



I-3 ADA Medals at the Olympics

Atlanta's skyline looms in the background as a I-3 ADA Sentinel radar guards the Centennial Olympic Games against terrorist aerial attacks.

Article by Maj. Dave Bagnali
Photos by 1st Lt. Steve Thornton

Their mission was to assist in controlling all of the temporary flight restriction areas during the summer games. The Sentinel ground-based sensors detected more than 25 unauthorized aircraft and passed this information to U.S. Customs. The soldiers from I-3 ADA only had three days to prepare, set up and execute this mission, which was performed in an outstanding manner. Job well done!

— Maj. Gen. John Costello
Chief of Air Defense Artillery

The combat readiness of I-3 ADA "I Strike" soldiers created the flexibility to accomplish the Olympic mission on extremely short notice. 3ID (Mech) will always prepare for war and maintain the ability to rapidly respond to our nation's call.

— Maj. Gen. John W. Hendrix
3rd Infantry Division (Mech)

The Oklahoma City and World Trade Center bombings should have awakened Americans from their dream of immunity to terrorist attack, but when a pipe bomb concealed in a green knapsack detonated at the Centennial Olympics in Atlanta, horrified spectators repeated the same refrain: "I didn't think it could happen here." Afterward, *Time* magazine ran a headline that read "The Dream Turns to Nightmare,"

above an article about the pipe bomb explosion, which killed one woman and injured more than 100 people who had gathered for a rock concert in Centennial Olympic Park.

The death of even one person at an event meant to promote international good will may justifiably be described as tragic, but for soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Air Defense Artillery, the event fell short of nightmare proportions. They were fully aware of the truly nightmarish effects that a terrorist aerial attack — the most often overlooked but potentially most devastating form of terrorism — could have inflicted on crowds within the "Centennial Olympic Ring," the "downtown" portion of Atlanta, which was the site of most Olympic venues. The Munich games in 1972 had been marred when the Palestine Liberation Organization murdered 11 Israeli athletes, but as the 100th Olympiad approached, there was growing concern that, rather than targeting athletes from specific nations, terrorists, foreign or domestic, might target Olympic crowds. There was also a growing awareness that a terrorist attack might come from the air. It was I-3 ADA's job to prevent "it" from "happening here."

Mention the term “terrorist attack” and images of exploding truck bombs, car bombs and satchel charges immediately spring to mind while the threat of terrorist attack from the third dimension is usually ignored. To date, terrorist aerial attacks have, for the most part, existed only in works of fiction. In the movie *Black Sunday*, for example, an explosive-laden terrorist blimp hovers menacingly over the Super Bowl. But real-life terrorists have employed aerial platforms within the United States. In 1969 campus radicals at the University of Wisconsin launched an aerial attack against a Madison power plant, but their homemade bombs failed to explode. The escapade, as a result, made headlines only in the “underground” newspapers that were popular on college campuses during the 1960s, and the general public remained blissfully unaware that the threat of terrorist air attack is very real. However, terrorism experts have always known that a wide variety of lucrative terrorist targets are extremely vulnerable to air attack. Concern over the vulnerability of Olympic venues to low-level air attack increased as relay runners carrying the Olympic torch across America neared Atlanta.

On July 15, 43 soldiers from Headquarters Battery, 1-3 ADA, and 14 soldiers from the 123rd Signal Battalion, which comprised Task Force Hub, deployed from Fort Stewart, Ga., to Atlanta to provide airspace overwatch for the “Centennial Olympic Ring.” Their mission was to provide airspace overwatch for 11 Olympic venues, a worldwide contingent of athletes, spectators and the Olympic workforce. Working hand-in-hand with military, federal and local law enforcement agencies, these 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) soldiers conducted joint coordination and detection of hos-

tile aircraft with a multitude of other radar platforms. Operating under the tactical control of U.S. Customs, the officers and soldiers involved in this assignment executed a unique, challenging and realistic mission.

The primary aerial threat to the Olympic games was an unauthorized airframe carrying explosive or nuclear, biological or chemical devices flying at low altitude. The likelihood of such attacks are not as remote as those who have never considered the problem might suspect. Aircraft are easily chartered, and just about any type of airframe can deliver ordnance. How difficult would it be, for example, to fuel a crop duster with a lethal chemical spray rather than insecticides? As narcotic smugglers have discovered there’s no shortage of licensed or unlicensed pilots willing to take extraordinary risks for the right amount of money.

