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September 15, 2004

## 'OPERATION FIERCE EAGLE' CHALLENGES SKILLS AND MOBILITY OF V CORPS AIR DEFENSE ARTILLERY BATTALION

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**HANAU, Germany** — Soldiers of V Corps' 5th Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery recently spent two weeks honing their skills with the battalion's Patriot missile systems during a battalion field training exercise that spread across training areas in Kitzingen and Grafenwoehr, Germany.

The exercise, known as Operation Fierce Eagle, involved all five of the battalion's Patriot firing batteries, its headquarters and headquarters battery, and the battalion maintenance company.

The objective of Fierce Eagle was to enhance the battalion's warfighting capability by deploying for air defense operations and battery and crew certifications while maintaining communications throughout the exercise and conducting force protection training, said Maj. Shana Peck, the battalion operations officer.



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Spc. Russel Henderson of the Headquarters and Headquarters Battery of V Corps' 5th Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery, pounds the last stake before setting up a camouflage net for his platoon's tent at the Kitzingen, Germany training area during Operation Fierce Eagle. The two-week exercise, which spread across training areas in Kitzingen and Grafenwoehr, included all five of the unit's Patriot missile firing batteries, the battalion headquarters and the battalion's maintenance company.

"Soldiers were motivated and excited to be able to train on their wartime tasks. We moved all of the batteries at least three times, in some cases four times, across a distance of over [150 miles]. I've seen improvement across the battalion in nearly every area," said Peck.

"I like the field," said Pfc. Matt Huttner, a Patriot launcher operator and maintainer assigned to the battalion's D Battery. "It's different than the everyday routine; out here it's a challenge ... You can get a real feeling for what your job would be like in combat and you get to do what you signed up for -- to use the equipment, not just make sure it works."

Each of the battalion's five firing batteries passed their Gunnery Table VIII certifications during Fierce Eagle. The Table VIII is a timed evaluation of march order and emplacement of the Patriot system, air battle and air defense operations, and other wartime tasks.

Pfc. Chris Baker, also a D Battery Patriot operator and maintainer, was disappointed when the evaluation for his battery ended. "I like the competition in crew drills -- not just with the other batteries, but also with the other launcher crews in my own unit," Baker said.

"We train as we fight. For me, a [field training exercise] is an attempt to create the most difficult conditions you can to create realistic training," said Capt. James A. Stegall, commander of the battalion's Headquarters and Headquarters Battery.

"Soldiers work hard and they do the right thing when no one is looking. The whole unit has done an outstanding job. After changing sites three times in less than seven

days, they've managed to reduce the amount of time it takes to set up the command and operations center for the battalion by 66 percent. These last two weeks this unit has really exercised itself and its equipment."

"It was a good thing we came out here. We identified our flaws. Also, we have a lot of new people in key positions. It was good to get out here and do our jobs, and learn to work as a team," said 1st Sgt. Manuel Mirabal of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery.

Every opportunity to train on moving the Patriot systems from one place to another is a welcome opportunity, said Spc. Willie Davis, a Patriot enhanced operator maintainer in E Battery.



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Soldiers from the reload team of V Corps' E Battery, 5th Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery practice removing expended missile canisters from a Patriot launching station and replacing them with new canisters in preparation for their battery's gunnery evaluation during Operation Fierce Eagle.

"Practice makes perfect. Patriot is a mobile weapon so we have to be able to move it over and over again, quickly, and to the standard," Davis said.

For Davis, the exercise was special in another way.

"This will be my last [field training exercise] with 5-7 ADA," he said. "The training here is rough, but it's relevant. It's the key to a successful operation, and we take training very seriously in Echo. I had a lot of fun during this exercise."

Stegall said Patriot training in Germany is relevant in other ways as well, and generally more challenging than in the U.S.

“Back at Fort Bliss, Texas, we conduct our exercises in the middle of the desert, hundreds of miles from anything, in a closed training area. Out here in Germany, our convoys frequently travel the autobahn, and although our training takes place on land leased by the government, German civilians frequently turn up on our sites. Interacting with German civilians during training makes things a little more interesting, but lends itself to a more realistic and true-to-life situation.”

Following Fierce Eagle, the 5/7th began a recovery period to prepare for another two-week deployment to Grafenwoehr for individual and crew-served weapons qualifications that will culminate with a convoy live-fire exercise.

