

Shape-shifting training facility unveiled

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Personnel from the military and law-enforcement communities were introduced to a new type of training facility across from Range 6A at Army Support Activity, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst Oct. 30.

The unique and versatile shape-shifting training facility called the RATPAC (Reconfigurable Armored Tactical Personnel And Collective Training System) was developed by UXB International Inc., of Flemington, due to the need for innovative and reconfigurable tactical training facilities to support military and law-enforcement training.

According to Greg Pikul, program manager with UXB International Inc., the primary asset of the facility is that it is completely reconfigurable including the doors, windows, walls and stairs. There are multiple cameras, lights, microphones, speakers and pop-up silhouettes of good guys and bad guys throughout the facility. Smoke, gas and odors can also be pumped into the building through controlled inlets and are expelled through built-in exhaust fans.



Officers from the Piscataway Police Department SWAT Team enter the RATPAC during a demonstration at ASA, JB MDL Oct. 30.

Reconfiguration is accomplished with the use of only one simple tool. Pikul said that two men could reconfigure the entire facility in less than an hour, which allows for fluidity and realistic training in an ever-changing environment. The RATPAC can be set up in a six-story format with a rappelling tower and has an adjoining unit that is utilized as the control shelter.

The number of floor plans is unlimited, according to Mike Warminsky, vice president and director of project development with UXB International Inc.

“The focus in the military today is on urban-scenario training. With the introduction of the RATPAC and the abilities to add stress inducers such as smoke, gas and smell, we are able to better meet the training needs of today’s military and law-enforcement communities. Stress inoculation is quickly emerging as the preferred method of training. The ability to reconfigure the facility in a short order of time allows the trainer to match current mission requirements,” said Warminsky.

UXB International Inc. has worked very closely with the Army Development and Engineering Center Demilitarization and Environmental Technology Division at Picatinny Arsenal to test and improve the viability of the RATPAC for military training purposes. With input from the Army engineers, the facility has become more suited for military needs.

Retired Col. David McNeil, a defense solutions associate with SMH International and former commander of Fort Dix, is a strong proponent of the RATPAC. With his military experience as both Soldier and commander of a training installation, McNeil is well suited to know the needs for training military personnel for the urban environment they will face in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"This training facility is a great opportunity for the Soldier to get realistic training. One of the great points of this equipment is its portability. It can be reconfigured in a matter of minutes or disassembled, loaded on a truck and moved to a new location with minimum training downtime. The control shelter only needs two individuals to run it; a systems operator and a chief trainer. The cost for each basic unit configuration is \$750,000, which, when translated to the multiple configuration possibilities that there are for the RATPAC, becomes very affordable and an efficient expenditure of the taxpayers' dollars," McNeil said.

ASA Range Control Officer Doug Hasemann shared that the RATPAC came to the ASA through a longstanding partnership with Picatinny Arsenal. "This project has been three or four years in the making. We consulted with members of the FBI SWAT team to assess needed capabilities. We gauged our needs against operations in the field today and the way we train Soldiers here at the ASA," he said.

Col. Patrick Slowey, ASA commander, said the relationship with Picatinny goes back to 1990 and was formalized in 2000. He said that the ASA provides the real-estate footprint for Picatinny to test systems while military personnel benefit from the use of those systems.

"We have the same type of relationship with Fort Monmouth. That type of synergy benefits the Soldiers the most," said Slowey.

To show off some of the capabilities of the RATPAC, officers from the Piscataway Township Police Department Special Weapons and Tactics Team put on a demonstration of urban/close-quarter combat techniques while searching and clearing the facility.

"I think this is an absolutely tremendous capability for training. The possibilities for military and civilian training are endless. When you incorporate the mobility and configurability aspects of the structure, it is phenomenal. The shoot-through walls and break-and-rake windows add reality to the scenarios that can be played out here," said Detective Sgt. David Powell, Piscataway Township Police Dept. SWAT team.

The modules of the RATPAC were developed and built to interconnect with already existing CONEX box villages but can also be expanded into a myriad of village components on their own. Made of a durable, lightweight synthetic composite, the RATPAC can withstand the weather and physical abuse involved with training Soldiers and provides a tool with which to train the military for many years.