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STATEMENT OF
COLONEL KEVIN S. NOONAN, U.S. ARMY
PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICER
SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES WARRIOR PROGRAMS
UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
DEFENSE BODY ARMOR PROGRAMS
JUNE 6, 2007

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COLONEL KEVIN S. NOONAN, U.S. ARMY
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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, it's an honor to appear before this Committee today to report on the United States Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) Body Armor requirement and material solution.

I am COL Kevin Noonan, the USSOCOM Program Executive Officer for Special Operations Forces (SOF) Warrior Programs within the Command's Acquisition and Logistics Center. I am in charge of acquiring SOF-peculiar solutions for a variety of items including weapons, ammunition, ground mobility, visual augmentation systems, and personal survivability equipment that are not provided by Service-common solutions. To achieve this, we utilize a process that directly teams with our component users from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps Special Operations Commands. Our goal is to maximize the use of Service-common solutions, and we are actively engaged with Service Program Offices to test equipment that can meet SOF requirements.

The USSOCOM ballistic protection solution is known as the SOF Personnel Equipment Advanced Requirements (SPEAR) body armor system. The USSOCOM requirement is to provide a level of protection to defeat 2-strike Armor Piercing Munitions. We do this by rapidly fielding successive lightweight and advanced SOF-unique components of clothing and individual equipment

while integrating them into a tailorable system.

This tailorable system is called the SPEAR Body Armor/Load Carriage System, or BALCS. It is a family of integrated armor and load carriage systems which provides SOF operators with the modularity required to meet the various mission profiles in all environmental extremes. Specifically, USSOCOM requires the ability for the individual operator to tailor his protection and load to meet various mission profiles while maintaining the necessary agility, mobility, and range of motion required to meet SOF mission standards.

The first material solution to meet SPEAR requirements was realized in Fiscal Year 1998 through a Full and Open Competition, involving seven different vendors. Based on the technology at the time, our initial plate fielded in 1999 was capable of stopping only one strike of Armor Piercing Munitions due to weight constraints. Through Spiral Development, SOF was able to field an armor plate meeting the two strike requirement in 2002. We have been fielding this plate ever since. In addition to the increased ballistic capability, several other BALCS sub-systems have been modified to better support current operations in spiral development through feedback from SOF operators.

The SPEAR Body Armor plates are tested using a standard test protocol. In both first article and lot testing, plates are shot with Armor Piercing Munitions, 4 inches apart, 2 shots per plate, in an "around the clock" pattern. The first shot is 1 inch from the edge until we get around the plate once, then we probe other areas of the plate.

This protocol is used during first article testing of SPEAR plates exposed

to ambient, hot and cold temperatures; salt water; chlorine water; and petroleum. Lot testing consists of only Ambient testing using the shot protocol. We have all the Lot testing results from 2002 which substantiate the performance of our plates through the years.

The approved standard USSOCOM SPEAR body armor system includes the Releasable Body Armor Vest (RBAV) made by Eagle Industries in Missouri, GEN II Tactical Plates and Modular Supplemental Armor Protection (MSAP) made by Ceredyne in California, and Soft Ballistic Fillers made by Safariland in California. In accordance with the USSOCOM requirement for modularity and tailorability, the SPEAR body armor system employs a variety of pockets, pouches, harnesses, and an additional plate carrier to meet various SOF mission scenarios.

USSOCOM uses the SPEAR Body Armor system because it has been successfully tested and has been proven to meet the 2-strike Armor Piercing Munitions requirement since 2002. Additionally, the SPEAR Body Armor system has maintained its operational suitability and effectiveness as demonstrated in robust independent operational evaluation and combat operations.

The SPEAR Body Armor system has proven an effective ballistic system in SOF combat operations throughout the world since 2002. There are many documented cases in which the SPEAR body armor system has saved the lives of SOF operators in combat. These results have produced an enormous confidence in SOF operators with regard to their ballistic protection.

With the assistance of the National Assessment Group and the Army

Research Lab, USSOCOM has initiated a threat evaluation of current, emerging, and future battlefield threats to the SOF operators to ensure we are vigilant about their protection. We will continue to test our SPEAR armor system against prioritized battlefield threats. USSOCOM continually searches for new technologies that support our SOF missions. We recognize that in order to meet the needs of our SOF warrior, we must continue to work to reduce the weight of our body armor while increasing ballistic protection. We have challenged industry to meet this requirement in our current solicitation for the SPEAR "Family of Ballistic Plates," which was released this month. In response to industry requests, we have extended the response date of the solicitation 60 days to August 7th to allow all vendors to provide the robust test data we have required of them. We expect to award this contract no later than the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2008.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you and the members of the House Armed Services Committee for your continued support of our SOF soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and our dedicated USSOCOM civilians. In particular, I would like to thank you for your support of the SPEAR program, and request your continued support as it has proven to save the lives of SOF operators over the years.