Engineers bag top Mindef prize

Team hailed for radar cooling unit used in Afghan conflict

BY JERMYN CHOW

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A TEAM of army engineers has snagged a top Ministry of Defence (Mindef) prize for keeping a battlefield radar system in Afghanistan up and running for 15 months — three months longer than it can normally function.

The team was rewarded for its efforts in designing a cooling unit for the Singapore Armed Forces' (SAF) weapon system, radar, preventing it from overheating, among other things.

The design allowed the Swedish-made Artillery Hunting Radar, or Arthur, to provide round-the-clock protection for NATO-led international troops based at Camp Holland, in the Afghan province of Orzgan. The radar detects enemy artillery, rocket and mortar launches.

The 15-man team from the army's Maintenance and Engineering Support Formation, and the Defence Science and Technology Agency was among the top winners at yesterday's Defence Technology Prize Ceremony — Mindef's annual event to honour the finest in defence research and engineering — held at the Biopolis Auditorium.

This is the first time that the ministry has honoured innovations originating from real-life operations in a war zone.

Leading the team, which comprises combatants and engineers, was deputy chief maintenance and engineering officer Chew Wei Yein. Among them, 12 were deployed to Orzgan at various times over the 15 months to ensure that things ran smoothly.

Military Expert 6 Chew, 41, said: "It was critical in this deployment, which depended heavily on the radar working... we had three officers (carrying out maintenance works) every three to four months, to ensure that anything that cropped up could be dealt with within the shortest possible time."

Five teams and one individual received the awards this year.

A team from Singapore's defense research body, DSO National Laboratories, and Nanyang Technological University won the prize for successfully designing, building and launching Singapore's first-ever microsatellite, known as the X-Sat.

Other winning teams worked on technologies such as an advanced radar system, a sharper sensor and weapon system, and stronger building structures that can withstand shocks.

The individual prize went to Dr Teo Chin Heng from DSO for his research and development in information security.

Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said engineers and scientists have made an impact on the SAF's operations.

"I know you have worked quietly behind the scenes, pushing the boundaries of science and technology so that the SAF can continue to keep its combat systems and platforms at the cutting edge," he said.

The minister also said Singapore spends 4 per cent of its annual defence budget on research and development.