

Video Refutes Bogus Claims



Correctional Officers at Florida Jail Spending Less Time in Internal Affairs

Correctional officers at Hillsborough County Jail in Tampa, Florida, are spending a lot less time defending themselves against bogus accusations from inmates following the installation of March Networks digital video recording systems by security systems integrator Cam Connections.

Required to investigate every complaint of excessive use of force or other inappropriate behavior, the jail's Internal Affairs staff routinely summon correctional officers to get their side of the story, adding to the stress of their job and taking them away from their operational responsibilities.

With March Networks™ digital recorders and cameras throughout the jail's two sites, Internal Affairs staff are now able to dismiss a bogus complaint immediately after reviewing video of the alleged event, says Hillsborough County Jail software specialist Roland Morgado. In many cases, investigations never even proceed to interviews with correctional officers because the video evidence exonerates them right up front.



The county jail is operated under the jurisdiction of the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office and accommodates more than 4,000 inmates at two separate facilities – the Orient Road Jail, located within Tampa, and the Falkenburg Road Jail a few miles away.

The two facilities process between 70,000 and 75,000 inmates annually, employ 1,500 employees and contractors and operate on an annual budget of \$125 million.

Hundreds of cameras were installed when the Orient Road facility was built in 1990 to assist correctional officers responsible for remotely opening and closing doors, but none of them were recorded.

A tape-based recording system was subsequently installed in the booking department on the advice of the jail's legal department, but it was "cumbersome to keep changing tapes and search for video," recalls Colonel David Parrish, Commander of Detention Services for the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office. It was eventually replaced by a small digital video recording system, but it was only capable of recording video at two frames per second.

When a decision was made to expand video recording beyond the high-risk areas of the two sites, jail management opted to start from scratch with a newer, more powerful system able to better accommodate its needs.

"One of the things that really stood out for us was the docking station architecture.

That was a big selling point."

- Roland Morgado
Software Specialist

"With March Networks technology, we're recording at eight frames per second on all cameras, giving us much higher video quality," says Morgado.

RAID

Video from cameras covering the facility's exits, sally ports, booking areas and drug testing rooms are saved to an external RAID unit and archived for four years and nine months "to get us past the statute of limitations for filing a lawsuit," explains Col. Parrish. Video from all other cameras is

saved to hard drives on the recorders themselves.

Morgado, another software specialist and one senior manager looked at four different systems proposed by security system integrators who responded to a call for bids. The March Networks system offered by Cam Connections came highly recommended by technical services staff at the Pinellas County Jail in nearby Clearwater.

"We spent a morning with them looking at their March Networks system and were very impressed," says Morgado. "One of the things

Cam Connections Inc.

Cam Connections (www.camconn.com), headquartered in Pinellas Park, Florida, is a leading CCTV and access control systems integrator serving retail, commercial and institutional clients in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and North and South Carolina. To contact a sales representative, please phone 727-544-1085 or email sales@camconnections.net.

that really stood out for us was the docking station architecture. That was a big selling point.”

The docking station design of the 4000 Series recorders allows the jail’s IT staff to replace a hard drive or service a unit without having to disconnect any of the cabling. It saves time, eliminates errors and maximizes system availability.

Thirty-two March Networks recorders were installed in July 2006, providing jail staff with access to recorded video from more than 500 cameras covering hallways, stairwells and building perimeters, in addition to the high-risk areas.

Morgado is kept busy responding to requests for video from the State Attorney’s Office, the Public Defender, the FBI and other law enforcement and security agencies.

“Often, they don’t know exactly what they’re looking for,” he says. “They’ll give me a date and time range and I’ll have to research it to see what I can find. Many of the alleged events occur in the booking area where we have a lot of interaction with the inmates. They’ll sometimes come to us a little intoxicated and, if something occurs there, the authorities will want evidence for court.”

The facility-wide recording system has proven to be “a tremendous management tool,” says Col. Parrish. “It has really assisted our supervisors in determining what is actually happening. Every morning, we review our incident reports from the previous 24 hours and if we have any questions, we can just go back and look at the video.”

Fire

One event captured by the jail’s March Networks video system came as a bit of a surprise. Soon after commissioning the system, a propane storage and distribution facility immediately across the street from the Orient Road jail went up in flames.

“It looked like a war zone,” recalls Morgado. “As the propane tanks ignited, they shot up into the air. We were fortunate that we had several pole cameras around our perimeter, so we were able to capture the whole event



Orient Road Jail, Tampa, Florida

from the time the blaze first started to the time it was extinguished.”

Firefighters who responded to the call had to make a snap decision to either evacuate the neighborhood and let it blow up or fight the fire.

“There were some huge tanks there,” recalls Morgado. “If they had gone up, it would have made a burn mark a mile away.”

Fire crews responded to the call within five minutes and had the blaze extinguished within 25 minutes. A video record of the fire requested by the Fire Marshall’s office will be used for training purposes.

The new video systems are connected to the jail’s network, allowing sergeants and lieutenants from both sites to access live or archived video from any camera. It took all of 10 minutes to train each user, says Morgado.

Next on the agenda is an expansion of the system to cover the jail’s property rooms to assist in streamlining the resolution of complaints about personal property not being returned when inmates are released from incarceration. ✨

Hillsborough County Jail

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