



Land Warrior: A Trainee, Combat User and Trainer's Perspective

Staff Sergeant Matt Dodge has been using Land Warrior since the commencement of the programme's successful Limited User Test (LUT), then using it during combat operations in Iraq and is now tasked with helping the next generation of Land Warrior users get the most from the system

"We fielded the Land Warrior system for the LUT at Fort Lewis, Washington in April 2006," explained SSG Dodge outlining the Manchus history with the system. "Our battalion, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry, 4th Brigade, 2nd Division was the test battalion. We did a year of testing where we worked through a lot of the problems that every system has with software and programming-bugs. Then the decision was made to take the system to Iraq. We took it overseas in 2007 and used it during 15 months of combat operations on the ground."

Prior to joining the Manchus, Sergeant Dodge had served four tours in Afghanistan and two in Iraq, both with the 2nd Ranger Battalion, based at Fort Lewis. In his 15 month deployment to Iraq with the Manchus, 4/9 started in Central Iraq, north of Baghdad, operating around Taji, Mushadda and Balad Air Base for about seven months from May until December 2007.

Early in January 2007, SSG Dodge explained that the unit moved from Taji to Camp Speicher in Tikrit where they were based until they left Iraq in June 2008. "We jumped around quite a bit. A Stryker Brigade Combat Team is very light and fast moving, so in the summer of 2007 we went out to help other units. We helped 3rd Brigade 2nd Infantry Division in their clearance in the city of Bakuba then went with the 82nd Airborne and did sustained combat operations in the Diyala river valley for

a month. Then, we went back to Taji and were involved in the full clearance of the city of Tarmiah. Then we went North to Tikrit where we worked in the deserts west of Tikrit, in places like Samara and Baiji."

SSG Dodge believes that the Land Warrior technology changed the entire dynamics of ground operations for the Manchus. "Land Warrior gave us the ability to have an overview of everything on the ground – it was like having

an FBCB2 or a FalconView in your face. It made us much faster and more lethal. Everybody who wears a Land Warrior has an icon, showing their exact location. You can track the movement and the placement of all of your dismounted leaders via this system, during periods of light or hours of darkness. It made us much faster. It made us more confident because we had the ability to see where we were, to track what we were doing and to have complete



"We never got lost. We never missed a turn. We never missed a house." © DoD

► control because we knew where our forces were. We never got lost. We never missed a turn. We never missed a house. The digital icons were great tools that we used every day. I can go in and plug in a co-ordinate – any ten digit grid and it will drop an icon on my screen that everybody can see and identify.”

SSG Dodge used his experience to undertake Time Sensitive Targeting (TST) missions as part of Blowtorch Company, to show how Land Warrior could be used to immediately orientate users, who had been set down in unfamiliar surroundings. “We did a lot of TST operations when we first got to Taji. We would be waiting ready to leave and the commander would give us a mission to go to a grid reference. We would already have our systems set up and the commanders would have the ability to build digital overlays on a computer programme, apply it to the system and then send it over the lower tactical internet to all leaders. We could then apply those overlays and they came up on our screens.”

“While I was driving, walking or flying in a helicopter, my icon followed me, giving me Situational Awareness so I could see every leader on the ground. I could track my movement and route. I knew where to turn. I knew where the target house was. There were a lot of operations in which we did air assaults at night. It was dark, urban and we’d never been in that area before, but we were able to

follow our icons straight to the target, making us much faster and much more fluid. It took all the guess work out of it, so with absolute certainty, we knew where we were going at all times.”

“While we were over there, leaders began to appreciate the technology and the abilities that Land Warrior gave us. As a result some other units in 4th Brigade such as the brigade Personal Security Detail and some other platoon level units wanted the system.”

CHANGES

Changes to the hardware took place during the deployment, not least to improve load carriage. SSG Dodge said, “When we first initially fielded the systems, we were wearing the Interceptor Body Armour. That didn’t really work very well because of all the added space that we needed. Our Sergeant Major worked with the Army and the acquisition corps and we got the new IOTV vest. However, it was still a bit bulky and the equipment outside the armour still flopped around.”

SSG Dodge was instrumental in refining the design in the field to mitigate this problem after coming back to Camp Warhorse from a two week combat operation in Baquba.

“Staff Sergeant Tidwell and I, said we were going to sit down and take twelve hours and figure out a

better way of doing this. We designed a backplate to fit underneath the body armour. The first design was cardboard covered with tape and zip-ties. We rerouted all the cables, so they weren’t exposed when mounted on the backplate. We made it on the fly. But once everybody saw it, people saw it made sense.” This innovation was then taken up formally and a new streamlined holster has been introduced.

Freeing up this space made room for everyday equipment used during operations. SSG. Dodge said, “Guys want to wear Camelbaks. I’m a Master Breacher, so I do a lot of explosive breaching. I needed space for my charges, initiation systems and smoke grenades. When you are working with a system like Land Warrior, you want to try to get it out of the way so you can use all the available space on your kit for mission essential items, without compromising your system. Over the course of the 15 months that we were there, we made other small changes to the way people wore it.”

As for weight SSG Dodge said, “We got used to it very quickly. The average weight for the total kit was anywhere from 70-85lbs and the Land Warrior system adds 10.2lbs to your load. When it was worn on the sides the weight wasn’t well distributed and that was part of the reason that we put it in the back. It sits on a plate and you carry most of your weight on the front so it balances out a little and makes it easier to carry.”

Now back at Fort Lewis, SSG Dodge is helping prepare soldiers in the 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) to operate Land Warrior on future operations.

“The Army took twelve NCOs – squad and team leaders including myself, who had used the system the entire time and attached them to the programme. We had the opportunity to show Land Warrior and what it could do. I had the opportunity to brief [Army Chief of Staff] General Casey, division commanders and sergeant majors and show them the capabilities of the system. Since we came back, the Army has stood up the 5th SBCT and are fielding the next generation of Land Warrior to the entire brigade. SSG Dodge and the other NCOs are attached to the 5th SBCT in order to facilitate training and help them with testing.” ■



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