

SPOTC: Desert shoot-out at the security crossroads of the nation

BY JOHN THOMAS

THE ISOLATED RIDGES and canyons of the Manzano Mountains in New Mexico have long been home to bears, cougars, bighorn sheep, and coyotes. Security professionals from the Department of Energy complex and other agencies know the area as the site of a modern live-fire range (LFR) in Coyote Canyon, five miles from the main campus of the DOE's National Training Center (NTC), of which the range is an integral part.

Once a year, the peace of the 698-acre NTC facility in Coyote Canyon gives way to the combative din of an armed competition known as the Security Protection Officer Training Competition (SPOTC). As usual, the unpredictable weather of a New Mexico summer adds a mix of challenges—everything from arid, high-desert heat, wind, and dust to rain, hail, and snow, at an average elevation of 5400 feet.

SPOTC: The present

By 8 a.m. on June 1, 2008, the protective berms around the firing ranges and the surrounding hills and ridges already echoed with the sound of gunfire. The week's events would involve activities such as sprinting through obstacle courses weighted down with 40-lb yellow canisters marked with radioactive material symbols.

Twenty teams of elite security protection officers (see accompanying box) came to the LFR for the 36th SPOTC, which became an international event in 2001, when the U.K. Atomic Energy Authority team took part. In 2008, the competition expanded even further. Initiated by NTC Director Jeff Harrell, measures were taken to include more officers from more DOE sites. Although five-man DOE teams have always been encouraged to compete, in 2008, three-man teams were included in the handgun events, giving smaller DOE facilities that had not participated before a chance to enter these selected events.

"This expansion allowed individuals and members of three-man teams to interact with the wide range of protective forces who compete in SPOTC each year from across the DOE complex," Harrell said. "This not only reflects DOE diversity, but it also showcases the experience and training of pro force officers at all levels."

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An annual training competition helps security protection officers develop and test their marksmanship, decision making, physical conditioning, and tactical skills.

How it began

From the beginning, the NTC's training has kept pace with the changing world around it, adapting its curriculum to address world events, advances in technology, and the appearance of new threats around the globe.

In 1984, the DOE created the Central Training Academy (CTA) in Albuquerque, N.M., to train protective force personnel in the skills required to protect against terrorist threats directed at U.S. nuclear facilities. CTA training focused primarily on tactical



The Bruce Power Security Division Nuclear Response Team nears the simulated evacuation point with its "injured" officer. The team, from Canada, won first place for overall events in the non-DOE teams competition. (Photos: DOE)



Members of the Wackenhut Services Inc. (WSI) Oak Ridge team, second-place finishers in the Five-Man Overall Team event for DOE teams, sprint for the next station in the Super Team competition. The last team member is carrying a 40-lb simulated special nuclear material (SNM) canister.

The final standings for SPOTC 2008

Twenty teams participated in the 2008 edition of the Security Protection Officer Training Competition, held at the Department of Energy's National Training Center in New Mexico. The competition included events for DOE teams and non-DOE teams. Following are descriptions for each of the events:

Team Event 1 (rifle and handgun event): Teams negotiate a course of three shooting positions, donning gas masks before the final shoot. Throughout the event, team members must transfer a briefcase from one member to another, keeping the briefcase and its attached rope off the ground.

Team Event 2 (handgun-only event): Teams move through a metal culvert and negotiate three shooting positions as team members transfer a 180-lb dummy and backboard simulating an injured officer. Targets must be engaged in a specified color sequence.

Team Event 3 (combination rifle and handgun event): Teams first negotiate five shooting positions, then a fixed fighting position, to retrieve a simulated canister of special nuclear material (SNM).

Team Event 4 (combination rifle, handgun, and belt-fed machine gun event): After exiting a parked security vehicle, the team separates into two groups. One group moves to a fixed fighting position and, with handguns, engages targets downrange. The second group retrieves a simulated SNM canister and transfers it to a Humvee on an adjacent range, where the two groups join together. The team's designated M249 gunner assumes a position in the Humvee turret, loads the belt-fed machine gun, and engages targets downrange as remaining team members move to a fixed fighting position parallel to the vehicle. At the team leader's command, they load their rifles and engage a spinning target.

