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**ARMY**

# A real hard case

MoD looks at a palmtop computer that is Rugged by name, rugged by nature

**A**N Army Land Rover's radio crackles into life and its crew are informed that a fugitive war criminal has been sighted in the area, writes **Graham Diggins**.

The vehicle commander is instructed to switch on her personal digital assistant (PDA) and download the latest e-mail from headquarters.

Within minutes the alleged war criminal is staring out at her from her palmtop computer screen.

With a few deft taps of her stylus she is also able to access a map showing where the suspect is believed to be hiding.

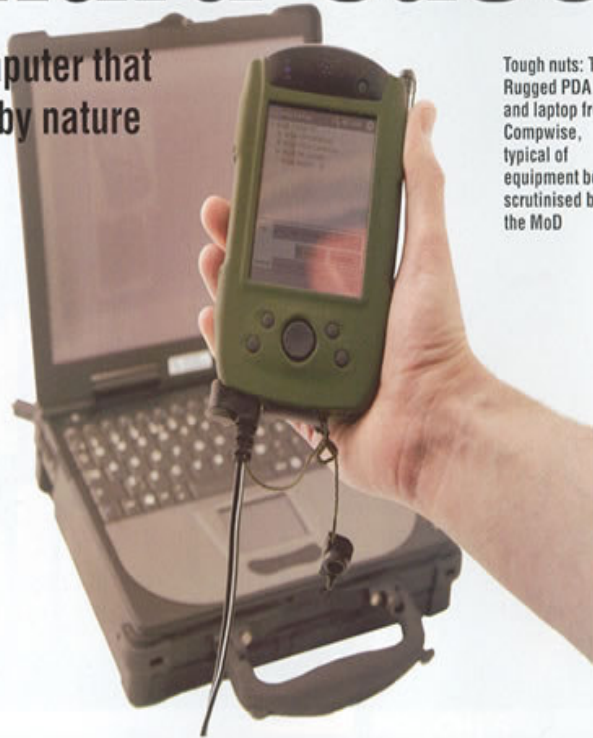
She reaches for her laptop and downloads information to her PDA using a Bluetooth wireless connection. Within minutes the call sign is speeding toward the area, ready to pounce.

A new breed of rugged handheld computers and laptops may soon turn this imagined scenario into a commonplace reality for British troops on operations.

The Rugged PDA from Enfield-based firm Compwise is typical of kit being scrutinised by the MoD.

Smaller than a paperback book it can run programmes including Word for Windows, spreadsheet applications and even image-viewing software and PowerPoint presentations.

With additional hardware it can also be transformed into a mobile phone and is equipped with a global positioning system (GPS) so troops can track themselves on a computer-generated map on the PDA's colour screen.



Tough nuts: The Rugged PDA and laptop from Compwise, typical of equipment being scrutinised by the MoD

They'll also be able to scroll around maps, images or even documents using the device's touch-sensitive display.

An interruption in the power supply shouldn't be a problem either – simply plug in its external battery which provides enough juice for more than 30 hours of non-stop operation.

Encased in a cocoon of tough plastic, the Rugged PDA is not only a smart cookie, it's also a tough nut to crack.

Designed to be squaddie-proof, it can survive a 6ft drop on to concrete, dunking in water 3ft deep for up to an hour and shrug-off levels of dust and rain that would cripple normal IT kit.

Compwise have also worked their magic on the humble laptop. Their Rugged Notebook 130 is water resistant and can withstand a fall on to concrete from 3ft thanks to its shock-mounted hard drive.

Like the Rugged PDA it also boasts a touch screen and a specialist LCD display that is visible even in sunlight.

Extremes of temperature shouldn't cause a problem either as the laptop can operate between zero and 50C.

Compwise are fighting hard to get their kit in a Bergen near you soon, but even if their bid fails you can bet a similar product will soon be in its place.