



A Coming of Age: The CERFP Sharpens Its Capabilities

By Major Michael A. Ladd

Like their chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives (CBRNE) enhanced response force package (CERFP) brothers and sisters nationwide, the Florida CERFP has enjoyed a bit of a “coming of age” in recent weeks. Not only did the Florida CERFP pass its external evaluation (EXEVAL) by the congressionally mandated March 2009 deadline; but as part of the CBRNE consequence management response force (CCMRF) mission, it also conducted awareness level training for the 3d Infantry Division “Raider” Brigade and then hosted a grassroots joint, collective, interagency training event called “Operation Integration” at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center (CBJTC), Starke, Florida. This would be considered a busy month for just about any unit—let alone a unit that is barely two years old and largely comprised of traditional National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

The Florida CERFP EXEVAL was conducted by a joint evaluation team formed from the Joint Interagency Training and Education Center and the U.S. Army North. The evaluation team replicated an incident command structure, resourcing various observers and trainers that proved vital during the capstone evaluation event, but even more importantly during the days of training and instruction leading up to the event. The evaluation was resourced by training consultants who assisted in the construction of training locations and the tactical mission of the

search and extraction team. Role players and a very experienced team of contractors were used to transform the CBJTC state-of-the-art “collapsed building simulation range” into an incredibly realistic disaster area representing “Anytown, USA.” The level of realism and doctrinal accuracy allowed Florida CERFP team members to become immersed in the scenario and helped them to pass the EXEVAL, receiving special recognition for their command and control, search and technical extraction, and medical capabilities. The momentum that the Florida CERFP garnered from validating its capability to save lives through a national-level evaluation paid nearly immediate dividends when working with the Raider Brigade during the CCMRF emergency deployment readiness exercise.

The Florida CERFP had another opportunity to expand its sphere of training partners by taking advantage of recent CCMRF exercises at CBJTC. As part of the CCMRF, the Raider Brigade was looking for some technical extraction training that could potentially take place during a defense support to civilian authorities mission; and the Florida CERFP (again supported by training consultants) conducted round-robin training that introduced the Raiders to some of the basic skills used by the Florida CERFP during a technical extraction event. The Raiders received valuable awareness level training that included high-angle extraction, jack hammering, cribbing

and shoring, and lifting and hauling operations. In addition to the technical extraction introduction, the Florida CERFP and training consultants provided the Raider Brigade with a hasty obstacle lane consisting of obstacles constructed of precast concrete, timber, and wire barrier material that helped test the Raiders' route-clearing methods.

But Florida does not have the corner on the CERFP preparedness market; rather, Florida is a proud member of a community that believes in a capability that is constantly being strengthened by proactive, aggressive Guardsmen finding the best way to complete the mission. Sixteen of the seventeen CERFPs nationwide have conducted EXEVALs and are certified by their state adjutants general as fully capable of providing search and technical extraction, mass decontamination, and medical triage operations to save lives. CERFPs from Colorado, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Georgia supported the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. Illinois and Georgia CERFPs have established very mature partnerships with foreign countries, and they continue to produce best practices, tactics, techniques, and procedures from an even broader, international source. Emergency managers and event planners are increasingly realizing the benefit of a modular, joint task force (JTF) that is trained to the operations level, equipped to Level C protective posture, and capable of saving lives following a CBRNE event or structural collapse. Although the two-year life span of the CERFP is short and the use of the CERFP capability in international, national, regional, and state events has been relatively recent, the readiness and vetting of first responders and follow-on federal forces continue to grow.

To complement these employment efforts, specialized CERFP equipment (including technical extraction kits, decontamination trailers and tents, communications equipment, and transportation assets) has been fielded to the states and is being leveraged by CERFP commanders to prepare their units for contingencies. The CERFP, a joint Army and Air National Guard capability, continues to hone skill sets and identify best techniques across "big three" (search and extraction, mass decontamination, and medical triage) missions. The task of developing tactics, techniques, and procedures has increasingly been accomplished at the tactical level while working side by side with some of the best in the business during national- and local-level exercises. Operation Integration was an example of such an exercise.

Operation Integration was a grassroots exercise created by planners from Georgia JTF 781 (CBRNE), the Florida CERFP, Indiana Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Task Force (TF) 1, and the Marine Corps' elite Chemical Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF). Exercising units included the CBIRF, a contingent from Indiana FEMA TF 1, and Georgia JTF 781, with the Florida CERFP acting as the exercise administration and backside support. The operation was aimed at the identification of capability gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for integration. Facilitated by the Florida CERFP, Joint Interagency Training and Education Center,



CERFP participants performing medical triage

and training consultants at CBJTC, the exercise was a highly effective, relatively low-budget opportunity to truly integrate complementing capabilities from the National Guard, FEMA, and federal forces. The exercise was made possible by funding from the National Guard Bureau, U.S. Northern Command, and CBIRF.

Set against a mature incident scenario, participating units had opportunities to observe and then integrate with on-site response units working for an incident commander—especially if functionally aligned (medical, urban search and rescue). During Operation Integration, Indiana FEMA TF 1 augmented JTF 781 search and extraction efforts; the Marine CBIRF augmented JTF 781 decontamination efforts; Indiana TF 1, CBIRF, and JTF 781 conducted concurrent technical extraction missions; and units routinely coordinated "across the aisle" for hand offs of operational objectives and capabilities that would best fit a given problem. Operation Integration was a unique opportunity for CBRNE response forces to truly understand where they fit into a response and, more directly, where their capabilities differed from those of other CBRNE and urban search-and-rescue agencies.

The Florida CERFP and the CERFP community as a whole, along with their newly established training partners, look forward to expanding this very critical capability. Following the EXEVAL, the opportunity to work with CCMRF and the integrated operations of FEMA, CBIRF, and JTF 781 as part of Operation Integration has underscored the importance of collective capabilities and the mantra of "One Team—One Fight." 🎯

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