Super Team Event (rifle-only event): This event requires teams to do the following: Negotiate three shooting positions (one after donning gas masks), conduct a downed-officer rescue inside a metal culvert, open a locked gate with keys given to the team leader at the start of the event, retrieve a simulated SNM canister that the team must carry for the remainder of the course, and climb over a chain-link fence. After climbing the fence, the team stages behind a tactical training tower. After one member enters the tower and engages all downrange targets, he notifies waiting team members to move to a barricaded firing position. There they secure the simulated SNM canister and engage downrange targets until all targets are down.

DOE Team Results

#	Team Event 1	Score	%
1	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Savannah River Site	103.2	100.00
2	Idaho National Laboratory	128.89	80.07
3	Hanford Patrol	135.45	76.19
4	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Nevada Test Site	139.31	74.08
5	B&W Pantex	145.13	71.11
6	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Oak Ridge	149.64	68.97
7	Sandia National Laboratories–New Mexico	153.46	67.25
8	Office of Secure Transportation	165.4	62.39

#	Team Event 2	Score	%
1	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Savannah River Site	73.58	100.00
2	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Oak Ridge	82.75	88.92
3	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Nevada Test Site	102.03	72.12
4	Office of Secure Transportation	103.81	70.88
5	Sandia National Laboratories–New Mexico	108.24	67.98
6	B&W Pantex	112.9	65.17
7	Hanford Patrol	127.22	57.84
8	Idaho National Laboratory	129.81	56.68

#	Team Event 3	Score	%
1	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Savannah River Site	41.52	100.00
2	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Oak Ridge	44	94.36
3	Office of Secure Transportation	44.13	94.09
4	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Nevada Test Site	46.29	89.70
5	Idaho National Laboratory	47.75	86.95
6	B&W Pantex	54.47	76.23
7	Sandia National Laboratories–New Mexico	56.07	74.05
8	Hanford Patrol	59.32	69.99

#	Team Event 4	Score	%
1	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Savannah River Site	89.17	100.00
2	B&W Pantex	91.74	97.20
3	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Oak Ridge	95.48	93.39
4	Office of Secure Transportation	98.99	90.08
5	Sandia National Laboratories–New Mexico	103.03	86.55
6	Hanford Patrol	103.75	85.95
7	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Nevada Test Site	114.37	77.97
8	Idaho National Laboratory	118.58	75.20

#	Super Team	Score	%
1	Office of Secure Transportation	458.31	100.00
2	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Oak Ridge	460.39	99.55
3	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Savannah River Site	478.04	95.87
4	Idaho National Laboratory	528.41	86.73
5	Hanford Patrol	534.59	85.73
6	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Nevada Test Site	588.57	77.87
7	B&W Pantex	611.84	74.91
8	Sandia National Laboratories–New Mexico	635.19	72.15

#	Overall Team Events	Team Event 1	Team Event 2	Team Event 3	Team Event 4	Super Team	Final Score
1	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Savannah River Site	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	95.87 %	495.87
2	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Oak Ridge	68.97 %	88.92 %	94.36 %	93.39 %	99.55 %	445.19
3	Office of Secure Transportation	62.39 %	70.88 %	94.09 %	90.08 %	100.00 %	417.44
4	Wackenhut Services Inc.–Nevada Test Site	74.08 %	72.12 %	89.70 %	77.97 %	77.87 %	391.73
5	Idaho National Laboratory	80.07 %	56.68 %	86.95 %	75.20 %	86.73 %	385.64
6	B&W Pantex	71.11 %	65.17 %	76.23 %	97.20 %	74.91 %	384.61
7	Hanford Patrol	76.19 %	57.84 %	69.99 %	85.95 %	85.73 %	375.70
8	Sandia National Laboratories–New Mexico	67.25 %	67.98 %	74.05 %	86.55 %	72.15 %	367.98



A member of the WSI-Oak Ridge team takes aim during one of the rifle events on the second day of the competitions.

operations and on firearms, armorer, and rangemaster certification. From 1985 to 1991, the CTA's annual special event, simply called the Small Arms Tournament, was basically a shooting competition.

