

Military Asks Victoria Company To Build Prototypes
February 2, 2005
THOMAS DOYLE
Victoria Advocate



The military has ordered three additional prototypes of a special manufacturing system built by Victoria-based Clegg Industries.

The original prototype has been manufacturing vehicle replacement parts in Kuwait to support military operations in Iraq since October of 2003.

The unit, commonly referred to as the lathe unit, is part of the Army's Mobile Parts Hospital, a research and development project that allows spare parts to be produced at the point of need, said Kevin Green, a production support engineer with Michigan-based Focus Hope Manufacturing.

Focus Hope is a subcontractor for the project who in turn is subcontracting the assembly of the lathe unit to Clegg Industries. Green spent two three-month periods in Iraq using the machine to make parts for soldiers.

The unit takes raw bar-stock metal and creates new parts by removing metal through multiple processes, he said. For easy transportation, the entire unit fits into a standard 8-foot by 8-foot by 20-foot shipping container.

Based on the experience of project personnel in Kuwait, several design changes were suggested which will be incorporated into the new prototypes, said Kevin Ksiazek, an engineer with Virginia-based Alion Science & Technology, the primary contractor on the project.

Both Green and Ksiazek have spent time in Victoria overseeing the construction of the new prototypes. Among other changes, the structure will get a new air conditioning system, an electric leveling system, and an electric deployment system, he said.

With improvements, the entire modules cost around \$1 million each, said Todd Richman, Mobile Parts Hospital project manager with the Army's Tank Automotive Research Development and Engineering Center, known as TARDEC, in Warren, Mich.

Even without the new improvements, the unit in Kuwait has received rave reviews from the soldiers, who ultimately are the device's customers and end users, Ksiazek said.

So far the unit has been used to manufacture around 15,000 parts, Green said. Among those was an award-winning invention designed in the field to allow vehicle-mounted weapons to be aimed at a higher upward angle while still allowing operators some cover in vehicles.

Soldiers asked for the device after convoys were ambushed by enemy combatants in buildings and overpasses. The entire device was designed and built in a matter of hours, Green said.

While originally designed for a light machine gun, subsequent models have been made for a host of different weapons ranging from M-16 rifles to .50 caliber machine guns, he said.

While Clegg Industries is assembling the lathe unit, two other area companies have played a role in its development. MBRT Inc. in Cuero built the boxes that house the lathe units, and also came up with the idea for a foldout section for the machine's operators, said company co-owner Kenneth Birchfield.

The company hired about eight additional workers to help fulfill the contract with Clegg Industries, he said. Much of the design work for the system was done by Paul Williams with Victoria Mechanical Services.

Clegg Industries approached the company with a series of ideas on how to make the project work. "We put the thoughts to metal for them," Williams said.

He commented he was proud to know something he designed was helping to expedite the work American soldiers are doing in Iraq.

Of the three new units, two are scheduled to be delivered to the military in February, said Richman. One is expected to be delivered to Iraq and one to Afghanistan, both for further field trials, he said. The third will be used for training and demonstrations at the TARDEC facility in Michigan, he said.

The command plans to recommend that the government acquire 12 such units. The decision of whether or not those units will be ordered and how they will be built will be determined by a different department of the government, Richman said. The actual building of those modules, if approved, would be up to competitive bid, he said.

John Clegg, vice president of Clegg Industries, said his company would definitely put in a bid to build those units. While the company could fill the order with its existing facilities and workforce, building the prototypes has thus far created about six new jobs at the company, he said.

" Thomas Doyle is a business reporter with the Victoria Advocate. Contact him at 361-580-6511 or at tdoyle@vicad.com