



The Rapid Fielding Initiative: Equipping Soldiers to Succeed

The untold story of the Rapid Fielding Initiative (RFI) is the tremendous effort by a relatively small group of individuals who acted quickly and within existing procedures to ensure Soldiers have the most current equipment the Army can acquire.

What is it?

The Rapid Fielding Initiative aggressively modernizes individual and small-unit equipment for active and reserve Soldiers throughout the operational Army. By the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 some 840,000 Soldiers in 48 active and 36 reserve component brigade combat teams (BCTs) and their associated support personnel are expected to receive the enhanced capabilities provided by the basic RFI Soldier kit. **The RFI kit contains about 50 items ranging from mission-essential equipment, such as improved boots, socks and “wick-away” T-shirts, to key force protection items, such as the advanced combat helmet and knee and elbow pads. Also included**



Examples of Lethality Items

are critical lethality items, such as improved ammunition packs, team radios and advanced weapon optics. Since November 2002, more than 120,000 Soldiers supporting Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF) have received the new equipment, dramatically improving their lethality, mobility and survivability on the battlefield. The Rapid Fielding Initiative has provided millions of mission-essential items and equipment to deploying Soldiers and units **in a matter of weeks and months instead of years.**

How did it start?

In 2002, Soldiers reported equipment shortages in Afghanistan and elsewhere. In many instances, they used personal funds to buy commercially available equipment to enhance mission accomplishment.

The Army Vice Chief of Staff, General John M. Keane, directed the Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier to develop a plan to remedy the situation, starting with the 82d Airborne and 101st Airborne (Air Assault) Divisions. Unit commanders and senior noncommissioned officers were asked to develop a core list of needed equipment, ensuring it represented the practical concerns of Soldiers who were deployed or had recently been deployed. With this list in hand, PEO Soldier set an ambitious goal to field an initial brigade—about 3,500 Soldiers—with the equipment within 45 days.

The success of this initial fielding led to a total of eight Brigade Combat Teams being “RFI’d” in FY 2003. As a result, thousands of Soldiers deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq with significantly enhanced lethality, survivability and comfort.

Where is the initiative now?

Originally, an expanded RFI equipment list was tailored to meet each brigade combat team's needs. As the Army's requirement for RFI increased exponentially, Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) established a standardized list of equipment for all Soldiers and a list of additional items for BCTs, totaling about 50 types of items.

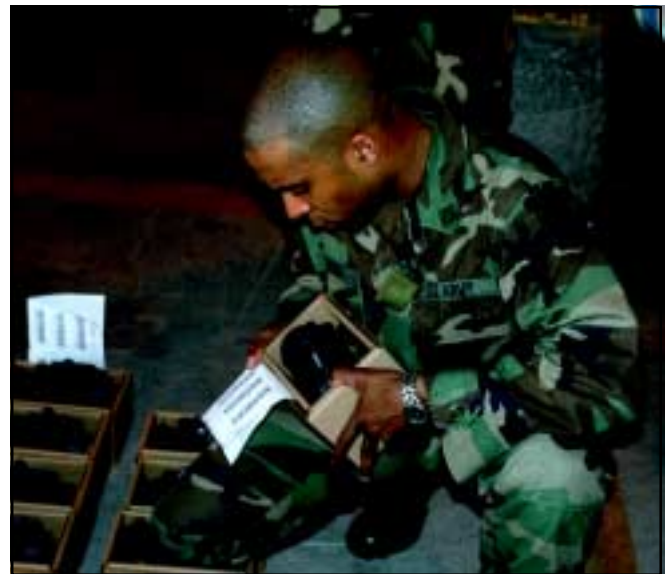
While much of the RFI equipment was harvested from commercial off-the-shelf and government off-the-shelf production lines, innovative approaches were taken to meet operational shortfalls for deploying units. RFI also has provided combat optics, sensors and lasers to enhance Soldier lethality. This has required some purchases above the Army's Basis-of-Issue Plan (BOIP) and also some adjustments to the Department of the Army Master Priority List (DAMPL).

The compelling urgency of hostilities in Afghanistan and Iraq compressed the approval of beyond-BOIP procurement and out-of-DAMPL sequence fielding so that deploying units received the equipment they needed in a few short months rather than through the traditional decades-long process. These specific RFI items enabled Soldiers and units to dramatically increase lethality and reduce collateral damage.