In 1992, the CTA expanded its mission to include all safeguards and security (S&S) topics and was rededicated as the Safeguards and Security Central Training Academy (S&S CTA). Over the next two decades, the academy developed courses to address the six key elements of the S&S program: information security, nuclear material control and accountability, personnel security, program and planning management, protective force, and physical protection. The annual competition adapted to these advances as the Physical Security and Protective Forces Firearms Competition and Training Symposium.

From 1993 to 2005, the annual event was known in the security profession as the Security Police Officer Training Competition and included not only firearms and tactical testing but also written examinations regarding DOE policies and procedures. In 1997, the S&S CTA was designated a DOE

Training Center of Excellence. In 1998, it was renamed the Nonproliferation and National Security Institute (NNSI) and included enhancements such as training for classified matter custodians and personnel involved in nuclear materials accounting.

In 2004, the NNSI became the NTC, with a growing number of programs that included the original S&S training, as well as counterintelligence training, foreign interaction training, professional development, and nuclear safety training. The NTC has hosted SPOTC since 2006.

A critical and primary concern

Planning for SPOTC 2008 actually began with lessons learned and after-action meetings from the 2007 competition.

"Our goals were to have a competition that was safe for competitors, staff, and other attendees, challenging for all competitors, and relevant to DOE's mission," said Jerry Harbour, director of training and education at the NTC and the SPOTC project manager.

Because the competition takes place in the high desert of New Mexico, health risks

such as exertional heat illness are always a possibility, even for young and fit competitors. As a precaution, an exercise physiologist reviewed plans for the competition early in 2008, and two paramedics were assigned to be on duty every day of the competition. Daily activities would run no longer than 10 hours. Range officers were authorized to halt any competition at the first signs of heat strain or stress.

The usual precautions were also taken to ensure that all observers and competitors wore safety glasses and earplugs before they entered individual ranges, each of which was posted with signs regarding the wearing of "eyes and ears." Because of the rough ground on the range, competitors were also required to wear knee and elbow pads. In the year of preparation, LFR staff worked systematically to replenish its supply of such things as water bottles, sunscreen, insect repellent, electrolyte drinks, safety gloves, earplugs, and eye protection.

No spectators at the NTC

During the year preceding SPOTC 2008, preparation became an addition to the normal workload. SPOTC planning meetings were held weekly, duties were assigned, and tasks were completed, checked off, and reported.

All the while, through the winter, spring, and early summer, the regular business of training personnel at the LFR continued. Students applied for admittance to courses and were processed through registration. Schedules were updated, and course materials were designed, developed, and printed. The students (10 857 of them this year, to date) arrived and logged on, or were sent videos and workbooks. Classes convened, and instructors conducted them. But as the actual competition neared, the weekly pace picked up.

"The success of SPOTC can be directly attributed to the participation of every NTC employee," said Randy Putt, manager of the Protective Force Training Department and SPOTC competition manager. "For example, the Friday before the competition begins, all of the employees meet at the live-fire range

Twenty teams participated in the 36th Security Protection Officer Training Competition, held June 1-5, at the Department of Energy's National Training Center in Albuquerque, N.M.

- B&W Pantex, Amarillo, Texas
- Bonneville Power Administration, Portland, Ore.
- Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, N.Y.
- Bruce Power Security Division Nuclear Response Team, Tiverton, Ontario, Canada
- Drug Enforcement Administration-Albuquerque, N.M.
- Hanford Patrol, Kennewick, Wash.
- Idaho National Laboratory, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Kansas City Plant (National Nuclear Security Administration), Kansas City, Mo.
- Marine Corps Security Force Close Quarters Battle Team, Chesapeake, Va.
- Office of Secure Transportation, Panhandle, Texas
- Pueblo, Colo., Police Department
- Rio Rancho, N.M., Police Department SWAT
- Sandia National Laboratories, Albuquerque, N.M.
- Sandia National Laboratories, Livermore, Calif.
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation-Grand Coulee Dam, Okanogan, Wash.
- U.S. Enrichment Corporation, Paducah, Ky.
- Wackenhut Services Inc.-Nevada Test Site, Mercury, Nev.
- Wackenhut Services Inc.-Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, Tenn.
- Wackenhut Services Inc.-Savannah River Site, Aiken, S.C.
- Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, Carlsbad, N.M.

for training in such things as safety, scoring, targeting procedures, and the overall expectations of the SPOTC officials.”

