Biometrics Provides Precision for Military

By PAM KASEY

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Any question about the value of biometrics for the military has been answered for Clarksburg's **Biometrics Fusion Center (BFC)**, and West Virginia stands to benefit.

"We're seeing biometrics growing at an exponential rate within the **Department of Defense**. It's becoming commonplace," said BFC Director **Samuel J. Cava**. "Two years ago, when I took over here, biometrics was a good idea. Now biometrics within the department is a mission-critical technology."

Cava

Cava said biometrics has proven itself as a force multiplier: a technology that exponentially increases the power of the force.

One of the biggest challenges in the current world environment, he said, is positively identifying specific individuals to accomplish mission objectives while minimizing collateral loss and damage.

Biometrics benefits the military through its precision, Cava said.

"The first Gulf War in 1991 was really the first war environment where precision munitions were used, and it allowed us to target specific locations with very little collateral damage or civilian loss," he said. "Biometrics is equivalent in my mind to the military benefit that was given to us by those strategic bombs in the 1991 Persian Gulf War."

The military's increasing use of biometrics poses an opportunity for West Virginia, Cava said.

One system in use now, the Biometric Identification System for Access, or BISA, was created in West Virginia in response to the December 2004 bombing in Mosul, Iraq, that killed U.S troops in a dining facility, Cava said.

"The BISA system was built to screen foreign persons that are applying for access to U.S. installations in Iraq and Afghanistan," he said. "That system takes the biometrics of foreign persons and checks them against various databases to see if there are events in their past that indicate the person might be a threat to U.S. interests."

Prime contract manager **Computer Science Corp.** and project engineers **Azimuth Corp.** of Morgantown produced the BISA prototype under a tight time frame of little over a month, Cava said.

"The West Virginia team was able to pull together technologies from a lot of different disciplines and effectively integrate them into an overall system," he said, demonstrating that West Virginia companies have the capability to execute leading-edge programs.

BISA is now the primary means of vetting people for base access in Iraq, he said, and it has without question made U.S. troops safer.

The military's need for biometrics in Iraq increases even as U.S. troop force decreases, Cava said.

"We have to make better use of the technologies as the force structure goes down," he said. "It just follows that as you have less people, you have to become more efficient. Biometrics provides those efficiencies."

But looking beyond Iraq, the BFC is leading the effort to implement similar identification technologies at U.S. bases around the world, Cava said.

In another project, the center is taking a leadership role in developing the technology for a common credential for all government agency employees and contractors in accordance with the White House's Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12.

Continuing growth at the BFC is evident in its employee roster: 161 employees across the U.S., most of whom are in West Virginia, and another 155 overseas, according to BFC spokesman **Cary Dell**. That's up from a total of about 100 employees a year ago.

Growth also is reflected in the new facility planned for the BFC on the FBI's Clarksburg campus, Dell said. Groundbreaking for that facility is expected to take place this year.
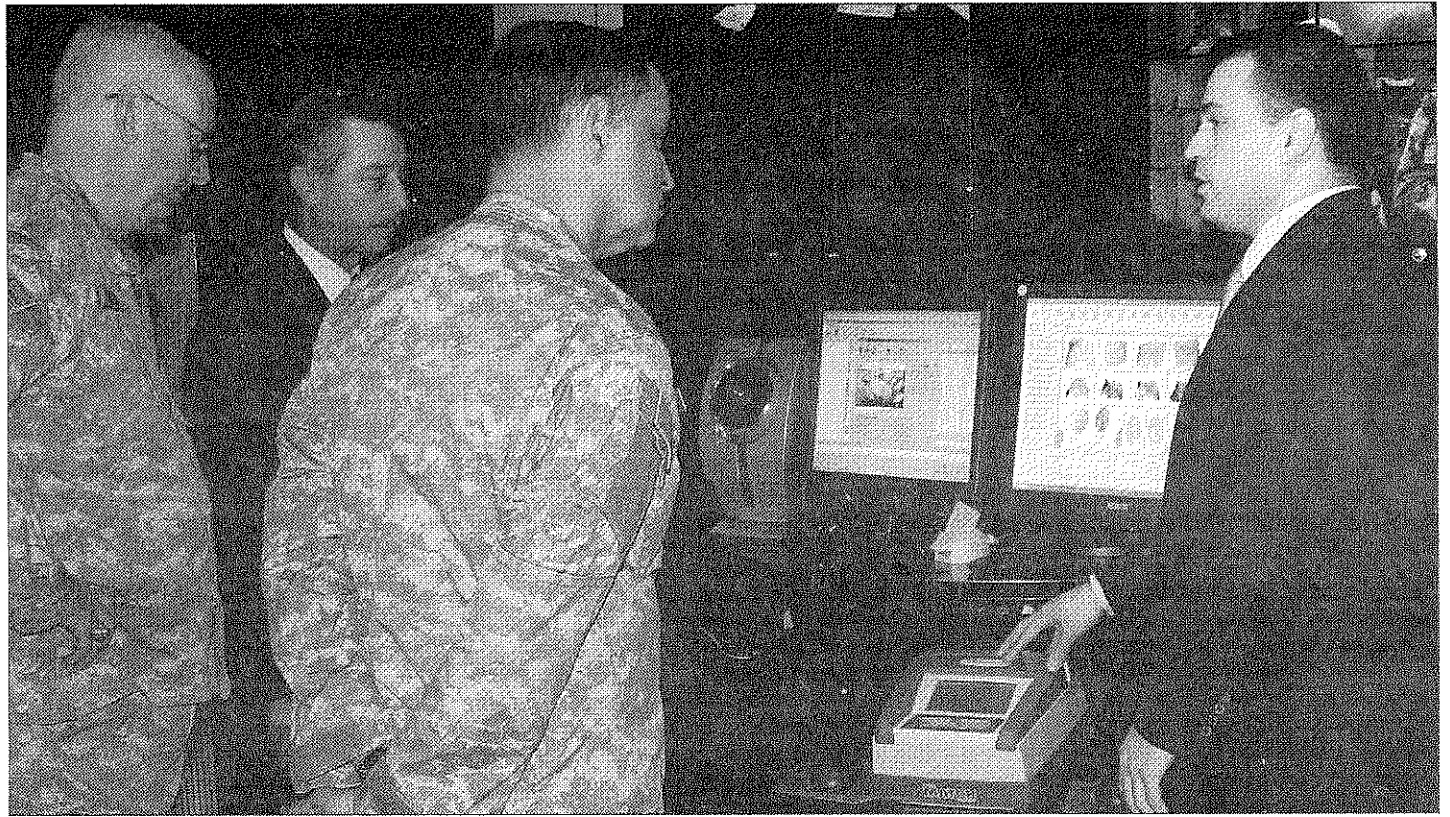

Photo courtesy of the Biometrics Fusion Center

Biometrics Fusion Center Director Samuel J. Cava demonstrates the operation of a livescan biometric collection device to (from right) Lt. Gen. Steven W. Boutelle, U.S. Army chief information officer/G-6; Kevin Carroll, Program Executive Office Enterprise Information Systems; and Maj. Gen. Conrad Ponder, U.S. Army chief integration officer/G-6.