

More SPARKs already approved

ARMY PM SEEKS TO MAKE ANTI-IED MINE ROLLERS PERMANENT PROGRAM

With the approval of additional purchases in hand, the product manager for a modular mine roller system designed to protect soldiers and vehicles from improvised explosive devices is seeking inclusion in the Army's six-year spending plan and the creation of a program of record.

Lt. Col. Karl Borjes, product manager for IED Defeat/Protect Force, told *Inside the Army* in a June 4 interview that the Self-Protection Adaptive Roller Kit was rapidly acquired and fielded.

The more than 300 SPARK systems now in both Iraq and Afghanistan -- funded by the Joint IED Defeat Organization-- are successfully saving lives, Borjes said.

First fielded in March 2007, he told *ITA* "once we got the funding approval from JIEDDO and we got the money, two weeks later we put it on contract, three months later we had the first roller on the ground, bolting it to a truck. "That is rapid acquisition at its best," Borjes said.

SPARK systems -- acquired through urgent materiel releases -- are mounted on Army tactical wheeled and tracked platforms, he explained.

They are intended to initiate IED events and take "the brunt of the blast," Borjes said. "So it protects the soldier's life, number one, and then the materiel."

Now, he told *ITA*, U.S. Central Command has approved a revised joint urgent operational need statement calling for additional rollers and a greater variety of vehicles to which they can be applied.

Though he declined to specify the number of rollers to be procured, or the timing of a contract award, he said his office is considering different types of contracts.

The current SPARK is manufactured by Pearson Engineering.

"I'm not saying it's going to be sole-source; I'm not saying it's competitive," Borjes explained. "We're going to look at everybody, and we're going to look at whatever contract type we're going to do."

He also indicated that the SPARK will be used on Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles.

"It's not on the front of an MRAP now, but soon it will be," he said.

Ultimately, Borjes told *ITA* he wants to move the system toward becoming a program of record.

"The most important thing that you wait on for programs of record is establishment in the [program objective memorandum] cycle," he said, referring to the service's six-year spending plan. "Fingers are crossed, but it's what the Army decides."

Meanwhile, he said the service is constantly improving the rollers now in the field. Borjes said he frequently goes to theater to assess the system.

"We have to be able to easily counter the threat, and you can't make something just so static," he said. "There are improvements to the roller, the SPARK roller, that we have made, and it continues to be effective to this day."

The feedback Borjes acquires in theater can be applied both to immediate improvements as well as future procurement, he said.

The PM IEDD/PF office, located in the program executive office ammunition at Picatinny Arsenal, NJ, was chartered in September and receives most of its funding from JIEDDO, Borjes said. The office also works with the Rapid Equipping Force and partnered closely with Army Test and Evaluation Command on the SPARK program. -- *Marjorie Censer*

'It is not a crisis'

PENTAGON ACQUISITION CHIEF SEES IMPROVEMENT IN COST-GROWTH TRENDS

Buffeted by a recent congressional audit that found weapon system programs experiencing skyrocketing cost growth, the Defense Department's chief weapons buyer last week offered a vigorous defense of the military acquisition system, asserting that recent cost-growth trends signal an improvement, not a crisis.

In a June 5 meeting with reporters in his Pentagon office, John Young, under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, laid out a detailed rebuttal of a Government Accountability Office report that earlier this spring calculated the entire portfolio of new weapons the Pentagon is buying have experienced cost growth of \$295 billion.

"I think there is a need to look beyond the bumper sticker at the facts," said Young, whose staff recently concluded its own analysis of program cost growth to ascertain the exact source of the figures cited by a March 31 GAO report, "Defense Acquisitions: Assessment of Selected Weapon Programs."

Katherine Schinasi, a senior Pentagon auditor at GAO, provided a detailed analysis to the Senate Armed Services Committee on June 3 that calls for fundamental changes in the Pentagon's acquisition system, including a need for more discipline and accountability. Young testified at the same hearing.

The bulk of the cost growth -- \$202 billion of the \$295 billion -- identified by GAO, according to Young's analysis, took place before 2004.

This means that the \$93 billion hike in costs experienced in 2005 and 2006 to the overall \$1.5 trillion price tag for the entire portfolio of weapons reflects an increase of 6 percent for two years, or 3 percent a year.

"I would tell you this reflects an improvement," Young said. "It is not a crisis."

The 3-percent annual growth he says weapon systems experienced came as the price of materials and labor climbed steadily higher.

The Pentagon acquisition chief noted that global demand for key commodities has propelled the cost of specialty metals essential to some weapon systems significantly. Titanium and copper prices have increased at least five fold between 2003 and 2008, he said, adding that aluminum and steel prices have more than doubled.

"DOD experiences labor, health care and other increases just like the rest of the economy," Young said, adding: "Military programs are complex, software intensive, use premium and specialty materials, and are purchased at low rates of production -- seriously aggravations efforts to control cost."

Six weapon system programs, across their total life cycles, have generated \$186 billion of the total cost growth identified by GAO, Young said.

The DDG-51 program is responsible for \$46 billion of the total tab; the Future Combat Systems, \$40 billion; Joint Strike Fighter, \$37 billion; Virginia-class submarine, \$24 billion; C-17 cargo plane, \$22 billion; and the tiltrotor V-22, \$17 billion, according to Young.

While some of the factors that caused each of these programs to increase in cost are similar, each had unique challenges, Young said.

"You cannot simply look at this in a short [congressional] hearing and declare the process is out of control," Young said to reporters last week in response to charges at the June 3 hearing that the Pentagon's acquisition system requires fundamental improvements.

The Pentagon's acquisition executive then offered a detailed analysis of the main factors that caused cost growth in many of these major programs, reiterating: "There is not a crisis, far from it."

Young underscored his view that any cost growth is unacceptable, and outlined recent guidance he's given to program managers to find ways to execute their programs within their planned allocations.

While there are many actions the Pentagon can take to ensure stability of programs and control dynamics that can generate new bills, he argued that lots of other actors outside the Defense Department also have an important role in containing cost growth.

"Many people, including the Congress, are stakeholders in the cost increases in weapons programs," Young said. "It is absolutely not totally tied solely to the defense acquisition process or the DOD program managers." -- *Jason Sherman*