

PM in-transit visibility tools support National Guard missions

By Stephen Larsen

In the largest and swiftest response to a domestic disaster in history, the National Guard deployed more than 50,000 troops to the Gulf States to support relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

However, tracking assets proved to be problematic, at best. Support personnel had no answer to questions like: How much food, water and other supplies were available? Where were those items? And how long would it take to get those items to where they were needed?

“One of the lessons-learned that came out of Hurricane Katrina was that we knew we needed increased capabilities to track assets,” said MAJ Ron

Robbins, logistics staff officer with the Army National Guard Readiness Center, Arlington, Va. “We needed tools to track assets when we’re assisting civil authorities in responding to natural disasters and national emergencies, and we needed a tool to share this information across agencies for a common operating picture.”

Such tools that provide in-transit visibility are now available from the Product Manager, Joint-Automatic Identification Technology, part of the of the Army’s Program Executive Office, Enterprise Information Systems’ Project Manager, Defense Communications and Army Transmission Systems. “Radio Frequency Identification

products allow logisticians to track shipments from the factory – or fort – to the foxhole,” said LTC Cary Ferguson, J-AIT the product manager, whose organization has established and maintains a suite of indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contracts through which DoD organizations can acquire AIT products and support including RFID. “RFID products provide ‘in the box’ visibility – the ability to see the contents of containers or pallets without opening them. These products afford visibility of a unit’s en-route deployment status and facilitate inventory control and redistribution of assets.”

PM J-AIT teamed with the National Guard Bureau to conduct a training course at the National Guard Combined Support Maintenance Shop in Manchester, N.J. from Sep. 27 to Sep. 29, 2011, to teach National Guard Soldiers from Connecticut, Maine, New Jersey and New York how to conduct site surveys to deploy radio frequency identification systems that provide in-transit visibility. RFID systems consist of three basic components: RFID tags that are electronically programmed with unique identification information; interrogators that emit and receive radio signals from tags; and computers that process digital information from tags and interrogators. During the training course, Tom Kaberline and Tommy McCullough of the NGB taught the Soldiers how to conduct site surveys and to deploy interrogators, Albert Losten of the NGB taught them how to



Photo by Stephen Larsen

WO1 Dan Dubay (*left*) takes notes and SFC Trevor Brown looks on as Thomas Kaberline (*right*) of the National Guard Bureau explains how the signpost he’s holding can track active radio frequency identification tags on passing vehicles. This took place during a training class at the National Guard Combined Support Maintenance Shop in Manchester, N.J. on 29 Sept. 2011.

write to RFID tags and Andy Smith of PM J-AIT showed them how to use the RF-ITV Tracking Portal.

Visual common operating picture via RF-ITV Tracking Portal

“The RF-ITV Tracking Portal traces the identity, status and location of cargo from its point of origin to its destination, via the DoD’s worldwide Active RFID Network, which is the largest active RFID network in the world, located in more than 50 countries and including more than 3,600 worldwide read and write sites,” said Smith. He added that the RF-ITV Tracking Portal also receives near real-time position information from more than 12,000 satellite-based system (such as the Movement Tracking System) modules, combines and processes the information, and delivers it to systems such as the Battle Command Sustainment and Support System, the Standard Army Retail Supply System and the Transportation Coordinators’ - Automated Information for Movements System II.

Smith demonstrated to the Soldiers in the class the RF-ITV Tracking Portal’s Google Earth mapping capability, which enables users to see exactly where interrogators, shipments and conveyances were located anywhere in the world.

“This is standard, commercial Google Earth with RF-ITV data overlaid,” said Smith, adding that PEO EIS has obtained authority to operate and a certificate of worthiness for this application, allowing any DoD user to request and obtain the Google Earth download on their computer from their network enterprise center.

“This is a great tool for logistics in-transit visibility



Photos by Stephen Larsen

Left photo: Tommy McCullough (left, in maroon shirt) of the National Guard Bureau Warrant shows National Guard Soldiers how to erect a mast-mounted radio frequency identification interrogator outside the National Guard Combined Support Maintenance Shop in Manchester, N.J. on Sep. 29, 2011.

Right photo: Staff Sgt. David Arroyo of the Joint Force Headquarters-New York steadies the mast-mounted radio frequency identification interrogator.

and asset visibility, an additional tool above-and-beyond the IT components currently in the field, such as BCS3,” said Robbins. “We can use the RF-ITV Tracking Portal from any Common Access Card-enabled PC - and in the future, we will be able to share this visual tool across agencies - such as Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, DoD and the Red Cross - for a common operating picture.”

SSG David Arroyo of the Joint Force Headquarters-New York, who provided logistics support out of the emergency operations center at JFHQ-Latham NY after the 9-11 attacks, said the AIT tools the class was being trained with would have “helped tremendously “ in that relief effort.

“It would have been extremely helpful to be able to watch on the computer screen

of the RF-ITV Tracking Portal and see exactly where supplies were,” said SSG Arroyo. “Is this inbound? Where is it? The good thing about this is that you can annotate on the tag information about exactly what’s in the truck -Meals Ready to Eat, water, cots or whatever.”

MAJ Robbins said the National Guard Bureau has these AIT products at their headquarters and has implemented AIT pilot programs in five states - Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska.

“We also have a training package that we take to units to regionally train - neighboring states collaborate, so we do training that way,” said MAJ Robbins. “PM J-AIT has been a really big help in supporting us as we roll this out. It’s a living, breathing program - it’s evolving on the fly and we’re learning new things all the time.”