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STATEMENT OF

**ROGER M. SMITH
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
(EXPEDITIONARY WARFARE)**

BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON

NAVY BODY ARMOR PROGRAMS

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Navy's individual body armor requirements and equipping process. The Navy procures and fields various body armor configurations based on our ashore and maritime mission requirements as defined by combatant commanders. These systems all provide a minimum of defense level IIIA ballistic protection while enhanced systems provide level IV protection to meet the most stressing mission requirements for Navy Forces.

The Navy personnel deployed worldwide currently fluctuates around 59,000 depending on unit rotations, of which about 31,000 are engaged in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) with 13,000 on the ground. About 90 percent of the personnel in the CENTCOM AOR are deploying and supporting ground forces in their traditional military specialties, or core competencies ashore, such as base and port operations support, medical services, explosive ordnance disposal teams, construction and engineer battalions (Seabees), electronic warfare, mobile security forces, detainee operations, infrastructure protection, and traditional joint intelligence and staff support. Navy personnel fulfill four basic requirements; 1) unit or individual, 2) active component (AC) / reserve component (RC) or a blended AC/RC mix, 3) joint requirements or internal Navy requirements; and 4) pre-planned, existing structure or ad-hoc needs. Navy personnel are equipped with body armor appropriate for the required mission that the individual or the unit they are assigned to will perform.

The Navy acquires body armor for three main mission requirements:

- 1.) Navy expeditionary forces;
- 2.) Individual augmentees assigned to joint forces; and,
- 3.) Shipboard anti-terrorism.

The Navy leverages Army and Marine Corps research and development of individual ballistic protection materials and equipment, both of which have extensive programs to maintain a high level of personal ballistic protection. The Navy capitalizes on these investments by using the most recent approved specifications and test procedures from the Army's Natick Soldier RDT&E Center, and procures body armor that meets these requirements, while incorporating features dictated by the Navy's operating environments. The Navy also adopts Marine Corps body armor solutions when they accommodate our mission needs and fielding goals.

NAVY EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

Navy expeditionary forces primarily comprise the core missions of Naval Construction Forces (NCF), or Seabees, airlift support, cargo handling, maritime security, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Riverine, and medical / Marine Corps support. The body armor for these personnel is procured through various buying agencies. Currently, all deploying NECC Forces are equipped with Level IV ballistic protection.

Naval Construction Force (NCF) Body Armor

Determination of NCF requirements is a collaborative process between the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (Type Commander), First Naval Construction Division (Fleet), Naval Facilities Engineering Command (Systems Command), OPNAV N43

(Resource Sponsor), and the Naval Facilities Engineering Logistics Center (Table of Allowance (TOA) Managers). A Logistics Working Group meets quarterly to review and assess new requirement recommendations, which are based on research of industry product development, Department of Defense (DoD) standards, field testing results, and procurement options. Interoperability and commonality of products with the Marine Corps and /or the Army is maximized to the greatest extent possible. Body armor is acquired and fielded in accordance with Task Force Commander Area of Operations Doctrine. Fielding of requirements is based on the Fleet's prioritization of needs.

We currently have 1,700 Seabees deployed in the Central Command area of operations, with over 50 percent of those deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). These forces are typically on 179-day rotations into theater.

The NCF is currently outfitted with the standard Interceptor Outer Tactical Vest (OTV) with Enhanced Small Arms Protective Insert (ESAPI) plates, groin protector, throat protector and side plates for enhanced ballistic protection. However, the Navy is currently procuring 4,480 Modular Tactical Vests (MTV) for the NCF through the Marine Corps. Deliveries are expected this month through July 2007, and will outfit seven battalions, two of which will be deploying in September 2007. The vests will be fielded with ESAPI plates to provide level IV ballistic protection, while providing more protection from shrapnel in the lower back and kidney area. The MTV also features a load-bearing system for weight distribution, and a quick-release system for emergency access. The decision to shift to the MTV was based on improved comfort and wear, and the strong desire for continued interoperability with the USMC. Additional body armor ensemble protection is fielded as required by the operational commander and the threat.

