

NEW FIRE ALARM CONTROL PANELS ARE AS GOOD AS GOLD

By Kris Bylan-Rydel and Netta Altimari-Mello



Fort Knox is the home of the Army Armor Center, and the U.S. Army Recruiting Command. Encompassing 109,000 acres in four Kentucky counties, Fort Knox has a population of over 23,000 soldiers, family members and civilians. The Armor Center and the Recruiting Command School, the largest organization on Fort Knox, performs the mission of bringing men and women into the U.S. Army.

These military personnel and other residents are housed in 14 barracks at Fort Knox. In 2003, Fort Knox called on Freedom Communications of Louisville, Kentucky to completely upgrade the fire alarm systems in a number of key buildings at the base, including the 14 barracks.

Brian Banta, vice president of Freedom Communications, had many responsibilities as the provider to the base for such projects, including specifying the equipment for specific projects, ordering that equipment, overseeing the installations and acting as a liaison with the fire inspectors. Banta explained the thinking at the initial stages of the Fort Knox project:

“We got our feet wet working with the electrical installer on a small job at the base in 2003. While doing that, they informed us about the bigger project, which included installation of fire control panels and mass notification systems in 14 barracks buildings.

“They told us that they were looking for non-proprietary control panels that they could easily work on, and order parts for, after the install. We looked at a number of different brands that were out there, and the Fire-Lite panel quickly rose to the top of the list.”

Freedom Communications’ winning project bid incorporated the installation of 14 Fire-Lite MS-9600 control panels in

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The new fire-detection system was needed to meet the post-9/11 needs for anti-terrorism mass-notification systems.

new fire alarm

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the different barracks. The Fire-Lite MS-9600 addressable fire alarm control panel is a compact system manufactured with surface-mount technology and designed for easy installation and programming. The Fire-Lite system includes advanced fire protection features like Maintenance Alert, Automatic Detector Test, and smoke detector sensitivity printout.

The units can also come with the convenience of an optional Digital Alarm Communicator Transmitter (DACT-UD) which allows for remote site upload/download and remote monitoring and diagnostics.

“The impetus for the entire project,”

continued Banta, “was a need to stay up to speed with post-9/11 codes. Since that time, and the sharper focus on terrorism, there has been a big push for military bases around the country to install anti-terrorism mass notification systems in conjunction with compatible fire alarm systems. The flexible non-proprietary nature of the Fire-Lite system made it a perfect partner for the two types of mass notification systems we were using.”

The new fire alarm system was a long time coming and much needed at Fort Knox. The previous system was conventional, as opposed to addressable, so pinpointing a source point for an alarm posed a challenge. The new 9600 panels have completely overcome this problem, while addressing all of Fort

Knox’s needs. Said Banta, “Not only can the Fire-Lite panels easily hook-up with the mass notification panels, but they completely meet the facility’s specifications and budgetary needs.

“The Fort Knox project managers were extremely pleased with the way the installation went and the fact that the Fire-Lite project and our company passed the inspection the first time with zero problems. They also appreciated the fact that we easily completed the project within their deadlines.”

In fact, Banta and his team had four months to complete the entire project; the installation of the fire alarm systems was being done in conjunction with many other building upgrades, including rewiring, new windows, new roofs, and

overall interior remodeling. The flexibility and ease of installation of the MS-9600 panels certainly played a big role in speed of the installation.

“Everything goes together seamlessly now,” continued Banta. “From the Fire-Lite control panels to the smoke detectors, duct detectors, heat detectors and System Sensor speakers and strobes; it all works together extremely well.”

The versatility of the Fire-Lite product made it an easy choice when Freedom Communications was tasked with installing fire alarm control panels in a number of other locations around the base, including the regional correctional facility, two elementary schools and an officers’ club.

Banta explained how the officers’ club project, although a smaller project than the barracks installation, posed its own unique challenges. He said, “With the officers’ club, we were set with the task of providing a system that could shut down the audio on the dance floor, turn on all the lights and initiate a mass noti-



fication message. We were able to put in control modules and relay modules that work with the MS-9600 so that all of these unique events could be easily controlled and monitored. The Fire-Lite system has the kind of versatility to work with a smaller building like the officers’ club, or a warehouse that has just 10 smoke and/or heat detectors, all the way up to bigger facilities like the barracks buildings.”

Both Banta and Fort Knox are extremely pleased with the results of the life safety system installation in the bar-

racks, so much so that Freedom Communications has many other projects in the works on the base. These upcoming projects include providing fire protection for The Patton Museum of Armor and Cavalry, as well as for an ammunition building.

The recruits who live and sleep in the barracks are undoubtedly pleased as well, resting easy with the knowledge that they and their families are protected by one of the most advanced fire safety systems available.

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