SPOTC planning had avoided conflicts and problems by scheduling many activities before and after the competition, and skeleton crews maintained vital systems, security, and support back at the main NTC campus during SPOTC week. For the four days of the actual events, many of the volunteers checked phone messages from the LFR, dropped by their offices during lunch, stopped after work, or all of the above to keep up with tasks that couldn't wait.

“SPOTC is a high-profile, DOE-wide competition,” said NTC General Manager Mark Jamsay, himself a protective force veteran. “That scope requires that all of our employees play a part. In order to put SPOTC together, individuals have to juggle their schedules—business has to go on as usual. This ability to multitask lends itself not only to the success of SPOTC, but to the

daily deliverables here. Year after year, testimony to our success is the high praise that comes from the highest levels on down.”

Realistic courses of fire

SPOTC courses of fire were designed to test individual and team problem solving of tactical situations and decision making under stress, skill in employing tactics, and physical conditioning.

“When I create a course of fire, I include marksmanship and tactical problems that must be solved under adverse conditions,” said Neil Terry, of the LFR staff. “You will fight like you train. The more problems you encounter during your training, the more capable you'll be in an actual fight.”

Handgun and rifle marksmanship challenges and tactical problems were based on real-life situations, such as shooting from behind vehicles, using tactical vehicles with crew-served weapons, dragging downed officers to safety, shooting from an angle,

shooting at partially or completely obscured targets, and firing from unconventional positions—all under the unremitting mental and physical stress of competition.

A class act

When SPOTC was over on June 5, the Wackenhut Services Inc.–Savannah River Site team, returning from its second-place position in 2007, took home a 2008 DOE Secretary's Trophy as Five-Man Team of the Year. A second Secretary's Trophy went to the Sandia National Laboratories–California team as winners of the new Three-Man Team of the Year category.

The team from Oak Ridge won the 2008 Competitors' Choice Award—an honor bestowed by fellow competitors in recognition of outstanding sportsmanship and team spirit. “You vote on this yourselves,” Harrell told the assembled competitors, whom he called a class act. “The winner of the Competitors' Choice Award is chosen by you and your fellow competitors. It goes to the team that exhibited professionalism, *esprit de corps*, and support, not just for one another, but for other teams as well.”

In presenting the award, Harrell told the story of a particular team in last year's SPOTC. The Kirtland Air Force Base team had been eager competitors, although not winning ones, he said.

“Most were young, and many were Iraq-bound,” Harrell added. In fact, he said, the team's coach, Travis Griffin, was killed by an improvised explosive device earlier this year, just two weeks away from the end of his fourth tour of duty in Iraq.

“This year's Competitors' Choice Award is dedicated to staff sergeant Travis Griffin, a Bronze Star winner, because he embodied the spirit of the award and because he did what you do: He served as a security police officer and a trainer of security forces,” Harrell said.

Next year

The ceremony held at the end of the competition was the culmination of an entire year of preparation. Another year of planning and preparation has already begun.

“The goal of the NTC is to expand SPOTC even more,” Jamsay said. “We are looking for ways to draw more three-man teams from the smaller sites, but we'd also like to get more participation from the larger ones next year.” SPOTC maintains an important link between the quality of the competition and its relation to the training, he said. “SPOTC provides an environment where DOE, law enforcement, and military professionals can share aspects of protective force training, operations, and equipment.”

“The competition is enjoyable,” Jamsay added. “There's a camaraderie that promotes realization of the SPO mission in the DOE complex. It's why we're here. For the benefit of national security. It's our mission.” ■



Jay Blake, of the Idaho National Laboratory team, rounds the corner of a steel tower carrying a 40-lb simulated SNM canister during one of the competitions. Blake was named Five-Man Security Protection Officer of the Year for SPOTC 2008.