

FINDING SHELTER

The military's need for versatile tents is extensive, and DHS Systems has been filling this need with its rapidly deployable and modern designs.

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PHOTOS BY **ANDREW CRAFT**

It looks more like a war zone than an office park near the airport; tents are sculpted to the landscape like sandcastles.

DHS Systems and its parent company, DHS Technologies, got their start in the 1980s producing lightweight field hospitals. Now worth an estimated \$220 million, DHS Technologies is considered one of the country's leading sources of military equipment, including tents known as Deployable Rapid Assembly Shelters, or DRASH for short.

A slice of that business is right here. DHS has positioned six support facilities near Army posts: forts Bliss, Hood, Lewis, Riley, Stewart and Bragg.

Not far from the Fayetteville Regional Airport, a regional support facility is responsible for all customers east of the Mississippi River. Every tent used by soldiers from Fort Lee to Fort Bragg at forward operating bases in Afghanistan and Iraq comes here for repair. The facility also trains units before they head overseas.

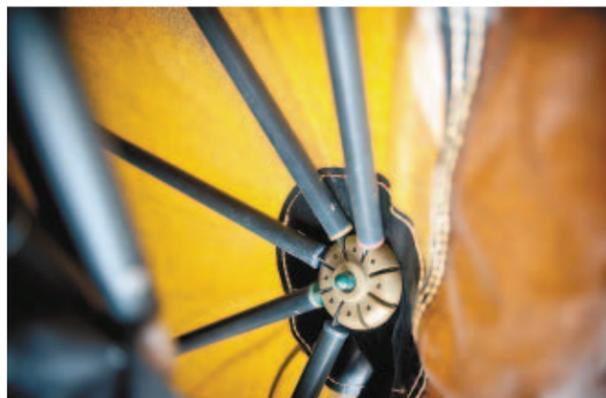
But DHS makes more than tents – it produces the equipment that powers and moves them: off-road trailers, portable heaters and power grids. A visit to one of the company's sophisticated display tents often turns into something of a shopping trip. The floor-to-ceiling screen at one end flashes enough audio-visual feeds to keep

SETTING UP: A Deployable Rapid Assembly Shelter is prepared for members of the military to view at DHS Systems.

visitors riveted for days, earning it the nickname of "the Best Buy wall."

Facility Manager Brad Stobb describes Fort Bragg as a revolving door. His team recently prepped certain 82nd Airborne Division units, signal units within the 18th Airborne Corps and the North Carolina National Guard on setting up and maneuvering DRASH tents overseas. With U.S. Army Reserve Command and Forces Command moving to Fort Bragg this year, DHS is looking forward to the possibility of more business.

The company knows what the modern soldier needs because it employs them. Most employees have years of military experience. Stobb was once responsible for running the 82nd Airborne



The shelter's fiberglass skeleton extends like a spider's legs, stretching the flame-retardant, weather-resistant material.

Division command post on Fort Bragg. After retiring as a master sergeant, he took a job with the company that most impressed him.

"That's kind of what I was hoping for, to be honest," Stobb said, "just

working with soldiers and the day-to-day routine."

Kevin Shirey is DRASH's manager of business development. He spent nearly 21 years in the Army; by the time he was preparing to leave Fort

Bragg, DHS pulled him back in again.

But DHS has made a point to extend its reach beyond the military. It has become a go-to company following natural disasters. It is expanding into the civilian world of emergency management. Rescue teams, the FBI and the National Disaster Medical System are all DHS customers. You might also see a DRASH shelter set up on a college football field; Ohio State University has used DRASH tents during athletic events.

"Anyone that can use it was our target," Shirey said.

DRASH's popularity for both military and civilian clients is marked by each shelter's easy assembly and modern design. Give six able-bodied individuals an hour, and a 1,250-square-



Members of the military look through a display model of a deployable rapid assembly shelter at DHS Systems.

foot shelter can be assembled. The fiberglass skeleton extends like a spider's legs, stretching the flame-retardant, weather-resistant material.

Shelters come in different sizes that can be connected. Trailers, which act as information hubs, connect generators to form an

intelligent power grid. If the energy consumption level dips, a generator will automatically shut itself off, preserving fuel. If one fails or is scheduled for maintenance, the backup will maintain a steady flow of power. This technology can reduce fuel consumption by up to 40

percent.

The result is a shelter with all of the modern conveniences and comforts of home or office. A large shelter, roughly the size of a small house, costs about \$250,000 and can be used

as a command center. Medium shelters are regularly used as hospitals and dining facilities.

Shirey said the shelters last an average of three overseas rotations, or six years. However, some tents fielded 15 years ago are still being used today.

Both Shirey and Stobb remember a time when a pre-assembled, easily-maintained shelter didn't exist in the Army.

They said DHS hopes to excel at high-tech shelter systems for years to come, by taking the manpower out of assembling shelters and putting it back into the mission.

"We lived your pain," Shirey said.

"We're going to try and make this easier." ★

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