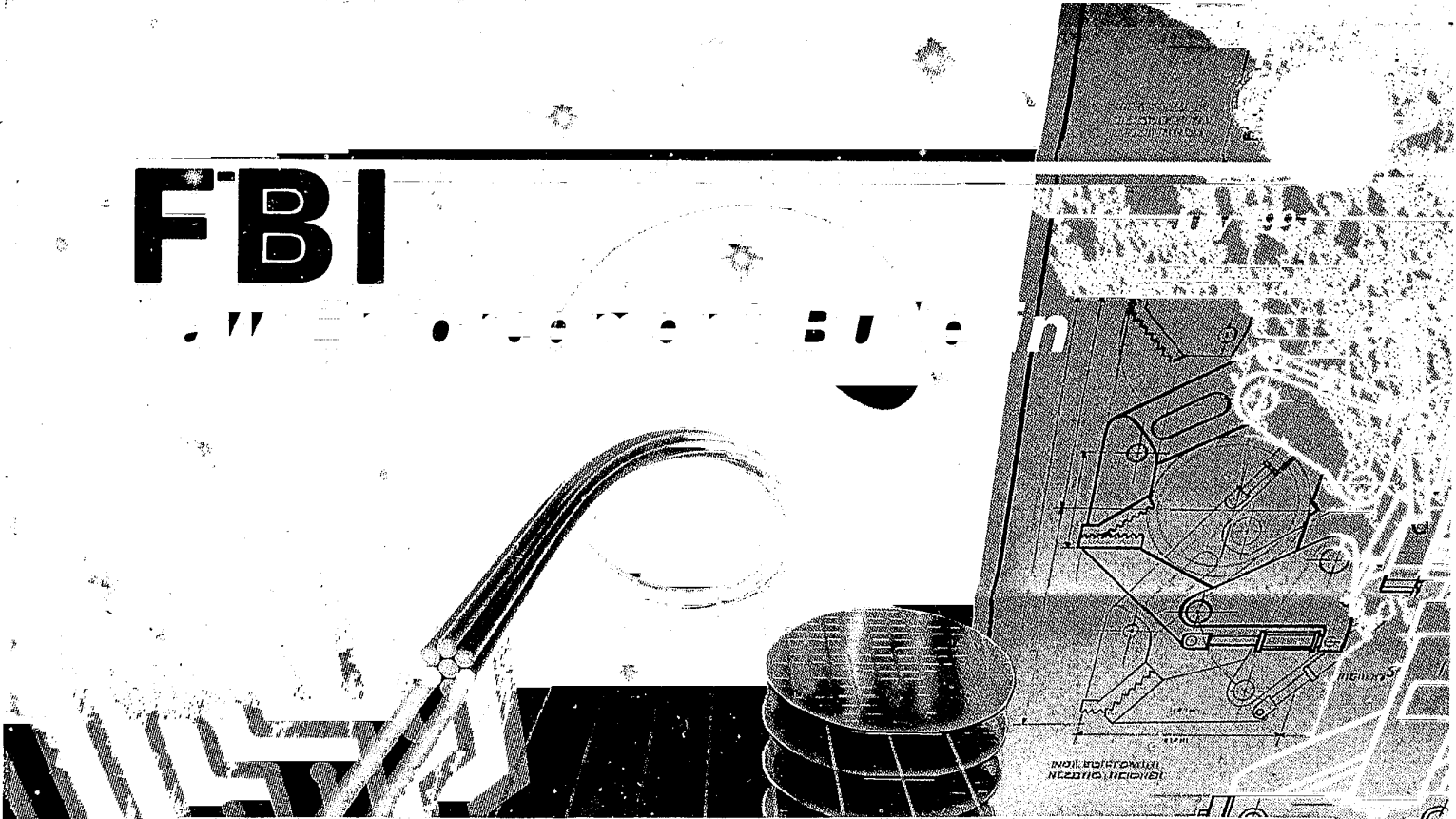


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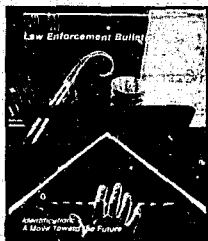


