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New Personal Black Box to Track Soldiers

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Tracking soldiers in an emergency situation sometimes takes too long, a critical factor that might cost the lives of wounded soldiers. A new technology of personal black box-style designed to be worn by soldiers on the battlefield will be developed for the Australian army. Versions of the device could eventually be developed for use by police, firefighters and other emergency workers.

How will it work? The Fight Recorders will enable satellites to quickly pinpoint the precise location of injured soldiers and record information which can be used to reconstruct what happened during an engagement with the enemy.

The Australian telecommunications company Myriota and wearable technology firm IMeasureU have been selected by the Defense Ministry to develop the Fight Recorders. They beat 47 other firms to win the $700,000 contract, according to adelaidenow.com.au.

Defense Industry Minister Christopher Pyne said the devices could help reduce the time taken to locate and treat wounded diggers. "Survival rates for battlefield casualties are closely tied to response times and the Fight Recorder will enable Defense to quickly locate and treat casualties," he said.

"In addition to serving as a location beacon, the data captured by the Fight Recorder could be used to inform the design and performance of soldier equipment and protective wear."

The devices will record a soldier's body movements to assist in post-event investigations.

When the emergency beacon is activated by the wearer or a medic it will connect with low-orbit satellites and transmits detailed geolocation information. It will also transmit data which can be used to recreate the motion and location of the soldier during the event. The information from the reconstructed events could be used by the Army to develop new procedures and in the development of protective equipment.

Pyne said the Defense Department would work closely with Myriota and IMeasureU to develop the recorders. "Once again our local small and medium enterprises have demonstrated they are well placed to deliver Defense innovation," he said.

The project is being financed by the $730 million Next Generation Technologies Fund which involves Australian companies and universities in developing solutions to the challenges faced by Defense.

SA universities are involved in the early phases of a project which aims to develop new technology to protect Australian troops from improvised explosive devices and chemical weapon attacks.

Australian-developed "REDWING" devices which jam radio signals are already being used to protect soldiers in the Middle East from remotely-controlled bombs