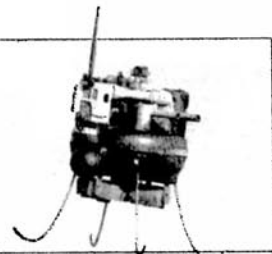


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WORLD NEWS

U.S. Army Using War Zone as Equipment Lab

By KRIS OSBORN

Why not harvest innovations from the war zone and bring them back to laboratories and learning centers, rather than the other way around?

That's the thinking behind the U.S. Army Capabilities Integration Center's "leading from the edge" acquisition and training effort, which will put new gear into the field, gather unprecedented amounts of real-world test data, and drive training and procurement decisions back home.

"I've been looking real hard at how we generate our assumptions and how we do our experimentation and how we do our concept development," said Lt. Gen. Michael Vane, director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center. "If you asked me, 'Where do you find most of your innovative ideas,' I would say, 'Mostly in the field.'"

The concept reflects the Army's introduction of the Micro Air Vehicle (MAV) UAV and Small Unmanned Ground Vehicle, which were sent to the front before formal production began.

"What you learn from use of that MAV has the potential to drive changes in real time back in the U.S. We want to harvest this innovation and bring it back into the generating force," said Rickey Smith, director of Army Capabilities Integration Center — Forward.

Vane doesn't want to replace the experimentation done in Army laboratories, but to better incorporate forward innovation.

Today, Army acquisition officials often don't get to ask soldiers about their gear until a year after combat.

Under the new concept, and using the data networks that increasingly connect deployed Army units to the rest of the force, they will get data as the gear goes

into battle.

"We have the [data] pipes now which allow us to have visibility on that without trying to command and control the war from the continental U.S., which is a dumb idea," Vane said. "We have feedback from soldiers through warfighter forums, so why don't we bring that all together in one place, a link to the training and leader development directly from these people leading from the edge?"

Army officials will carefully pick which gear will go quickly to the war zone. Officials with the service's Training and Doctrine Command and in the office of the assistant Army secretary for acquisition will cooperate to look for gaps that need filling, while remaining wary of sending untested equipment that might put soldiers at risk.

"Ultimately, the commander and the warfighter determines whether they want to

accept that risk, given the environment where they will operate," said Col. Timothy Goddette, director, soldier/maneuver and sustainment systems.

One analyst praised the Army's willingness to turn combat experiences into training, tactics and procedures.

"You see this particularly in areas such as the whole up-armoring of MRAPs and in the IED fights," said Daniel Goure, vice president of the Lexington Institute, an Arlington, Va.-based think tank. "One of the problems for the U.S. military is what happens between wars. It is fine to lead from the edge now, but it tells you nothing about the next conventional war, just as focusing on the central front in Europe did nothing to help us fight the current irregular wars." ■

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