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# Marine Commandant Halts Purchase of New Tactical Vests

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 29, 2008 – Marine Commandant Gen. James T. Conway halted purchases of the Marine Corps' new modular tactical vest after Marines complained about the equipment's design.

Marines said the new vests are heavier and more impractical than the outer tactical vests they had been wearing.

"The feedback on the vests is that the Marines don't like the pullover design," said Lt. Col. T.V. Johnson, the commandant's spokesman. "A lot of the guys get scraped about the ears and face when they put them on.

"The commandant wore it during a trip over there for Thanksgiving, and he absolutely did not like it," Johnson said. "He made the call to not buy more until perhaps they find a way to mitigate the issues the troops are raising. That's typical of our commandant. He listens to the Marines, and where it makes sense, he executes based on their feedback."

The tactical vests have saved many lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. There are stories of Marines getting struck by 7.62 mm rounds and walking away with just bruises. Johnson said most of the casualties in Iraq are Marines struck in the extremities.

Both the old and new vests are built around small-arms protective inserts, ceramic plates that fit in pockets in the vests.

"I would trust my life to either one of these pieces of gear," Johnson said. "Safety has never been an issue. If anything, the MTV is a refined edition of the OTV. It doesn't open in the front, but it provides refined protection around the shoulders.

"The ceramic plates are integrated into the vest," he continued. "You don't have to strap those on and adjust them like you do in the OTV."

Weight, however, is a problem. The basic load of a Marine is anywhere between 40 and 60 pounds, and that doesn't include crew gear.

The Marine Corps ordered 84,000 of the new vests in 2006. The service has received 76,000. All Marines deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan are wearing the new vests, Johnson said. "Some very senior discussions are going to take place on what the way ahead is going to be," the colonel said.

Among options are adding features to the MTV to mitigate the annoying features or for the Corps to jump to the next-generation vest, Johnson said. Marine Corps Systems Command continually looks at and suggests ways to improve gear.

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