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ARTILLERY SOLDIERS OF V CORPS' 1ST ARMORED DIVISION SEARCH OUT ENEMY IN IRAQ WITH THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE ST. MICHEL, Iraq – Soldiers of B Battery of the 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery of V Corps' 1st Armored Division have been using thunder and lightning to flush out insurgents in Iraq.



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On patrol in Mullafayad, Iraq, Spc. Kyle W. Shifflett, a fire support specialist with the 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery of V Corps' 1st Armored Division, chats with an Iraqi boy as he passes out leaflets offering rewards for information and weapons.

The mission in Mullafayad, a town about 20 miles south of Baghdad, and the surrounding areas was to deter insurgents from attacking Iraqi communities and coalition forces in the area. The cannoners of 4/27th brought the thunder of their howitzers to bear on nearby rural areas, lighting the area with illumination rounds.

"We're doing our best to secure the routes into the city," said Capt. James M. Collins, B Battery commander. "We're getting a lot of intelligence and a lot of weapons out there, but it's hard to tell how many people are out there against us."

Collins said one way of trying to discover who may be setting up improvised explosive devices or firing mortars at Soldiers in the area is to catch the culprits when they are most active: at night.

The battery uses two platoons for these night missions. One fires its M109 A6 Paladin 155 mm howitzers, the other conducts infantry missions. Working as a team, the Soldiers hunt or deter attackers who use IEDs, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars.

"This mission is as important, if not more so, than anything we did in Baghdad," said Collins, referring to the year his unit spent patrolling the streets of Iraq's capital city.

"There were a few munitions factories in this area before, and when the war kicked off the factories were looted. That's why there are a lot of bombs to deal with here."

The battery's platoon of infantry set out on foot late one night to find a forward observation point from which they could assess any enemy activity in the area. With just a sliver of moon available for ambient lighting, they were going to need help. The firing battery lit up the dark Iraqi night with illumination rounds that let the ground warriors see for miles during a time when night vision goggles are normally the only means of seeing the terrain clearly.

The idea was to catch enemies in the act and make other potential adversaries think twice about striking out against Soldiers or Iraqi civilians in the area.

"We were unable to observe any attempts last night," said Collins after the mission.

"But the awareness is out there, that we can monitor them at any time. Hopefully that will help deter their actions."

After sunrise, B Battery set out on foot again. This time they patrolled the streets of Mullafayad, now vibrant with the activities of the townspeople. Their goal was let residents know they are on the job, keeping their sector secure. The Soldiers also passed out flyers printed in English and Arabic offering rewards for information and weapons.

"I feel we came over here to take out a regime and free people," said Spc. Kyle W. Shifflett, a fire support specialist with B Battery, 4/27th. "The benefit of these patrols is to win the confidence of the people and let them know we're trying to get the weapons off the street and improve their quality of life."

