Members of B Battery’s Quick Reaction Force (QRF) respond to a ground attack from opposition force, played by D Battery (Markus Bach, Muna-Museum)
During the month of March, U.S. Patriot forces returned to the Illesheim Training Area, near Ansbach, Germany, for the first time in over eight years. The 5th Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery Regiment deployed A and B Batteries, E Company and Headquarters and Headquarters Battery (HHB) for a three-week period. The goals of the exercise were to complete Intermediate Gunnery Certifications (Table VIII) for A and B Batteries and then complete a battalion field training exercise (FTX). The FTX evaluated the battalion’s ability to execute sustained Air and Missile Defense (AMD) operations against a near-peer adversary in an austere environment. It served as the final training gate prior to the battalion’s deployment to its external evaluation in Romania this summer.

Throughout the first two weeks, A and B Batteries conducted Table VIII Gunnery Certifications, validating their ability to rapidly deploy to a new location, secure and establish the site and resume AMD operations. This included evaluation of the batteries’ reconnaissance, selection and occupation of position crews, all equipment mobility crews, missile reload crews and air battle management scenarios.

As the Table VIII certifications ended, the battalion transitioned to the FTX portion of Panther Shield. This involved a dynamic and complex scenario in which the battalion was forward-deployed to provide AMD against a near-peer threat, while simultaneously defending themselves from a hybrid insurgent ground force. D Battery served as the opposing force for the scenarios, conducting surveillance, probes and full-scale attacks against the battalion’s various locations. Key to the battalion’s training was a focus not just on air defense training tasks, but many key movement and maneuver tasks. The training focus was on fundamentals of establishing a deliberate defense, hasty attack, route reconnaissance and integration of aviation to support the movements.

This training not only validated the battalion’s ability to defend their sites, but also to coordinate effectively between units using various communications services. The battalion staff had to use creative techniques to continue the battalion’s mission despite the ever-changing ground situation, complicated by “white-card” injects that affected the battalion’s operations. These situations tested the battalion on all levels, including managing personnel and casualties, providing religious services, analyzing intelligence data and enemy actions, recommending adjustments to operations, providing logistical support and managing communications systems to allow the battalion to execute mission command.

1st Lt. Joseph Sierra, E Company’s executive officer, served as the battalion Quick Reaction Force (QRF) officer in charge. In addition to reacting to enemy actions, his unit was still responsible for regular maintenance and logistics support requirements to allow the firing batteries to maintain their AMD mission. “We were tasked to maintain command post operations and logistics package missions while supporting QRF,” said Sierra on his Soldiers’ activities during the FTX. “They truly enjoyed the experience since they...
were doing something normally out of their lane and having fun while doing it.”

In addition to the ground scenarios, 5-7th ADA had the opportunity to coordinate training events with the 1st Combat Aviation Brigade stationed around Ansbach, Germany. Soldiers from A and B Batteries conducted aerial insertions and established listening posts/observations post using UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters. During one of the ground attacks, friendly forces sustained simulated casualties that required immediate aero-medical evacuation. HHB's medics and Role 1 Aid Station provided immediate care and ultimately evacuated the casualties by UH-60 Blackhawks to the proper medical facilities.

For air scenarios, AH-64 Apaches serving as “Red Air” used terrain features around the ITA to try to avoid detection from the Patriot radars in order to attack them and their sites. Using the Live Air Trainer software in the Patriot system, the batteries, under the direction of the fire direction center, were able to detect, track, engage and destroy the Red Air Apaches, defending themselves and their assigned assets. Finally, a CH-47 Chinook conducted a reenlistment flight for eight Soldiers from the battalion. Ultimately, over 88 Soldiers from the Panther Battalion were able to fly in the Chinook as they trained hot and cold load operations.

Partnered with 5-7th ADA were eight members from the Swedish Armed Forces’ Luftvärsregementet (Air Defense Regiment) as observers. Sweden has decided to acquire the Patriot weapon system and these observers received a first-hand look at how the U.S. employs the battalion, sustains operations and conducts training and certifications. Some members of the observer team even had the opportunity to fight an air battle scenario and conduct emplacement and prepare for movement crew drills on a launching station.

“To get the opportunity to visit a Patriot unit such as 5-7th ADA has been a great experience, especially after some of us have attended the 14E and 14T classes in the fall of 2018,” said Sgt. 1st Class Simon Bjurgard of the Swedish 61st Air Defense Battalion. “This visit provided a much-needed context to the things we were taught while in the U.S. The visit included lots of experiences and lessons learned which will help us in the process of moving forward as a future Patriot nation.”

Lt. Col. Magnus Stegmark, 61st Air Defense Battalion commander, had an opportunity to shadow Lt. Col. Barry Carter, the commander of 5-7th ADA, during the exercise. “From my behalf, I see this as the starting point of coming events which can be conducted together,” Stegmark said. “Battalions meeting each other and exchanging experiences will be the foundation of building friendship.”

Overall, Exercise Panther Shield allowed 5-7th ADA to execute a wide range of operations, from finalizing the battalion's Intermediate Gunnery Certifications with A and B Batteries' Table VIIIs, to the battalion field training exercise. The unique training opportunities with 1st CAB allowed Soldiers from 5-7th ADA to test their AMD skills and train alongside Army aviation. Incorporating the Swedish observers strengthened the connection between our two nations, establishing key relationships that will help Sweden enhance the AMD capabilities and better integrate with allied systems in the future. Panther Shield, however, was just the precursor, as 5-7th ADA looks forward to deploying again this summer, this time involving the entire battalion with split operations between Astral Knight 19 in Slovenia and Saber Guardian 19 in Romania.

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