

A History of CTDP

By Battalion Chief Sean Newman

The 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks is a period of both reflection and evaluation. The FDNY honors the 343 of its members who made the Supreme Sacrifice—as well as the dozens on the Memorial Wall in the lobby of Headquarters who died of WTC illnesses—with much more than memorials and plaque dedications, but through two decades of vigilance and precautions against terrorism. A centerpiece of the Department's counterterrorism efforts in the post-9/11 period, from the policy to operational levels, is the FDNY Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness (CTDP) at Fort Totten.

CTDP: the Early Years

In response to a recommendation in “Increasing FDNY’s Preparedness,” a report released in 2002 by consulting firm McKinsey & Co. and based on extensive input by Department leadership, the Planning and Strategy Unit in the Bureau of Operations was created by Assistant Chief Joseph W. Pfeifer (then a deputy assistant chief). The unit’s efforts included special events, document control and planning/strategy, but within a short time, it was clear that the FDNY needed a separate function devoted exclusively to terrorism preparedness and other large-scale catastrophes. Hence, Chief Pfeifer opened CTDP in the summer of 2004.

Nothing like CTDP had ever existed in the fire service. It was not a unit, nor a command, nor a bureau, but rather something different to meet the unrecognizable needs of firefighting and pre-hospital care in the new century. The title of “center” was deliberate, suggesting that CTDP could bring together a wide array of actors from response, academia, emergency management, infrastructure specialists, the military and other fire departments.

As no template existed for what the FDNY set out to do to best prepare against terrorism, the early years of CTDP were a time of experimentation and exploration as the center’s plank owners figured out what initiatives and collaborations would best serve the Department. Looking back on its formative years (and even the first few months), it is clear now that CTDP’s founding members were on the right track, focusing their attention on high-profile special events, bioterrorism and exercises, and strategy papers.

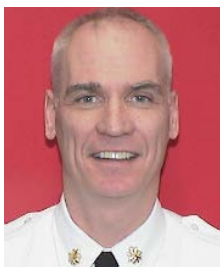
CTDP opened a few short months before the 2004 Republican National Convention (RNC), which was set to take place in Madison Square Garden (MSG) in late August into early September. Manhattan Borough Command (MBC) had been



Full-scale exercise at Citi Field (undated)

working on an operations plan for the MSG protected zone for about a year, but with only a few weeks until the event, Department leadership thought it best to also create a citywide RNC plan in case protests or other incidents occurred anywhere in the five boroughs. CTDP, most notably EMS Captain Tom Luby, was tasked with writing the FDNY RNC Citywide Operational Plan, and the Center did not have much time to write it. The 60-page document, essentially an expanded event action plan (EAP), had five chapters: Fire and EMS Operational Plan, Contingency Plan, Communications, Training and Marine Ops (primarily for emergency water-borne extractions of elected officials and other VIPs). Anticipated problems were addressed, such as possible methods of terrorist attacks, disruptive techniques of the most violent and ardent anarchists (the most relevant case study was the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests), and the possible need for Haz-Mat metering and supplemental respiratory gear. Assets would be deployed as part of either a citywide North Task Force or a South Task Force. The three-day convention went off with minimal disruptions, both inside and outside the MSG zone, but the FDNY was ready at the city level for the influx of people coming to the NYC region.

One of the first projects in the early days of CTDP was an in-depth survey of 50 high-profile locations throughout the City. This program was an early form of critical infrastructure protection, in compliance with Homeland Security Presidential Directive HSPD-7, released in 2003, and it evolved into the Risk



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Assessment and Target Hazards (RATH) project. Today, many high-rise and large buildings are required to have FDNY-approved building information cards (BICs) for arriving responders, as per NYC codes.

Exercise design was part of CTDTP from the very beginning, under a retired U.S. Army major, Ed Capps. The first locations chosen included Yankee Stadium and Penn Station, and CTDTP's first clients were FDNY divisions. In its first few months, the Center conducted its first Biopod exercise, playing out a simulated chemical or biological attack using seasonal flu shots to those members who accept, in lieu of WMD prophylaxis treatments that would be used in an actual event. Biopod, in close coordination with the Office of Medical Affairs (OMA) and the Bureau of Health Services (BHS), continues as an annual exercise and helped prepare the Department for its vaccination program against COVID-19 starting in late 2020. Though the Center was split into separate efforts shortly after its launch, there was much overlap in both personnel and missions.

