

TEAM IVAS CONTINUES TO DELIVER DESPITE COVID OBSTACLES

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FORT BELVOIR, Va. – Cutting-edge modernization efforts come with their own set of challenges, and COVID-19 has ensured that there are no exceptions.

Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier's Project Manager Integrated Visual Augmentation System (PM IVAS) continues to leverage the team's unique structure, talents, and culture to contribute to the force's readiness, even with the additional challenges presented by COVID-19.

funds to start IVAS in FY19. Within six months from the Secretary of Defense's approval in late May, Team IVAS awarded multiple Other Transaction Agreements to industry and kicked off IVAS before Christmas 2018."

Team IVAS has rapidly solved problems ever since. This includes the successful integration of partners from around the country. Because the team overcame this initial obstacle, remote work is now routine.



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—COL. Chris Schneider,
PM IVAS

Mark Stephens, PM IVAS Director of Acquisition and Operations, and Jared Walega, PM IVAS Test Director, highlighted how problem solving, routine distributed work solutions, modular architecture design, Soldier Centered Design (SCD), and Supply Chain Risk Management (SCRM) have allowed the project flexibility during the COVID pandemic.

Stephens emphasized how Team IVAS has applied efficient problem-solving skills from the project's inception.

"Senior defense officials recognized the erosion in close combat capabilities and saw an immediate need to ensure overmatch for our dismounted force," said Stephens. "Congress recognized the requirement and reprogrammed

The distributed team has built and relied on a digital infrastructure to manage the mission from any physical location. Therefore, they are able to maintain the mission even with the obstacles COVID has presented.

"When COVID hit we had already established a solid Integrated Product Team [IPT] Battle Rhythm using long distance collaboration methods like SharePoint, TEAMS, and Power BI," Stephens said. "Using TEAMS over the past 18 months allowed video teleconferencing, sharing document collaboration, and reviewing our program management dashboards, so all our leaders were battle tested".

Secure remote tools have allowed for continued IVAS prototyping through Army Enabled Tests (AET) even while team members are quarantined at home.

"We also implemented a practice of what we call Army Enabled Testing that allows us to get updates from our

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partners, test the updates in a safe environment, and provide feedback. This methodology helps us manage our performance risks, and not have to wait until Soldier Touchpoint 3 [STP 3] to discover problems," said Stephens.



Team IVAS' dynamic problem solving and reliable remote infrastructure guaranteed that aspects of testing continued to ensure minimal overall impacts to the program's timeline.

"As COVID-19 impacted the organization, the Test Directorate determined we could still conduct a thorough AET with focus on Rapid Target Acquisition (RTA), Tactical Assault Kit (TAK), Synthetic Training Environment (STE), and other necessary capabilities while maintaining requisite social distance and implementing COVID-approved decontamination procedures for the Heads Up Displays (HUD)," said Walega.

"We have a dispersed team that is capable of downloading the latest software build and loading it onto their HUDs. This process has enabled remote testing of software builds and the ability to provide rapid feedback to Microsoft to include live fire video, data, and assessments," Walega added.

The continued AET testing and iteration of specific IVAS capabilities through the COVID pandemic has been largely based on the Soldier feedback collected at every stage in development over the last 18 months.

"Soldier Centered Design (SCD) was developed in IVAS as a combination of Human Centered Design and tailored acquisition best practices," said Walega. "SCD focuses on current Soldier and Marine input throughout the entire development process to prevent engineers and developers from building a product that does not meet the priorities of our warfighters."

The process puts emphasis on making a product that Soldiers will enjoy using to increase their lethality in training and on the battlefield.

According to Walega, "If a Soldier loves and uses IVAS, then we have provided a system that has much greater capability than the current kit."

In order to ensure that IVAS will truly maximize Soldier lethality, intentional Soldier feedback at every design and decision point has been a program priority.

"We have collected over 23,000 hours of Soldier feedback," said COL. Christopher Schneider, Program Manager IVAS. "Because we've got so much feedback, we're highly confident in the current design and STP 3."

The Soldier-centric approach has turned out to be a key asset to the program during the change in normal operations. Though large scale events such as the IVAS STP 3 will shift due to COVID restrictions, the team has reorganized the internal program schedule so that IVAS is not delayed in deploying to the warfighter.

The team is reordering the intensive hardware and software design reviews that were initially planned for after STP 3, and is leveraging their ingenuity, remote tool infrastructure, and plethora of Soldier feedback to expedite the hardware design review to before the October event. This will allow the formal software design sprint to be completed after STP 3, and both designs to be finalized during Capability Set 4 iterations.

"We wouldn't have the flexibility that we do, frankly, if we hadn't been doing Soldier Touchpoints, user juries, user studies, and human factors engineering excursions throughout the last 18 months of the program," said Schneider.

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Though the pandemic has impacted every aspect of the program, including supply chain logistics, industry partners have continued to support with solutions.

"With the advent of the Coronavirus, the supply chain risk management strategy has taken on a new level of importance," said Nicholas Pate, PM IVAS Manufacturing Engineer.

"IVAS vendors have worked tirelessly to assess, analyze, and make quick decisions to avert imminent delays. Luckily, the PM IVAS supply chain strategy, from the very start of the program, has always been to mitigate risk by avoiding sole sources of supply, cultivating multiple sensor vendors, and ensuring parallel paths of supply," said Pate.

To date, IVAS vendors have been able to react quickly to minimize negative impacts from the Coronavirus.

"Microsoft, as well as the low light and thermal sensor vendors, delivered preliminary supply chain information on critical components for early risk mitigation assessment on the IVAS supply chain," Pate added. "This information ensures that quality and security controls are implemented to ensure a stable and sustainable supply chain."

As Team IVAS continues to overcome COVID's obstacles, leadership is unwavering in its dedication to the safety of both Soldiers and the team.

"We really took a deliberate thought process and approach to moving the Soldier Touchpoint into October," said Schneider. "We wanted to make sure that we had the opportunity to get it right."

Overall, every decision has been made with the safety of the team and readiness of Soldiers as top priorities. Though STP 3 is now taking place in October at Fort Pickett, Va., the rest of the program deliverables remain on track.

"I can absolutely say that today we are on track to meet a fourth quarter '21 delivery for our first unit equipped," said Schneider.