

Teamwork Tells

A Four-Year PEO Soldier Success Story

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The war in Iraq has changed how soldiers fight. Just a few years ago, lessons learned by soldiers in the field were not being addressed in a timely manner, and equipment requests were taking months, if not years, to make their way through an unwieldy acquisition process. When it became clear that soldiers urgently needed weapons and other items designed specifically for urban warfare and sniper fire, Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier was among the first to step up to the challenge of applying the most up-to-date technology and delivering gear to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan in as short a timeframe as possible.

On the eve of his recent retirement, Army Brig. Gen. James R. Moran, PEO Soldier, reflected on the four-year history and accomplishments of PEO Soldier, whose mission is to arm and equip soldiers to dominate the full spectrum of peace and war, now and in the future. "After a couple of hundred years of doing business one way, it has been an accomplishment to change the mindset so that the soldier is now seen as a combat platform—America's most deployed combat platform—and, therefore, needs to be treated as a combat platform," Moran said.

As Moran sees it, PEO Soldier is a story of teamwork writ large: Since its inception in 2002—thanks to the combined efforts of American industry, Congress, and acquisition offices throughout the Pentagon—a relatively small team of military personnel, civilians, and contractors at Fort Belvoir, Va., has changed the Army's business model for acquiring and quickly fielding soldiers' gear.

No one said it was easy. "In the beginning it was 20-hour days and seven-day work weeks," said Moran. "When I came here in April 2002, I inherited almost 400 programs stashed away in every nook and cranny of the Army. Just getting them under one organization with 10 program offices and a headquarters was the first challenge. We also faced a fiscal challenge—getting the funding needed to procure the items that would support the military's aggressive deployment schedule for the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Cultural change does not come easily to large organizations and certainly not to one as steeped in its own his-



PEO Soldier was created with one purpose: to equip the soldier. This gear consists of M4 rifles with the latest sensors, lasers, and sights, including Small Tactical Optical Rifle Mounted Micro-Laser Rangefinder, M68 Close Combat Optics, and Advanced Combat Optical Gun Sights.

PEO Soldier photograph.

tory as the Army. Yet today, the Army is well on the way to treating the soldier as a system—much as it treats tanks, howitzers, and aircraft as systems to be integrated with other even larger systems. All aspects of PEO Soldier

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equipment are developed to be integrated, modular, interoperable, and mission-tailorable. The result is a single, integrated combat system that enhances soldier performance in all critical areas: increased effectiveness, decreased load, improved mission flexibility, and greater survivability.

Moran elaborated: “Whether it’s a tank or a fighter plane or a combat ship, when that ship or plane or tank is delivered to the unit, it is delivered with all the pieces, parts, and systems associated with it. We don’t deliver a tank without a cannon. We don’t deliver a fighter without engines. We don’t deliver ships without power trains. Now we’re trying to field individual soldiers with the weapons and ammunition they need—the lasers, the optics, the clothing and textiles—so that neither the soldier nor the unit commander is responsible for integrating it and making sure it all works together.”

Importance of Feedback from the Field

Once PEO soldier initiated the Soldier-as-a-System approach, it conceived the Rapid Fielding Initiative (RFI) in 2002, based on feedback from soldiers in Afghanistan who met with PEO Soldier representatives in the field to talk about their specialized equipment needs. The result

has been astounding: RFI accelerated procurement to provide—in days or weeks rather than the months once required—more than 700,000 active and Reserve troops with equipment, such as the advanced combat helmet, advanced ballistic helmets, ballistic goggles, kneepads, elbow pads, improved hydration systems, and first aid kits. By the end of 2007, the entire Army, as well as other Services participating in joint missions with the Army, will be equipped by RFI. The current RFI kit consists of 58 items developed to meet the rigors of battle, as requested by soldiers themselves. And soldiers have been the first to report the results: lives have been saved, injuries reduced, and effectiveness enhanced.

While Moran is quick to attribute PEO Soldier’s success to many, he unflinchingly highlights the feedback from soldiers in the field: “We listened to those who know best, whose lives depend on having the right gear, and we understood the need to move fast.” As a result, PEO Soldier dramatically increased production and fielding of a variety of survivability and protection items, including the new Army combat uniform, body armor, night vision devices, thermal weapon sights, and radios, plus more advanced remote systems. PEO Soldier continues to receive soldier feedback through its Web site, e-mails, and from

the teams sent out to the field periodically to ask soldiers how equipment is performing and what additional requests they may have. In fact, that’s how the original list of 15 soldier-requested items has grown to the current 58 items in the RFI kit.

“We are still fielding almost 1,000 soldiers a day,” Moran noted, “but we’re not there yet. It takes a long time to change a culture in the Army and to change all these procurement programs.”

