

Air Defenders Travel to Israel for Participation in Operation Juniper Cobra

Courtesy Story by 1st Lt. Jerrell Teague / 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade / December 2009



FORT HOOD, Texas -- Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 44th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 69th ADA Bde., were selected to deploy a Patriot Advanced Capability-3 missile to Israel for participation in Operation Juniper Cobra 2010.

The recurring joint exercise happens every other year, bringing together Israeli Defense Force personnel and United States military personnel to validate plans to protect Israel against

ballistic missile threats. This year's exercise was significant, as it was the first time PAC-3 was deployed to Israel.

On Sept. 8, 1-44 ADA assembled and activated Task Force Defender at Fort Hood. The task force consisted of 70 personnel, each hand selected to accomplish the mission. It was commanded by Cpt. Todd Blanchette and Sgt. 1st Class Seagram Porter. The Task Force Defender consisted of PAC-3 battle crews, along with maintenance and support personnel needed for the exercise.

Prior to deployment in support of the exercise, the task force had a lot to accomplish in order to ensure the success of the operation. Utilizing 69th ADA Brigade's simulation equipment, the task force completed several tasks in preparation for this deployment.

The crews conducted several weeks of scenarios to validate equipment and theater specific tactics, techniques and procedures. In addition, select personnel received training on Patriot software upgrades that they would later use during the exercise.

Soldiers and maintenance support personnel worked hard on a short timeline to ensure that all deploying equipment would be ready to load on an aircraft to make its way toward Israel.

Simultaneous with pre-deployment training and maintenance, the task force Soldiers were processed through Soldier readiness processing. The Soldiers also received cultural awareness training, and the Family Readiness Support Assistant facilitated a town hall meeting for the families.

Equipment and personnel were ready to take off, Oct. 25, and the movement over the water for the task force proved to be more eventful than expected.

Upon their arrival to Portland, N.H., they received a very warm heart-felt sendoff by over 200 volunteers. Soldiers interacted with veterans whose services spanned from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. They visited with proud and thankful Americans, each sharing stories and expressing gratitude for the Soldier's service.

Following New Hampshire, the plane landed in Iceland where travel was unexpectedly delayed for maintenance, allowing Soldiers to adjust to a significant time zone change. Because of their stay in Iceland, the Soldiers were rested, well fed and, most of all, prepared.

As the Soldiers arrived in Israel, they were transported to Camp Cobra. The United States flag waved above an air defense artillery flag, welcoming Soldiers to the site. That morning they were quickly in-processed, assigned to tents and oriented to the facilities. Having been the last participants to arrive, the Soldiers quickly got to work.

Immediately following integration and system emplacement, the War fighter Exercise got underway. This exercise showcased the first deployment of PAC-3 into a foreign systems architecture. It served to validate communications and reporting methods in a true multinational joint environment.

The Command Post Exercise commenced, Nove. 1. For five days, participants simulated missile defense operations in the context of a combat scenario against various incoming threats. The threat required constant coordination across all weapons systems, producing redundant defense architectures capable of intercepting multi-tiered threats.

New tactics and techniques for conducting engagements were developed and reviewed on an hourly and daily basis, with PAC-3 emphasized as the last layer of defense against an incoming missile.

During the CPX, 1-44 Soldiers were honored with a visit from the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, President Shimon Perez, and Minister of Defense, Ehud Barak. The privilege of interacting with a foreign head of state was described by the Soldiers as "a surreal experience".

Following the exercise, Soldiers were able to enjoy some rest and relaxation. For two days the Soldiers of 1-44 toured historical sites across Israel; from The Sea of Galilee in the north, to religious and historical sites in Jerusalem, to the Dead Sea and the ruins of Masada in the south.

During the various exercises, the battle crews and leaders broke bread with their Israeli counterparts, swapping stories of combat and enjoying the camaraderie of air defenders. Redeployment operations commenced, and Task Force Defender was on its way home.

Finally, all Soldiers and equipment safely arrived to Fort Hood in time to spend the Thanksgiving holiday with their families. The hard work and discipline of Task Force Defender will pay off in the future. It will aid in the creation of new joint doctrine which fully integrates PAC-3 capabilities versus new threats in the United States and across the globe.