

Allied Patriot Top Gun

By Chief Warrant Officer 3 Matthew Keechi

"No nation's security and well-being can be lastingly achieved in isolation, but only in effective cooperation with fellow-nations."

~Dwight D. Eisenhower



Seven years in development, the inaugural Allied Patriot Top Gun (APTG) Course launched July 30, 2018. Two months later, eight foreign officers graduated — three from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, three from Kuwait, and two from the United Arab Emirates. A harbinger of things to come, it is both a product of addressing past failures and concerted efforts to develop and extend lessons and training to our foreign partners.

The aforementioned seven-year development of APTG was the direct result of the slow progression of material releasable to partner nations about Patriot. Obviously challenging due to those complexities, it took the concerted effort from steering agencies such as the Lower-Tier Project Office and the Air Defense Artillery School to both develop and receive approval for the course.

APTG offers a graduate-level intensely demanding curriculum to partner nations on Patriot system planning and employment. A mirror image of the U.S. course (which additionally trains on U.S. ballistic missile defense, BMD, platforms) APTG alternately focuses on BMD planning considerations and gives host nations' expertise in the air defense posture against threats to their home countries — a significant strategic planning value over generic training.

As we look back from the current course offered, history teaches that Patriot Top Gun was born of necessity and in wake of trag-



From left to right, Capt. Mohammed Alkaabi, Maj. Eid Almutairi (distinguished honor graduate), Lt. Col. Nawaf Alotibi, Lt. Col. Ahmed Alablan, U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 Matthew Keechi (instructor), Lt. Col. Naif Alarfag, Maj. Ahmed Kalandar, Capt. Saber Alkhyeli, Capt. Sulaiman Alenezi (honor graduate). (Courtesy photo)

ic, and in hind-sight preventable, events of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In late March of 2003, a Patriot radar classified a Royal Air Force Tornado as an anti-radiation missile. The aircraft was subsequently engaged and destroyed according with then established self-defense rules of engagement. A few weeks later, a U.S. F/A-18 Hornet was similarly destroyed due to an erroneous classification as a tactical ballistic missile. The result? Two aircraft were destroyed, but more tragically a British pilot, a British navigator and a U.S. pilot lost their lives.

Several factors contributed to these tragedies. Awareness, appreciation of, and appropriate planning for the complexities of Patriot were at the forefront — what we now call the “how” of system planning. Subsequently, the Patriot Top Gun Course was developed to address these important shortfalls.

Today, the premise of Patriot Top Gun is to teach officers how to think, not what to think. The Patriot Top Gun Course has been offered to U.S. Army officers since its inception in 2005, and has prepared nearly 120 officers to serve as planners and advisors for Patriot systems worldwide. Patriot Top Gun provides the major tools in developing that “how” with a comprehensive curriculum of radar theory, joint interoperability, ballistic missile defense enabling

platforms (e.g. E-2 Hawkeye, E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System, Aegis, etc.), advanced ballistic missile threat analysis, Patriot capabilities and limitations, and the art and science of air and missile defense design. Key to program success is the use of subject matter experts from across the country. Every topic in Patriot Top Gun is taught by such an expert. Student success is validated at course end by presentation of a plan for air and missile defense of assigned assets. This plan is presented and graded by an expert panel (Patriot Top Gun graduates, and/or planners who have already designed the in-theater plans being presented).

The Patriot missile system is a political tool used as a strategic deterrent in many countries across the globe. Including the U.S., Patriot is currently employed by 13 nations. As the enemy capability grows, it becomes increasingly imperative to share our training, curriculum, and what we have learned from our mistakes in the past. U.S. Patriot and host nation Patriot systems are often integrated to maximize the capability of the combined force. To retain a credible and effective strategic deterrence, combined forces must share knowledge and experience to maximize the employment of the system. The first APTG graduates have attained the skill level necessary to enhance the defense

of strategic assets and the population in their home countries.

The Gulf Cooperation Council has been united in the defense of ballistic missile and unmanned aerial vehicle attacks from Houthi rebels in Yemen for more than three years. The officers selected to attend the first iteration of APTG have a combined military service of over 120 years, and arguably more operational combat experience than any U.S. Patriot Top Gun Course has seen in the past decade. The eight officers that attended APTG have operationally deployed the system, and most have neutralized enemy TBM and aerial attacks. These officers have a responsibility to not only defend strategic assets, but also to develop plans that protect the population of their homeland. The students understood the demands of the course, but more importantly embraced the ideology that the knowledge gained would greatly assist with the defense of their homeland. They stayed two hours after class to study, and on weekends they gathered together to study as a group. For them, this course was about knowledge gained to enhance their ability; it was very personal.

Combined training has long been a part of Army history, and the tradition continues at the ADA School at Fort Sill. ADA instruction is given to many of our foreign partners in varying degrees, but the detail of instruction afforded by APTG has changed how we will conduct future courses. International cooperation in training is in line with the Secretary of Defense Lines of Effort that “provides avenues for peace ... [and] temper the plans of those who would attack other nations or try to impose their will over the less powerful.”

Ballistic missile and aerial threats will continue to advance their capabilities, and it is essential we continue to develop our air defense forces in parallel to combat the threat. Allied Patriot Top Gun will be offered for years to come.