The Center prioritized preparedness in weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from its onset, addressing the effects of large-scale chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive weapons (CBRNE). Early WMD efforts, especially an anthrax response plan, were led by EMS Deputy Chief Janice Olszewski (then a captain) and Ms. Susan Fink, who brought in extensive Haz-Mat expertise from previous work in government.

With the expansion of office space and personnel, clarity of mission sets and developing trends in homeland security over the next few years, CTDTP began to coalesce into its permanent structure, which is still largely in place today. The Center was eventually organized into four primary branches: Exercise Design, WMD, Intelligence and Emergency Preparedness. As stated earlier, the sections of CTDTP do not operate independently of their sister branches, but rather work in concert to maximize the collaborative nature of the Center, encouraged at all levels.

Exercise Design Branch

FDNY CTDTP may oversee the most prolific exercise design team in the homeland security community. Since its inception, the branch has averaged about 40 exercises a year, which includes workshops, tabletops, functional exercises and full-scale exercises. The branch also does extensive work in support of pre-planned events that include the United Nations General Assembly, the U.S. Tennis Open, the Thanksgiving Parade and New Year's Eve in Times Square, as well as major one-time events such as Super Bowl Boulevard (2014) and the Pope's visit in 2015. Over the years, dozens of members of the FDNY have earned the Master Exercise Practitioner (MEP) certification, sponsored by CTDTP, and have brought unparalleled professionalism to the field, most notably retired Captains Tom Engel, Richie O'Leary and Mike Nigro, as well as EMS Captain Charlie Fraser. No other entity at the Center, and possibly within the Department, works with a wider array of interagency partners. Branch leaders over the years include Battalion Chief Neil Hintz, Battalion Chief John Nykiel (who passed away as an active member of CTDTP in September 2019), Lieutenant Tom Healy (retired) and EMS Captain Lenny Tiberi (current head). Of those interviewed for this article, the 2nd Avenue Subway series and drills at East Side Access Tunnel (ESAT) were highlights of exercise efforts over the years. The complexities of construction in subterranean environments reveal many response issues (access, extraction, smoke removal, communications, etc.).

The premier event on the exercise calendar is the annual functional exercise with cadets from the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, held at the Fire Department Operations Center (FDOC) at FDNY headquarters—what Battalion Chief Nykiel called the branch's yearly "capstone" event. Students taking the homeland security class are placed at one of the five Incident Command System (ICS) functions (command, operations, planning, logistics and admin/finance) and put through a challenging scenario in support of civilian authorities during a large-scale disaster. In all, success in exer-



mittees for the Interagency Board (IAB), the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Committee for responder needs, the DHS Biowatch program and Haz-Mat groups for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). With a seat on so many committees, which issued Haz-Mat protocols affecting all responders, Chief Ingram traveled about 20 weeks a year. He added in an interview that his work was meant to preserve institutional expertise that could endure personnel changes or other disruptions. Since Chief Ingram's retirement two years ago, Battalion Chief Tim Rice in Haz-Mat Ops has taken on many of Battalion Chief Ingram's policy-level roles.

cise design is not measured by the number of exercises, but rather by how the lessons learned from planning and scenarios improve operations and safety in the field.

With hundreds of exercises listed in its catalog since 2004, the following is a shortened list of exercise locations and incident types.

Locations:

- Railroad stations, tunnels, etc. (Penn, Grand Central, Hudson Yards, etc.)
- Bridges and tunnels
- Ferries (Staten Island, etc.)
- Sports stadiums (Yankees, Mets, U.S. Tennis Center, etc.)
- Universities
- Malls
- Haz-Mat industrial sites
- Hospitals
- Power generation plants
- Airports
- Cruise ship terminals
- Tourist locations (Empire State Building, United Nations, etc.)

