

Smartphone solution sought for Nett Warrior

By [Joe Gould](#) – ArmyTimes Staff writer

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The Army is looking at a new smartphone solution for its wearable computer system, Nett Warrior, after ordering a halt to the program's development over the summer.

Program Executive Office Soldier unveiled a mock-up of Nett Warrior on Oct. 6 that trades the earlier versions' helmet-mounted monacle display, processing device, GPS and small hand-held keyboard for an all-in-one "end-user device."

Army officials said they expect key soldiers in eight deploying brigades will be issued these systems in 2013. The system would be issued primarily to rifle companies and reconnaissance companies who operate on foot.

Lt. Gen. Robert Lennox, deputy chief of staff for Army programs, said the combination of a smartphone and a Rifleman Radio would ultimately save money.

"That pairing and the fact that we have those two together would save us hundreds of millions of dollars and will lighten the load, to get it out to soldiers faster and cheaper," he said.

Bill Brower, the deputy project manager for Nett Warrior, said the chest- or wrist-mounted end-user device will provide blue-force tracking, run applications and connect to a tactical radio — all 50 percent cheaper and 70 percent lighter than existing gear.

"There were some capability trade-offs," Brower said. "Some soldiers, in fact, did not need the eyepiece on the helmet, so we have gone to the handheld display to bring that capability. The heads-up display could be brought back for selected leaders."

This device would connect to Army networks through the AN/PRC-154 Rifleman Radio, which is compliant with the Joint Tactical Radio System architecture. The radio weighs 2½ pounds.

Encryption is expected to be handled by both the device and the JTRS radio. Security protocols for transmitting data and data-at-rest on an operational smartphone are as-yet undefined.

Lt. Col. Matthew Dosmann, of the Army's Mobile Electronic Device Working Group, said the Army is working with the National Security Agency and Defense Information Systems Agency to decide policies for the garrison and the battlefield.

"Our current adversary is not as sophisticated in the electronic warfare department, but we've got to look ahead to cover that possibility," Dosmann said.

At this fall's Network Integration Exercise at White Sands, N.M., soldiers will test the offerings of various competitors, which will inform PEO Soldier's production decision in fiscal 2012. Brower declined to name the products in the test, but he said they were commercial "off-the-shelf products you could buy at a BestBuy," among them a tablet computer and a smartphone using the Android operating system.

Jeff Witsken, chief of network integration at the Combined Arms Center's Mission Command Center of Excellence, called a combination of a smartphone and a tactical radio a "first step forward."

"After this initial fielding, the Army will continue on this path, and more and more soldiers will start seeing these devices," he said.

The Army is close to finalizing major questions about how it buys and operates smartphones, Witsken said. What will be the standard characteristics of these devices? Which operating system will they use? What network will they use?

"Officially, they're open questions, but folks are way down the road on all of these," he said.

The Army wants to take advantage of technological advances as they happen, Witsken said.

Army leaders realized the potential of pairing a smartphone to Rifleman Radio after a demonstration at the NIE of a "ruggedized" handheld computer called the GD300.

The device, manufactured by General Dynamics Itronix, connects to the Rifleman Radio. It runs commercial apps for Android and military apps such as the Tactical Ground Reporting System, a blue-force tracking application.

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