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Cop for a Day: AFTAC Airmen learn role of base Security Forces

By Susan A. Romano, AFTAC Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Members of the Air Force Technical Applications Center here spent a day with Airmen of the 45th Security Forces Squadron to learn more about the law enforcement officers who patrol and protect the installation and its most critical resource: the people.



Eighteen military and civilian personnel of AFTAC's 21st Surveillance Squadron teamed up with cops July 30 to get an up-close-and-personal look into how base law enforcement trains in shoot/no-shoot scenarios and to experience what it feels like to be stunned by a Taser.

Staff Sgt. Adam Edwards, non-commissioned officer-in-charge of deployed analysis system (DAS) logistics, suggested to his squadron commander that pairing up with the 45th SFS would be a great way to spend their Comprehensive Airman Fitness Day. His commander concurred, and

Edwards coordinated the visit with the unit scheduler at the 45th SFS.

Once the coordination efforts were complete, the team of AFTAC scientists, engineers, technicians and analysts made the trip to the base defense operations center where they were met by Tech. Sgt. Thomas Angelini, noncommissioned officer in charge of training, and Senior Airman Steven Morales, unit schedule and training specialist. The group was led into a large room that houses the SFS' VirTra System, a state-of-the-art training simulator security forces experts use to train for the most difficult real-world situations.

"VirTra is a 300-degree wrap-around simulator that's configured to employ an M4 (rifle) and an M9 (handgun) with realistic visual scenarios to give our guys an understanding of what it looks like downrange under extremely stressful situations," said Angelini. "We've been using the system for about two years now, and it's been extremely beneficial. We're able to train using dozens of scenarios, like an active shooter, a suicidal ideation, use of force, or even urban combat conditions. It's an incredibly realistic system."

Each member of the 21st had a chance to get a feel of what the VirTra training platform had to offer using either type of weapon available.

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“It was very realistic training,” said Tech. Sgt. Scott Buske, 21st SURS spectral analysis section chief. “We go through active shooter exercises and they’re helpful and all, but being able to use simulation equipment like this really brings it to a totally different level. I definitely walked away with a lot of respect for the guys who face these threats in real life. Big thanks to the 45th for giving us the chance to experience it.”

After the virtual firing range action was complete, the Airmen were introduced to James “Chewy” Chenoweth, a security forces trainer and retired Air Force senior noncommissioned officer.

Chewy demonstrated techniques used when employing a Conducted Electrical Weapon, more commonly known as a Taser. The gun uses compressed gas to fire two small darts that are attached to copper wires. When the darts pierce the skin, an electric current flows through the body, immediately subduing the suspect.



He explained why law enforcement agencies use stun gun technology as a tool in their arsenal.

“Generally speaking, it’s a safe and effective means to controlling a subject without having to resort to deadly force,” said Chewy. “It delivers a high voltage, low amperage jolt to the human body that temporarily causes the suspect to lose voluntary muscle control. More often than not, the ‘damage’ a recipient experiences is during the fall when the Taser makes contact, not from the voltage itself.”

Since injury from falling is a factor, the Security Forces Squadron requires trainees to be in a prone position on floor mats with two spotters on each side of the recipient to ensure his or her safety.

Six brave AFTACers took on the challenge to allow themselves to receive up to 50,000 volts from Chewy’s Taser.

“As soon as I heard the buzzing sound, I felt my body seize up and stiffen like a plank,” said Senior Airman Nam Tran, a DAS operations technician. “I didn’t black out or anything – I was completely aware of what was going on around me – but I couldn’t move a muscle. What felt like several minutes was only a few seconds. It was rough!”

Edwards was pleased with the outcome of his squadron’s CAF Day, and walked away with an even greater appreciation of the work Patrick AFB’s law enforcement sentinels perform every day.

“This was extremely beneficial for all of us,” said Edwards. “I walked away with a lot of admiration and respect for the cops who are on guard 24/7 to keep us safe, and a much greater understanding of the role they play as defenders of the base and its people. I hope we can reciprocate by having them come over to our building to learn more about how we monitor nuclear treaties around the world.”

Lt. Col. Matt Morello, commander of the 21st SURS praised his Airmen for putting teamwork at the forefront of his squadron’s CAF Day efforts.

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“This was a very effective way for us to build our internal team as well as build a partnership with our Security Forces counterparts here at Patrick,” said Morello. “The level of courage and professionalism required of the SFS Airmen is difficult to grasp. Running through the simulator gave us a glimpse into what is required of them daily.”

Angelini added, “I’m really proud of the men and women of the 45th Security Forces Squadron, and it was a pleasure to have AFTAC Airmen come over to learn more about what we do. It’s a job that has hours of boredom with moments of terror, so it’s critical for us to make sure we’re trained for those moments. It’s great to be able to illustrate that to our fellow Team Patrick-Cape members.”