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Editor—Stephen D. Gladis, D.A.Ed.
Managing Editor—Kathryn E. Sulewski
Art Director—John E. Ott
Assistant Editors—Alice S. Cole
Karen F. McCarron
Production Manager—Andrew DiRosa
Staff Assistant—Carolyn F. Thompson

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Visiophones

French High-Tech Security



By
PIERRE MARIE
BOURNIQUEL

High-tech security techniques, which may become commonplace in the next century, are being tested in the French resort city of Biarritz. The visiophone, a device that transmits both audio and visual images across fiber optic lines, is being used by the Biarritz Police Department to augment traditional policing techniques. The device provides personnel in the police station the opportunity to access visually the interiors of offices, stores, nursing homes, and some residences in the city. While this pilot program began small, it has

grown to include over 1,500 units and has changed policing methods and public perception about police effectiveness.

BIARRITZ AND THE VISIOPHONE

Biarritz, once a renowned resort destination for American and European vacationers, had fallen on hard economic times after its popularity was eclipsed by other resort areas on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts. However, when French Telecom, the French telephone company, began to search for a suit-

able site for its visiophone pilot program, Biarritz met the requirements and was chosen due to several important factors:

- The experiment was to take place in a medium-sized city; the population of Biarritz, though it swells to 100,000 in the summer, remains at about 30,000 during the remainder of the year.
- The city's old telephone network needed refurbishing.
- The city's geographical location and population,

largely made up of retirees, was well-suited for the visiophone experiment.

The visiophone itself is a compact device, measuring 47cm (18") wide, 42cm (16") deep, and 30cm (11") high. It includes a 17cm (3") square screen, a detachable camera on the right side, a telephonic module, a full keyboard (with numbers and letters), and a voice amplifier. The instrument, which has the ability to access Minitel (the Telecom computer), produces either black-and-white or color images, depending on the type of camera used.

For this program, installation of the visiophone is free, with monthly costs averaging \$14.50. Visiophonic calls are billed at the same rate as regular telephone communications.

The initial network of 50 subscribers in 1985 has steadily grown. While security was not the motivation for the development of this pilot program, it quickly became obvious to the local police that the system offered potentially valuable applications in the realm of enhanced security, especially for the large population of elderly citizens in Biarritz.

POLICE USE OF THE VISIOPHONE

Telesurveillance

A number of banks and businesses throughout the city have alarm systems that are connected to police headquarters. These alarms are activated accidentally several times a day, resulting in wasted time and effort by the police. But now, when an alarm sounds, it is possible to

conduct an initial investigation of the establishment using the visiophone.

In a usual case, the watch officer contacts the business by visiophone once an alarm sounds, and requests that a visual scan of the interior be conducted using the detachable camera. All doubt can be resolved without an officer leaving the precinct. However, if doubt remains—no answer to the visiophone, poor vision through the camera, or suspicious activity observed in the premises—a patrol is dispatched immediately. The patrol then knows that this may not be a routine call and will naturally exercise more caution.

Visiophonic Patrolling

As mentioned earlier, the population of Biarritz includes a significant number of elderly persons. The majority of these retirees have worked elsewhere and now find themselves isolated from their families. Many

have developed a sense of insecurity fueled by accounts of rising crime rates.

It is the responsibility of the police, to some degree, to ease their feelings of insecurity. To this end, a plan was developed, in late 1988, to integrate the visiophone with the traditional patrol function.

This plan involves 500 subscribers and impacts approximately 1,000 residents of the community. The initial effort required beat officers to contact residents over the age of 65 personally and provide them with a written explanation describing the program. These residents were then informed that if they desired, the police would contact them about twice a month by visiophone.

