

As 4th Battalion, 3rd Air Defense Artillery, prepares for an upcoming deployment to the Middle East, the unit is doing everything it can to prepare its Soldiers for the task ahead.

One way to ensure their Soldiers are ready is through the Standardized Patriot Evaluation and Assessment Reporting, or SPEAR, an assessment conducted by representatives of Fort Bliss' 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command.

"SPEAR training is the most realistic and valuable training for Patriot," said Sgt. John Bearth, a team leader for A Battery, 4th Bn., 3rd ADA. "It's different from the rest of the training because it's tailored in this exercise for real-world scenarios."

Evaluators execute the SPEAR utilizing the Flight Mission Simulator/Digital, which provides real-time simulation of all Patriot radars, launching stations and missiles, as well as providing dynamic control of all radar tracks within the scenario. The FMDS immerses Patriot crews into a dynamic air battle that stimulates the crew to make rapid decisions based on a variety of engagement scenarios, and provides Soldiers the opportunity to learn from mistakes.

"One thing I'll take from this exercise is that you can continue to learn," said Spc. Enock Placide, A Btry. "Everything you make a mistake on you learn from it and drive on."

The SPEAR also helps test a Patriot missile crew's ability to conduct and direct surface-to-air engagements while performing under sometimes chaotic conditions. It is how this battalion operated under these challenging conditions that made one Soldier especially proud.

"I've done SPEARs before in other units and it always ended badly," said Bearth. "I'm really proud of the proficiency and professionalism of 4-3. The 'I Strike' Battalion has done everything we're supposed to do twice, and done it well, to prepare for our upcoming mission downrange."

One Soldier said the level of intensity has better prepared him for whatever challenges may lie ahead.

"I feel extremely prepared because my first evaluation was high stress, and I have never been exposed to that kind of stress," said Spc. Bentley Dalton, a Patriot switch operator for A Btry. "I now feel better prepared as a result."

The external evaluation also gave participants a fresh look at ways to execute their mission and also provides the unit the opportunity to exercise the air and missile defense kill chain, which extends from the Patriot firing battery to the controller at the joint-service level.

"Having external evaluations brings personal knowledge to the fight," said 1st Lt. Michael Nizolak, a fire control platoon leader for A Btry. "We get to see a bigger picture of what we do. The graders ask us questions and give us scenarios we never thought of, plus a lot of our graders just got back from down range."

The SPEAR training gave participants an idea of their strengths and which skills they need to improve. After the training, evaluators provided feedback to let the crews and leaders know how

everyone performed. Ninety-three percent of command post crews passed their standard level testing on their first try, with one crew successfully passing the advanced level training the first time.

The "I Strike" Battalion had nine air battles simulated over a three-day period and had the highest SPEAR score in the 32nd AAMDC within the last seven years. Soldiers from 4th Bn., 3rd ADA, also earned one gold and three silver awards of the Blackjack Pershing Crew Award. Gold is awarded to crews that earn an overall test average of 97 percent, and silver to crews that earn an average score of 94 percent on the SPEAR test.