

Body Armor: Fact vs. Fiction

Earlier this week, a statewide political party organization issued a series of news releases implying that Wisconsin National Guard troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan do not have adequate body armor.

This is simply untrue. Although the misleading news releases have now been withdrawn, I want you to know the facts about body armor for Wisconsin's sons and daughters in uniform.

The Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard currently has 2,330 overseas and every single one of these troops assigned to a combat zone is issued a complete set of Interceptor Body Armor, provided by the active services and procured with federal funds.

According to Brig. Gen James Krueck, the senior National Guard infantry officer in the Central Command area of operations (which includes Iraq and Afghanistan), "I can assure everyone in Wisconsin that all active, Guard and reserve service members are issued full sets of best body armor in the world before they set foot in a combat zone."

Interceptor Body Armor (IBA) is part of a complete system of personal protection equipment designed to be worn by combat forces and integrated with combat uniforms. In addition to the new Advanced Kevlar Helmets and effective ballistic goggles, all service members assigned in combat zones are provide:

- Outer Tactical Vest (OTV) – provides fragmentation and 9 mm bullet protection and can be tailored to particular mission threat by adding or removing subcomponents, including removable collar, throat protector, and groin protector.
- Enhanced Small-Arms Protective Insert (ESAPI) plates – boron carbide ceramic designed to stop, shatter and catch fragments up to and including 7.62 mm rounds with

muzzle velocity of 2,750 feet per second. All U.S. service members in Iraq or Afghanistan are issued ESAPI plates, which replaced the somewhat less resistant SAPI plates in early 2005.

- Deltoid and Axillary Protectors (DAP) – an IBA component that provides additional protection from fragmentary and projectiles to the upper arm and underarm areas. This additional protection been issued to all combat zone troops since September 2005.

Body armor is continually evaluated and upgraded to ensure U.S. forces have the very best protection available. Newly-fielded IBA components include the Enhanced Side Ballistic Inserts (ESBI) system to improve protection from projectiles and fragments which strike a service member's torso on the side, and extra protection for lower extremities. These new components are issued to service members based on specific locations and mission requirements.

The entire Wisconsin National Guard leadership team is disappointed in the careless misrepresentation of the facts about body armor provided to Wisconsin service members. These misrepresentations created unnecessary alarm for the families of our troops at the same time they unfairly criticized several elected public officials.

We remain grateful for the outstanding support for our citizen soldiers and airmen consistently demonstrated by our Governor, the Wisconsin State Legislature, our Congressional delegation and the citizens of Wisconsin. We hope these facts about body armor for our troops help you better understand this complex issue.