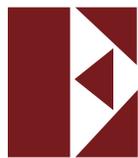




REST ASSURED JTACS

LOOKING OUT FOR THE WARFIGHTER

BY MAJ ERIC LITTLE
COMMANDER, 1ST SPACE COMPANY (JTACS)



Envision a missile launch from an unnamed, unfriendly country in the Middle East that is inbound toward U.S. forces deployed in a combat zone. As the launch occurs, a Defense Support Program satellite in a geosynchronous orbit detects the launch, and a signal is transmitted to a Joint Tactical Ground Station (JTACS) TACSTAR antenna located within the theater. The data is processed through a series of high-tech components and eventually ends up as an array of information on three computer screens inside a JTACS shelter. Manning the system is a three-person crew that has the responsibility to detect, understand, and process the missile data all within a matter of seconds, and then immediately report the event to forces in theater for early warning. This is truly an awesome responsibility for a three-person crew with ranks ranging from private first class to staff sergeant. The mission is real-world and JTACS crews perform it 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

There is no room for error in this Space mission, so to ensure each JTACS crew at every site is trained and proficient in their duties, a contest is conducted to assess their performance. The Best Crew Competition is an annual event and is an integral part of the JTACS mission. The mission conducted by the Soldiers of 1st Space

Company (JTACS) is unique and one of a kind. No other unit in the military has the capability that 1st Space Company executes on a daily basis. Specifically, JTACS maintains a direct down-link capability that allows real-time warning to the deployed U.S. forces, friends and allies within the theater of the reporting JTACS detachment.

Because the detachments are forward located in various theaters of operation, they have the capability to detect and report directly within the theater. The four detachments that comprise 1st Space Company train and conduct their mission the same way, but from different geographic locations around the world. Because of the geographic dispersion, the Soldiers and crews do not see or know operators conducting the same mission within their company. The Best Crew competition instills a sense of competitiveness and friendly rivalry within the company to be the best, and strengthens the bond between detachments around the world. It also reinforces the standardization of how crews provide theater missile warning.

1st Space Company (JTACS) formed an evaluation team consisting of representatives from the company, 1st Space Battalion and 1st Space Brigade to find out who is currently the “best of the best” regarding theater missile warn-



SMDC/CORSTROT



Left: SPC Vyncent Beasley, SGT Brandon Smith and SSG Jonas Moody of Charlie Company, JTAGS-Central Command, were named the 2008 Best Crew for all JTAGS crews worldwide. Photo by Daniel Vigil

JTAGS BEST

ing. It took the evaluation team approximately four weeks to cover all four JTAGS sites around the globe and identify the best crew at each site, as well as the best overall crew within 1st Space Company. When the dust finally settled, SSG Jonas Moody, SGT Brandon Smith and SPC Vyncent Beasley with Charlie Crew, JTAGS-Central Command claimed the title as JTAGS Best Crew.

Contrary to what many would think, JTAGS crews do not perform the theater missile warning mission from a modernized operations center or from a high-tech room with a bridge, multiple flat screen monitors, computers and radios, and a 14 person crew. Rather, they operate as a three person crew, inside an 8 foot by 8 foot by 20 foot shelter. These confines make it essential for JTAGS crews to work closely together.

The Best Crew Competition program offers the Soldiers of 1st Space Company the opportunity to prepare, train and show their skills in a profession that they alone represent. Because 1st Space Company is the only theater missile warning unit in the Army, the competition not only identifies the best theater missile warning crew in the company, but also the best crew in the Army. These crews are without question the best in the world at what they do.

Nine events were evaluated over a four day period as part of the competition. The competition commenced at each site with a record Army Physical Fitness Test that measured the physical fitness endurance of all crews as well as the detachment as a whole. The JTAGS detachment in U.S. European Command received the highest overall APFT average of 274 points and will receive a physical fitness streamer for excellence to recognize the achievement. The APFT was followed by a 100 question, closed book, classified, written examination covering regulations, policies and procedures surrounding missile warning. The crews also endured a rigorous and extremely challenging event processing exercise that stressed the crews with a myriad of missile events and other infrared special events. The competition also included a written situational paper exercise, a fault detection/fault isolation (maintenance troubleshooting) event, antenna assembly and emplacement, Army Warrior Task evaluation, and crew presentation.

The Army Warrior Task evaluation began with a no-notice detachment recall, weapons draw and inspections. This allowed for an assessment of not only the readiness and preparedness of the JTAGS crews, but also the readiness of the entire detachment.

The most non-standard event of the competition with regard to JTAGS operations was the crew presentation. The crews were given the task, conditions, and standard for the presentation during the opening brief on day one of the competition. Over the following two days of competition,

the crews prepared an informative briefing on the dismount of the JTAGS system, to include suggested system improvements, optimal geographic location for the system, and the benefit to the supported theater. The results brought forward by the crews were beyond impressive. Many of the suggested improvements to the system were so innovative, practical, and relevant that they are currently being packaged for presentation to the JTAGS Product Office for consideration in future upgrades.

