

19 June 2012

“Future Soldier – Expanded System”: Rheinmetall to supply the Bundeswehr with cutting-edge “Gladius” infantry equipment

The German Bundeswehr has placed an order with the Düsseldorf-based Rheinmetall Group to supply it with state-of-the-art infantry equipment. A contract to this effect has now been signed at the Federal Agency for Defence Technology and Procurement (BWB) in Koblenz.

Under the initial order, a total of 900 soldiers (90 infantry sections or squads) will be outfitted with the new equipment. Specially developed by Rheinmetall on behalf of the Bundeswehr, it is the most advanced system of its kind anywhere. Units due to deploy to Afghanistan in 2013 and 2014 will be the first to be equipped with Gladius.

This forward-looking system is an important step in the process of providing German infantry troops with significantly improved capabilities in current and future deployments.

Back in 2009, Rheinmetall was awarded a contract to develop a pre-series demonstrator version of the Gladius system for the Bundeswehr. It supplemented the basic Future Soldier (IdZ) system which Germany ordered in 2005 as an interim response to an urgent operational requirement.

Now ready for fielding, Gladius is intended to expand and improve the capabilities of the existing system, particularly with regard to networking, command and control, and combat effectiveness. Responding to heightened requirements on the part of the Bundeswehr and building on the results of extensive trials and operational experience, Gladius is a far-reaching, highly advanced new development.

A prominent feature of the Gladius system is a holistic design approach that takes full account of the complex operational requirements levied on modern soldier systems. Gladius is intended first and foremost to bring the 10-man infantry section and its vehicle into the network-enabled operational loop. This network, consisting of reconnaissance, command and control components, and weapons, enables rapid exchange of information as well as shared situational awareness as the basis for planning and conducting operations.

The individual soldier receives all relevant data concerning the tactical situation, the position of friendly forces, the mission, and system status. It includes a GPS and an inertial navigation system as well as a magnetic compass, facilitating reliable orientation on the ground.

Equally impressive are the system’s ergonomic features, especially with regard to weight reduction, miniaturization and improved integration of individual components. The modular battle dress uniform, body armour and harness system provide

excellent protection from detection in the visual and infrared spectrum as well as from the weather – even in extreme climate zones – and especially from biological and chemical agents. Flame-retardant equipment and vector protection round out the system's high level of protection. The system is integrated into an "electronic backbone" that contains the radio, core computer, batteries and GPS module.

More than just the sum of its parts, the Gladius system puts Bundeswehr infantrymen on the global cutting edge, placing them ahead of their peers in terms of networking capabilities, command and control, and operational efficiency.

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