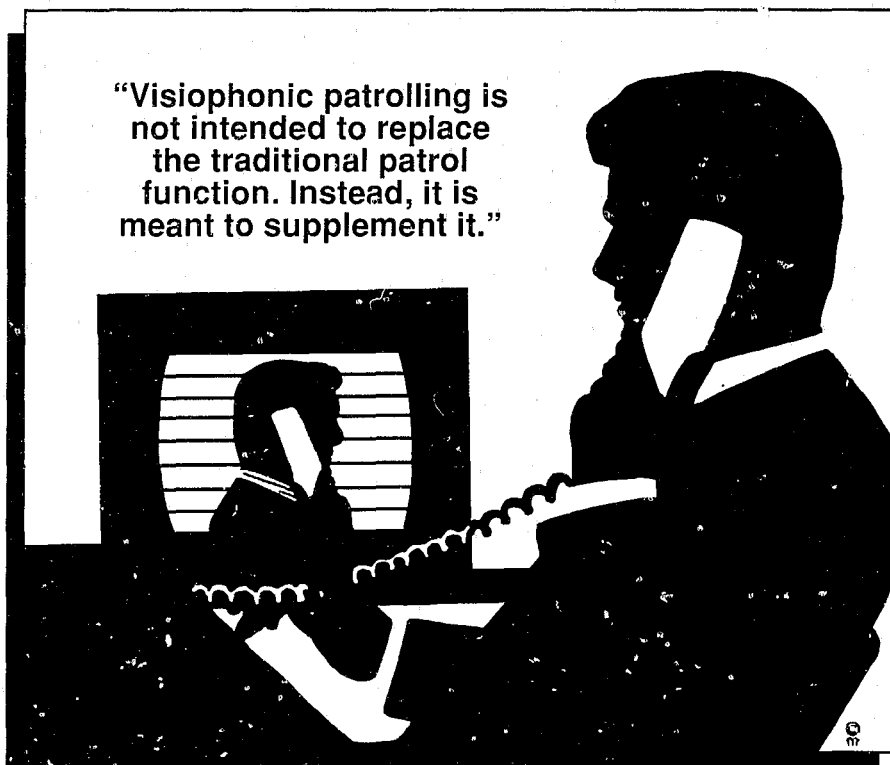
Visiophonic patrolling is not intended to replace the traditional patrol function. Instead, it is meant to supplement it. The visiophone allows the police, in a sense, to enter the door of the elderly and reassure them concerning their security.

“
...advances in technology, such as the visiophone, are providing...unprecedented opportunities in the realm of security and surveillance....
”



Mr. Bourniquel is the Commissaire Principal—Chief of Police—Biarritz, France.

"Visiophonic patrolling is not intended to replace the traditional patrol function. Instead, it is meant to supplement it."



Because many of the elderly reside in high-rise apartment buildings, the opportunity for door-to-door personal contact by the police is significantly reduced. The visiophone provides a more-intimate level of contact than ever before possible in these situations.

Answering the Call

The visiophone is, of course, a two-way system, allowing a citizen with the device to call the police and be greeted by the reassuring image of an officer on the screen. When an emergency call is placed, the watch officer can view the interior of the premises and maintain audiovisual contact with the caller while the patrol is making its way to the scene. This has proven particularly reassuring, especially to elderly residents who become very anxious when facing a potentially

dangerous situation feeling isolated and alone.

RESULTS

Early reaction to the police use of the visiophone has been very positive. Residents and businesses have expressed appreciation and a new level of regard for the police since visiophonic patrolling and telesurveillance have been instituted. Factors contributing to the success of the visiophone program were studied by the National Center of Telecommunication Studies (France). The NCTS drew these conclusions:

- 90% of the elderly persons surveyed are very satisfied with the type of police contact made available by the visiophone.
- The visiophone provides a much more efficient means

of communication than the telephone, since during a typical conversation, as much as 40% of the message is communicated by gestures and countenance. The visiophone permits the communication of the visual signals that the telephone misses.

- Because communication via the visiophone is interactive, rather than passive, more information is retained by the citizen during a conversation.

In addition, the visiophone is rapidly becoming a valuable investigative tool, allowing a large number of contacts in a relatively short time. Officers can attain visual contact of a victim, witness, or potential suspect before ever leaving the precinct.

CONCLUSION

The technology of the 21st century is augmenting, not replacing, traditional police functions in Biarritz, France. Personal contact with victims and witnesses is still an important responsibility of the police department, as is sound investigative work and code enforcement. However, advances in technology, such as the visiophone, are providing law enforcement with unprecedented opportunities in the realm of security and surveillance that can be realized today. In this pilot program, both the police and the residents of the community are discovering that modern technology can be used effectively and responsibly to enhance security and to expand the protection and services offered by law enforcement.

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