

## **Army receives go-ahead on Manpack radio production**

U.S. Army

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. (Oct. 15, 2012) -- The Army has received authorization to continue production of an advanced radio that will link Soldiers at the company level and below with real-time information passed on its holistic tactical communications network.

The Department of Defense granted approval to the Army Oct. 11, to purchase 3,726 Handheld, Manpack, Small Form Fit, or HMS Manpack radios under a second Low Rate Initial Production, or LRIP order. Those radios will support future test events, development up to a Full Rate Production decision and potential fielding as part of Capability Set 13.

Thus far, the Army has purchased 100 of the two-channel, software-defined radios, which are designed as a "mid-tier" radio solution allowing lower-echelon Soldiers carrying Rifleman Radios and Nett Warrior handheld devices to connect to the network backbone through the Soldier Radio Waveform, or SRW, and Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System, SINCGARS waveforms.

"The Manpack will enhance current communications capabilities by allowing small units in austere environments to exchange voice and data information with their higher headquarters, without having to rely on a fixed infrastructure," said Col. Russ Wygal, the Army's project manager for tactical radios.

The decision was based on test results from the Network Integration Evaluation, NIE 12.2, held in May-June at White Sands Missile Range, N.M., as well as a Government Developmental Test, or GDT, conducted by the Army Test and Evaluation Command, held earlier this month at the Electronic Proving Ground at Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

The Manpack completed a key operational test in May as part of the NIE 12.2, the latest in a series of semi-annual, Soldier-driven evaluations designed to integrate and mature the Army's tactical network. The evaluation showed that the radio significantly enhanced the mobile, ad-hoc network formed through SRW, a high bandwidth waveform that draws upon a larger part of the available spectrum compared to legacy radios in order to share mission command information. With both mounted and dismounted variants, the Manpack also provided beyond-line-of-sight connectivity through satellite communications, improving units' ability to communicate despite obstacles such as buildings and nearby terrain.

The NIE assessment also identified areas in need of improvement, such as the performance of the radio using the SINCGARS waveform and the approach to training Soldiers who are unfamiliar with software-defined networking radios.

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Technical and human factor issues have since been addressed, and the fixes were evaluated as part of the GDT. The test allowed the Army to collect additional data and validate improvements to the Manpack in a focused environment.

"This test is one piece of the Army's effort to work with the vendor and the Department of Defense to evaluate issues identified during the Network Integration Evaluation 12.2 and improve the Manpack system." Wygal said. "There is nothing like Soldier feedback to help us improve our products."

Ultimately, the Manpack is envisioned as a piece of the Army's network Capability Sets -- an integrated communications package that spans the entire brigade combat team formation, connecting the static tactical operations center to the commander on-the-move to the dismounted Soldier. The first such package, known as Capability Set 13, began fielding to two BCTs of the 10th Mountain Division earlier this month and will continue fielding to additional brigades through 2013.

Along with the Manpack, the HMS program includes the Rifleman Radio, which will be carried by platoon, squad and team-level Soldiers for voice communications. The Rifleman Radio can also connect with the smartphone-like Nett Warrior devices carried by dismounted leaders in order to transmit text messages, GPS locations and other data. The Manpack provides an SRW-enabled "gateway" between the Rifleman Radio and the Army's satellite communications backbone, known as the Warfighter Information Network-Tactical, or WIN-T.

"HMS radios will network small units with individual Soldiers, providing game-changing information at the lowest echelons," Wygal said.

The Army was authorized to procure an additional 13,077 Rifleman Radios based on a July 2012 Department of Defense decision.

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