

Missile Defense System goes operational during Korean missile crisis

By MAJ Laura Kenney, 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD)

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo.— The 100th Missile Defense Brigade (Ground-based Midcourse Defense) headquartered here was brought to operational level by U.S. Northern Command in response to the recent Korean missile crisis.

With interceptors located in Alaska and California, the unit, which had previously been maintained in test mode, was moved for the first time to operational status. Composed of full-time Colorado National Guardsmen and a contingent of active Army Soldiers in Colorado, and manned exclusively by active Alaska National Guardsmen in Alaska, the 100th MDB remained at high alert status for the duration of the crisis.

The crisis culminated in North Korea's multiple test launches July 4. It was determined quickly that none posed a threat to the United States or its territories. All seven (six July 4, one early the next morning) landed in the Sea of Japan. The long-range Taepodong-2 failed in the early stages of its launch.

Members of the brigade and its battalion, the 49th Missile Defense Battalion (Ground-based Midcourse Defense) in Alaska, rose to the heightened mission requirements with great spirit. Although vacations and military schooling had to be canceled, no complaints or grumbling were heard. This was the mission all training had been focused on for years.

A Soldier who'd been enroute to Hawaii for leave with a spouse prior to the spouse's departure for an Iraqi deployment was called back. Cruises left for exotic locations with family members aboard, the Soldier reporting back to headquarters for duty.

The mood throughout the crisis was of taut readiness to do whatever was required.

"As we saw this play out over a span of weeks, every single Soldier wanted to be on the crew that would respond in defense of the nation. We weren't called upon to do so, but we were ready," said brigade commander, COL Michael Yowell.

Intelligence from multiple sources kept the crews informed and on their toes.

"We had excellent situational awareness," said the brigade's intelligence officer, MAJ Porter Grant. "From the initial preparations to the day the North Koreans fired, our Soldiers knew what they needed to know to perform their mission."

On the day of the actual launch, Echo crew was on duty.

1LT Scott Slaughter, battle analyst for Echo crew at the Fire Direction Center in Alaska, said, "We've always understood how important our mission was; that the primary reason for our existence as a unit is defense of our nation. That day, if possible, we understood it even more clearly. As a student of history, I can say that both we and the North Koreans will learn a lot from what happened. Before and during the incident, I (we) had complete confidence in the system and our training. After the actual launches, we continued scanning the horizon, because

you can never let your guard down."

The FDC director on duty July 4 was CPT Chad Haman, dual certified as a battle analyst and director.

"The real world intelligence made all the difference in the world. In the five years I've been with the system, there were never any doubts but that we would be ready. After all the building, practicing and rehearsing, and then the additional build-up to this particular event, we were ready for anything. Afterwards, we were able to capture excellent lessons learned," said Haman.

Battalion commander, LTC Ted Hildreth, who took command May 8 of this year, said that on the big day, there were no surprises.

"Between all the communication and activity from Missile Defense Element and Cheyenne Mountain, we were trained, prepared and rehearsed for any possible contingency that North Korea could throw at us. I was there in the node the day they launched, and our response was exactly the same as had been trained for. This one just happened to be real."

In Colorado Springs, MAJ Ron Hoard and his crew came on duty at the Missile Defense Element shortly after the first two short-range missiles had been fired. The MDE and FDC crews mirror each other, with MDE having a larger command and control role, and FDC taking the lead tactically, although they can act interchangeably.

Hoard said the prior launches had everyone in an immediately heightened state of awareness.

"Very shortly after we assumed duty, the Taepodong-2 was launched. It failed almost immediately, and we were informed pretty close to instantaneously of that failure. The crew reacted magnificently, exactly as we'd trained, going into crisis action mode without the slightest hesitation."

The GMD System, while not utilized in response to any of the launches, was available when needed to defend the United States and its allies. Trained and ready missile defense crews were at their stations on systems prepared to respond as necessary. USNORTHCOM had the primary responsibility to direct missile defense operations to protect the homeland, allies, friends and other national interests from potentially hostile acts.

MAJ Laura Kenney is an Active Guard Reservist serving as the public affairs officer for the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/U.S. Army Forces Strategic Command's 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD) in Colorado Springs, Colo. She served five years active duty as an enlisted journalist with Air Defense Command in Germany. As a commissioned Reserve officer, she performed public affairs in the Gulf War theater, and served as deputy public affairs officer for the American sector in Kosovo in 2001. She volunteered for active duty after September 11, 2001 and served three years in the SMDC/ARSTRAT public affairs office before moving to the 100th MDB.