U.S. Customs minimized the air threat by using two-dimensional Doppler radars located at Dobbins Air Force Base and P-3 surveillance planes operating out of Jacksonville, Fla. Although these are capable systems, their ability to detect aircraft at low altitudes is limited. Therefore, the National Command Authority called on the highly trained and motivated soldiers of 1-3 ADA’s Sentinel and Enhanced Position Location Reporting System (EPLRS) Platoon to cover the the dead space and to operate during extended hours. Commanded by Capt. Kenneth D. Hubbard, Task Force Hub was to provide low-altitude (zero to 7,000 feet above ground level) radar coverage for the Olympic Ring no later than 0700 on July 17.

The platoon had served as the Sentinel test bed unit, and its soldiers had a high degree of confidence in the ground-based sensor system’s capability. The Sentinel can detect rotary-

TASK ORGANIZATION

TASK FORCE HUB

**Headquarters & Headquarters
Battery (-) 1-3 ADA**

**Sentinel Platoon
1-3 ADA**

**Air Battle Management
Operations Center**

**Army Airspace
Command & Control**

**EPLRS Platoon
123rd Signal Company
(Attached)**

Guards



Sgt. Jerry Myers, Capt. Kenneth Hubbard, 1st Lt. Steven Thornton and Lt. Col. Harry Bloomer, 1-3 ADA commander, observe as Sgt. Todd Grieco performs maintenance on a Sentinel radar.

THREAT

- Low-altitude aircraft violating FAA and U.S. Customs airspace for the purpose of conducting unauthorized observation or terrorist activity directed at the Olympic Games.

- Potential threats may use low-altitude aircraft, including unmanned aerial vehicles to avoid Federal Aviation Administration and P-3 surveillance.

- Aerial terrorist threats are possible and may be directed against highly attended events.



Sgt. Andrew Cox, SFC Jeffery Robinson, SFC James Williams, Lt. Col. Harry Bloomer, SFC William Reyes and Sgt. William Kennison of I-3 ADA take a break outside the ABMOC, which was collocated with the Air Security Operations Center at Dobbins Air Force Base, Ga.

and fixed-wing aircraft, low-flying aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and ultralites during all weather conditions, 24 hours a day.

The forward area air defense command, control, communications and intelligence (FAAD C³I) system linked to the Sentinel would enable the I-3 ADA air battle management operation center (ABMOC) to provide a three-dimensional air picture to the U.S. Customs operation center via 123rd Signal Battalion's EPLRS. The battalion's ability to effectively integrate the overall air picture from three remote sensor sites would enable U.S. Customs to vector aircraft to interdict potentially hostile aerial platforms that penetrated the restricted area.

The urban Atlanta Basin terrain posed several obstacles to Task Force Hub. First, the hilly, built-up terrain limited line

