

Event Report: Golden Phoenix 2008

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INTRODUCTION

The International Journal of Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management, IJISCRAM, has a goal of promoting quality research into information systems, IS, for crisis response and management. Unfortunately, this research doesn't lend itself well to the traditional positivist quantitative research methodologies considered quality research by main stream IS researchers. Instead, our methodologies focus on qualitative and action research methods. This event report, on the Golden Phoenix exercise, is action and experimental research. Action research as all the authors were participants in the exercise. Experimental research as the exercise itself was a live world laboratory for testing various IS, sensor, and other technologies supporting crisis response.

GOLDEN PHOENIX 2008

On July 21 2008, several subjects were detained by United States, U.S., Border Patrol agents as they attempted to cross the U.S./Mexico border south of San Diego. The subjects were searched as part of routine detainment procedures and were found to be transporting what appeared to be narcotic substances. Local military pilots transported the suspects and agents via helicopter to a nearby base where the Drug Enforcement Agency, DEA, conducted an initial investigation. During a chemical analysis of the substance, it was discovered that the unknown substance was not a narcotic, but rather weaponized anthrax.

Isolation procedures were immediately activated and a cursory analysis determined that, due to the nature of the anthrax and the helicopter transportation, a large number of civilians were potentially exposed to the deadly bacterial spores. The media was notified and alerted local citizens of the attack. Three area hospitals

were subsequently flooded with panicked citizens, some feeling ill and others simply hoping for reassurance, forcing the hospital to activate triage procedures and set up quarantine facilities with military support to maintain order.

This was one of the scenarios that initiated Golden Phoenix 2008, a coordinated exercise that involved military organizations, Customs and Border Patrol, FBI, local law enforcement, clinics and hospitals, academia, and dozens of civilian industry partners and participants. Golden Phoenix was engineered as a venue allowing government organizations to activate their existing protocols and procedures in a controlled, yet real-time, fashion while incorporating the technological support of private industry in an experimental capacity.

This combination of military exercise and the inherently less-coordinated members of industry provided a unique and invaluable opportunity for the military to work in an environment that partially simulated the chaotic nature of actual emergencies while allowing private industry to both learn how to interact with the military and demonstrate the means by which they could enhance the military's crisis management and response capabilities as well as their own.

ACTIONS

Golden Phoenix 2008 consisted of a total of nearly 20 organized scenarios, trainings, briefings, and debriefings conducted between July 14th and 27th, with military groups accounting for most of the activity during the first week, and most of the industry-integrated actions being executed between July 21st and 24th.

Locations

Golden Phoenix 2008 took place primarily in and around San Diego, California including the following locales:

- The hospitals involved were the Thornton and Hillcrest UCSD medical centers and the Scripps Memorial hospital in La Jolla.
- Military training and workshops took place at North Island Naval Station in Coronado, Miramar Marine Corps Air Station in northern San Diego, and the San Diego Marine Corps Recruit Depot near the city center.
- Coordinated offsite mobility trainings also took place at El Paso Airfield, Texas; Portland Airfield, Oregon; and Stuart Airfield, New York.
- Brown Field, a small airstrip near the U.S./Mexico border, 13 miles southeast of San Diego was the site of many of the field activities and demonstrations.
- The exercise involving the Border Patrol apprehension and transportation of the anthrax-bearing individuals took place in the city of Imperial Beach (to the south of San Diego).
- Unmanned vehicle demonstrations were located in Yuma, Arizona.
- San Diego State University, SDSU, was the site for the industry demonstrations; the Visualization Laboratory, Viz Lab, on campus was intended to serve as an operations center for the Brown Field and Yuma activities.
- Qualcomm Stadium, northeast of downtown, was used for SWAT exercises.

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