Exercise Scenarios:

- Chemical or biological attack/decontamination drills
- Petroleum product leaks
- Active-shooter/edged-weapons events
- Large-scale carbon monoxide releases
- Earthquakes
- Hurricanes

WMD Branch

Haz-Mat projects at the Center took on a wider scope when Battalion Chief Bob Ingram gradually became WMD branch chief around 2005-2006 and his previous duties were split in half. His day-to-day role was divested to Haz-Mat Ops, while Chief Ingram expanded his efforts at the strategic level. Over the years, Chief Ingram either chaired or participated on com-

Intelligence Branch

After 9/11, the need for information sharing for non-traditional intelligence members was prioritized in several federal directives, such as the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and

Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, but it takes time to go from concept to practice. Deputy Chief Mike Puzziferri (retired), who served as executive officer and head of the Intelligence branch at CTD from 2007-2009, captured the fire service's legitimacy in intel forums: "We need the right information at the right time to make the right decision." During Chief Puzziferri's time at CTD, DHS asked the Center how intel relationships and functionality could be improved. The FDNY was most concerned with identifying what could interfere with its operations and member safety, later codified as "intelligence requirements" for the fire service.

In 2007, relationships were formalized during the Fire Service Intelligence Enterprise (FSIE) conference held in Midtown Manhattan, attended (and partly organized) by original intel branch



Captain Mike Nigro Addresses USMA cadets at FDNY FDOC (2019).

member Captain Timothy Carroll (then a lieutenant). DHS Intelligence and Analysis officials met with fire department representatives from the 15 largest cities in the U.S., prioritizing the highest, most likely threats in the densest urban areas of the country. A network of participants, who would exchange information both vertically and horizontally, seemed to be the model to serve the national fire service's intelligence needs. Around the same time as the FSIE, the National Strategy for Information Sharing was released (October 2007), further reinforcing the need for intel networks and integration. Chief Puzziferri pointed out that many participants in the FSIE found value in both the structure of the network and the informal relationships that were built, which can drastically speed information flow during exigencies. Another outcome of the emerging field of fire service intel is that the FDNY bypassed the debate on whether the fire service should be a proper consumer of intelligence by proposing in the FSIE strategy that firefighters should produce of their own intelligence when appropriate.

Around the same time as the FSIE conference, CTDP began a PowerPoint series called Fireguard on notable plots or attacks in an easy-to-digest format. The Fireguard on the Times Square bombing in 2010, produced by Intel branch head, Assistant Chief John Esposito (then a battalion chief) and Captain Carroll, set the standard for concise, timely reporting and analysis for the product line. Other notable Fireguards include "Mumbai Terrorist Attacks" in 2008 by Captain Chris Ward (which included a much-needed definition of what a "Mumbai" attack actually was), "The Paris Terror Attack" (2015) and "Aggressive Deadly Behavior" in 2019. Fireguards were a huge leap forward for fire service intel, but there was clearly a need for something in a prose style that was more regular and analytical.

After considering how to best launch into true analytical intelligence, Chief Puzziferri envisioned a one-page field intel brief produced by the FDNY. Hence, *Watchline* was born. The weekly fire service intel newsletter debuted in February 2008 and has continued uninterrupted until the present. It was well received by DHS Intelligence and Analysis and has been a staple on the Homeland Security Information Network for years. The document has become more refined in its 14 years of production (and is approaching 700 issues), serving a much wider readership that includes all response missions, the military, protective services and academia. About 3,000 direct subscribers receive the document, but through extensive forwarding and postings on various intel portals, *Watchline's* worldwide readership has been estimated between 50,000-100,000 across 200 agencies. *Watchline's* analysts have provided early warning of many threats and developments, such as Boko Haram, chemical suicides, ISIS, flash mobs, Ebola virus, live-stream terror, zika virus, ramming attacks and COVID-19. *Watchline's* success can be tied directly to the talent and hard work of its staff. Captain Chris Ward (now retired) served as managing editor for almost 10 years as the document grew in sophistication and depth, primarily in its assessments. The current editor, Captain Hugh Boyle, brings new perspectives and skillsets to an ever-changing intelligence landscape.