There is tremendous value to the best crew competition because it focuses on the proficiency of a three person crew over the individual. When processing infrared data that is direct from a satellite to a three person work station, JTAGS crews have to recognize an event, process the data, determine if what they are looking at is a threat, and then determine whether or not to report it; all within a very constrained time line. There is a significant reliance on every Soldier in the three person crew to carry their share of the workload. A typical shift will consist of hours of monotonous work with seconds to minutes of high adventure and extremely stressful data processing. In order to succeed as a crew, it is imperative that every crew member be proficient. The best crew competition places a significant amount of stress on every crew member and very quickly identifies if there is a weak link. Crews recognize this and in turn, train and prepare so that every crew member is proficient. All of this training and preparation ultimately results in a Company of mission ready crews; the Best Crew Competition is just one tool to get to that end state.

The competition proved extremely rewarding for both the command and the Soldiers of 1st Space Company. It provided the command an opportunity to watch every crew in JTAGS perform what they are trained to do, and assess not only who is the best, but to assess the overall operations at each JTAGS site. The return was far greater than anticipated and the lessons learned from this year's competition are already integrated into a plan for an even better competition next year. Most importantly, the competition afforded the individual Soldiers and crews a goal and a target to strive for, that went beyond the day-to-day routine of providing early warning for those deployed in a combat zone. A high level of camaraderie and esprit de corps was displayed among the Soldiers and crews that truly represent the spirit of the American Soldier.

The 1st Space Company motto of "Rest Assured" emphasizes the importance to the JTAGS crews that as long as they are on watch, the homeland of the U.S., deployed U.S. forces, friends and allies can indeed "rest assured" with JTAGS Operators on mission.



..... additional photos on following pages >>

WINNER

Overall JTAGS Best Crew 2008

TOP: SPC Vyncent Beasley, SGT Brandon Smith and SSG Jonas Moody of Charlie Company, JTAGS-Central Command prepare for Army Warrior Training. The three-man crew was named the 2008 Best Crew for all JTAGS crews worldwide. MIDDLE: PFC Toby Unzicker replaces a TACSTAR antenna during the best crew competition. BOTTOM: Members of JTAGS-CENTCOM conduct a unit run led by company 1SG Steven Adams. Photos by Daniel Vigil



Best Crew

SSG Jonas Moody
SGT Brandon Smith
SPC Vyncent Beasley



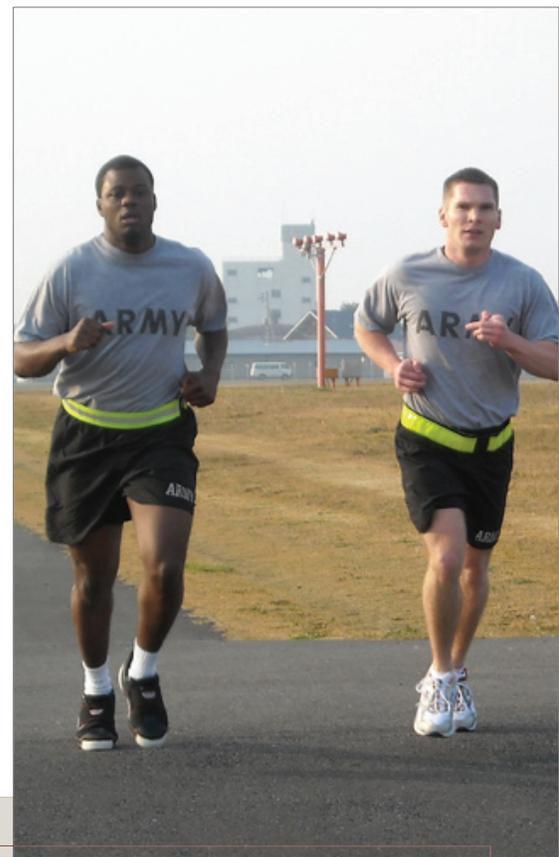
BELOW: (left to right), SSG Kenneth Hansen, SPC Amanda Henderson and SPC Shawn Johnston of JTAGS-Europe set up a TACSTAR antenna. Right, a Soldier from JTAGS-Europe prepares for Warrior Training as part of the competition. Photos by Daniel Vigil



Best Crew

SSG Andrew Brown
SPC Samuel Heath
PFC Michael Maughan

EUROPE



ABOVE LEFT: SSG George Stratakos, SFC Benjamin Hartwig and SGT Wallace Connell perform maintenance on a TACSTAR antenna. Above right: SGT Christopher Crook and SPC J.C. Thomas conduct the two-mile run portion of the Army Physical Fitness Test. Left: 1SG Steven Adams and Company Commander, MAJ Eric Little, take part in a reflagging ceremony for JTAGS-Japan. *Photos by Daniel Vigil*

Best Crew

- SSG Christopher Douglas
- SSG Christopher Crook
- SPC Emmanuel Dickerson

JAPAN



Best Crew

SGT John Hardegree
SPC Ernest Dominguez
SPC Robert Swain

TOP: SGT John Hardegree, SPC Robert Swain and SPC Ernest Dominguez set up a TACSTAR antenna during the JTAGS Best Crew Competition. The three-person crew was named the JTAGS-Korea Best Crew. **Bottom:** JTAGS Korea Soldiers receive a Best Crew in-brief from the evaluation team. *Photos by Daniel Vigil*