

“Remember this is your ticket home,” Vitale encouraged. “Make it big. Make it good.”

Afterward, agents built shelters using plastic sheets, cord, duct tape and the knots they practiced in the classroom.

Fire was next. “Fire is extremely important,” said Vitale. “It purifies water and cooks food.” Taking the group into the woods, Vitale showed them how to properly collect fuel. He then stacked the wood, starting with brittle tinder, then adding heavier kindling and then thick sticks.

Vitale smacked a knife against a magnesium block. Sparks flew into the fibrous tinder, spiked by a cotton ball smeared in petroleum jelly taken from the 98.6 kit. Instantly, fingers of flame shot out.

“Light the bottom of the tinder,” he instructed.

“Fire moves upward.”

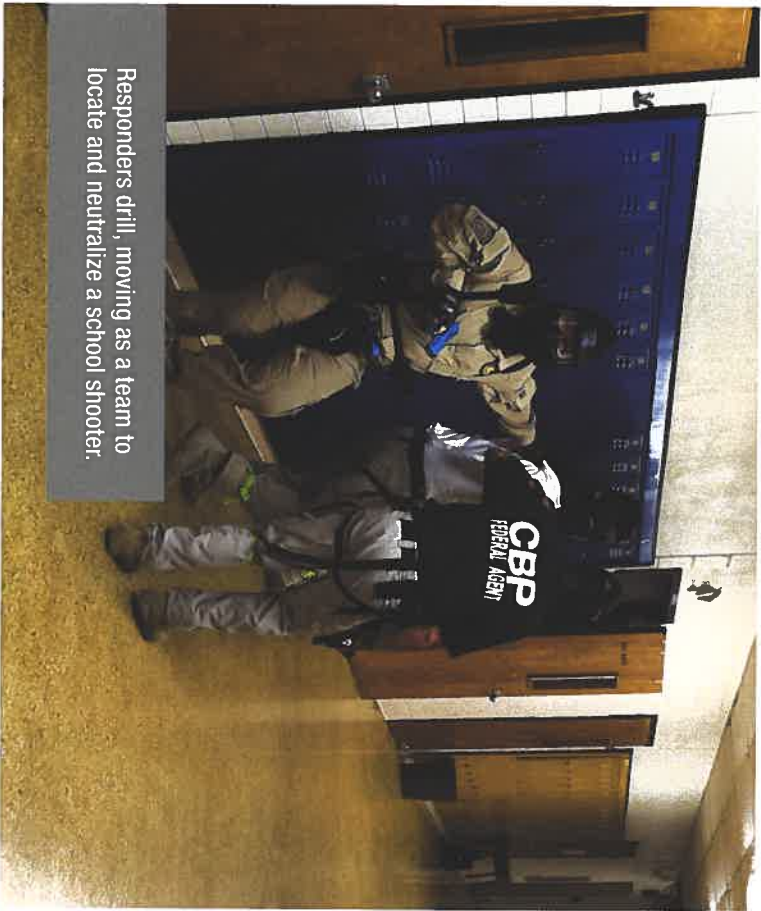
“Fire is simple,” said Vitale. “But people have trouble because they skip stages—they want to go too big, too soon.”

Facing a terrorist

The active shooter scenarios create perhaps the most intense training. It’s where standardization is really critical.

The center uses a former junior high school and role players from a local municipal SWAT team who pose as crazed shooters. Air and Marine agents practice the same tactics taught to all law enforcement officers.

Standardization is key. “If you show up [at the shooting] it’s likely you will work with someone you’ve never met,” Warren advised the group. That means police from many jurisdictions will likely be converging on the building where a shooter is on the loose and they can only work together safely if they know what’s expected, he explained.



Responders drill, moving as a team to locate and neutralize a school shooter.



Maintaining focus amid the chaos of an active shooting is no easy task.

Tactics are designed to quickly locate and subdue a shooter while keeping responders safe. Agents review how to proceed through a building, what clues to look for, how to communicate as a team and how to identify and clear the occupants.

During the exercise, the agents raided the school three times, the third time in the dark. To make the event more realistic, a high-powered speaker blasted audio of confused and panicked crowds punctuated with screams and gunshots.

Growth and center goals

Aviation training in Oklahoma City began in 1987 when the U.S. Customs Service founded the Customs National Aviation Center. In 2005, the center became the National Aviation Training Center when Air and Marine

Operations merged with elements of the Border Patrol, continuing its mission of training and standardization with a growing cadre of law enforcement aviators.

Under Director Salter’s leadership, staff and instructors strive to provide training that enhances both an agent’s personal and professional life. And while agents learn the skills to perform their jobs safely and efficiently, it’s just as important that they’re pleased with the instruction, according to Salter.

“I consider this institution more than a training center,” he said. “I want agents to leave here satisfied that they got what they came here for. I want our agents to leave here with the confidence and skill to continue to train, develop and grow into world-class pilots.” **F**