Joint Light Tactical Vehicle 'closes capability gap,' Army says

U.S. Army

QUANTICO, Va. (Army News Service, June 17, 2013) -- While the Humvee has served the Army well for some 25 years, there's a "capability gap" in what it can do for warfighters on a 21st-century battlefield, said the Soldier responsible for overseeing its replacement.

That replacement is the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, or JLTV, said Col. John Cavedo, manager, Joint Program Office, or JPO, for JLTV, during an off-road demonstration at the Transportation Demonstration Support Area here, June 14.

Cavedo said the JLTV "closes the capability gap" left by the Humvee.

Marine Lt. Col. Mike Burks, deputy, JPO, JLTV explained the gap.

"We've been trying to break the laws of physics by overloading the Humvee with survivability measures," Burks said. "The Humvee is overloaded even before a Soldier or Marine gets inside."

The other vehicle used to transport Soldiers and Marines around the battlefield, the mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicle, known as an MRAP, has the necessary armor to defeat improvised explosive devices and has saved many lives. However, Burks said the MRAP lacks mobility.

One of the MRAP variants weighs as much as three JLTVs, Burkes said. The weight of that MRAP means it can't be transported by the Army CH-47 Chinook or the Marine CH-53E Super Stallion, the heavy-lift helicopters of the services.

Burkes also said that an additional concern for the Marine Corps, in regard to the MRAP, is that it can't be moved from ship-to-shore like other light wheeled vehicles.

The Army, the lead for the JLTV portfolio, plans to purchase some 49,000 JLTVs, with 5,500 for the Marine Corps. The average production cost will not exceed $250,000 per vehicle, said Cavedo.

Various JLTVs may also be specialized with kits for performing different missions, including fording, combat buffering or command. That specialization may change the cost of a particular vehicle.

Despite sequestration and budget shortfalls, the JLTV program is still on track for fiscal year 2015, Cavedo said. At that time, the JLTV contract will be awarded and the 20-plus year production cycle will begin.

The plan calls for a phase-in of JLTVs, with Humvees and MRAPs still being used, commensurate with mission requirements, said David Branham, PEO Land Systems Marine Corps.

FIERCE COMPETITION

Last year, three manufacturers were selected and are now competing for the JLTV contract. Competition is "fierce and the stakes are high because the winner takes all," said Cavedo, who noted that an important part of his job is to ensure a "level playing field" during the competition.

The three competitors include Oshkosh Defense, which builds MRAPS and other Army vehicles; Lockheed Martin, which produces High Mobility Artillery Rocket System vehicle; and AM General, who builds the Humvee.

Improvised explosive device, or IED, blast and shot testing have already been conducted at Aberdeen Test Center, Md. While not at liberty to say the levels of the blasts, Cavedo said the JLTV's survivability is comparable to the MRAP.

The next milestone comes in mid-August 2013, when each competitor will turn over 22 JLTV prototypes for testing. Those 66 vehicles will undergo 14 months of rigorous testing in a variety of battlefield scenarios conducted by Soldiers and Marines, said Cavedo.

Testing areas include Yuma Proving Grounds, Ariz.; Redstone Test Center, Ala.; and Fort Huachuca, Ariz. Additionally, both the Marine Corps and the Army will conduct helicopter trials of the vehicles at various locations, and there will be ship-to-shore testing conducted at Little Creek, Va.

Reliability, availability and maintainability, called RAM testing, will determine the winner, Cavedo said. Additionally, input from Soldiers and Marines "will absolutely be taken very seriously."

RAM testing includes the "iron triangle of performance," Cavedo said. That includes evaluations of performance, protection and payload. The vehicles will also be evaluated for transportability, mobility, expeditionary capability, network-readiness and affordability.

In early fiscal year 2015, following user testing, the requirements document will be revalidated to ensure the original requirements are still pertinent. After that, a winner will be chosen, Cavedo said.

During the demonstration runs at Quantico, Va., all three of the JLTVs in the competition ran smoothly at high speed over the roller coaster-like hills which followed alongside power transmission lines. The vehicles didn't protest turns at high speed, and bumps and ruts barely registered. Inside the vehicles there was plenty of room for network gear, blue-force tracker, GPS, and other networking and communications equipment. Seating was comfortable as well.

"All three vendors absolutely meet the key requirements, all could close that critical and substantial capability gap in our light tactical wheel portfolio," Cavedo concluded. "In the end, the government will pick very best of best. We're in a fortunate situation."

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