Aircraft mishap drill commences Citadel Shield-Solid Curtain exercise

Underway through Feb. 15

By Donna Cipolloni
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An aircraft mishap marked the first simulated drill to take place during Citadel Shield-Solid Curtain (CSSC), the Navy’s annual two-week anti-terrorism/force protection exercise designed to test the training and readiness of NAS Patuxent River security services and first responders.

One word, repeated three times – exercise, exercise, exercise – preceded reports of a helicopter crash at Alpha Taxiway West. Personnel in the affected area were instructed via the AtHoc emergency notification system to simulate Shelter-in-Place, which describes a safe area inside a building during an event and is the preferred action to take to avoid casualties and fatalities. Other personnel not directly involved in the exercise were advised to continue normal operations and asked to avoid the exercise area while commuting.

The scenario, which occurred on day one of Citadel Shield – that portion of CSSC focusing on installation-level training and taking place entirely within Pax River’s gates – involved fire in a downed helicopter, a leaking fuel hazard, and six crew members onboard with casualties.

Using the Mobile Aircraft Firefighting Training Device in place of the helicopter, fire and emergency services, hazmat unit, and medical corpsmen from Naval Health Clinic Patuxent River responded to the call and performed their required duties under the watchful eye of observers making notes on clipboards.

Three other drills are expected to be run in the first week and some of the scenarios may lead to gate delays or closures, barriers being set up, temporary changes in traffic or parking patterns and an increase in force protection conditions.

To be prepared in advance, personnel should be enrolled in AtHoc to receive any emergency notifications. Information will also be posted by the NAS public affairs officer on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NASPaxRiver; or on Twitter @NASPaxRiverP AO.

Mutual aid agreement beneficial to Pax, county firefighters

By Donna Cipolloni
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The mutual aid agreement between the fire departments of NAS Patuxent River and St. Mary’s County was on full display recently as engines went from one incident to another, first off base and then within the installation’s fence line.

Mutual aid is defined as an agreement among emergency responders to lend assistance across jurisdictional boundaries when needed, with the primary objective being to facilitate rapid, short-term mobilization of personnel, equipment and supplies.

“We’re a regional fire department,” said Pax River’s District Fire Chief John Lyon. “Here at Pax, we’re one battalion within the [Naval District Washington] region. If you take all of the jurisdiction boundaries we cross, I think we have something like 17 written mutual aid agreements regionally.”

In the early morning of Jan. 25, Pax firefighters – trained in chemical, biological and radiological response — assisted in the community with a hazardous materials mutual aid call for an overturned leaking tanker truck.

“With everything that goes on here on base, we have a hazmat mission,” Lyon said. “And we provided that assistance in the community in conjunction with their hazmat unit.”

On their way back to Pax from that incident, the firefighters responded to a call about an electrical odor in one of the barracks on base but when their first apparatus arrived, they discovered it was a working fire, not just an odor. Command then requested mutual aid units from St. Mary’s County to assist.

Through the efforts of all emergency responders involved, the fire was quickly extinguished with minimal damage to the barracks room.

“Every time there’s smoke or fire, you get three of four engines which carry all the hoses and water, then you’ll get two or three ladder trucks, then the rescue squad,” Lyon explained. “One crew will do fire attack, one search, one will take the line above the fire, another would throw ladders, and another would serve as the [rapid intervention company] in the event anyone gets in trouble.”

Just with those five things, that’s multiple different companies all doing their job at the same time,” Lyon added. “It’s literally a collective group that’s helping each other.”

On scene, confusion and chaos is avoided by each responding engine knowing their pre-determined assignment ahead of time.

“Let’s say it’s a house fire,” Lyon noted. “If you’re the closest engine, you know what you need to do; second closest engine knows what they need to do, etc. It’s all spelled out as part of the mutual aid. Wherever you fall within the assignment, you know what you’re expected to do.”

While each battalion has general firefighting equipment, there may also be additional specialized equipment, like the resources related to Pax River’s confined space/technical rescue mission.

“Confined space may be someone working down inside a narrow manhole electrical vault, where we’d have to go below grade,” Lyon added. “We also have a collapsed trench/technical rescue trailer. We have contractors working in trenches here and if something happens, we’re the ones who go shore up the trenches and have to dig them out.”

Though there had always been a standard of mutual assistance between fire and police departments around the country, the push for more formal written mutual aid agreements came with Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 8, issued by President George W. Bush on Dec. 17, 2003 – two years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks – to establish actions to strengthen the preparedness capabilities of federal, state and local entities.

See more CSSC exercise photos on pages 6 and 7