

U.S. troops deploy new weapon in Iraq

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Published: November 20, 2007



**U.S. troops in Iraq deploy at night. rlw/JoAnn S Makinano/REX FETAURES
UPI via Newscom**

U.S. forces in Iraq are using a high-resolution, thermal/infrared sensor system that turns night into day and helps protect troops as well as bring security to towns and cities.

The European-made system (the cheapest model is reputed to cost about \$1 million) is called GBOSS, an acronym no one seems to know the meaning of. But troops call it a godsend.

"It's terrific," said Pvt. Joshua Bernard, who was manipulating the system's "eye" with a joystick one night in a command post. "This thing is by far one of the best things we have. It makes life much easier, especially for the guys who'd have to do night duty in the guard towers if it wasn't for this.

"The Iraqis think it has a laser beam we can zap them with."

Bernard, from Providence, Rhode Island, is with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment the Army's 3rd Division, which is home-based at Fort Stewart, Georgia.

He and about 40 others man what is known as TCP-2, a traffic control point on the outskirts of Rutbah, a small trading town in northwest Anbar province on the main highway from the Jordanian border to Baghdad. It's a desolate outpost but an important one. Together with another TCP, it's a gateway to Rutbah. Through the use of strategically placed berms, all road traffic into

and out of the town must stop at the two TCPs, where identity papers are thoroughly checked and cargoes vetted – by sight and hand as well as by mobile X-ray vans the vehicles must pass by.

U.S. military and town officials credit the berms that virtually encase the town and the TCPs for bringing insurgent violence in the community into the "occasional" category. The only incident of note since November 1 was a young insurgent who tried to plant an IED at night. He didn't succeed. He accidentally blew himself up and killed his two companions.

"The army [Americans] makes Rutbah more secure," Sheikh Fala Hussein Mohammed abu Zenna told a reporter, who stopped by a city council meeting. "Only a few troubles now. Before, many troubles."

Rutbah and U.S. officials have established curfews as part of their security plan. In Rutbah, everyone must be indoors by 11:30 p.m. U.S. forces close their gateways at 9 p.m., and no traffic is allowed into or out of Rutbah until the next morning.

At night GBOSS, which is European made, comes into its own. From a 150-200 ft. tower in the middle of TCP-2 - a barren encampment of dust and plywood structures ringed by berms, concertina wire and sand barriers - its large lens scans for movement of any kind. Nothing escapes notice as it methodically gazes, tilts and pans in slow 360 degree journeys. Depending on the switch tripped by Bernard or others, the landscape and human or animal life scanned by it appear as clear and bright – from a distance, and then up close through a zoom function.

Programming allows the GBOSS lens to travel along pre-determined coordinates. The system can also be programmed to emit a sound when it detects movement. It also has a laser, which is used to calculate targeting distance.

The range: miles, many miles.

Troops won't say much more about the system's capabilities for security reasons. But in a demonstration, shown to this reporter one night, the GBOSS was aimed at a pickup truck at great distance. It would have been just the barest speck to the naked eye if it had had its lights on. Bernard flipped a switch, played with the joystick and suddenly one could clearly see the empty water bottles in the back of the vehicle. The image was so clear and the view so close, there was no mistaking the objects for what they were.

"They [insurgents] know we have it and are scared to death of it," said Capt. Jason Schuerger of West Virginia. "I'd like to keep it that way."