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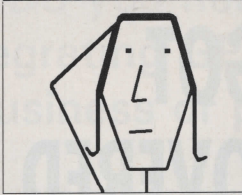
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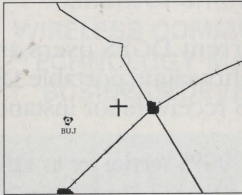


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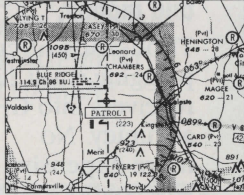


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WAAS On Board

However one views the Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS) — and there are those who love it, and some who hate it — its progress to date stands as a testament to the inspiration GPS has provided for that most cautious and conservative of U.S. agencies, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Last month's award of the prime contract for WAAS also bears witness to what a focused initiative with energetic leadership can accomplish even in a turf-conscious, tradition-bound bureaucracy.

The program hasn't had an easy row to hoe. Hardly an element of the program has gone unquestioned. There are those who criticize its design, its utility, its fairness to commercial differential GPS providers, its impact on military users, the acquisition process and selection, and its schedule for completion. Some criticism stems from interested sources; in other cases, from institutional competitors. Often, such assessments are substantive and well-placed. They benefit the program by demanding considered responses to questions testing WAAS's tenets, targets, and timelines. Some of those remain issues for further comment another day.

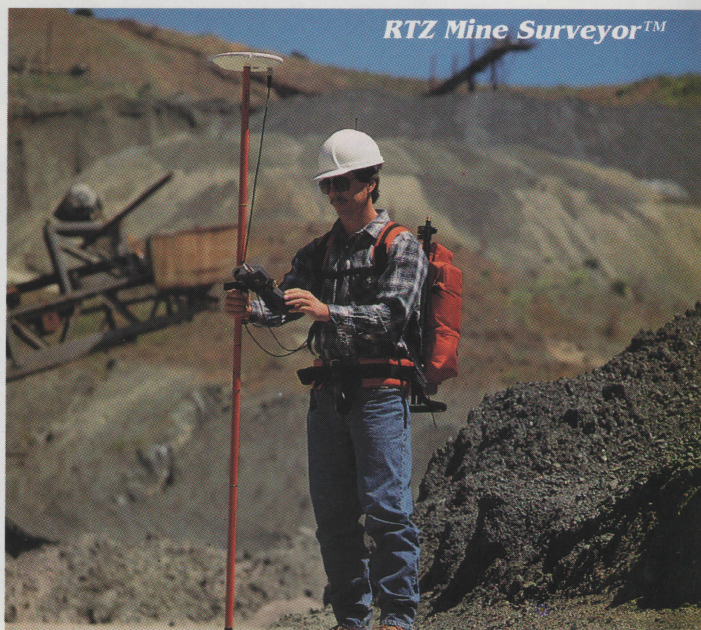
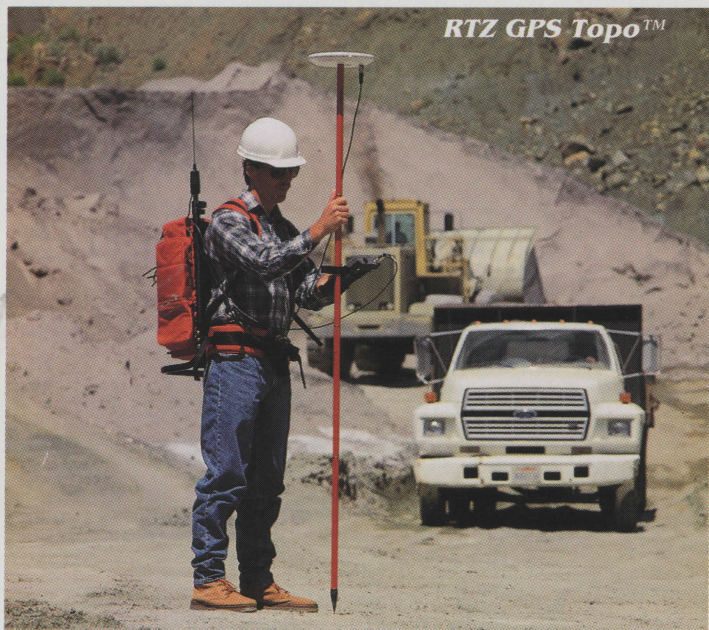
But today should be one of WAAS's moments in the sun, and that of the leadership team at the FAA Satellite Program Office (SPO), where much of the heavy lifting gets done. SPO combines tenacious, straight-ahead managers and an agency-savvy director with a matrix-style operational implementation team that gets representatives of all the key FAA divisions in the same room on the same page at the same time. Their efforts are expedited by political support given the program higher up. GPS has strong backing from FAA Administrator David Hinson and Transportation Secretary Federico Peña, both of whom spoke at the WAAS contract announcement.

FAA leadership is complemented by the energy of industry organizations such as RTCA, Inc., which is wrapping up a proposal on WAAS minimum operational performance standards (MOPS), and the Airlines Electronics Engineering Committee (AEEC), which is putting together the technical requirements for equipment that will use the satellite-based WAAS signal. Both groups have made key contributions on other aspects of GPS.

Their labors have served a wider audience than aviation, however. Because of the agency's safety-of-life responsibilities in a high-tech/high-demand environment, FAA has frequently served as point man for the civil GPS community in general, pushing the envelope of system requirements and capabilities available to nonmilitary users. Inevitably, that leadership role has meant the program and its leaders have taken their lumps, with more likely to come in the future. But the GPS community has benefited from the debate and drive that has kept the technology moving ahead.

Glen Gibbons

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