

## **Fire-resistant ghillie suit, enhanced rocket fuze win DOD awards**

U.S. Army

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. (March 25, 2013) -- U.S. Army program managers earned Department of Defense acquisition awards recently for rapidly fielding a fire-resistant ghillie suit and an enhanced fuze rocket warhead.

After two Soldiers from the Army's 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment burned to death when their camouflaged sniper gear caught on fire in Iraq, an urgent requirement for a fire-resistant suit was issued.

Neal Nguyen, the product manager for Soldier clothing and individual equipment under Program Executive Office Soldier, known as PEO Soldier, answered the request in 2010 with the help of the Defense Acquisition Challenge, or DAC, program. He was named the DAC Program Manager of the Year for 2012 for his work on the ghillie suit as well as a uniform repair patch kit and enhanced combat vehicle crewman coverall.

"It's a privilege to serve the Army and provide much-needed protective equipment to the warfighter," Nguyen said. "The flame-resistant ghillie suit accessory kit and flame-resistant base uniform will improve the safety of those forward operators and keep the Army on the leading edge of capability and lethality.

"The Comparative Technology Office allows us the ability to lean forward and fast track capability and protection to our Soldiers who volunteer to be in harm's way."

Matthew West, a junior hydra project engineer with the U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command's Armament Research, or RDECOM, Development and Engineering Center, earned the Foreign Comparative Testing, or FCT, PM of the Year for 2012.

The enhanced fuze FCT project's goal was to qualify and field a cockpit-settable fuze version of the multipurpose penetrator M282 warhead for U.S. Special Operations Command's, or SOCOM, use on helicopters, West said. A now-retired senior hydra team leader started the project, and West took over for him.

"Over a 20-year period, the branch that I work in has completed multiple successful FCT programs based on the Carl Gustav recoilless rifle weapon system," West said. "The FCT office, along with my branch chief's knowledge of the SOCOM FCT program office, gave me support and guidance when taking on this task. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide this capability to the Warfighter."

RDECOM manages the DAC and FCT programs for the Army, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense Comparative Technology Office oversees the programs.

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Earl Wyatt, deputy assistant secretary of defense for rapid fielding, and RDECOM Director Dale Ormond presented Nguyen and West with their awards at the Pentagon, March 20.

U.S. Air Force Col. Rodney F. Todaro, director of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, or OSD, Comparative Technology Office, lauded their work in support of the warfighter.

"Mr. West's accomplishments stood out among a very strong field of candidates," Todaro said. "The 70mm enhanced fuse project will greatly increase the capabilities of our 70mm rockets while avoiding development, acquisition and sustainment costs, exactly what the FCT program is supposed to do.

"Mr. Nguyen's project met a critical need in minimum time while improving capability. Significant cost savings were achieved by avoiding a large, new development program."

### **DEFENSE ACQUISITION CHALLENGE**

The DAC program was created in 2003 in response to a Congressional mandate that the DOD initiate a program that was innovative, flexible, competitive and affordable to integrate mature technologies into the acquisition cycle, said William "Randy" Everett, with RDECOM's Global Technology Integration team. The program allows U.S. vendors to submit mature technology proposals for evaluation by the PEOs.

With a focus on small business, the DAC program has been a vehicle for small domestic vendors to transition their products to the acquisition cycle. It was funded through fiscal year 2012.

In response to requests for snipers' ghillie suits, Source One, a small business in Florida, submitted a response. PEO Soldier sponsored the proposal.

Nguyen took on the project and collaborated with RDECOM and Source One to deliver the ghillie suit as quickly as possible. PEO Soldier received \$185,000 to purchase suits for testing. Nguyen oversaw testing and evaluation.

The project was completed in 10 months, a record time. The fire-resistant ghillie suit is now being fielded at the U.S. Army Sniper School at Fort Benning, Ga., at the U.S. Marine Corps Scout Sniper School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., and at the Special Operations Target Interdiction Course at Fort Bragg, N.C.

"It is unknown how many Soldiers and Marines may be saved by this, but if even one life is saved, it is money well spent," Everett said.

Since beginning, the DAC program has saved an estimated \$375 million in DOD research and development by avoiding manufacturing, procurement and life cycle support costs. Additionally, more than 2,000 proposals have been evaluated and 130 projects have been funded from 35 states and the District of Columbia.

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More than 70 percent of the awarded projects have been to American small- and medium-sized businesses, and more than 25 percent to non-traditional defense companies. Twenty-three projects have been deployed to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

### **FOREIGN COMPARATIVE TESTING**

FCT's mission is to find and evaluate "here and now" solutions to meet the operational needs of American service members so that Soldiers have the technology they need to remain dominant on the battlefield and return home safely, regardless of the origin of that technology, Everett said. OSD has leveraged new and evolving technology through FCT since 1980.

The program encourages international cooperation and helps reduce overall DOD acquisition costs by funding the testing of foreign non-developmental items, commercial-off-the-shelf items, or those items in a late state of the development process that demonstrate the potential to satisfy the U.S. military's needs.

The program has brought U.S. forces the benefit of 105 items that were tested and deployed in the last 12 years. They include enhanced body armor from Germany; a mine-clearing system from Denmark; and a bunker-busting, multi-purpose rocket warhead from Norway. Other examples include advances in lightweight body armor and lighter, longer lasting rechargeable batteries.

For West's FCT project, he said the enhanced fuze warhead provides a capability to dial in a delay for a rocket warhead, allowing users to select where to detonate the round. Pilots had this capability 20 years ago, but it suffered from poor reliability and safety risks.

Users can engage all targets with one rocket, whether under light brush cover, in a vehicle, inside a structure or out in the open, West said. This reduces the number of rounds the user needs to fly with, which can also reduce weight.

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