Non-NCF Expeditionary Forces

Requirements for non-NCF expeditionary personnel, such as maritime security forces, are determined through the Navy's requirements generation process. There are three basic requirements for body armor in the NECC Force: operations in the land environment, operations over the water, and Navy EOD. Units that operate exclusively on land will continue to use OTVs with Level IV ballistic plates and additional deltoid and auxiliary protector kits, and MTVs as they become available. These units include both traditional units, such as Navy Cargo Handling Battalions (within NAVELSG), as well as new units like the Maritime Civil Affairs Group and Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center. Units that operate on the water, such as Naval Coastal Warfare and the Riverine Force, wear a lightweight, Tactical Maritime Body Armor System (TMBAS), which includes 25% more coverage than the Interceptor OTV, with ESAPI front, back and side panel ballistic plates, providing level IV protection. These vests incorporate float packs that provide positive buoyancy and a single pull release mechanism, which allows a distressed operator to eject the front and back inserts simultaneously. The vest also offers the option to attach additional groin, throat and shoulder panels as a TMBAS fragmentation accessory package. The Table of Allowance (TOA) for the Navy's Mobile Diving and Salvage Units is currently being revised to include TMBAS and other new unit TOAs, such as Level III Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) and Maritime Intercept Operations (MIO) Intelligence Exploitation

Teams, are being drafted with TMBAS. The final non-NCF requirement for body armor is Navy EOD, which utilizes a unique maritime version of the Combat Integrated Releasable Armor System (CIRAS). The CIRAS system incorporates ESAPI plates and additional fragmentation protection kits.

Marine Corps Expeditionary Forces Support Personnel

Navy medical, religious and other support personnel (e.g., doctors, dentists, corpsmen, chaplains, religious support personnel, etc.) assigned to our Marine Expeditionary Forces are provided the body armor the Marine Corps issues to its personnel and to the level of protection required by the units they are assigned to.

SHIPBOARD ANTI-TERRORISM BODY ARMOR

Shipboard personnel wear the “Point Blank,” (contractor’s name) concealable body armor. The Point Blank ballistic vest can be worn under other uniform attire, if required, providing Level IIIA ballistic protection. The vest also provides extended length front and back coverage, as well as side ballistic coverage. It is adjustable through elastic straps, has removable ballistic panels (allowing the vest carrier to be laundered), and can accept front and back ESAPI ballistic plates, which provide level IV protection.

Level I and II Visit Board, Search and Seizure / Enhanced Maritime Intercept Operations (VBSS / EMIO)

Shipboard personnel conducting VBSS / EMIO wear uniquely-configured equipment due to the physical requirements of transferring between rigid hull inflatable boats to ships and vessels which are being boarded, as well as negotiating ladders and passageways while aboard the ship or vessel. These teams wear the “London Bridge” (contractor’s name) ballistic tactical vest, with front, back and side ballistic ceramic plates, which provide level III ballistic protection. The plates are neutrally buoyant for enhanced safety during water operations. The London Bridge ballistic tactical vest also acts as a floatation vest and is adjustable through elastic straps, which provide a firm and custom fit.

INDIVIDUAL AUGMENTEES

Individual Augmentees (IAs) comprise almost half of the approximately 13,000 Navy personnel deployed on land within the CENTCOM AOR in support of the GWOT.

Approximately half of all IA’s destined for CENTCOM will go through a 14-day pre-deployment training course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. This Navy Individual Augmentee Combat Training (NIACT) curriculum was developed in coordination with the Army. Theater or mission specific training, which many IAs may require, is determined by the Combatant Commander, and the IAs receive it prior to deployment at other training facilities. Additionally, eight hours of online training on rights and responsibilities is required to be completed through Navy Knowledge Online prior to deployment. Approximately 360 IAs per month are trained at Fort Jackson. The Army’s PEO (Soldier) issues the standard Army IPE to Navy IAs at this site.

The remaining IAs who do not attend NIACT receive their combat skills training in conjunction with their mission specific training at Army Training and Doctrine Command sites around the country. These IAs are trained and issued standard Army individual protection equipment by the resident Army issuing authority at the training sites.

CONCLUSION

The Navy procures and equips its forces with the best available body armor, tailored to our maritime and joint mission requirements and continues to seek improvements in equipment while leveraging Army and Marine Corps research and development initiatives.