RFI was not the first to try to get specialized equipment to soldiers quickly. Since 1989, the Soldier Enhancement Program (now managed for the Army by PEO Soldier and TRADOC [Train-

ing and Doctrine Command] System Manager Soldier) has worked to identify and enhance commercial off-the-shelf items that meet specific needs reported by soldiers—uniform redesign, ration improvements, laser eye protection, the desert combat boot, sniper kits, the soldier intercom, protective masks, and stabilized binoculars.



Equipped with the Advanced Target Pointer/Illuminator/Aiming Light, a soldier has an infrared aim laser, an infrared illuminator, and a visible aim laser at his fingertips to maximize firing distances.

PEO Soldier photograph.

However, Soldier Enhancement Program items are based on proposals that anyone can submit identifying an existing item that can be revised in three years or less.

State-of-the-Art Equipment

Among PEO Soldier's other successes in meeting the needs of soldiers are an improvement to the Interceptor Body Armor (IBA) known as DAP or the Deltoid Axillary Protector, and the Common Remotely Operated Weapons Station (CROWS). DAP was developed in response to the improvised explosive device threats that soldiers face in Iraq. Unlike conventional threats, which usually come from the front, back, or above, IEDs throw shrapnel and spall at soldiers from below and from the sides. DAP enables soldiers to cover shoulder and upper arm areas as well as the armpit and underarm. The original IBA design is open around the arms to allow air to circulate. But it is a modular design, which allows for protective additions. Soldiers in the field developed the DAP prototype themselves by using groin protectors, and PEO Soldier responded by adding the DAP improvement to the IBA system.

CROWS is a remotely operated targeting system that can be mounted on top of an armored vehicle. This stable targeting system integrates sensors and firing controls so that the gunner can acquire and engage moving targets while protected inside the vehicle. Multiple CROWS prototypes have been deployed. The system includes daytime video capability, thermal imagery, and increased laser rangefinders.

Another example is PEO Soldier's Air Warrior system. Army aircrews deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom have been equipped with this new-generation aircrew ensemble that provides advanced life support, ballistic protection, and chemical-biological protection in a system of mission-configured modules. The Air Warrior system enhances aircrew comfort, cockpit synergy, and aircraft mission capability; and it improves lethality, survivability, mobility, and sustainability. The system maximizes safe aircraft operation and human performance without encumbering the aircrew. Air Warrior was developed with interoperability in mind and has leveraged several joint Service technology efforts. In the past, before Air Warrior centralized the process, the separate development and application of aviation life-support equipment and mission equipment resulted in a layered, nonintegrated assemblage of protective/survival gear. The list goes on: the Electronic Data Manager is a ruggedized computer worn as a kneeboard that provides the enhanced communication capabilities; the Microclimate Cooling System is worn by the aviator/crewmember to reduce heat stress to helicopter crewmen; the Cockpit Air Bags System saves lives and prevents or reduces injuries by protecting the aircrew from multiple cockpit strike hazards.

PEO Soldier Equipment provides soldiers with state-of-the-art sensors, lasers, clothing and other individual equipment, including the Enhanced Night Vision Goggle, a helmet-mounted device that provides improved mobility and situational awareness in all weather and obscured battlefield conditions; the AN/PAS-13 Thermal Weapon Sight, which enables gunners to see deep into the battlefield, increasing surveillance and target acquisition range; the Modular Lightweight Load-Carrying Equipment system, which enables soldiers to tailor loads with modular, flexible, load-carrying equipment; and the Modular Sleeping Bag System, which allows environmental and physical comfort in a variety of situations.

The PEO Soldier Team

Headquartered at Fort Belvoir, Va., PEO Soldier is supported by 10 project and product managers and their committed staffs. PM Soldier Warrior is responsible for Land Warrior, Air Warrior, and Mounted Warrior. PM Soldier Equipment has purview over sensors and lasers as well as clothing and individual equipment; and PM Soldier Weapons manages both individual and crew-served weapons.

Looking ahead, Moran affirmed his organization's commitment and called on others to ensure that support continues in the years ahead. "I think the biggest challenge ahead will be to continue the transformation of the Soldier-as-a-System concept. As defense dollars become ever more scarce—as they do after any major conflict—we need to ensure that these programs are adequately funded so that the tip of America's combat machine, the heart of our Army—the individual soldier—is adequately funded and resourced. Because we develop and field the best technology and the best equipment America can provide, our soldiers have confidence in their equipment. They know the United States government and the Army and the Congress are providing them the resources and equipment they need for victory on the battlefield."

With a final bow to the soldier, the general concluded, "I think that the American fighting men and women are the best fighting force that the world has ever seen because of their intelligence, their drive, their dedication, and their will to win. And I believe that because they have the will, it is our job to provide them the means for victory."

The author welcomes comments and questions. Contact her at debi.dawson@us.army.mil.

[Defense AT&L printed an interview with Moran in the May-June 2004 issue and featured photographs of the equipment mentioned in this article. The interview is posted on the DAU Web site at http://www.dau.mil/pubs/dam/05_06_2004/mor-mj04.pdf.]