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Delays discouraged**CHRISTIE BACKS RADIO'S PRODUCTION BEFORE FULL REQUIREMENTS MET**

The Defense Department's top weapons tester disagrees with a recent budget decision to delay production of the Air Force's Combat Survivor Evader Locator (CSEL) radio system until all program requirements are met and suggests meeting combat search and rescue capability requirements with both the developing radio and upgraded existing radios, according to a report released last week.

The CSEL radio will provide secure two-way communications between downed survivors and rescuers, and equip rescuers with precise location information. The technology is intended to "provide an interim survivor capability until the fielding of the Joint Tactical Radio System (JTRS), a new system designed to provide seamless joint communications capability for a wide range of users," according to the fiscal year 2003 report to Congress by Thomas Christie, the Pentagon's director of operational test and evaluation. JTRS will probably not be fielded until 2012, the same year in which CSEL radio deliveries are scheduled to be completed.

A full-rate production decision for CSEL is expected by the second quarter of 2004, but the Office of the Secretary of Defense recently issued a program budget decision to reduce production and continue development, Christie's report states. "The delay would allow the program to reach program requirements, but would unnecessarily delay production to do so," according to the report. "DOT&E does not support this program budget decision since it leads to fewer systems in the warfighters' hands without speeding or increasing capability."

CSEL operational testing and evaluation has been delayed throughout the system's development because of technical difficulties. The most recent scheduling holdups in 2002 and 2003 were caused by software and integration problems with the Selective Availability Anti-spoofing Module -- precise military signal technology for Global Positioning Satellite users.

Joint and coalition testing in spring 2003 found that "while CSEL has made substantial progress in the past 18 months, there are still issues with employment concepts, training, hand-held radio data loading and maintenance, information assurance, batteries and national asset support," the report states.

Multiservice operational test and evaluation conducted between June and October 2003, have preliminarily "demonstrated certain individual capabilities (radio function, message relay, [Joint Search and Rescue Centers] receipt, etc.), but have had difficulty in showing total system capability in end-to-end tests that exercise all aspects of the CSEL system," it states. "Deficiencies have been identified in water intrusion and ground reference point calculations."

Using a command and control system linking hand-held radios, unmanned base stations and rescue center workstations, CSEL technology is being developed to replace the Vietnam-era PRC-90, and the more modern PRC-112 and PRC-112B radios. Planned capabilities include line-of-sight UHF and VHF voice communications, beacon, GPS and UHF over-the-horizon satellite communication data modes for worldwide coverage.

Christie backs a recommendation by the Personnel Recovery Advisory Group to provide available capabilities to both the developing CSEL and the existing PRC-112 "Hook" radio. "They recommend immediate implementation of an over-the-horizon capability for the PRC-112 (which CSEL has, but Hook lacks) and terminal area guidance for CSEL (which Hook has, but CSEL lacks) . . . DOT&E supports these recommendations and also recommends follow-on operational test and evaluation of Hook and CSEL," the report states.

Both systems with upgraded capabilities will be needed to meet high demand for survivor radios until JTRS is available, according to the report. -- *Cynthia Di Pasquale*

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