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## Hand-held computer may become jawan's true friend

By Anand Parthasarathy



**A handheld tactical computer developed for the Army.**

BANGALORE, DEC. 4. A Bangalore-based company has developed a hand-held tactical computer that may provide the armed forces a critical technical edge in the increasingly electronic battlefield scenario. Encore Software — known mainly so far as co-developer of the first Indian-made hand-held computer, the Simputer — has created a device integrating satellite-backed Global Positioning System (GPS) navigation with radio frequency communication, a Geographical Information System (GIS) and a wireless data network

In effect, the colour touch-screen display will show the soldier exactly where he is, help him navigate across unknown terrain and access a secure network for tactical command and control. The GIS map display can be integrated with military grid references, which will help to distinguish friend from foe. Secure and encrypted short messaging services will allow the soldier to interact with command centres — and in the event of the device falling into enemy hands it will destroy itself.

### Codenamed "Sathi"

Backed by heavy-duty lithium-ion batteries, which provide 24 hours of use before needing recharge, the computer codenamed "Sathi" or friend — acronym for Situational Awareness and Tactical Handheld Information — works off a special processor based on the industry standard ARM chip. Developed over two years by Encore, in close cooperation with the Army's Director-General of Information Systems (DGIS), the device, delivered in prototype quantities earlier this year, is being evaluated in various battlefield scenarios of C3I - Command, Control, Communication and Intelligence — and indications are, the Army may soon place orders for larger quantities.

In the course of a special briefing for *The Hindu*, Encore's General Manager, Mobile Computing

Products, Samyeer Metrani, said the company was working on "hardening" the computer — so that it would meet the stringent environmental and performance specifications of military equipment. Encore has partnered with TVSE Electronics for its production requirements. The President, Abdul Kalam showed interest in the product when it was demonstrated to him and in a subsequent address to jawans in the forward areas, he said he was thrilled to see Indian soldiers operating "Sathi". "I am reminded of the `smart soldier' of the 21st century." The former head of the Defence Research Organisation and father of the Indian Missile programme is also known to have made some very practical suggestions to add value to the tactical information provided by Sathi - with inputs such as avalanche warnings and bio sensor feedback.

The last Iraq conflict was the first war situation, where the U.S. Army put the "electronic" or "smart" soldier concept into operation. They are known to have equipped their marines as well as the "Humvee" military vehicle with similar hand-held and portable GPS-backed computers.

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