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EOD School holds mass casualty drill

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Personnel assigned to the Naval School of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (NAVSCOLEOD) participated in a mass casualty drill, Nov. 28.

The exercise scenario tested emergency personnel's capabilities to quickly and safely respond to students and instructors who suffered burns, lacerations from fragments of ordnance, broken bones and missing limbs due to ordnance prematurely detonating during training.

"This exercise was our worst-case scenario in terms of casualties and response time," said Lt. Michael Stratton, officer in charge of the Medical Division at NAVSCOLEOD, who assisted in planning the drill. "Range 52 north is the most isolated range where instructors and students work, so we decided to combine casualties and the distance from the schoolhouse for this mass casualty drill."

Students at NAVSCOLEOD typically train for one day at Range 52 north using the knowledge they gain in the Demolition Division to detonate 1,000 pounds of ordnance in three different pits. Students saw firsthand how dangerous the job of an EOD Technician can be if something goes wrong, and how everyone works together to assist in an emergency.

"I expected to see only the medical people doing the heavy lifting," said Pvt. Alexander Kimbrell, an Army student, in reference to the injured being transported on litters by less-injured students and instructors. "But a lot of the non-commissioned officers in charge were doing the work beside us."

The training emphasized how cooperation and teamwork are essential in emergency situations, including working with local authorities to provide the quickest care to the wounded.

Lt. Randolph Prince, division officer in charge of the Demolition Division and on-scene commander, and Gunnery Sgt. Matthew Small, non-commissioned officer in charge of the division, were first to arrive on the scene. Once cleared, civilian emergency medical technicians working at NAVSCOLEOD began to assess and stabilize their injured patients.

"As with all training, you crawl, walk and then run," said Prince. "Since this was the first such drill conducted on our outer range and included events that would overwhelm our response system, there were definitely areas identified for improvement and we were therefore in our crawl stage. I look forward to exercising this event again to implement our lessons learned."

Members from the Eglin Air Force Base Fire Department were next to arrive at the scene. Following a description of the situation from Prince, the Eglin Fire Department assisted with the injured. The North Bay Fire Department arrived shortly thereafter, and everyone continued to work together to determine the best treatment for the patients and coordinate their transportation to local medical facilities.

"As with every large scale event, communication between responding entities is the largest challenge," added Prince. "Once the Fire Chief arrived on-scene and assumed on-scene command, he had certain expectations of what he needed to know and get briefed on. I quickly realized the

information I provided was interpreted differently and therefore delayed some important actions and decisions. I now have a better understanding of what is needed and will be able to provide arriving supporting agencies with the best information possible in the future.”

Catherine Stanley, the safety manager at NAVSCOLEOD knows that mass casualty drills are stressful for those involved, but the experience and knowledge gained from the event will be immeasurable if a real accident should occur.

“The EMT’s who work at NAVSCOLEOD responded exactly how I expected them to,” said Stanley. “All the emergency responders involved in this exercise worked together as one team. Overall this drill was a good experience for everyone involved and there were some valuable lessons learned.”

NAVSCOLEOD, located on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. provides high-risk, specialized, basic and advanced EOD training to more than 2,100 U.S. and partner nation military and selected U.S. government personnel each year.

For more information on the Naval School of Explosive Ordnance Disposal, visit the NAVSCOLEOD website:

<https://www.netc.navy.mil/centers/ceneoddive/eods/>.

To learn more about the Naval Education and Training Command, visit the NETC website: <https://www.netc.navy.mil>.

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Story by Ensign Elizabeth Allen, Center for Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Diving Public Affairs