

Soldiers Know What Soldiers Need

SEP Evaluates Products to Meet Soldier Needs

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With the Army immersed in conflicts around the world, Soldiers need equipment that reflects the best technology and they need it fast. Before “transformation” was a part of the Army lexicon, the Soldier Enhancement Program (SEP), within Project Manager Soldier Warrior, promoted transformation of the Soldier system with an accelerated acquisition process that issues better weapons and gear to Soldiers. SEP continues to play a key role in the effort to meet Soldiers’ needs. The SEP panel reviews more than 100 proposals every six months with the objective of identifying and obtaining worn or carried items to further enhance the effectiveness of the dismounted Soldier in a tactical environment.

The National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 1990 established SEP with the purpose of enhancing the equipment used by dismounted Army Soldiers using commercial off-the-shelf (COTS), government off-the-shelf (GOTS), and non-developmental item (NDI) products. SEP uses a “buy, try, and decide” methodology. If the review panel, which convenes twice a year, selects an item, SEP buys and evaluates the item in order to gain firsthand feedback from Soldiers. After evaluating an item for functionality, protection, and lethality, the Army considers issuing the product Army-wide.

Unlike many military acquisition programs, SEP represents an aggressive effort to identify and procure already developed items that have the potential to substantially improve weapons and support equipment. SEP evaluates products from all the warfighting functional areas: fires, mission command, movement and maneuver, sustainability, and protection. Previous SEP items include lighter and more lethal weapons, lighter and more comfortable load-bearing equipment, field gear, survivability items, navigational aids, and training capabilities.

Identifying Soldiers’ Needs

Infantry Soldiers, or Soldiers serving in a dismounted role, rely heavily on equipment and oftentimes have knowledge of commercial items that can better help them accomplish a mission. SEP provides Soldiers with an avenue to recommend those products directly to the acquisition community. SEP also uses themes to help focus industry leaders and Soldiers on items for which combat developers generate requirements. The current theme for SEP is to “Enhance Soldier Mobility by Reducing Soldier Load.” SEP reviews all products submitted, but products that reduce overall weight without increasing bulk/stiffness or compromising current capabilities will be prioritized higher for consideration and assessment within SEP.

Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier, in coordination with the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Capability Manager (TCM)-Soldier, reviews item submissions. A Council of Colonels meets each February and July to decide if an item is worth evaluating. If the item is approved, SEP will fund the evaluation of the item and provide a final report with findings and recommendations.

The recommendations could include:

- * Adopt the item as an Army capability,
- * Do not adopt the item as an Army capability,
- * Use the data/information gained during the evaluation to inform requirements generation, or
- * Assign a national stock number (NSN) — so that units can buy it as-is.

Some of SEP’s past successes include the M110 semi-automatic sniper system, clip-on sniper night sight, combat shotgun enhancement kit, squad common optic, extreme cold weather socks, parachute electronic activation device, fuel handlers coveralls and gloves, modular ghillie suit, ghillie suit accessory kit upgrade, individual combat

shelter, PD-100 Black Hornet (nano unmanned aerial system [UAS]), Daytron Scout (UAS), InstantEye (UAS), and the Recon Scout throwable robot. Current initiatives within SEP include fire control systems, weapons accessories and upgrades, cold weather clothing and equipment, power charging and scavenger systems, Soldier borne sensors, and 40mm ammunition upgrades.

For more than 25 years, the Army's SEP has been providing Soldiers with items that help them complete their missions more effectively. Many of these items were recommended to the SEP by Soldiers operating in a dismounted role.

Anyone can submit suggestions and all submissions are processed through the PEO Soldier website at <http://peosoldier.army.mil/SEP>. For more information about SEP, the process, or meeting dates, call (706) 626-8600 or send an email to thomas.b.house3.ctr@mail.mil.

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**The M110 Semi-automatic Sniper System came from Soldier Enhancement Program input.
(Photo courtesy of PEO Soldier)**