Examples of Mission-Essential Equipment

By the fall of 2003, the new Army Chief of Staff, General Peter J. Schoomaker, had directed that all Soldiers deploying in support of OIF and OEF receive RFI equipment. Recognizing RFI's enhancement of fighting forces' capabilities in the daily performance of their missions, the program was expanded further in February 2004 to equip all 840,000 active and reserve Soldiers in the operational Army by the end of FY 2007, with priority given to deploying reserve units.



Examples of Force Protection and Mobility Items

Who are the players and what are they doing?

RFI program achievements have come from a collaborative effort by both the Executive and Legislative branches whose focus is to provide Soldiers with much-needed equipment. The Army leadership gave the direction and backing to accomplish RFI, and Congress has overwhelmingly supported the endeavor with additional funding to keep the program on track. Within the Army, HQDA and the Army Budget Office have supplied the resources and prioritization to quickly procure the equipment.

Army Test and Evaluation Command has issued material releases and validations in fractions of the time required by traditional testing processes. Army Training and Doctrine Command has assisted with documentation of operational needs and coordination of basic and unit-specific requirements. The core of the operation resides in PEO Soldier Headquarters at Fort



In that warehouse RFI items from more than 50 suppliers are received, repackaged into 100,000-piece, brigade-sized sets and either moved to an airport for shipment overseas or loaded onto trucks for transport inside the CONUS. One brigade's worth of RFI items requires the equivalent of two Boeing 747s or 15 tractor-trailers to move.

Once the 747s are unloaded at a staging base in Kuwait City, the pallets are transferred to the new facility at Camp Doha, Kuwait, or are transferred to IL-76 aircraft for subsequent shipment to Balad, Iraq. From these hubs 14 active and reserve Soldiers, supported by 120 to 160 contractors, coordinate and carry out the in-country fieldings.

Fielding operations in CONUS are considerably simpler. Fielding team representatives are prepositioned at the gaining unit's installation to receive the equipment from the commercial carrier. The equipment is then prepared for issue and distributed to Soldiers according to unit-designated schedules.

Belvoir, Virginia. Within a year operations had been established to field equipment to 20,000 Soldiers a month. Through the efforts of the PEO leadership, the RFI Operations Team, support contractors and a handful of project and product managers, several million pieces of equipment have been ordered, packaged into brigade-sized sets, shipped and fielded to Soldiers in the continental United States (CONUS), the Pacific, Europe and Southwest Asia. The operations team has networked with HQDA, with Army Forces Command and with the reserve component to synchronize fieldings with unit schedules, generate the new equipment training and establish logistical support to carry out this enormous effort.



The project and program managers have fostered substantial increases in industrial capacity from relatively small textile and specialty industries within a short period of time. The PEO leadership has vigilantly guided the entire process to ensure the Army leadership's intent is being met.

The Advanced Combat Helmet (ACH) was a refinement of the U.S. Special Operations Command's Modular Integrated Communications Helmet, improving Soldiers' comfort and survivability over the Personal Armor System, Ground Troops (PASGT) helmet currently in the Army inventory. A year ago, the ACH manufacturer was producing about 200 a month. Now, monthly production is approaching nearly 19,000 helmets.

The hub of the RFI logistical operation is now a large, ordinary-looking U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) warehouse in Middle River, Maryland.

Nine days from the time a shipment leaves the Middle River facility, the equipment is in the Soldiers' hands in Iraq.



Rapid Fielding Initiative



Representatives from PEO Soldier deployed to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Fort Drum, New York, and Schofield Barracks, Hawaii to field equipment to Soldiers and train them in its use just before their deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Soldiers and units, consequently, were far more survivable and lethal in the harsh terrain and climate of these countries.

What's next?

PEO Soldier continues to work closely with HQDA to provide RFI kits to the remainder of the active and reserve force. RFI has significantly improved the trust and cooperation between Soldiers and the acquisition community, as well as HQDA, Training and Doctrine Command and the Army Test community. This close cooperation will serve as a model for future acquisitions, providing direct and timely feedback for Army modernization investments and significantly compressing the timeline for putting mature technology into the hands of Soldiers.



RFI preserves America's technological superiority in combat and boosts every Soldier's survivability and lethality. RFI lets the Army and industry provide Soldiers and units the types of equipment that otherwise had been procured "out of pocket," "out of hide" or not at all. In addition

to addressing actual operational concerns and providing additional capabilities to Soldiers, RFI has brought to the military acquisition world a new knowledge and infrastructure to greatly accelerate acquisition and fielding efforts.

RFI saves Soldiers' lives, improves their well-being, and increases their combat effectiveness.