

THE COILS OF THE ANACONDA:
AMERICA'S FIRST CONVENTIONAL BATTLE IN AFGHANISTAN

BY

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Lester W. Grau

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Dr. Theodore A Wilson, Chairperson

Dr. James J. Willbanks, Committee Member

Dr. Robert F. Baumann, Committee Member

Dr. Maria Carlson, Committee Member

Dr. Jacob W. Kipp, Committee Member

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The Dissertation Committee for Lester W. Grau certifies
that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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PREFACE

Generals have often been reproached with preparing for the last war instead of for the next—an easy gibe when their fellow-countrymen and their political leaders, too frequently, have prepared for no war at all. Preparation for war is an expensive, burdensome business, yet there is one important part of it that costs little—study. However changed and strange the new conditions of war may be, not only generals, but politicians and ordinary citizens, may find there is much to be learned from the past that can be applied to the future and, in their search for it, that some campaigns have more than others foreshadowed the coming pattern of modern war.¹

— Field Marshall Viscount William Slim.

This is an initial American success story. Operation Anaconda was America's first conventional battle in Afghanistan. Despite the bravery of her soldiers, America's first battles did not always turn out as victories. Bunker Hill, Bull Run, Kasserine Pass, Task Force Smith, the Ia Drang Valley--all were hard-fought American fights which ended in retreat or a draw. Operation Anaconda was hardly a defeat. American forces entered a hostile fortified zone, fought the enemy to a standstill and then evicted him. US casualties were comparatively light. Enemy casualties were heavy. At the end of the fighting, the battlefield was in American hands and the enemy did not want to resume the contest. Indeed, the conventional enemy force was shattered. Operation Anaconda involved the forces of seven nations and US Armed Forces personnel from the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force. It was America's largest and longest light-infantry fight since Vietnam. It was the highest altitude land battle in US history. It was the Canadian Armed Forces first ground combat since the Korean War.

Operation Anaconda was not elegant. Recently, the American public has come to expect elegant operations and battles. Operation Desert Storm, that ousted Iraq's forces from Kuwait in 1991, was elegant--but it took place in an accessible developed theater with roads, airfields, ports and modern facilities. It also took six months to get all the forces, equipment, and supplies in place. The ground combat phase took a mere 100 hours and allied casualties were moderate. The combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom, which captured all of Iraq in 2003, was elegant. It took place in the same developed theater where equipment and supplies were already stockpiled and maintained over a twelve-year period. It still took over four months to move a much-smaller force into theater and get it ready to attack. The ground combat phase only took 26 days and allied casualties were moderate.

Operation Enduring Freedom, the take-down of Afghanistan, did not have the time, facilities, or operating space to create a deliberate, set-piece battle following extensive theater preparation. It began on 7 October 2001--less than a month after the 9/11 attack on America. It was done with an expeditionary force and a pick-up team of available units. Afghan forces from the Northern Alliance provided the bulk of ground combat power. Operation Anaconda, fought as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, was done on a shoestring with minimum forces, few helicopters, and no artillery. The few armored vehicles available belonged to the Afghan Forces of the provisional government.

Allied operations in Afghanistan were markedly different than earlier operations and expeditions. Usually, conventional forces make the main attack while

special operations forces (SOF) carry out their missions on the flanks or deep in the enemy rear. In Afghanistan, SOF initially had the main attack while conventional forces provided needed support and muscle where necessary. This meant that SOF led the planning and coordination effort and conducted a brilliant initial campaign which dismembered the Taliban forces. Only when the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces dug in for a determined defensive battle did the conventional forces of the 101st Air Assault Division and the 10th Mountain Division join the coalition SOF and Afghan Forces of the Northern Alliance for an assault on a natural fortress. Total allied losses were six Afghans and eight Americans killed and 53 Afghans and 86 Americans wounded. Taliban and Al Qaeda forces were smashed, suffering hundreds of casualties and limping away demoralized and disorganized.

