and prepared me to perform more efficiently in an emergency response environment.