

# Female Body Armor Named Among Best Inventions in 2012

By Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick Public Affairs

Members of the 101st Airborne Division's 1st Brigade will be the first to test the new female body armor, which was named one of *Time Magazine's* "Best Inventions of the Year 2012." An innovation that will leave female soldiers safer and more comfortable on the battlefield.

A collaborative effort between the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center and Program Executive Office Soldier resulted in an improved outer tactical vest, or IOTV, designed specifically for women. The 101st Airborne Division's 1st Brigade will be the first unit to test the new female body armor in Afghanistan.

The new armor was designed to offer better protection and to prevent bruised hip bones that women experienced when wearing IOTVs meant to fit smaller men.

Maj. Joel Dillon, Assistant Product Manager, Soldier Protection and Individual Equipment, PEO Soldier, called the *Time* story a motivator for those involved in the body armor's development.

"I think it's great that it shows the American people that we're continuing to make sure that our soldiers have the best equipment in the world," Dillon said. "And so any word that gets out in that respect is great. It's a big boost for our team, because we work very hard to make sure that all of the equipment we develop and field is

the finest that we can possibly obtain for the American soldier."

Dillon pointed out that in a head-to-head comparison with the current IOTV, the female version was chosen by all of the 101st soldiers who tested it.

"They provide a better, more secure fit for female soldiers," Dillon said. "I was down there visiting while the testing was ongoing at Fort Campbell (Ky.), talking to the soldiers, and it was just really obvious to me that the form, fit and function are definitely what we were shooting for."

In a recent interview with National Public Radio, Lynne Hennessey of NSRDEC, lead designer for the female body armor, related what she heard from soldiers during testing at Fort Campbell.

"Most of them, when they put it on, they were like, 'oh, my goodness, I need this right now. Can I have this? I could wear this all day. It fits so well,'" Hennessey said. "We actually took a picture of one soldier hugging her vest, like she was immediately in love with it."

Dillon said that more fine tuning is necessary, however.

"We are going to make some tweaks to the vest based on the feedback that we got from these female soldiers at Fort Campbell," Dillon said. "They had some comments about the location of the buckles on the shoulders and some other adjustability concerns, and we're going to make those modifications before we go out on our next contract. That is exactly the purpose of the ongoing testing – to make the vest even better."

The evaluation process will continue.

"Our goal is to fit additional female soldiers for testing, both Stateside and in Afghanistan," Dillon said. "We're looking to get more of them down range."

As Dillon noted, *Time's* recognition shines a spotlight on the continuing, combined effort to improve soldier equipment.

"There is a team of very dedicated professionals both at PEO Soldier and at the NSRDEC at Natick who have done yeoman's work behind the scenes to design, produce, issue and evaluate this vest," Dillon said. "While not as important as the feedback we have received directly from the female soldiers themselves, national-level recognition such as this helps validate our efforts, and provides additional motivation to this team of consummate professionals. ■



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