This is not to say that there were no glitches or problems. The fog and friction of war is normal. The battlefield is never transparent and Afghanistan is more opaque than most countries on the planet. US Air Force and Army concepts of close air support are incompatible and air power both crippled and aided the conduct of battle. The relatively quick Army planning process has difficulties understanding the slower Air Force planning process and incorporating it. There was a severe shortage of transport and attack helicopters. There was no US artillery in Afghanistan. The hierarchy of ad hoc commands and service interests often interfered with optimum mission accomplishment. Vital intelligence was hoarded by intelligence agencies instead of being provided to the combatants. There were problems with putting a coalition together, working inside that coalition and maintaining it. Adaptability and

training overcame many obstacles, but a lot of these obstacles were unnecessary products of putting together an expedition in a hurry and adjusting on the fly. Despite all this, as in every battle, the battlefield commanders prepared, planned, and fought the battle as best they could with what they had. The American, Afghan and allied combatants performed admirably.

This was not a repeat of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, although there were some parallels. The Taliban was not a guerrilla force, although some of its commanders were former Mujahideen guerrillas. The bulk of the combatants, the trigger pullers, were the children of the refugee camps, the “lost boys.” They fought as a conventional force using light cavalry or mounted rifle tactics, based on pick-up trucks and left over Soviet vehicles. They fought another similarly-equipped conventional force, the Northern Alliance. The Special Forces linked up with the Northern Alliance Forces and served as the Forward Air Controllers (FACs) for the Northern Alliance. US and coalition air power pummeled the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces. At Mazar-i Sharif, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad, the Al Qaeda and Taliban fought until they were losing and then kicked out at rear guard and went to the mountains. US and coalition special forces continued their partnership with Northern Alliance Forces as they pursued the Al Qaeda and Taliban forces into the mountains. The enemy fell back to fortified mountain logistics bases that had been built during the Soviet-Afghan War. The pursuers fought the fleeing enemy at Tora Bora. The defeated enemy kicked out a rear guard and retreated to Zhawar. Again, the pursuers struck the enemy who once again kicked out a rear guard and fled to the

Shar-i Kot valley. The Shar-i Kot valley was a fortified zone--a prepared conventional mountain defense designed by a professional military commander. The enemy dug in to have it out on favorable ground. They believed that if they could only kill enough Americans, the US would turn tail and withdraw, as America had in Somalia. The stage was set for the major ground battle of the conflict.

Les Grau has a long relationship with Afghanistan. He is a retired US Army Infantry Lieutenant Colonel who still carries shrapnel from Vietnam fighting. A Russian speaker with lots of travel throughout the Soviet Union and Russia, Les has written much on the Soviet and Russian military. His first book, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* is a translation and commentary on a Soviet Lessons Learned text from their Frunze Staff Academy.² His second book, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* was co-authored with Ali Jalali.³ Ali Jalali is a member of a leading family and a former Artillery Colonel in the Army of Afghanistan, Ali is a unique blend of urbane intellectual and Pashtu tribesman. His education includes the Afghan Military Academy, Afghan Command and Staff College, Afghan War College, the US Army Infantry Advanced Course, the British Staff Course, the Frunze Military Academy in Moscow, the US Naval Postgraduate School in Monterrey, and the Institute of World Politics in Washington, DC. He fought as a Mujahideen, served as the Mujahideen Chief of Staff for the NIFA faction, and later served as a war correspondent for Voice of America (VOA). After the war, he worked for many years as head of the Afghan desk and later the Iran desk at VOA. He served as Minister of the Interior in the

government of Afghanistan where, he, President Hamid Karzai and other patriotic Afghans are trying to rebuild their shattered country. Ali has now resumed the academic life on the faculty of the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. Ali and Les interviewed over 100 Mujahideen commanders while researching this book. Les' third book, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, is a translation and commentary of a Russian General Staff retrospective on the war.⁴ The books and articles written by Grau and Jalali figured prominently in the orientation and training of US forces for Afghanistan.

