



Corporal Michael Ring



Sapper Ben Johnston

All photos, taken in late April 2012, depict the Other Government Agency Platoon on patrol near the Sajawal Crossing in Uruzgan, and highlight the latest 'soldier combat system' deployed in the field.

The Other Government Agency Platoon's main role is to provide security to civilian contractors and other government agencies such as AusAID and DFAT, allowing them to do their jobs 'outside the wire'.

WHAT WORKS FOR DIGGERS?

Scientists, engineers, procurement officers and combat-experienced soldiers were brought together last year as part of a new virtual team called Diggerworks charged with delivering new equipment, better suited to the situation on the ground, more quickly, so that Australian troops on the battlefield will be more lethal and better protected.

Headed by Colonel Jason Blain, who commanded Mentoring Taskforce 1 in Afghanistan in 2010, Diggerworks' mission is, "To identify options and deliver integrated soldier combat systems solutions in order to enhance the capability of the warfighter."

Colonel Blain says key requirements to make Diggerworks work is to engage in constant and effective dialogue with the end user and with industry – to listen to soldier feedback and to adopt a more flexible acquisition process that provides for continual enhancement of soldier combat systems.

His 'adaptive acquisition process' essentially boils down to buying less equipment more often to enable change to happen more quickly.

However, he also points to a mindset where everyone will not be equipped the same and the close combatant will be treated differently.

In the past, the individual load-carriage and personal-protection systems employed by the Australian Defence Force have been sub-optimised to meet the requirements of the entire organisation. This meant that one type of combat uniform, one type of webbing and pack and one type of body

armour were identified and purchased in bulk to equip everybody uniformly irrespective of the job they did, the role they played or the dangers they faced.

Speaking at a Defence conference in Canberra earlier this year, Colonel Blain explained how he felt quite fortunate as the commanding officer of 6RAR to also be the commanding officer of Mentoring Task Force 1, which deployed to Afghanistan in January 2010.

"We were very-well trained and we were very-well equipped. We went into an environment where we knew what we were facing and we had trained hard for that," he said.

DIGGERWORKS