

Foreign officers visit 31st for week-long exercise



1ST LT. SABRINA SMITH

First Lt. John Pendon of 1-1 ADA Battalion points out a particular feature of the Engagement Control Station to the visiting Croatian officers during the 31st Brigade Air Defense Exercise.

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31st ADA Bde. Public Affairs

The 31st Air Defense Artillery Brigade conducted a weeklong air defense exercise at Tobin Wells.

During this exercise, 31st Bde. invited five foreign officers to observe the exercise, utilizing the time to improve relations between the air defense branches of the United States and Croatia.

The five officers invited were from Croatia, Col. Vladimir Superina, Maj. Zeljko Belic, Maj. Emil Curkovic, Maj. Mato Mikic, and Lt. J.G. Darija Gvozdenecic. Their main purpose in attending the ADX was to learn more about the air defense systems that the Army has in order to help them build their own air defense branch, a relatively new branch in the Croatian army.

"We are grateful for this opportunity," said Superina. "It's very important for us to be more familiar with this equipment and these procedures, because Croatia is trying to become a member of NATO, as the United States is, and we want to build our relationship with them, so it is very nice. The commanders have been very nice and we hope that this will be a very successful trip for us."

The Croatian officers were escorted by Capt. Travis Cieloha, 1-1 ADA Bn. signal officer, to the motorpool to be shown around the equipment they would be observing in use out at the Drive Up System Training facility on Tobin Wells. All of the officers were impressed by the general ability of the Patriot system and hoped to take what they had learned back to their country.

Following their tour of the motorpool, the Croatians were escorted to the home of Lt. Col. Brian Disinger, 1-1 ADA Bn. commander, where they were able to mingle with the officers and NCOs of the battalion and learn a bit more about the way the U.S. Army conducts its daily business. The officers and NCOs of 1-1 were friendly and welcoming to the foreign officers, and eager to impart their knowledge of air defense to a country that, up until now, has had little in the way of an air defense branch.

"We were really grateful for the opportunity to have these officers visit us," said Cieloha. "Being able to show them the ins and outs of Patriot to an extent, is very rewarding, because you know you're helping another army become even better able to defend its country. I was glad to be their escort during their visit."

The next day, the Croatians were escorted to the DUST facility, where they were shown what the unit does when they are training in air defense. 1st Lt. John Pendon, D Battery, showed them the general workings of the Engagement Control Station and also showed them around the Battery Command Post, explaining what each unit must do in order to have a successful site up and running.

The Croatian officers were also given a unique opportunity to view a new piece of equipment currently being fielded into the Army; the new Tactical Operating Center, that currently only 5-52 ADA Bn. is in possession of.

The Croatians were pleased with their tour and the willingness of the Army to aid them in their quest to build an air defense branch in their army.

"It was very useful to see this powerful set of equipment," said Superina. "We unfortunately don't have enough money in our country to buy this kind of system, but I believe learning about it will help us build our own air defense system that will be suited for our country. We are all very grateful to be given the opportunity to come here, and we thank you."

31st ADA Bde. participates in warfighting exercise

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When not deployed on operations around the world, III (US) Corps participates in Exercise Ulchi Focus Lens. UFL takes place at a number of locations, one of which being the Fort Hood Battle Simulation Center in Texas. The purpose of this simulation, conducted jointly with South Korean and US forces, is to exercise, refine and revamp numerous operation plans the military has in place for any eventuality.

As a member of III Corps, the 31st Air Defense Artillery Brigade also regularly participates in the exercise, honing air and missile defense planning and techniques in an effort to ensure the optimal air and missile defense is provided to U.S. and coalition forces.

During the exercise, 31st ADA Bde. faced a free-thinking enemy, and played through the simulation, depicting nearly every scenario that could possibly happen in the event of hostilities with another nation or nations, that might include chemical attacks, tactical ballistic missile launches, enemy aircraft attacks and ground attacks on ADA sites.

While these scenarios were simulated digitally in the brigade tactical

operations center, the training was extremely realistic and allowed the brigade to fight as it would if ever deployed. This experience provides a superb method for training and the employment and development of procedures.

In addition, the brigade staff had the opportunity to integrate with their higher headquarters, III Corps. Brigade staff planned and executed operations through the exercise with the III Corps staff helping to strengthen relations and understanding between staffs. For III Corps, the exercise provided an excellent means to see what it is that the 31st ADA Bde. is capable of accomplishing.

Capt. Charles Sargent, a member of the 31st ADA Bde. S-3 shop, was one of the officers picked to attend this exercise.

"For me, the best thing about the exercise was the opportunity to integrate with the corps staff, putting our scheme of maneuver into the Corps plan. It's beneficial to be able to practice the planning at that level," said Sargent. "It was a fluid and changing operation, and the ability to interact with the corps staff, while dealing with a changing battlefield and still being able to provide coverage to all the critical assets was great. The mechanics of it was great training. It was our opportunity to get

with them and integrate our plan with theirs. Also being able to keep up with the battle tracking, like reports and other things; it was really good training."

Pfc. Ruben Cruz of HHB, 1-1 ADA Battalion, also participated in UFL, and found it just as stimulating and challenging as the others.

"I gained a lot of experience seeing how the brigade's commanders shared information and seeing the battlefield aspect. Yeah, you're not on the front lines, but it's a whole different picture to see it on a monitor. I gained a lot of experience working as a team, and working with the computers. I really enjoyed attending the exercise."

Overall, 31st ADA Bde. performed admirably throughout the exercise, adapting to a fluid corps scheme of maneuver in what was a superb warfighting exercise. There were a great number of lessons identified, many of which will help to shape the brigade's future training with III Corps and 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command. The brigade staff agreed they gained a lot of knowledge and experience from the exercise which can be applied to future air defense training exercises for its subordinate units.



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