Time in Operation Anaconda is confusing. The US Army used Zulu time. Zulu time is Greenwich Mean Time, which is the universal time used by pilots and for US military operations. This supposedly assures that there is no confusion due to time zones since everyone is on the same time on a 24-hour clock. However, during Operation Anaconda, there were three times used--ZULU, CHARLIE (the time zone in Kuwait where CFLCC was located--three hours ahead of ZULU time) and local time. This book uses Afghan local time so that sunsets and sunrises occur at the expected time but it also uses a 24-hour clock. Perversely, Afghanistan is 30 minutes different than all its neighbors. Afghanistan local time is 4.5 hours ahead of Zulu time and 1.5 hours ahead of Charlie Time.

¹Field Marshal Viscount William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1941-1945*, [1956; repr., New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000], 535.

²Lester W. Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998).

³Ali A. Jalali and Lester W. Grau, "The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War" (U.S. Marine Corps Special Study DM-980701, Quantico, 1998).

⁴The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, (trans. and ed. by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2001).

PRELUDE

There was a young fellow named Fonda
Who was squeezed by a great anaconda
Now he's only a smear
A part of him here
And the rest of him somewhere out yonder.

—Ogden Nash

The Second of March 2002. The winter winds bit the soldiers' faces as they shuffled onto the crowded CH-47 helicopters. It was very early morning at Bagram airfield and all was pitch dark. Only the interior lights of the helicopters shown as the soldiers boarded. They did not want to tip off the locals. US soldiers of the 101st Air Assault Division, the 10th Mountain Division and Special Forces were going to try to pin down an elusive enemy that usually bolted when confronted with a strong US force. The US forces would be joined by Canadians, New Zealanders, Germans, Norwegians, Danes, Afghans, Australians, British, and other nationalities as they converged on the Shar-i Kot Valley in southeastern Afghanistan. The forty-year-old CH-47s were jam-packed with soldiers who jostled each other while trying to fit themselves, their rucksacks, weapons, radios, and other combat gear into the cramped confines. Most of the soldiers were nervous yet eager. Some were already regretting not making a last-minute latrine call before boarding. The rear ramps of the helicopters closed and soon the loaded helicopters took off into the night sky. Their objective was over 100 miles away.

As the Sergeants shouted last-minute instructions to their men, the six CH-47 transport helicopters, five AH-64A Apache gunship helicopters, and two Blackhawk

helicopters gained altitude and split into three groups flying on separate routes. Seasoned soldiers closed their eyes for introspection or sleep. Combat or another futile pursuit of a retreating enemy was still over an hour away, but the next chance for sleep might be days away.

Ten minutes from touchdown, the helicopter crew chiefs made sure that everyone was awake. The ramps came down part way. The sun was beginning to rise and soldiers near the few portholes and the back ramp could see the adobe buildings and dirt roads of Afghan villages. Many of the houses were little forts--with buildings and outbuildings surrounded by a high, tough adobe walls. Watchtowers dominated many of the corners. People here were accustomed to protecting their property.

The helicopters dipped into the Shar-i Kot Valley. Something was wrong. There were no women, kids, or dogs visible. There was not any laundry hung out to dry. The civilians were gone. Was the enemy also gone? The helicopters separated as they moved to the seven landing zones. The helicopters sat down heavily and fully lowered their rear ramps. Stiffly, yet quickly, the soldiers exited the aircraft and moved toward their squad leaders. The 8,000 foot altitude hit the soldiers like a wall. It was hard to catch your breath in the rarified atmosphere and the combined weight of body armor, rucksack, weapon, and other gear made it even harder. The squads began to move off the landing zones as the helicopters lifted off for their return flight to Bagram. Mortar rounds, heavy machine-gun bullets and rocket-propelled grenades began to slam into the landing zones. The enemy was still here. And this time, he

was not going to run. He was here to fight. Thus began the eleven-day battle known as Operation Anaconda.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the topic is limited in quantity and scope. The primary books on the topic are:

Gary Berntsen and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al Qaeda: A Personal Account by the CIA's Key Field Commander*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2005.

Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder, and Kalev I. Sepp, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan*, Fort Leavenworth; Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004.

Andrew Exum, *This Man's Army: A Soldier's Story from the Front Lines of the War on Terrorism*, New York: Gotham Books, 2004.

Malcolm MacPherson, *Roberts Ridge: A Story of Courage and Sacrifice on Takur Ghar Mountain, Afghanistan*, New York: Delacorte Press, 2005.

Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda*, New York: Berkley Books, 2005.

Richard W. Stewart, Center of Military History Publication 70-83-1, *The U.S. Army in Afghanistan: Operation Enduring Freedom October 2001-March 2002*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004.

United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective*, Washington, US Government Printing Office, 7 February 2005.

These books provide a narrow viewpoint of the military situation, but do not set the battle within the context of Afghanistan's history, geography, or culture.

Further, they do not set the battle within the context of the international and local politics. Naylor's and MacPherson's books are really about the fight on the top of Takur Ghar Mountain and have little to do with the main fight. Briscoe's book proved the most valuable as it provided an unclassified look at the role of Army Special Forces in the fight. Unfortunately, in Briscoe's book, practically everyone has a pseudonym, there is no index, and the photographs are marked with a black bar across soldier's eyes--much like the 1950s *Police Gazette*. Berntsen's, Briscoe's, and the USAF study all have a clear agenda. The enemy is missing in all of them.

Since the most important dimensions of understanding what has transpired in Afghanistan are outside the narrow military situation, this work required a broader investigation of culture, history, politics, and the region. Insurgencies, after all, are resolved at the political level, not the military. This work attempts to understand the dynamics of Afghanistan along with the dynamics of the enemy and the various causes of their resistance.

ABSTRACT

The battle was clumsy, but decisive. It was won by the combined efforts of American Armed Forces, Afghan ground forces, Canadian Light Infantry, and special forces from a variety of nations. It was a pick-up fight that started off badly, but training, good will, and professionalism pulled the operation together. It was Al Qaeda's last conventional fight and America's first conventional fight in Afghanistan. It broke the back of Al Qaeda and hastened their departure from the country. Lessons learned in air-ground coordination were successfully applied during the invasion of Iraq. As with any military operation or, indeed, human endeavor, Anaconda had its warts and problems.

Operation Anaconda generated several books, most in support of an agenda. What makes this dissertation different is that it: covers the entire battle instead of the first three days; provides a more-balanced view of air power and ground power in the battle; provides a historic view of Afghanistan before the events of 9/11; provides a good enemy picture; identifies the culminating event of the battle, and provides an analysis of what went right and what went wrong.

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| D+1, 1300-1530 (Bagram and the North) | 328 |
| D+1, 1500 (Task Force 64) | 329 |
| D+1, 1830 (The North) | 330 |
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| D+2, 0330-0430 (The North, short of HLZ 15)..... | 342 |
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CHAPTER 1.

AFGHANISTAN AND THE SOVIET INVASION

Geography and history conspired to make Afghanistan one of the most remote countries on the planet. High rugged mountain ranges, vast arid deserts, bitter-cold winters and oven-like summers shape its rugged, independent, proud people. The armies of Alexander the Great, Ghenghis Khan, Persia, India, the British Empire, and the Soviet Union came to Afghanistan--and left the bones of many of their soldiers behind--along with their gene pools. Afghanistan and America are thousands of miles and centuries of culture apart. The path that eventually brought American soldiers into Afghanistan is twisted, but the historical map is fairly clear.¹

Militarily, the operational key terrain is the limited road network that connects Afghanistan's cities in a giant ring with side roads to Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. There are only 24 kilometers of railroad in Afghanistan--and these are split in two unconnected segments--leftover spurs from the former Soviet Union's incursion. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, many countries offered to build railroads in Afghanistan, but Afghanistan was bordered to the north by the Russian Empire, to the East and South by the British Empire, and to the West and South by Persia, heir to the late Persian Empire. The rulers of Afghanistan noted that the armies of empire traveled on rail and so no railroads were built in Afghanistan. Militarily, this was a dubious choice since Afghanistan has been a crossroads for invasion throughout its history, but it exacted a severe economic and

political price. To this day, Afghanistan is one of the most poverty-stricken and isolated countries on the planet.²

There are some eternal truths about Afghanistan. First, it is a mountain-fragmented land in which a strong central government is often an anomaly. Tribal chiefs and regional warlords exert considerable power and the central government requires extraordinary leadership to control and dominate its unruly regions. Rural Afghans think of themselves primarily in tribal and peer group [*qwam*] terms, not as Afghans. The one event that unites all Afghans in a common cause is foreign invasion. The central government's army has seldom been strong enough to repel external invasion, but the country's true combat power lies in the rural lands and remote mountains where warriors hold sway.

