



WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



[Back to History Index](#) | [35th Infantry Regiment ASSN Home](#) | [Contact](#)

Friday, July 23, 2004

Mortars make a difference in Afghanistan

By Sgt. Jeremy A. Clawson, 105th Mobile Public Affairs Det.



Photo(s) by Sgt. Jeremy A. Clawson

Spc. Matthew Root, a mortarman from Co. C, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt., kneels to adjust his team's mortar, while Pfc. Joseph Borgula, makes adjustments during Operation Dragon Tree in the Afghan Argandab Valley.

ARGANDAB VALLEY, Afghanistan -- Watching his team place mortar aiming stakes, Spc. Donald King entered grid coordinates on a M23 Mortar Ballistic Computer ready to deploy his team's 60 mm mortar. He prepared to cover troops as they moved into action recently during Operation Dragon Tree.

On this mission through the Argandab Valley in south central Afghanistan, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment moved to search a village. King and his team positioned themselves two kilometers away to over watch the villages on both sides of the objective and the ridgeline in the distance.

"The mortar is the most casualty producing weapon in the company," said King. The enemy knows this too and it makes the unit a 'hard target.'

For the enemy, a hard target is not only one with a hard shell such as armor plates, but also the ability to violently respond with effective fire. The job of a mortar team is to provide timely and accurate indirect fire in support to units as they move across the battlefield.

According to the team's gunner, Spc. Matthew Root, the mortar team's presence is a deterrent to

enemy forces. The enemy knows when mortar teams are providing cover for Soldiers as they search villages, "it makes the enemy think twice before trying anything," Root said. This deterrence enables troops to complete their missions without enemy contact.

King said Taliban and al Qaida fighters coming face to face with the U.S. infantry troops since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 will reconsider confronting Coalition forces. "I've never been on the opposite side of a mortar, but the (Taliban) probably have at one time and it's probably not fun," said King.

Moving through the mountainous terrain taxes the toughest infantrymen, each Soldier is weighted with equipment, weapons and ammunition. For mortar teams, that weight is compounded by the mortar system.

The gunner usually carries the cannon, bipod, sight unit, and usually two or three rounds, said Root. The assistant gunner carries the mortar base plate, while more rounds are divided among the line company fire teams, each round weighing nearly five pounds.

Once the team has set up the mortar position, they can respond with supporting fire within seconds of receiving a mission. Ground troops call for fire adjustments and within three rounds the team can lay a barrage of mortars on target.

A mortar team carries four different types of rounds, high explosive, illumination, infrared illumination and white phosphorous. Each round is used for a different effect. The team has participated in numerous combat missions to shut down terrorists and as 11 Charlies, (11C -- the Military Occupational Specialty for mortarmen) they stand ready to strike -- from a distance.

The nature of an over watch position keeps King and his team away from most of the close encounters. Watching things develop from afar irritates King at times.

"I guess I'm just frustrated because we haven't even been close" to an enemy engagement, said King, although he qualified his unease about not engaging the enemy up close. "I'm not a warmonger. I'm not trying to get into firefights or anything. If I go the whole war without seeing a firefight I'll be happy."