



Driving force

A Boeing subsidiary tracks trucks in Afghanistan

By Robert Sterling

In a small staging area, Afghan truck drivers huddle in the shade to escape the scorching sun of Bagram, a city in Afghanistan northwest of Kabul. Wherever they step, they kick up clouds of extremely fine sand the American soldiers refer to as moon dust. It disperses like cake flour.

The trucks are worn and many bear bullet holes and other battle scars. As contractors in the U.S. military's Host Nation Trucking program, the drivers are undeterred. They look forward to a chance to earn a paycheck.

Meanwhile, some 8,000 miles (13,000 kilometers) away in California, a Boeing subsidiary, Tapestry Solutions, will take care of the trucking details, from planning the route to keeping track of the vehicles by satellite.

The U.S. military uses Tapestry Solutions' computerized Global Distribution Management System (GDMS) to manage the independent truckers it hires to move food, clothing, medical supplies and other cargo throughout Afghanistan. The system tracks the vehicles as they pass hazards and checkpoints, and keeps second-by-second tabs on the vehicles to help ensure their cargo gets to its destination.

"The GDMS network is up and running around the clock and works a lot like a GPS system in your car," said Justin Davis, a program manager for the system at Tapestry. "It provides U.S. commanders in Afghanistan and Iraq unparalleled situational awareness."

Transponders on the vehicles send signals to commercial satellites, which are relayed to a ground station and then to Tapestry's Network Operations Center in San Diego. From there, the information is sent back to the military customer to provide a near real-time view of truck movements throughout the region.

Boeing acquired Tapestry Solutions in November 2008. In April, it was integrated into the Defense & Government Services division of Boeing's Global Services and Support, part of Defense, Space & Security.

The truck tracking system was first used in Iraq in 2003 when U.S. commanders were having problems distinguishing between civilian and enemy truck movements. "This led to incidents of friendly fire with deadly consequences," Davis said. As a result, the U.S. military placed transponders on military and defense-contracted vehicles so their movements could be monitored using the Global Distribution Management System.

The U.S. Army also used the system to mark the times and locations of improvised explosive devices and attacks on coalition vehicles. When an attack occurred, those affected sounded an alarm and the system recorded the details. This allowed the military to map and establish patterns that helped increase safety and security. "Initially, it was normal to hear alarms sounding 30 times a day, pinpointing in-progress attacks on missions in support of U.S. forces," Davis said.

The Host Nation Trucking effort gained momentum in 2009 when the U.S. military contracted with local carriers in Afghanistan. Because coalition resources were limited, the program freed resources for other uses while providing support to a growing trucking industry in Afghanistan.

Lewis Byrd, a field service representative with Tapestry Solutions, provides support for the Global Distribution Management System on the ground in Afghanistan. "The customer has been very satisfied, and it's making a difference," he said. "It's also created a business for the local population that's helping contribute to the country's infrastructure."

Thanks to the system, the military customer knows what's being sent where—and when it arrives, said Mark Young, a Tapestry finance executive. "We even had an Afghan trucking company ask us for assistance in an instance where the military had no record of a delivery," Young said. "We were able to go back, look at transponder data down to the minute and verify the contractor's claim so they could be paid." ■

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PHOTOS: (Left) As part of the U.S. military's Host Nation Trucking program, Afghan trucks loaded with gravel wait to be escorted off a base in the city of Bagram to classified areas throughout Afghanistan. The trucks have been outfitted with transponders so the military can track their whereabouts via Tapestry's Global Distribution Management System. LEWIS BYRD/TAPESTRY SOLUTIONS

(Top) Matthew Hayward, Tapestry Solutions field support engineer, checks transponder cable connections on the top of a truck in Bagram, Afghanistan. ROB HANIGAN/TAPESTRY SOLUTIONS **(Middle)** Members of the U.S. Army get trained on how to use Tapestry's Global Distribution Management System. U.S. ARMY **(Above)** Rob Hanigan, Tapestry Solutions field support engineer, prepares a transceiver for rooftop-mounting aboard a truck in Bagram, Afghanistan. MATTHEW HAYWARD/TAPESTRY SOLUTIONS