Another Intel branch offering is Situational Awareness Bulletins (SABs) on breaking events that could have immediate local consequences. The series began as supplemental notes in Department Orders in 2010 and grew into "Counterterrorism Bulletins" in 2011—and later, SABs. Notable SABs in recent years include the Iranian threat after U.S. military strikes, civil unrest, the NYC Marathon threat after the death of al Bagh-



dadi, and the arrest of a man with gasoline at Saint Patrick's Cathedral (days after the Notre Dame fire in Paris).

An offshoot of the FSIE in 2007 was consideration of a fire service representative at the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). After working in essentially every capacity in the Exercise Design and Intel branches at CTDP, Captain Chris Flatley (a lieutenant at the time, now retired) was accepted to represent FDNY at NCTC from 2012-2013. Captain Flatley was uniquely qualified to serve as a fire service analyst, and he understood that—in his words—“intel drove the needs assessment,” meaning intelligence does not exist for its own sake, but rather influences priorities in exercise design, training, operations, awareness and many other components of response. Captain Flatley was at NCTC during the Benghazi attacks in September 2012 that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and two other Americans. As fire was a significant component of the attack on the diplomatic compound, Captain Flatley's fire expertise proved invaluable to the greater intelligence community. After his tenure at NCTC, Captain Flatley offered his extensive body of knowledge and experience to the NYC Joint Terrorism Taskforce (JTTF), where he served as an analyst in support of terrorism investigations. He split his time between CTDP and the JTTF until his retirement in March 2020.

In a recent interview, Captain Flatley stressed that the FDNY is the only fire department with a standing classified briefing to senior leadership, which, during his tenure, complemented his other duties on the JTTF and CTDP.

Though less visible than some of its other work, the Intel branch has collaborated with the FBI, the Department of Defense and the Department of State for at least a decade on operational issues related to active-shooter events that also include fire. Fire and Smoke Weapon (FSW) research and collaborations began after the Mumbai attacks in 2008 and only expanded with the Benghazi attack in 2012. CTDP, in coordination with the FDNY Bureau of Training, has created an abbreviated firefighting course tailored specifically for military and security personnel.

Policy and Analysis

The skillsets required to create sophisticated intelligence documents overlap well with other types of written products, such as strategies and white papers. Led by Intel branch members, CTDP has written or supported several strategies and policies since it opened. Notable products include the “FDNY Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness Strategy” in 2007, the “FDNY Counterterrorism and Risk Management Strategy” in 2011 and “Vertical Terrorism: The Threat Against High-Rise Buildings,” released in 2016 on the 15th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. CTDP will continue to study macro trends that affect response, including cyber, pandemics and political violence.

Emergency Preparedness

From the earliest days, the Emergency Preparedness branch has touched many areas of the Department. CTDP has always



The late Battalion Chief John Nykiel on the radio at an exercise (undated)

helped maintain Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP), which falls under the offices of the Fire Commissioner and the Chief of Department. As the current head of CTDP, Assistant Chief Thomas J. Currao serves as executive sponsor of FDNY COOP. Deputy Chief Mike Barvels has served as project manager for FDNY's COOP for many years.

Many of FDNY's Emergency Response Plans (ERPs) and addendums originated at CTDP, including the Bio Plan, Underground Plan, Interagency Response Protocol to Incidents Involving Deadly Behavior and Emergency Command Procedures. ERPs are an important vehicle for turning policy-level concepts on specific threats into procedures. Currently, CTDP is working on a guidance document to clarify how and when EMS units would relocate to Fire stations during high-impact events.

Another project coming out of Emergency Preparedness is FDNY Broadcast, formerly the Emergency Notification and Response System, led by Lieutenant Anna Schermerhorn-Collins. The project—different from the Emergency Notification System (ENS)—is meant to alert active members who are at risk of various disasters and events. FDNY Broadcast was inspired by members and their families affected by the very active hurricane season in 2017. Members receive notices through text, voice calls or email. The system will aid in determining the status of FDNY employees, whether they are safe or in distress, or if they need additional resources during disaster recovery. FDNY Broadcast falls under First Deputy Commissioner Laura Kavanaugh's office, which works in close coordination with BTDS and CTDP.

