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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20310-0103

22 DEC 1989



Honorable Alan J. Dixon
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Dixon:

This responds to your letter to the Secretary of the Army concerning the procurement of the Mask Drinking System (MDS).

At your request, we reviewed the MDS project. This review indicated that the program is progressing as fast as possible, especially in light of safety and human factors requirements and testing. The fiscal year 1988 - 1989 National Defense Authorization Act, Public Law 100-180, provided \$600,000 and a directive to the U. S. Army to evaluate non-developmental item (NDI) candidates to satisfy the MDS requirement. The Army initiated action upon receipt of the funds in March 1988. A comprehensive market survey identified three potential candidates which merited further evaluation. The Army's Research and Development (R&D) community completed a preliminary evaluation to determine the relative merits of each system. Of the three, only one candidate, the Wesleyan FIST/FLEX System demonstrated characteristics warranting further consideration.

An expedited test and evaluation effort was initiated on the FIST/FLEX system in December 1988. During these tests, the Army determined that the materials of the FIST/FLEX system were not chemically resistant, which is a critical requirement for this item.

On May 8, 1989, we briefed Mr. Smith, of your staff, concerning the status of the program. We showed during this briefing that the Wesleyan system was not chemically resistant, works only with the flexible two-quart canteen (which has limited applications), and requires modifications to satisfy minimum human factors requirements. Furthermore, the Army requested an interpretation of the congressional language to allow the NDI system to be modified with appropriated funds

and to grant the Army permission to conduct the appropriate R&D program to fulfill completely the user requirements.

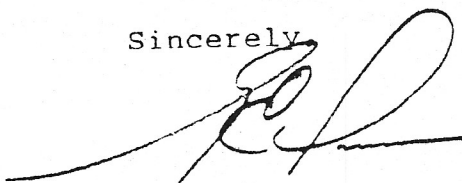
Since the May 1989 briefing, the Wesleyan Company has made material changes to the MDS to address chemical resistance compatibility issues. In August 1989, the Army was informed that compatibility was feasible and awarded a contract in September 1989 to obtain sufficient modified systems for chemical agent testing. The balance of the time, from now until the estimated type classification date, will be primarily used for testing.

Initial chemical testing to determine whether the material modifications to the MDS make it chemically protective are scheduled to be completed March 1990. If the MDS passes these expedited technical screening tests, the Army will buy the final test items from Wesleyan, conduct operational soldier use tests, subject the worn items to chemical tests, and evaluate the results to determine suitability for use. These tests are scheduled July through December 1990. This schedule will be compressed if Wesleyan can manufacture and deliver the final test items sooner than estimated.

If the system is found to be suitable in testing, our plans include procuring 200,000 sets of the MDS as soon as possible following type classification by the Chief of Staff, Army. This approval is now estimated for early in 1991. This program has been expedited while assuring that our soldiers will be supplied with the best and safest systems available.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Sincerely,



George E. Dausman
Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army
(Research, Development and Acquisition)