

## FEATURE

# Teamwork, quick action by base members prevent potential danger

By Tech. Sgt. Ben Gonzales  
437AW Public Affairs

He was desperate. After taking groceries from the commissary without paying for them, the man loaded the food in his white pick-up truck and tried to sneak off the base undetected Sept. 23. By the time he made it to the Rivers Gate, the 437<sup>th</sup> Security Forces Squadron had already implemented stop, check and pass vehicle-inspection procedures. With traffic backed up near the gate, the man did a U-turn in the middle of the road, which security forces noticed immediately.

The chase was on now, but the man had no intention of stopping – for anyone.

With a security forces vehicle in pursuit, the man drove erratically trying to elude being apprehended. Because of the quick action taken by the commissary manager, the immediate response by the 437 SFS, augmented by the Army National Guard, and the assistance of local law enforcement, a potentially dangerous situation was resolved with no serious injuries and minor damage to base assets.

The incident started at approximately 2:30 p.m. when the suspect left the commissary with a cart loaded with groceries. Noticing this, Eddie Williams, the commissary manager, got a description of the suspect, the make and model of his truck, and a partial license plate number.

“The commissary manager did a great job of getting a good description of the suspect before he took off,” said Maj. Paul Stang, 437 SFS commander. “The manager then flagged down a patrolman, who was driving through the area on patrol, gave him the description of the suspect, and security forces immediately acted by implementing inspection procedures at all base exits.”

Noticing he couldn't just pass through the gate on Arthur Drive because security forces were stopping vehicles exiting the gate, the suspect made a U-turn and started speeding away. Security forces noticed him and began pursuit down and around Arthur Drive.

“The suspect then attempted to evade security forces, and began driving in a dangerous manner,” said Major Stang. “Tech. Sgt. (Tony) Mullins was the duty flight sergeant and had to make the tough decision to pursue the suspect, which is a judgment call determining if it is a greater risk of danger to pursue him or not.”

“He was speeding down Arthur Drive and coming right for me,” said Sergeant Mullins, who was at the squadron, but went on patrol when he first heard the situation was escalating. Sergeant Mullins parked his security forces vehicle at the intersection of Arthur



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Ben Gonzales

**Tech. Sgt. Tony Mullins, 437<sup>th</sup> Security Forces Squadron, radios a patrolman. Sergeant Mullins directed all security forces actions, stopped the suspect's vehicle and helped apprehend the suspect.**

Drive and Hill Boulevard, waiting to make sure the speeding vehicle didn't turn toward the base residential area.

“He wasn't stopping for patrols,” said Sergeant Mullins. “I knew it was serious, and as he headed right for me I was forced to draw my weapon. The suspect jumped the curb instead and drove through the clinic parking lot, still being pursued by security forces.”

No shots were ever fired on base, and the suspect continued to elude security forces and drove hazardously through portions of the base.

“Security forces have two priorities in a situation like this,” said Major Stang, “to protect citizens on base and to protect mission assets —

namely the C-17 on the flightline. Our forces were positioned in areas to prevent the suspect from doing considerable bodily harm and to protect our aircraft.”

At one point, the suspect smashed through a concrete barrier and drove along the tarmac in an attempt to escape capture. Waiting for him was Army National Guard Sgt. Leonard Benton, a security forces member driving on the flightline.

“I heard on the radio the suspect was heading toward the fuel area, so I positioned my vehicle in an area where I could defend our critical resources,” said Sergeant Benton, who is also a Dorchester County deputy when he isn't on active duty. “Using my vehicle, I corralled the suspect away from our key resources and I began to

take evasive action. He was at times erratic, but he controlled his vehicle. The suspect avoided me by turning hard to his left and busting through a closed gate along the Arthur Drive extension. I followed him off base along Aviation Avenue, Interstate 26 and Rivers Avenue when North Charleston County authorities arrived and took over the chase. I then returned to where the suspect busted through the fence and secured it with my vehicle.”

Local law enforcement continued the chase as base security forces secured the area around the Rivers Gate. But it wasn't long before the sirens could be heard getting louder as the suspect, with police close on his tail, had circled

around and was heading back toward the base. Waiting at the intersection of Arthur Drive and Midland Park Road was Sergeant Mullins, in his vehicle preventing traffic flow toward the base, and Staff Sgt. Frederick Zaiser, a security forces patrolman on foot at the intersection directing traffic.

“Local deputies gave us permission to use stop spikes, and when the suspect was approaching the intersection, Sergeant Zaiser deployed the spikes and somehow avoided the erratic driver,” said Sergeant Mullins. “He could have easily run us over. The spikes really slowed him up, and then I sped up and hit the suspect's vehicle from behind, flipping it over.”

But the chase still wasn't over as the suspect immediately jumped out of his disabled vehicle and tried to run through the forest to escape. Sergeant Mullins was first to exit his vehicle as other law enforcement officials quickly emerged from their vehicles to catch up with the suspect.

“The suspect didn't get very far before I was right behind him and ordered him to halt,” said Sergeant Mullins. “He pulled out a knife, but dropped it shortly after other deputies arrived.”

The chase ended there along the wooded area along Arthur Drive around 3:40 p.m., but it couldn't have been accomplished safely without the cooperation of a number of people and organizations.

“It takes a team effort to get our job done,” Major Stang said. “The base really pulled together to prevent any injuries to base personnel and damage to any of our essential assets. The great description and actions by the commissary manager, all of the 437 SFS, the Army National



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Ben Gonzales

**Army National Guard Sgt. Leonard Benton, an augmentee with the 437<sup>th</sup> Security Forces Squadron, patrols the base flightline. Sergeant Benton kept the suspect from getting near critical mission assets.**

Guard augmentees around the base and at the gates, local law enforcement, and the understanding of base personnel as traffic came to a standstill played a part in the success of the

situation. The actions of Sergeants Mullins and Benton saved lives. Sergeant Benton kept the suspect from getting anywhere near aircraft and was instrumental in passing off responsibility of the chase to local law enforcement authorities. Sergeant Mullins was most directly responsible for the success of this operation because he coordinated all security forces actions, risked himself, terminated the chase and took part in the apprehension of the suspect.”

“I'm not a hero. We save lives every day by keeping the bad guys off base,” said Sergeant Mullins. “The training and exercises we've conducted really paid off. Everyone did what they were trained to do; it was like clockwork.”

“It was a total team effort,” said Sergeant Benton. “Local law enforcement, Army and Air Force security forces, and actions done by base personnel helped us make sure our mission was accomplished. My adrenaline was flowing when I was chasing the suspect, but he wasn't thinking about safety. I, along with all the security forces, always know that safety is the priority.”

“As a team, we all worked together to do a great job of protecting the people on base and the C-17s,” said Major Stang.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Corey Clements

**The suspect's pick-up truck rests upside down along the Arthur Drive extension after being knocked from the road by Sergeant Mullins' security forces vehicle.**