

## Meigs Field – Terrorism Response Plans – An Expert Speaks



"Meigs Field gave us capabilities that were not available in most other cities."



-- Former anti-terrorism planner, U.S. Army

The following sequence of e-mails was received by the Friends of Meigs Field, unsolicited, starting on September 25, 2001, two weeks after the terrorist attacks on New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania.



They illustrate the important role Meigs Field plays (and has played for over a decade) in preparing against urban disaster in downtown Chicago, whether natural or man-made.

[Original e-mail, received 9/25/2001, by Friends of Meigs Field, details withheld by request]:

Dear Friends;

This may get a little involved, but bear with me. I was a [technician in the U.S. Army] at Ft. Bragg from [1981] to [1986].

While there, those of us in the [...] section, of one of the eventually four platoons, used to about weekly have an exercise we referred to as "Playing When..." It was an exercise in terrorism disaster management. We would pick a major city, decide on most likely terrorist targets, and develop the aviation and equipment assets staging plan.

Our plan for WTC [World Trade Center] just happened to be the area known as Sheep Meadow, the place the Black Hawks happen to be currently flying out of, and in case you haven't noticed, there is also a TSW-7A portable control tower there. Our plans included everything, a full IFR airfield, police and fire telephone numbers and TAC frequencies, hospital locations, ER phone numbers, helipad dimensions and communication frequencies.

Every bit of information we could imagine air or ground units needing, to include contact numbers for public utilities, went in to our plan. It usually took us only a day to develop these plans. After five years of playing this game we got pretty good at it.

In light of the recent disasters, can somebody take a wild guess and figure out what our plan for Chicago looked like?

Meigs Field gave us capabilities that were not available in most other cities. Only Phoenix and LA had better accessibility from the air. Most importantly was a runway near the city center for importing heavy equipment.

Please relay the following sentiments to [Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley]: "Go ahead [...] Shut down Meigs, if you dare. But you can d\*\*n well expect me to say 'I told you so.' WHEN, not if, but WHEN it happens to Chicago."

[Name withheld by request]

Follow-up e-mail reply, received 9/26/2001:

[...]

I don't remember the exact details of our plan for Chicago, since this was over 15 years ago.

Obviously we didn't plan on zealots using airliners either. We did expect bombs similar to the one used in Oklahoma City, just much larger. I believe we figured the Sears Tower as one of the prime targets in Chicago.

In this situation, we would have flown our equipment into Meigs on C-130s and installed an NDB [non-directional beacon] approach, GCA [ground control approach] radar, portable control tower, and a tactical flight operations center. We would also have brought in two companies of engineers, also by C-130 or light-load C-5s (C-141s can't operate on runway that short).

The MEDEVAC air units from Ft. Campbell and the National Guard would have met us there, along with available Coast Guard units. The full plan called for within 24 hours after the disaster having an entire battalion of engineers, a field surgical hospital, a heavy-lift helicopter unit, a MEDEVAC C-130, a field mess unit (got to have food!) with water treatment capabilities, all on a full IFR [instrument flight rules] capable airport.

The flight-ops center has the capability to tie in to several land lines and has programmable phones not to mention HF, FM, VHF and UHF radios. Dispatch of engineers and medical units would be handled through the ops center.

[...]

[Name withheld by request]