

Pilots Praise New F-15E Targeting Pods

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New targeting pods aboard F-15E Strike Eagles proved invaluable in Iraq, pilots with the 494th Fighter Squadron, RAF Lakenheath, Britain, recently declared.

Lt. Col. Daniel Debree, 494th FS commander just back from a tour in Iraq, told a Pentagon media roundtable that flying over Iraq these days is very different from what pilots are used to.

"We are more like cops on the beat" than anything else, Debree said, adding that during the entire deployment from January to May, the 494th dropped just eight bombs on targets in Iraq. The new F-15E sensor array, featuring optical and infrared sensor arrays with the Sniper targeting pod, was key, however, in finding deadly improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Capt. Joseph Siberski, F-15E weapons system officer, cited an example from April. Near Mosul, Siberski said, came reports of a possible IED site. After a fly-over, the Strike Eagle found a hole nearby. The hole "was a square," which was highly suspicious, said Siberski.

An Army Stryker team was dispatched and approached a group of approximately 20 men who had congregated near the site. After detaining many of the men, a search near the hole uncovered three weapons caches, cell phones, and high-grade C4 explosive and shaped-charged weapons. There was enough materiel to build nearly 150 IEDs.

"It was an unqualified success," Debree said, crediting the Sniper pod for being able to locate the site.

Lockheed Martin, the pod's manufacturer, is evaluating the 494th's pods after their deployment, Debree said. With more than 5,500 hours of combat data on the pods, the company wants to fine-tune the sensors before employing them more widely on other strike aircraft.

—Marc Schanz