Second, combat in the mountainous regions is seasonal. In November, the snows fall, closing the mountain passes and forcing the people down into the valleys where they winter over. Little fighting occurs, except in the low desert regions. In March and April, the snows begin to melt and combatants begin to stir. May and June are excellent months for combat. July and August are too hot and the pace of combat slows. September and October are again excellent months for combat. And in November, the snows fall.

Third, combat in Afghanistan has a certain logic to it. Battles between Afghans are never fought "to the knife" where one side attempts to annihilate the other completely. Rather, when it is apparent that one side is winning, the other side kicks out a rear guard and melts into the mountains. The rear guard, the slow, and the

uninformed constitute the bulk of the casualties. When foreigners invade Afghanistan, however, the Afghans are capable of annihilation combat. The British “Army of the Indus” that perished between Kabul and Gandamak in 1842 and the British “Burrows Brigade” that was nearly wiped out at Maiwand in 1880 are two prime examples.

Fourth, personal loyalty is primarily to family, *qwam* [social, school, or trade group] and tribe. Higher loyalty to cause and regional or national leaders is situational. Units may change sides in battle when the other side is winning. A common perception is that the other side is winning because it is God’s will and one should not oppose God’s will. Temporary truces and alliances are common. In the words of a prominent Afghan, “an Afghan can be rented, but he can never be bought.”

Background

Afghanistan of the 1970s was a fairly liberal Islamic country. *Purdah* was rare in the cities and one saw more women in miniskirts than in *Burqahs*. In Kabul, discos blared country and eastern music until early in the morning. Literacy rates were low, perhaps 10 percent.³ The power of the mullahs and imams was restricted to religious matters. Secular leaders controlled the country, provinces, districts, cities, and villages. Tribal power was strong, but challenged by the increasing urbanization of the country. There was an inherent friction between the more-liberal urban populace and the conservative rural community. Before he was deposed, the

King was working to modernize and enlighten the country--an effort that did not always sit well with the rural and religious community.

Afghanistan is an ethnically diverse society with a Pashtun, Uzbek, Tajik, Hazara, Baluch, Aibak, Qizzelbak, and Nuristani populace. The primary languages are Pashtu and Dari. Turkmen, Tajik, Uzbek, and Baluch are also spoken. The country is overwhelmingly Islamic with the majority being Sunni. The Hazara are Shia and closely affiliated with neighboring Iran. The country has a strong Sufi tradition, but during the Soviet-Afghan War, Wahhabism and Deobandism made strong inroads due to their substantial external financial contributions to the cause as well as the rise of strident beliefs when national survival is at stake.

Afghanistan has a traditional warrior society and a strong sense of independence. Male children receive a firearm before their teens and learn to use it. Most men carry a weapon. Still, rifle marksmanship is no longer all that good, particularly since the introduction of the Kalashnikov assault rifle. Further, their weapons handling is casual and muzzles point everywhere--an unfortunate habit only partially alleviated by the fact that there is seldom a round in the weapon's chamber. The independent nature of the people means that they are reluctant to accept military discipline. They can be fierce warriors but indifferent soldiers.

The northern part of Afghanistan, bordering the former Soviet Union, is a major agricultural area. The river valleys are also fertile and productive. Agriculture products were Afghanistan's major exports. Truckloads of melons, grapes, wheat, apples, nuts, and even rice crossed the borders of Pakistan and Iran.

The Soviet Union had a long and fairly friendly relationship with its southern neighbor. Afghanistan was the first nation to recognize the Soviet Communist regime after the Bolshevik Revolution. Modest amounts of Soviet aid, accompanied by Soviet advisers, entered Afghanistan in the 1920s and were a constant feature in Afghanistan during the next fifty-plus years. One of the best country studies and military appreciations on Afghanistan was published in 1921 by Andrei E. Snesev, a Tsarist and Soviet general who had toured the area extensively (and spoke 14 languages).⁴ In 1930, the Soviets briefly invaded northern Afghanistan in hot pursuit of a fleeing Uzbek insurgent leader.

