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GNOMAD Offers Vehicle Connectivity in Tight Quarters

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A mobile satellite networking technology recently shipped to the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea, as well as to the 4th Infantry Division fighting wildfires in Colorado, is one of the most promising solutions being considered for the service's vexing inability to connect Bradley fighting vehicles and Abrams tanks to its marquee battlefield network of the future.

An Army official speaking confidentially late last week said that the Global Network on the Move-Active Distribution (GNOMAD) system, which has been evaluated at the service's Network Integration Evaluation (NIE) as well as in Iraq, has showed promise and that the service plans on further exploring its capabilities.

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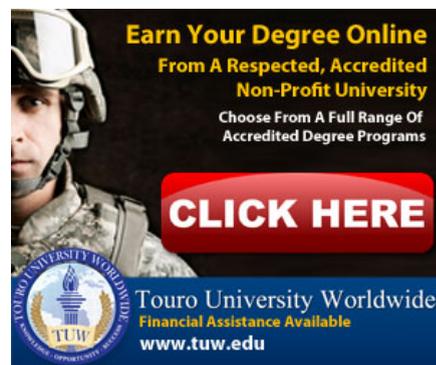
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The biggest issue with installing WIN-T on a Bradley or Abrams is a simple one: There's just not enough room inside the already crowded vehicles to fit the WIN-T hardware. Enter the GNOMAD, an 8-inch tall, 120-pound mounted system capable of meeting the threshold requirements for WIN-T and global Ku-band operations, according to Ross Ostrow, ITT Exelis' senior manager, business development. The Army has made fielding the WIN-T network its number one priority.

The GNOMAD was sent to South Korea after the 2nd Infantry Division, 8th Army filed an operational needs statement to identify capabilities that would provide secure, vehicle-mounted, on-the-move satellite communications when it became clear that the unit would not receive the WIN-T system for some time. In response, the Army mounted three GNOMAD systems on Caiman MRAPs, Osborne said, and deployed them earlier this year. The unit is also scheduled to receive Capability Set 13, a communications suite that uses WIN-T as its backbone, later this year.

This is hardly the system's first deployment, however. In 2011, the 4th Infantry Division deployed to Iraq with five Caiman-mounted GNOMADs.

"The systems performed very well" Osborne said, successfully providing on-the-move satellite voice and data communications as well as NIPRnet connectivity while traveling between 35 miles per hour and 75 miles per hour. The gear remains deployed in Kuwait as part of the strategic response force stationed there.



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The division's 3rd Brigade, which is currently performing firefighting missions in Colorado, has also tapped the company for three GNOMADs, which ITT Exelis recently shipped within 36 hours of the initial request.

"They're running commercial Internet, and bridging between civilian and military radios" Osborne said.

Three systems have also been issued to the Army's 20th Support Command at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Md., which handles chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high yield explosives missions.

In addition to these deployments, the Army's Heavy Brigade Combat Team program manager is running a feasibility assessment of the GNOMAD for possible integration on Bradley and Abrams platforms. The assessment is scheduled to wrap up in early September, and be briefed to Heihi Shyu, acting assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition, logistics and technology, in mid-October.

GNOMAD has already taken part in the last two NIEs in the fall of 2011 and spring of 2012, and will participate in the next one coming up in October. It is also being considered for the NIE scheduled for spring 2013.

The system has been integrated on Humvees, Chevy Suburbans, MAT-V's and MaxxPro Dash MRAPs, as well as the Caiman, Osborne said. As it runs these assessments for the Army, Osborne stressed that the company continues to work on reducing size, weight and power requirements by introducing capabilities such as a Soldier Radio Waveform module "so maybe you could eventually reduce the number of radios in a vehicle."

While not going into details, he also said it is possible that in the next few months the system could again deploy to a combat zone.

Osborne maintains that the low profile of the system and its lack of antennae is an added security measure, since Iraqi insurgents often targeted command-and-control vehicles that bristled with antenna.

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