

New equipment gives Reserve MP Soldiers resources to succeed

U.S. Army

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md. (March 4, 2013)-- Although a military's strength is often measured by its arsenal, mission success sometimes depends on non-lethal equipment not traditionally used in armed conflicts.

At the 200th Military Police Command, or 200th MPC, here, mission accomplishment not only depends on Soldiers and the weapons found in the arms room, but also the Long Range Acoustic Device, or LRAD, -- a system of speakers that uses audio as a crowd-control as well as peacekeeping measure.

Although the LRAD has been successfully used by U.S. ground forces in Operation Enduring Freedom for at least the last three years, the device will be fielded to deploying 200th MPC Soldiers for the first time this year, said the command's operations and training officer, Robert Truitt.

In the years since its inception in Afghanistan, the LRAD has been used by not only military police units, but also those in the infantry, because of the versatility it provides. Infantry Soldiers, as an example, can use the system to broadcast warnings to local populations during combat operations, ensuring civilians do not unknowingly enter a danger area, Truitt said.

The system's long range audio capabilities, which can reach up to one mile, also helps with public service announcements, enabling Soldiers to warn local populations about cordoned off areas. This is especially important in reducing civilian casualties by minimizing misunderstandings when well-meaning and curious onlookers wander into an area troops are protecting, turning them into unintended targets, Truitt added.

Although systems similar to the LRAD have been in use prior to its debut, the LRAD is more compact, giving Soldiers the ability to mount it on most tactical vehicles. That's an option not previously available according to Sgt. 1st Class Michael Casey, a training and operations noncommissioned-officer with the 200th MPC. The previous version of the LRAD was so wide and heavy that it needed to be carried in the back of a large 5-ton military truck.

Especially in the context of military police work, the LRAD is useful in its ability to disperse crowds, preventing Soldiers from having to use deadly force. This critical war-fighting ability reduces the number of casualties and gives Soldiers the luxury of only engaging a potential target as a last resort.

"The way I see it is if we can prevent a Soldier from pulling a trigger, then it's a good thing," Truitt said. "There are two aspects when we talk about young Soldiers.

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First, we don't want them engaging anyone they don't have to because it could turn on us. But the other aspect is about the Soldier -- if he engages a target he didn't have to, he's going to have to deal with it.

"If we can help keep him from doing that, we'll help him the long run," Truitt continued.

Another advantage to the LRAD is that it comes in two sizes -- a large version that can be mounted on top of combat vehicles to be used during convoys and on the streets, and a smaller version that can be carried when Soldiers are dismounted. Along with its mobility, the LRAD can also be linked with other equipment, including the Phraselator, which can take commands in English and translate said commands into almost any language, minimizing Soldiers' dependence on a translator during critical times.

All of the functions the LRAD offers can be operated via remote control from a distance, minimizing Soldiers' interactions with locals -- a factor Truitt said is critical within the fog of combat.

An infantryman and master sergeant in the Army Reserve, Truitt said he remembers a time when equipment like the LRAD didn't exist, thereby putting Soldiers in situations that might prevent them from mission accomplishment.

"[It used to be] that we didn't get the equipment I am now buying," said Truitt. "I now look at the capabilities and see how much it could have enhanced what we could have done."

Although the LRAD is available to MP units deployed to Afghanistan, Truitt said it isn't included in the Modification Table of Organization and Equipment, or MTOE. Despite this, he added, the equipment shouldn't be considered an item of luxury either, because of its ability to enhance combat readiness and mission accomplishment.

"It may not be on the MTOE, but it's not a 'nice to have' item," Truitt said. "It's a combat multiplier that gives us an advantage over the enemy."

"In the Army, we talk about shoot, move, communicate," Truitt continued. "Well, this is that communicate part. Communications is the key not only in winning in engagements, but also hearts and minds. The fewer people we have to engage the more we are able to keep Soldiers safe, as well as not engage the local populous in deadly force."

It isn't just in wartime, however, that the equipment proves to be useful. In peacetime the LRAD can be used for riot control and the prevention of chaos. An example of this, said Truitt, took place recently when the Chicago Police Department deployed the LRAD during the NATO Summit this past summer to prevent protesters from getting close to the site.

"Regardless of the mission you're on, whether you're a combat unit or combat

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support, the LRAD is multi-usage," he said. "It's not just useful for this war, but it will also be useful in our future endeavors -- there are a lot of way it can be used."

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