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## V CORPS MORTAR CREW LIGHTS UP NIGHT SKIES IN IRAQ IN SEARCH FOR INSURGENTS

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**YUSUFIYAH, Iraq** -- Mortar team Soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment of V Corps' Task Force 1st Armored Division, lit the up the night skies here recently with luminescent mortars as they hunted terrorists in an area suspected of harboring anti-coalition insurgents.



STAFF SGT M. TRENT LOWRY

Soldiers of "Bandit" Troop, from the 1st Battalion, 1st Cavalry Regiment of V Corps' 1st Armored Division illuminate the sky as their 120mm mortars fire illumination rounds to help root out insurgent activity in the Yusufiyah area south of Baghdad.

Belching flames, the 120mm mortars leapt from the launcher of "Bandit" Troop's M1064 heavy mortar carrier with a thunderous report.

"The two target areas were launch sites for mortar attacks against us," said Sgt. 1st Class Pierre Thibodeaux, Bandit Troop mortar section sergeant.

"The idea is that the luminous rounds bursting might scare the enemy into not setting an (improvised explosive device) or firing mortars."

The purpose of the night mission, which took place in an area where IEDs had previously been found was resoundingly affirmed when a roadside bomb detonated just in front of one of the troop's vehicles. No one was injured and the vehicle only sustained light damage. But the blast gave substance to the night's activities.

After sending more than a dozen luminous rounds into the air, the scouts and mortar crew members searched homes in this small rural community for signs of anti-coalition activity.

The mortar fire and street search was the culmination of the lessons the troop's Soldiers learned during their mission in Iraq.

Being able to do the job they trained for was also a morale booster for the Bandits.

"Just recently we got to do our mission -- firing mortars -- and it's definitely helped with our morale," said Spc. Jonathan Bentley. "Our first MOS (military occupational specialty) is infantryman, and then mortars is a secondary MOS for us. So we're getting to do what we were trained to do."

During the first year the unit spent in Baghdad, Soldiers patrolled the streets of the city searching for anti-coalition insurgents. That mission provided no opportunity for firing mortars. Since the task force was extended in Iraq, though, the Bandit Troop mortars have not been silent.

"It's what we've wanted to do the whole time out here," said Pfc. Philip Lala, an assistant mortar crew member with Bandit Troop. "We did this mission tonight just to let (the enemy) know we're not afraid to fire back."

In the time spent preparing for the mission, the Bandits' conversations often strayed to other subjects, such as how they might spend their leave when they redeploy, or news from their families back home. But, they, too, have become a family, and a strong bond has grown between all of them.

"We've definitely gotten tight. (We're) a real tight family here," Lala said. "When it comes down to it, we trust each other with our lives, and that's what makes me confident about doing missions like this."

While the mortar and search mission that night didn't turn up any evidence, it did go without a hitch.

"It was another successful mission; another successful patrol," said Thibodeaux.

"We're at the top of our game."