Education and Instructional Seminars

From the time CTDP opened, it has been a nucleus for educational opportunities. FDNY maintains a robust group of active members who graduated with master's degrees from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California. Many student theses have become policy, and the relationships formed by



classmates from many disciplines and regions greatly enhance collaborations and information sharing. CTD, which administrated CHDS applicants for many years, likely maintains the highest concentration of graduates under one roof for any agency in the country.

Another FDNY offering, run by CTD, is the West Point Counterterrorism Leadership Program (CLP), where select FDNY officers attend a nearby corporate retreat for one week of intense instruction in terrorism awareness and theory, led by professors from the U.S. Military Academy and NPS.

CTD also runs periodic seminars. At least two events have centered on film screenings at HBO's Manhattan headquarters, where CHDS and CLP alumni watched "Dirty Wars" and "Terror in Mumbai" and then engaged in question-and-answer periods with a select panel. Another seminar was held at the Intrepid museum.

A Place Where Excellence Thrives at Any Rank

CTD's leadership has always prided itself on cultivating a workspace where contributions are encouraged at all ranks of the Department. The most notable contributor at CTD who transcended rank was Firefighter Raymond J. Pfeifer, who became Chief Joseph Pfeifer's aide in late 2002 and was an original member of the Center. Ray passed away from WTC illness in 2017 after 27 years with the Department, but his spirit remains alive and well at CTD. For Ray, no task was insurmountable.

One project, in particular, proved Ray's unique style of leadership. Around 2007, FDNY was exploring a mobile communication truck that could better transmit voice and data in support of operations. There was no commercially-available vehicle at the time to serve this specific need. Ray approached a cellular provider about getting the equipment and access needed to transmit during incidents. He demonstrated the importance of communications to responders by showing telecommunications executives the documentary "9-11" by Gedeon and Jules Naudet, French brothers who filmed both WTC collapses. Ray's telecommunications contacts were moved by the quiet professionalism of the firefighters in the lobby of tower 1, many of whom did not return. By showing the documentary, Ray was able to show the importance of situational awareness and communications far better than with a routine PowerPoint presentation, fostering a sense of civic duty. The FDNY Command Tactical Unit was born, which harnesses an array of cell phone towers—even its own when needed. But Ray will best be remembered for his steady presence over the years at CTD until his retirement in 2014.

Another long-time member of CTD, whose

influence far exceeded rank, was EMT Amanda Schmidt-Harnischfeger. Amanda joined the Center full time in 2010 and continued as member of Exercise Design branch until she became a commissioner's liaison before her retirement in 2018. In 2014, FDNY met the Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak with enhanced protocols, training, personal protective equipment and awareness, which included close coordination with area hospitals. CTDP did tabletop drills with more than 20 hospitals, ensuring the most robust substance isolation practices at all levels of patient care. Amanda was instrumental in the Department's Ebola exercises and was part of the FDNY Ebola Task Force that won an administrative award in 2016. Also, EMT Schmidt-Harnischfeger has the distinction of being the first FDNY member to be trained in moulage (the art of applying mock injuries for drills). Amanda's skills brought a level of realism to CTDP's exercises, especially those that simulated active-shooter incidents.

Leadership Transition and Recent Developments

Chief Pfeifer passed the baton to Chief Currao in June 2018. Like his predecessor, Chief Currao—a longtime contributor to CTDP—made collaboration and project completion top priorities. Due to overarching trends, Chief Currao gave the Center a slightly more operational focus without losing sight of policy-level concerns. Collaboration continues to be a hallmark of CTDP, from interagency coordination to intra-department engagement.

Under Chief Currao's tenure, the FDNY Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) system matured into a user-friendly reporting model. SAR awareness products—namely, a placard for Department apparatus and vehicles—were created by CTDP several years ago, but it became evident that an online form would function more intuitively than a hotline number. To make the new SAR initiative viable, it required close coordination with the Bureau of Investigations, DiamondPlate and the Bureau of Operations. Today, SARs generated automatically alert various levels of law enforcement, including the JTTF.

