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Naval Postgraduate School Hosts Collaborative Interagency Field Experimentation Program

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Article By: MC1 Grant P. Ammon

Students, faculty and staff from the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) conducted Joint Interagency Field Experiment (JIFX) 12-2 with representatives from the Department of Defense's combatant commands (COCOMs), as well as federal, local and state agencies at Camp Roberts, Calif., Feb. 11-14.

Sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Joint Operations Support directorate, and the Department of Homeland Security, JIFX is a collaborative field experimentation program that allows a broad group of students, researchers, defense industry leaders and military members to test, evaluate and collaboratively develop new technologies, as well as define emerging requirements.

"JIFX is a sponsored research program that the Office of Secretary of Defense's Joint Operations Support directorate," said NPS Department of Information Sciences Associate Professor, Dr. Ray Buettner, director of field experimentation at NPS. "They have funded NPS to provide an environment for the combatant commanders—six geographic and three non geographic—in which they can rapidly evaluate and refine existing requirements and potentially identify new requirements to their capability challenges to the warfighter."

NPS coordinated the event where graduate students and faculty were able to execute experiments and demonstrate research projects developed at the university.

"I view JIFX as a terrific opportunity for our students, faculty, COCOM partners, and other government agencies to come together in an experimental way," said NPS interim President Rear Adm. Jan E. Tighe. "It's a chance to test out new ideas and innovations, and for our students to actually see it all come together."

"Student learning is not just theoretical back in the classroom, or even the lab, but here they actually get to do something practical with the knowledge gained while studying at NPS," continued Tighe.

All participants at JIFX had the potential to benefit from the collaborative nature of the field experiment.

"Our NPS students and faculty benefit from JIFX because we're in the middle between bright technologists from the labs, the defense industry, other universities and the warfighter," said Buettner. "This exercise provides militarily-relevant, unique graduate education opportunities for our students.

"The sponsor also benefits because the COCOMs better understand technologies and the potential of those technologies to solve their problems," added Buettner.

The series of field experiments allowed for an open dialogue on technologies demonstrated, and with participation from California's National Guard units, researchers and industry representatives were provided with direct feedback from the warfighters' perspective on the applicability of the technology demonstrated.

"The companies, industry and lab participants benefit because they better understand what the warfighter challenges actually are, and how their particular products need to be changed to meet that," said Buettner.

Of critical importance to the collaborative and exploratory nature of the program is the end users direct interaction with developmental technologies.

"This environment is pre-acquisition," said Buettner. "There are no sales involved with this experiment.

Because we have academics running the environment, it's about research, and not acquisition. We're able to lower the barriers to collaboration."

For NPS student Navy Lt. Chris Guttierrez, who attended JIFX to demonstrate his thesis work on beyond line-of-sight communication equipment based on netted iridium technology, the ability to take his work outside the classroom and into the field was highly beneficial.

"You can get a lot from the classroom, but to really get out and meet other folks that are looking at the same problems that you're interested in is invaluable," said Guttierrez. "This is especially helpful as a thesis student at NPS. We're here doing research on things that might affect the Navy and the military in the future."

The collaboration between COCOM representatives, the defense industry, warfighters, and the technologists working towards solutions to their challenges provided an excellent opportunity to further student learning while contributing solutions to real-world problems.

"This is why we do this field experiment," said Buettner. "It provides students the opportunity to engage in thesis work that not only meets the bar for a master's degree, but also they get to do something that supports the larger effort by supporting the COCOMs and warfighters."



Naval Postgraduate School students watch the demonstration of a remote controlled quad rotor aerial vehicle during Joint Interagency Field Experiment (JIFX) 13-2. JIFX is a four-day field experiment hosted and coordinated by NPS, and is a sponsored research program that provides combatant commanders, as well as state, local and federal agencies an environment in which they can rapidly test, evaluate, and refine emerging technology in support of warfighters and first responders.

Representatives of agencies from outside of DoD are also benefiting from the support of COCOM participation at JIFX.

"Each of the COCOMs has a requirement to provide defense support to civil authorities," said Buettner. "Often times, we find that the only time those agencies work with the military is in the middle of a disaster. That's too late. You have to build ties and connections to figure out what works and doesn't work before that event."

Many of the technologies demonstrated during JIFX had crossover implications between the DOD and other federal, state and local agencies.

According to Buettner, NPS-hosted exercises like JIFX enhance the quality of education to graduate students, as well as provide solutions to complex problems the nation is facing.

"In my opinion, this is exactly the kind of activity that demonstrates NPS' uniquely relevant military education that you can't get at other universities," said Buettner. "This is why the country needs a place like the Naval Postgraduate School."

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