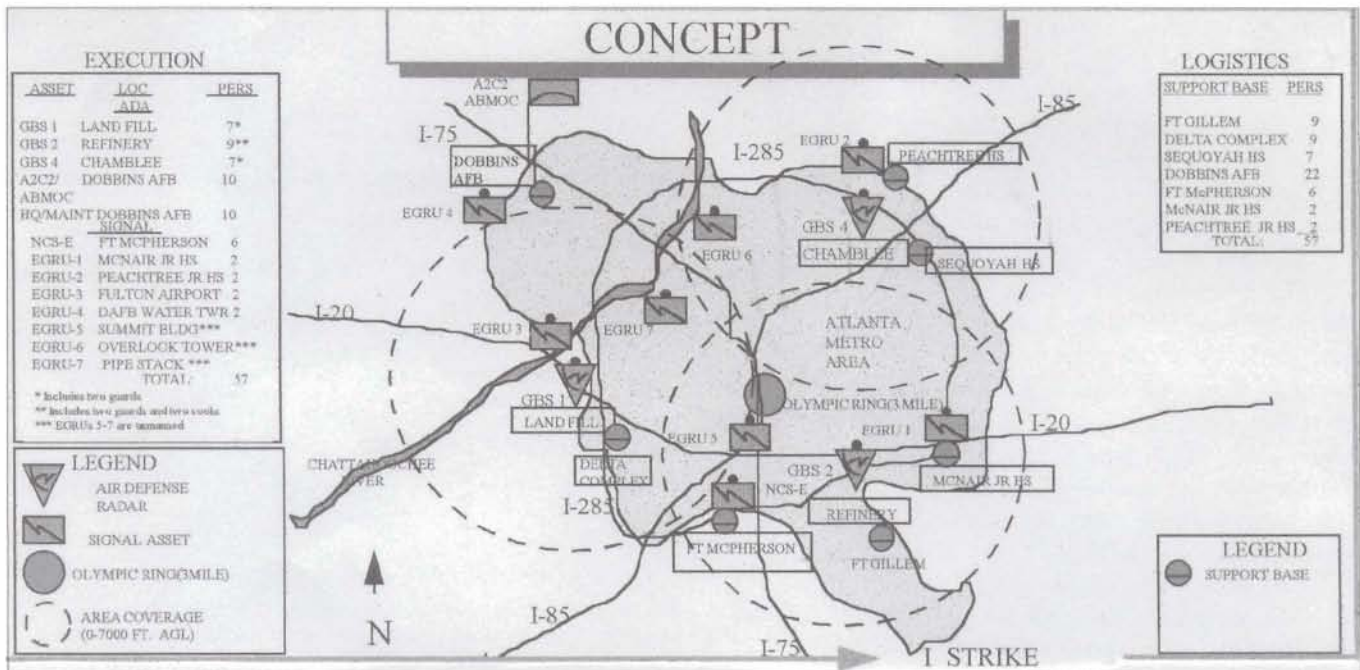
of sight, which is necessary for the effective operation of the Sentinel and EPLRSs. To minimize dead space created by terrain masking, the Sentinel platoon, under the control of 1st Lt. Steven M. Thornton, emplaced three Sentinels with overlapping coverage around the Atlanta Basin. To enhance data transfer from the EPLRS-based FAAD C³I system, the EPLRS Platoon, under 2nd Lt. Delbert J. Bancroft, emplaced seven enhanced grid reference units (EGRUs) throughout the Atlanta Basin. Second, few sites in the Atlanta Basin are suited for radar emplacement (obstacles such as trees and buildings limit the Sentinel's line of sight). Therefore, the Sentinel Platoon emplaced one Sentinel at a local airport and two Sentinels at two different landfill sites. Third, there is a great deal of electromagnetic interference in an urban area. Task Force Hub coordinated with the Federal Communica-



I-3 ADA Sentinel ground-based sensors can detect rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft, low-flying aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and ultralites in all weather conditions, 24-hours a day.

MISSION

“Task Force Hub deploys to the Atlanta Metro Area to provide low-altitude (0-7000 FT AGL) radar coverage for the Olympic Ring NLT 170700 JUL 96 in order to assist U.S. Customs in detecting aerial threats.”



Safeguarding the Olympic Ring

tions Commission to ensure the Sentinel and EPLRS frequency bands were clear of interference, thus ensuring the systems' optimal operation.

Operation Torch Overwatch, the code name for the Olympic security operation, fell into the operations other than war (OOTW) category. The operation required Task Force Hub to coordinate with civilian, military and government agencies. Task Force Hub coordinated closely with Department of Defense special events officials, who contracted sites for Sentinel and EGRU emplacement. The Joint Task Force

Olympics (JTF-O) and 24th Combat Support Group from Fort Stewart provided billeting and logistical support to Task Force Hub. Soldiers integrated into the existing JTF-O logistics system at the Delta Complex in southwest Atlanta and at schools throughout the Atlanta Metro area.

The rules of engagement were extremely important for this operation. Sensor and EGRU sites were located on private and government property throughout the Atlanta Metro area. The possibility of larceny, vandalism or other criminal acts against the personnel and equipment of Task Force Hub were clearly present. However, neither the guards nor the early warning system operators on the Sentinels carried ammunition or weapons. They were permitted to use force only in self-defense. Otherwise, they were to use cellular phones to dial 911. Unlike citizens of other countries, Americans are still relatively unused to dealing with the military in security situations. This added a degree of unpredictability to the operation. Fortunately, Task Force Hub experienced no problems with civilians, nor did it become the target of criminal acts during the operation.

