OLETC Hosts Third Annual Mock Prison Riot

By Thomas Burgoyne

In Moundsville, W.V., a staged prison riot was held for the third straight year. Forty inmates riot in a chow hall. Twenty inmates riot in a maximum security cellblock killing a correctional officer. A prison nurse is taken hostage by a deranged inmate. Two inmates escape to a darkened basement. Twenty-four inmates harass correctional officers while in the prison yard. Several correctional officers and other prison personnel are killed or seriously injured. Other inmates are extracted from their cells after refusing to leave. Forensic teams investigate prison crime scenes including a bullet-riddled car used by escaping inmates in which an inmate was shot to death.

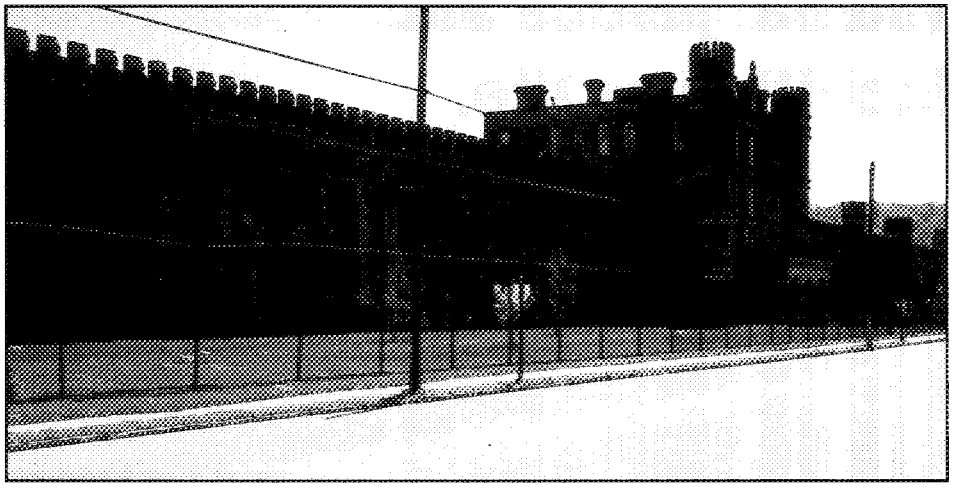
All photos courtesy of OLETC.

Participants of the mock riot learn to respond quickly and effectively without endangering the lives of staff or inmates.

This unique event was organized by the Office of Law Enforcement Technology Commercialization (OLETC), a special national program office established by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ); the West Virginia Division of Corrections; and the Moundsville Economic Development Council (MEDC).

NIJ's National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center's system and members of its national Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Advisory Council (LECTAC) provided organizational support. The primary objective was to showcase and demonstrate emerging correctional technologies, which allow correctional tactical teams and administrators to observe the use of these technologies to solve existing prison problems and to evaluate their use in simulated riot scenarios.

This year's mock riot attracted more than 1,100 participants, observers and technologists from 35 states, Washington, D.C. and six countries. More than 700 corrections officials attended and 125 correctional tactical team members actively participated. The three-day event included a full day dedicated to showcasing and demonstrating 54 technologies from around the world. One day included eight riot training scenarios and another included a corrections conference. The riot also included special telemedicine and interoperability technology demonstrations in which several emergency and medical units participated in caring for triaged inmates and correctional officers who were por-



The closed West Virginia State Penitentiary, site of the third annual mock prison riot, is being developed into a year-round training facility.

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trayed by 75 criminal justice students and visiting correctional officers.

Emerging Technologies

OLETC's role is locating, evaluating and facilitating the commercialization of emerging technologies. Based on the interaction that occurred and comments made by the project managers, several commercialization negotiations are in the works involving technologies that were exhibited. The goal is not only to introduce the technologies to the corrections community, but to get it to evaluate and use the technology in simulated corrections events by people who will eventually put them to use. Technology products ranged from see-through-wall technology to drug and explosive detection devices, from crowd control apparatuses to monitoring equipment.

Training

Corrections officials and technologists from all over the world, including Canada, England, Germany, Ireland, Israel and Columbia, South America, participated in the technology training scenarios. Other participants included tactical teams from the West Virginia Division of Corrections, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. A forensic team from West Virginia's Marshall University provided demonstrations of evidence collection and analysis assisted by the Utah State Crime Lab.

One of the scenarios in this year's riot was a food fight. Inmates standing in the cafeteria line became upset about the food that was being served. Before long, food was flying and hostages were taken. The inmates, for the time being, were in control. But following a negotiation session, officers eventually stormed the cafeteria and quickly controlled the situation. "This is as real as it gets," stated several state corrections officials.

Due to the event's increasing popularity among corrections officials, the retired prison is being developed into a year-round training facility. MEDC holds a 25-year lease on the facility and will coordinate this project with various other organizations. The new training center will be called the National Corrections and Law Enforcement Training and Technology Center.

"The annual mock riot is a big factor in the continued revitalization of this historical structure and the future economic growth of our community. This event has not only given us the dream of a year-round national training center, but has been instrumental in making it a reality," says Paul Kirby, commissioner for the West Virginia Division of Corrections. "The mock riot is proving to be the catalyst in the revitalization of this facility and providing an outstanding opportunity to train correctional and law enforcement officers and evaluate emerging technologies in a prison setting. The retired prison offers the potential to be a model for training and evaluating emerging technologies for all public safety officials."

"After this year's riot, several teams expressed an interest in using the facility for training. The fact that correctional organizations have committed to using the site to train reinforces the need and desire for similar exercises to take place on a year-round basis," says Rachel Miller, executive director of MEDC.

Kirby adds that the event "thrusts correctional officers into a situation they know is going to happen to them some day and they must be prepared to respond quickly and effectively without endangering the lives of inmates or corrections personnel."

OLETC has received very positive feedback on this year's event from correctional officers who represent both urban and rural areas. Some of these included the tactical team attendees from Boston and New York City and corrections personnel from Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles. Additional positive comments also came from Arizona, Minnesota and Vermont. According to Kirby, "Future mock riots, as well as the design and development of a year-round training and technology center at the Moundsville facility, will be driven by the corrections community."

Thomas Burgoyne is acting director of OLETC.

Scenarios such as this allow correctional and law enforcement officers to evaluate new technologies in a prison environment.

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