

## iSOLDIER

A new technology closes the cultural gap in war zones, giving troops the ability to communicate with civilians by using iPods — thanks to a Gator Engineer. BY MARILEE GRIFFIN



### A NEW KIND OF PLAYLIST

iPods garner a whole new meaning during wartime when a soldier is able to communicate with foreign citizens using video, phonetic pronunciation and the written word.

**D**uring a recent deployment, a colonel told an Iraqi civilian to lie down on the ground, but the man did not understand. The colonel spent many unsuccessful minutes trying to explain before having to physically lie down himself to get the point across.

After being sent back to Iraq with Vcommunicator Mobile on his iPod, the colonel was able to read the words phonetically in Arabic to civilians, as well as see culturally-specific hand gestures demonstrated by a virtual human being.

This technology, developed by Vcom3D Inc., is primarily being used by the U.S. Army in Iraq, Sudan and Af-

ghanistan to help soldiers communicate more effectively.

“Many times, higher-level officers will have interpreters, but many soldiers walk the streets without any way to communicate,” said Vcom3D CEO Carol Wideman (M.S. ISE '79). “This gives them the ability to communicate their intent and start to build a relationship.”

Wideman explained how the University influenced her: “I think the most important thing was we really learned the concepts behind something. It wasn't just surface-level so you could pass a test — you really learned how to think things through.”

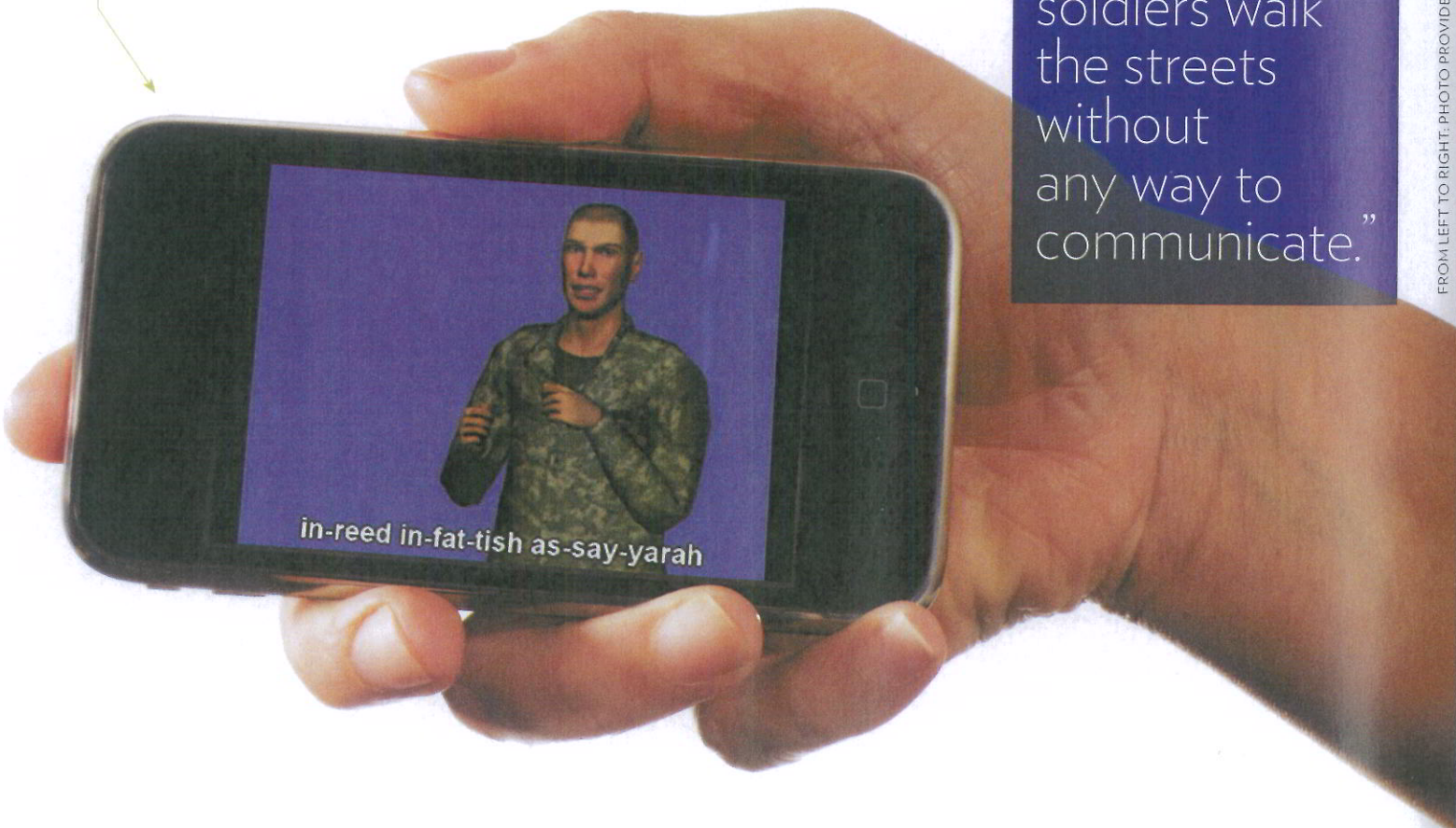
Originally, Vcom3D created 3-D characters to lip-synch and perform

hand gestures as a way to teach American Sign Language. The program was adapted for iPod (and now iPod touch) and attached to an armband.

A soldier saw this and suggested the product be adapted for the military; within a month, there was a prototype. The finished result: a cultural learning tool that teaches soldiers how and what to say during missions, whether it's a vehicle checkpoint or a raid. Soldiers are able to see phrases like “Can I see your I.D.?” in Arabic, phonetically and, finally, as a video — so they can see the accompanying hand gestures.

About 800 Vcommunicator Mobile devices are currently being used overseas. □

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FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOTO PROVIDED BY VCOM3D INC.; JASON HENRY