The 1996 Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta concluded on Aug. 4. Operation Torch Overwatch concluded two days later with the safe redeployment of Task Force Hub to Fort Stewart. These soldiers can be proud of their accomplishments. The Sentinel Platoon covered a nearly 360-square mile area around Atlanta and detected 48 aircraft penetrating restricted airspace. Twenty-seven of these aircraft were unauthorized to enter the restricted airspace. U.S. Customs Blackhawks intercepted 26 of the 27 aircraft and



Assistant Secretary of the Army Robert M. Walker posed for photographs with 1-3 ADA soldiers.

escorted them to local airports, where the FAA detained the pilots and suspended their licenses. One aircraft was able to fly into other air traffic before it could be positively identified by U.S. Customs Blackhawks and be properly detained.

The soldiers of the Sentinel and EPLRS Platoons are among the division's most frequently deployed soldiers. However, they clearly faced new challenges and overcame all problems. Leaders and soldiers completed the operation safely and successfully. Furthermore, they learned many lessons about operating in an urban environment during an OOTW.

First, urban terrain poses several unique challenges not associated with other terrain. Second, the issue of frequency management becomes even more critical in urban terrain. Third, leaders must be capable of coordinating with civilian and government agencies during OOTW. Fourth, clearly understood rules of engagement are as critical during OOTW as they are during war, because the lives of civilians are involved. Fifth, the Sentinel and EPLRS, although originally developed for a battlefield environment, are very capable of operating in an urban environment.

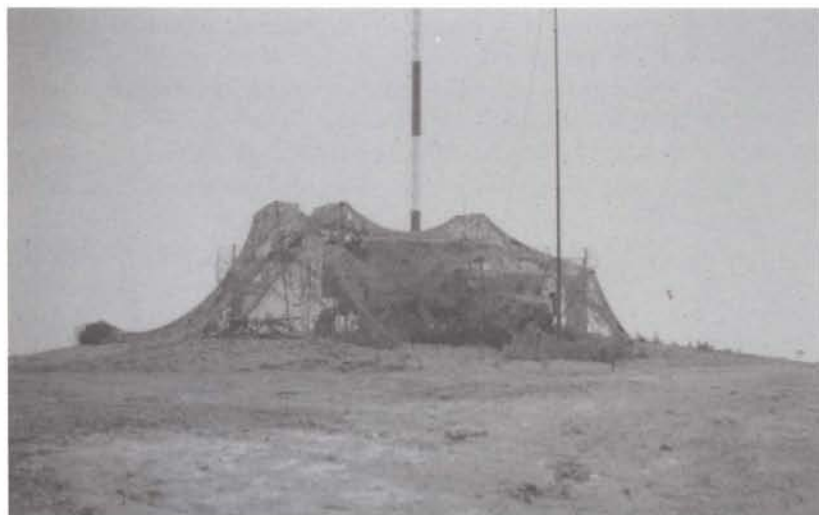
Due to the efforts of 1-3 ADA and 123rd Signal Battalion soldiers and the advanced equipment they operate, the skies remained safe over Atlanta during the Olympics. They established an effective joint defense against terrorist aerial attack that will serve as an archetype for future operations. They demonstrated the flexibility of ADA soldiers and the opera-



Non-duty hours for 1-3 ADA were miniscule, as were Task Force Hub's beach and volley ball court.

tional effectiveness of an important new air defense system, the Sentinel ground-based sensor, in a real-world environment. And air defense soldiers recommended for awards for their part in Operation Torch Overwatch will be able to tell their grandchildren that they "medaled" at the Centennial Olympic Games.

Maj. Dave Bagnati is the 1-3 ADA S-3. 1st Lt. Steve Thorton is the HHB, 1-3 ADA, executive officer.



Data relayed by FAAD C²I sensor nodes appeared on FAAD C²I displays collocated with Federal Aviation Administration displays in the Air Security Operations Center.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Plan for more EGRU/EPLRS sites when operating in an urban environment.**
- **Launch airborne communications platforms to establish line of site and bring the Sentinel systems into operation.**
- **Ensure commercial and military radio frequencies are deconflicted.**
- **Eliminate the "language barrier" between military units and civilian agencies. Translate the Military Grid Reference System and military methods of presenting latitude and longitude into language civilians can understand.**