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## **Gruntworks aims at lightening Marines' load**

STAFFORD, VA—Marines under fire will carry a lighter load in a more functional arrangement into combat as the new Gruntworks Squad Integration Facility in Stafford fulfills its promise to better serve the warfighter.

On Nov. 1, Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) hosted the grand opening of Gruntworks. This facility will provide critical integration expertise to the continuing modernization of the Marine rifle squad, taking excess weight off warriors' backs in the process.

"We really didn't have a facility that had all the resources and equipment for program managers; the science and technology community; and combat developer to come together under one roof," said Mark Richter, Program Manager for Marine Expeditionary Rifle Squad, at the Gruntworks opening.

"It's still under construction," he said. "We still have a lot of work to do. It's been a big team effort, and it's come a long way. There's a lot of progress we've made in the last couple of years with integrating the rifleman's equipment, putting that squad together, making them lighter and a little bit better, but there's a lot more work to be done in the future."

MCSC Commander Brig. Gen. Michael Brogan said the Gruntworks opening was a welcome development. "For far too long, we've treated the infantryman as a Christmas tree on which we hang ornaments," he said. "Admittedly, many of the things we've adorned him with have improved his combat capability and made him more effective. But at the same time we've had an increase in weight, and it hasn't been well integrated."

The general said the answer lies in taking a systems approach to warfighter support.

"From a combat track vehicle background," he said, "we look at the combat vehicle as a system -- made up of subsystems [including] mobility, firepower, communications and survivability. But we've never taken that holistic look at the Marine infantryman and Marine infantry rifle squad. As a result, we haven't had a systems engineering approach to equipping our squads."

With that in mind, Gruntworks will analyze the equipment Marine riflemen carry in terms of human factors, combat effectiveness, logistics and load with a view toward making changes that increase efficiency and survivability. At Gruntworks the Marine Corps will evaluate the best industry, government, academia and foreign solutions offered through simulation and human systems integration and modeling. Determination will also be made if new technology can be integrated into the squad equipment to make it more effective and more reliable in future versions.

Brogan is talking the talk far beyond Gruntworks. He noted that during the last month he carried his message to industry representatives gathered at Quantico, Va., McLean, Va., and Panama City, Fla.

He said, "I had two messages for them in areas where they needed to improve and help us get better: systems engineering and lightening the load. All of you see just how heavy we've made the equipment for the Marine deployed today in Iraq and Afghanistan. It's necessary in many cases but not put together with a lot of thought. We just keep adding things onto his kit.

"So, [the Gruntworks opening]," Brogan said, "is an opportunity for us to look at the squad as a combat system, integrate pieces, remove redundancies, lighten the load and make him better."

Lt. Gen. Jim Amos, Commanding General of Marine Corps Combat Development Command, reiterated Brogan's assessment. In an earlier statement he said Gruntworks "is a revolutionary step in making our ground Marines more agile, lethal and survivable. This capability will increase our ability to protect Marines in the future."

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(From left) Glynn Raymer, Vice President of Combat Systems at Raytheon's Network Centric Systems; Brig. Gen. Michael Brogan, Marine Corps Systems Command Commander; and Col. Lawrence Nicholson (selected for Brigadier General), Marine Corps Combat Development Command Deputy Commanding General, participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony marking the opening of Gruntworks. Gruntworks is a new state-of-the-art Squad Integration Facility located in Stafford, Va. Marine Corps Systems Command's Program Manager for the Marine Expeditionary Rifle Squad (PM MERS) operates the facility and is directly supported by Raytheon and its unique team partners. *(Photo by Bill Johnson-Miles)*