



TOP 5 TAKEAWAYS

5 Things Military Leaders Need to Know About ATAK

- Situational awareness on the battlefield is paramount to both safety and mission success. But providing warfighters with the information they need to make informed critical decisions is no easy task.

Enter the Android Tactical Assault Kit, a situational awareness (SA) app that brings critical information to the fingertips of those on the frontlines. Available in the field via smartphones or rugged mobile devices, like the Panasonic [TOUGHBOOK N1 Tactical handhelds](#), which can easily enable the necessary capabilities for the app, such as sending photos, viewing and using maps and, accessing and sharing mission-planning data. Mobile devices running ATAK technology are now a key element of the warfighter's toolkit.

Originally built and designed by the federal government on the Android platform, ATAK makes it easier for warfighters to share information and coordinate among teams. Equipped with a handheld device loaded with ATAK, warfighters can receive real-time tactical information feeds, analytics and visualizations

in high-stress, hostile environments. It can also enable secure, joint-mission communications across multiple agencies.

HERE ARE THE TOP 5 THINGS military decision-makers need to know about the ways that ATAK helps to keep the warfighter informed, aware and safe.

1 An 'Effective, Simple' SA Application

ATAK is frequently deployed to Android devices used by military personnel on the battlefield or homeland security officers working along the border. These personnel are typically in vehicles or in tactical operation centers equipped with laptops also running ATAK or WinTAK, a Windows-based application similar to ATAK, providing a virtual look at the space they're operating in. This capability includes "Blue Force Tracking"—to track other team members—and "Red Force Tracking"—to keep an eye on adversaries as well as terrain, weather and other topographical elements.

In addition to providing visibility into everyone's location, ATAK facilitates easy communication between the various teams.



It's literally like texting. You pull up the little message app and send a message directly to another teammate or to the whole team.



Jeff Henderson

Strategic account manager for Army and special services at Panasonic



2 A User-Friendly, Easy-to-Stand-Up App

ATAK is easy to use: Standing up a basic environment and getting users familiar with the app can take as little as 30 minutes.

"I think that's why it's become so popular," Henderson said. "It's a very effective, simple, straightforward tool." In fact, it's so user-friendly, according to Henderson, that a potential user would have a solid, high-level understanding of ATAK's functions after just mere minutes of trying it out.

ATAK isn't the only SA application. Blue Force Tracking, an SA network that tracks friendly forces, has been used since 2002 by the U.S. Army and joint services; the Army's Nett Warrior bolsters troops' situational awareness during combat operations so they can make better decisions faster; and the Marine Corps and Navy use KILSWITCH, an Android SA app used in combat zones.

What makes ATAK stand out, however is that none are as easy to stand up as ATAK, according to Henderson.

"There are other tools out there—ATAK just seems to be the most popular and fastest-growing today," Henderson said.

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3 A Flexible, Lightweight and Free Solution for Warfighters

Another advantage of ATAK is that it's flexible enough to enable rapid integration of other new defense technologies. For example, raw video from an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) or a robot can be processed by software at the edge and then fed to ATAK, very quickly giving operators output as 2D or 3D line-of-sight imagery. Other SA apps require a mobile server to provide the significant computing power required.

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ATAK is so lightweight that you can really put it on any Android device. It definitely gives you a lot more flexibility than most tools.

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And in times of slimmed-down budgets and tightening of the purse strings, ATAK comes with another huge advantage: It's available to all government agencies free.



4 The ATAK Is Evolving to Meet Growing Challenges

While ATAK began as a simple SA tool, it is now evolving into something with much broader applications. For example, one of the most difficult challenges on the battlefield is troop communications jamming by adversaries. Now, ATAK combined with additional third-party tools can pick up possible jamming attempts and alert warfighters when it happens.

Moreover, the tool is expanding the role of UAVs. With UAVs becoming more and more popular in the Defense Department, a simple ATAK plugin enables drone operators to call in supplies, water and MREs, Henderson said.

“I can take video imagery from a UAV and see it in a little window inside of ATAK,” Henderson said. “Then I can pull up controls for a UAV and actually perform functions that way.”

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You can still do all the simple SA activities, but you can also do all of these other things. The capabilities are really growing.

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5 It's Moving Beyond the Battlefield

- While born for use on the battlefield, ATAK has also been used by first responders equipped with rugged mobile devices during emergencies, such as disaster recovery.

Fast-evolving, confusing scenarios where first responders have to act swiftly can benefit from an SA tool like ATAK, Henderson notes.

"If you picture responding to a wild fire or flood, or any fairly chaotic situation where you have to make decisions quickly, that's a perfect environment to leverage the features of an ATAK application," Henderson said.

In fact, the Department of Homeland Security used ATAK to support the complex communication and coordination needs of state, local and federal first responders during Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

"In environments like that, ATAK is extremely useful," Henderson said.

- + For more information about Panasonic technology for defense:

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