



HANDHELD LINK 16 RADIO: 17 MONTHS TO INITIAL OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY

Challenge

The fundamental mission set of Close Air Support (air action that assists friendly forces on the ground) hasn't changed that much since the early days of World War II. The key issue that has remained constant over the years has been the difficulty in seamless communications between supporting aircraft and ground forces in order to establish a common understanding of the situation on the battlefield, locations of friendly and enemy forces, and the desired effects required by ground forces from their supporting aerial components.

With Close Air Support, the mission revolves around two key players: the warfighter on the ground and the pilot in the sky. The warfighter on the ground charged with directing the pilot to a specified mission target, commonly known as the Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC), uses smoke to show pilots their own location.

In the air, the pilot jots down the coordinates on paper using a knee board while flying the plane, and inputs everything into his flight computer. All of this serves to expend a lot of crucial time (measured in time to engage the enemy as well as the aircraft's available time on station) and inevitably creates a fog of war and uncertainty in the mind of the aircrew as to whether or not what they are interpreting in the air is the same picture as what is being described by the JTAC on the ground. This can oftentimes prevent a CAS mission from being executed if the aircrew does not have sufficient confidence in their understanding of the situation on the ground, especially if there is risk of friendly fire or fratricide incidents.

Fratricide: A Horrible Cost

In the chaos of combat, you only have seconds to identify a friend from foe before deciding whether or not to engage. And when you have poor and unreliable voice communications, this can add another level of confusion and uncertainty to an already high-stress situation.

A friendly fire incident in Afghanistan that killed U.S. Special Forces and other American soldiers, along with an Afghan soldier, was the result of poor communication, inadequate planning and several other mistakes, according to the results of a U.S. military investigation.

– The Washington Post

The Viasat Advantage: Faster Deployment Of Game- Changing Capabilities For The War Fighter

For more than 30 years, Viasat has helped shape how consumers, businesses, governments, and militaries around the world communicate. We have a history of delivering results built on bold promises — redefining what's possible to make a difference in our customers' lives today and tomorrow.

Today, we're a global team of fearless innovators finding better ways to bring transformative capabilities to warfighters on the battlefield. Our culture encourages revolutionary thinking in pursuit of innovations that others view as impossible.

Viasat has a track record of creating game-changers that transform missions and make new kinds of operations possible. We blend breakthrough commercial and defense technologies with unconventional ingenuity to deliver greater operational capabilities for the US and global defense community.



Solution

In an effort to find a better way, a team of former pilots, JTACs, veterans, and engineers came together to revolutionize the fundamental mission set of CAS. In just 17 months, Viasat went from the concept of a handheld Link 16 radio sketched on the back of a napkin to delivery of the Battlefield Awareness and Targeting System - Dismounted (BATS-D) units to Special Forces JTAC's to successfully undergo operational assessment. Shortly thereafter, the BATS-D radio entered production with the official nomenclature, "AN/PRC-161."

With Viasat's BATS-D radio, JTACs can now designate multiple targets and confirm their location through a digitally automated process that's directly entered into a pilot's mission computer, heads up display, and helmet-mounted cueing system.

The BATS-D was developed using Viasat's signature Non-Developmental Item (NDI) offering model, which puts cutting-edge technology capabilities and solutions into the hands of warfighters ahead of the traditional government procurement model. It was launched as a private-sector initiative to solve an urgent need for a small, secure device that could enable seamless Link 16 air-ground communications.

Benefits

Operational capabilities include:



Access integrated air/ground information for improved situational awareness and enhanced communications



Positively identify friend from foe with pinpoint accuracy in seconds



Coordinate and direct forces instantaneously via Machine-to-Machine interface



Significantly reduce targeting timelines (95%) and decrease the risk of fratricide incidents

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Every single JTAC we surveyed who's used the BATS-D system said they don't just want the BATS-D radio, they don't want to go into combat without it.”

- Ed Priest, director, special operations applications, Viasat Former U.S. Air Force Combat Controller for 23+ Years

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