

FUTURE OF COMBAT



Photos by Andra Calloway/U.S. Army

Soldiers from the 3rd Infantry Division fold a vehicle lightweight arresting device during brigade nonlethal capability training in July at Fort Stewart, Ga.

Nonlethal weapons

Picatinny soldiers help create Army's nondeadly tactics

By **SETH AUGENSTEIN**
saugenstein@njherald.com

PICATINNY ARSENAL — The next weapon of choice for America's military could be a typepad translating a patrolling soldier's English into an Arabic voice speaking to a crowd in Baghdad or Kabul.

The U.S. Army has added more nonlethal tools to its 21st-century arsenal, to adapt to a changing battlefield.

A group of Picatinny soldiers brought the nonlethal weapons to reality, by creating a combat system for the Army's first brigade-size outfit, between 3,000 and 5,000 soldiers, and is training them in the use.

Nonlethal weapons had been used previously by smaller forces, such as squads and companies, or fewer than 1,000 soldiers. Now they will be employed by larger forces to provide alternatives to deadly force on a greater scale.

"They're all designed to give commanders and soldiers on the ground the maximum number of options," said Maj. Thomas

See **WEAPONS**, Page A6



Sgt. Justin Smith unravels a spike strip during training on the brigade nonlethal capability set. The spike strips contain spikes called caltrops that puncture tires and impede vehicles from entering restricted areas.

FROM PAGE ONE

Weapons

Continued from Page A1

Aarsen, one of the Picatinny researchers behind the new Army system. Picatinny Arsenal is an Army weapons research base in Jefferson Township.

The tools were inspired by such contemporary battle-grounds as Iraq and Afghanistan, and even humanitarian missions. They will be used in checkpoints, crowd control, detainee operations, convoys and dismounted patrols.

The devices sound like they belong in an action film—a net that can ensnare a car, high-intensity lights and voice amplification devices, a spray that can detect explosives residue.

Also among the items are two, even more diplomatic tools for dealing with hostile situations in a non-deadly way: a Phraselator and a voice response translator.

The first translates simple typed English commands into Arabic, while the second actually translates spoken English into Arabic. Both could be lifesavers on a sometimes-confusing and momentarily-changing battlefield.

Staff Sgt. Jesse Lujan, who has finished two tours of Iraq, said the Phraselator could work well in the conflict in that country.

“There were times when you would try to go through a house and they don’t understand you, and you don’t understand their response,” he said.

It’s a growing concern among all branches of the military. At the end of July, the soldiers from the Army’s 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team of the 3rd Infantry Division out of Fort Stewart, Ga., spent a week training with the new non-lethal sets. This week, another Army brigade will also incorporate the sets into their training.

Col. David Ptak, of the Air Force’s security forces, said the nonlethal capabilities were being



Photo by Andra Calloway/U.S. Army

Soldiers with the 3rd Infantry Division set up the Picatinny-designed portable vehicle arresting barrier. It is a capture net used to deny vehicles access to critical facilities at roadblocks and checkpoints.

incorporated into the moments between shouting and shooting in modern battlefields.

He said all the armed forces were incorporating the new tools, through the military’s Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program, as additions into existing weaponry — and as a way to accomplish missions that can often be complex with fewer deaths.

“If you could de-escalate a situation with less force, why wouldn’t you?” Ptak said.

Nonlethal combat systems were first officially employed in a

Kosovo peacekeeping mission in 2000 but have been employed unofficially by the Army for much longer than that, Aarsen said.

With the recent wars in civilian-heavy Iraq and Afghanistan, however, the urgency for more options with fewer casualties has become more pressing on today’s missions.

“Nonlethal has always been an option, but we haven’t always had as many choices as now... But with the current situation, it’s become so much more important than before,” Aarsen said.