

LAND WARRIOR DRAWS PRAISE FROM SOLDIERS IN THE FIELD

by Debi Dawson

Land Warrior, a first-generation integrated modular fighting system for dismounted Soldiers, has recently been added to the war fighter's tactical toolbox. Stryker Soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Division's 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment are the first to deploy into combat with the system. Though all of the Soldiers in the 4th Battalion have trained with Land Warrior, the system has only been issued down to the team leader level. Reports from the field indicate that the system unquestionably enhances combat effectiveness.

"Land Warrior gave me confidence as I planned to coordinate for a blind hit at night for the first time in this area," said 1LT Brandon Kint.

The system features a radio for sending and receiving voice and data communications; a helmet-mounted display (HMD) for viewing digital maps, reading messages and target identification; a navigation system; and weapons optics for targeting the enemy. All of Land Warrior's components are wired through a computer, and are worn attached to the body armor along with the other gear Soldiers carry, such as ammo pouches, first aid gear and water. Another component of Land Warrior is a weapons subsystem, which consists of a daylight video sight, a multifunction laser aiming device and a lightweight thermal optic. One Soldier per squad is designated to carry this Land Warrior component, which can be used during over-watch operations and other missions.

"The Land Warrior system is a great tool," said CPT Mike Williams, Commander of Alpha Company. "Forces are able to maneuver using imagery instead of your standard map. It provides great command and control for me and for my leaders. I am able to supervise my Soldiers moving 3 to 5 kilometers from my location, and I can tell exactly where they are going, what they are doing; and they are able to provide me feedback on what they see. This is a tremendous asset that we would be incapable of doing with standard FM communications with a map."

The digital communication and navigation equipment is designed to eliminate the fog of war, reduce elements of confusion in close combat situations, and provide leaders with accurate locations of both friendly and enemy forces. "It provides a sense of comfort in reducing the fratricide potential, especially when there are so many units moving in and out of the battlefield," Williams said. "Everyone knows where everyone else is on the battlefield and everyone knows where everyone else's direct fire is."

The payoff to Land Warrior's development cycle is in improving the management of Soldiers in combat and other operations. Williams said the system has been "extremely reliable," pointing out that it has held up to the heat of the Iraqi summer, with temperatures from 110 to 115 degrees.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the Army has been digitizing vehicles, but Soldiers would lose all of their situational awareness when they exited the vehicles. Land Warrior allows Soldiers to maintain this awareness and improves the commander's ability to manage the battle.



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Some Soldiers have voiced concerns about the bulk and weight of the equipment. "The bulk is not so much a problem with clearing the buildings, just with getting in and out of the [Stryker] hatch," said Garza. "We do a lot of raids where we are hopping walls, and then the bulkiness is an issue." Still, Garza says the payoff in combat effectiveness is worth it. "After a while, you don't notice it."

Land Warrior was a concept first considered in the early 1990s with the hope of making the Soldier a complete weapon system by integrating lethality, survivability, and command and control. Early versions of the system weighed in excess of 40 pounds, but after numerous iterations based on Soldier feedback, the current version is about 10 pounds in the typical configuration. Attaching the equipment directly to the armor provides additional weight reductions by allowing users to get rid of the pouches that formerly held the equipment. More weight reductions are planned in the near term.

Land Warrior is the first networked Soldier, in what is expected to be a continuous evolution with any future Army and Joint battlefield networks.



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