A new initiative called the Red Team Series was created about 2.5 years ago to better coordinate the efforts of the Exercise Design and Intel branches. Intel would start the project by mentally putting themselves in the place of a small terrorist cell that was set on carrying out an attack in NYC. Realistic parameters were put place (budget, number of operatives, terrorist skillsets, etc.), but the scenario was not held to the guidelines imposed by true exercise design practices (at least, not right away). As in the early days of CTDP, the Red Team product would be presented to FDNY divisions with members of both of the Center's branches in attendance. After the red team scenario is presented, exercise design takes over the project and tweaks the scenario to the needs of the division and the rules of exercise. To date, there have been three Red Team scenarios. In January 2019, a presentation was made to D-11 on a simulated attack at Atlantic Terminal. In December of that year, Resorts World Casino at Aqueduct (colloquially known as "Racino") was the site of another Red Team, this time for D-13. The latest Red Team was presented to EMS Division D-8, in February 2021, on an edged-weapons attack atop the span of an East River bridge, primarily to test response times and the efficacy of EMS Gators and Polaris ASAPs (small, low-profile ambulances). The transfer from Intel to Exercise Design is seamless, as all members involved give input during the various stages of development. The series has been well received and will continue to

other areas and commands.

The Mass-Casualty Rescue Taskforce, formerly the Counterterrorism Taskforce (CTTF), was created in November 2015 after the Paris terrorist attacks, most notably the assault on the Bataclan Theater. CTDP personnel had worked with CTTF leadership from the beginning, and CTTF shared office space at CTDP from its earliest days. Today, the Mass-Casualty Rescue Taskforce is the main component of the CTDP's newly created Operations branch.

After so many years of Biopods and other exercises, CTDP was well placed to work closely with the FDNY Incident Management Team (IMT) during the FDNY's rollout of COVID-19 vaccination sites in late December 2020. One CTDP member said that the Center's steady presence at the four vaccine locations proved to be the perfect complement to IMT's deployment schedule, where personnel completely turned over every two weeks. Continuity and vast resources, respectively, made for a highly organized, efficient system that served thousands of active and retired members, FDNY civilian personnel and members' families.

With major cyber and ransomware attacks becoming an almost weekly occurrence, CTDP has taken a close look at how these attacks and virtual probes can compromise response operations and support functions. Several products are in progress, such as a Fireguard and a concept paper. Members of CTDP are looking into methods, Department vulnerabilities, identifying illicit actors and employee awareness campaigns to close vulnerability gaps on the cyber realm.

In late 2019, Intel branch members noticed some reporting on a "pneumonia-like virus" that was spreading in Hubei Province, China, and centered in the city of Wuhan. As novel illnesses originate in Asia quite frequently, it was decided to monitor this development before including it in reports. In the first week of January 2020, it was clear that there was something unusual with this pandemic, and what became known as COVID-19 was introduced as a story item in the January 8 *Watchline* and was featured in many succeeding issues. Shortly after, it was clear that this disease was spreading unabated throughout the world. In late January, Intel branch released a new product line called FDNY Monograph, which, as the name implied, was intended to be a written study of a specific subject. COVID-19 was the first topic of the Monograph series. In early March, a second Monograph was released on COVID-19, providing readership with the most up-to-date information on a constantly evolving issue. Many policymakers have praised CTDP for its expeditious general coverage of what became one of the most significant developments in world history.

Conclusion

Though far from comprehensive, this brief history of CTDP shows how effective long-term planning, early warnings and the right team can bring a response organization to new levels of preparedness in a vastly more complex and challenging world compared to the previous century. It is well known that responders trust each other with their lives, and CTDP promotes a different type of trust that promotes meaningful relationships with the widest representation of stakeholders. Every initiative, every written product, every meeting, every interagency connection and every improvement implicitly honors the many who have made such profound sacrifices in the performance of duty. ■