Turkey and Germany also sought influence and advantage in Afghanistan. Turkish and German military advisers helped train the Afghan Army. During World War II, German Abwehr and Soviet NKVD agents conducted a deadly contest in Kabul. The Abwehr lost.⁵ The United States belatedly tried to gain influence in Afghanistan during World War II. As Hitler's forces drove toward the Caucasus, the Lend Lease route through the Persian Gulf and Iran to the Soviet Union was in danger and the United States was looking for a back-up route, should Germany reach the Caspian Sea.⁶ American interest in Afghanistan continued after the war. President Eisenhower even paid a brief visit to the country in 1959. Both the United States and the Soviet Union contributed economic aid and embarked on a series of infrastructure development projects in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷ The Soviet Union built airfields and roads in the northern part of the country, including the world's highest traffic tunnel--the Salang tunnel--a marvel of engineering stretching two miles and allowing transit

of the rugged Hindu Kush Mountains. The Soviets also developed the Kabul River irrigation project south of Jalalabad. The United States built roads in the south of the country and the Kandahar airfield as well as the extensive Helmand basin irrigation project. The Chinese were also competing with an extensive irrigation system near Charikar. Thousands of Afghan officials, officers, and students studied in the Soviet Union.

In July 1973, Prime Minister Daoud overthrew his cousin, the King, and set himself up as the President of Afghanistan. The shift from monarchy to a parliamentary system was not unopposed. Students dropped out of school and took to the mountains as guerrillas opposing the new president. They joined guerrillas who had started by opposing the reforms of the King. These isolated *Mujahideen* [holy warriors] would later become the basis for nation-wide resistance.

In the 1970s, communism and nationalism were sweeping the planet. The West was in retreat as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia became Communist. Revolutionary Iran threw the west out of the country, the Middle East was in chaos and Chile, Argentina, and El Salvador were tottering on the brink of joining the Communist camp. The future looked red and uninspired US leadership did little to rally the West. The Soviet Union was clearly in ascendancy and Soviet military internationalists were in Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Congo, Egypt, Syria, and Latin America. The Soviet Union was supporting revolutionary cells in West Germany, Italy, Spain, France, and Japan and providing financial aid to Western Communist parties. Communist espionage had

thoroughly penetrated the West. The future looked red, but it was unclear whether it would be a Soviet Red or a Chinese Red. The Soviet Union and China were locked in a deadly contest for leadership of the world Communist movement.

Daoud's regime did not last long. In April 1978, Daoud was overthrown by a Communist coup engineered by army and air force officers who had studied in the Soviet Union. The emergent Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) was poorly run by a faction-ridden Communist party. The new government announced ill-conceived, broad-sweeping reforms (land ownership, women's rights, and money lending) that alienated large sections of the populace, yet did little to implement the reforms, alienating the remaining section of the populace that might have supported them. In 1979, Prime Minister Amin assassinated President Taraki. Taraki was Moscow's man and Amin was not. Amin continued to request Soviet aid, including military intervention to help fight the growing Mujahideen threat. However, Amin did not accept orders from Moscow as readily as his predecessor. The DRA was spinning out of control and Moscow intended to do something about it. They decided to eliminate Amin and put their own candidate in power while using a seemingly reluctant intervention to aid the DRA fight against the Mujahideen as cover. It was a successful cover. The DRA General Staff cooperated with the Soviet General Staff in planning the entry of the initial three-division Soviet force. It was a brilliant operation. At the cost of 72 Soviet dead (44 due to accidents), the Soviets controlled the cities and government of Afghanistan.⁸ Their plan was to hold the cities, garrisons, and airfields while the Armed Forces of the DRA combated the

Mujahideen in the countryside. They anticipated that they would be there for two or three years. Little did they imagine that they were now involved in the middle of a civil war on extremely rugged terrain where the Soviets, not the DRA, would carry the bulk of the combat burden.

The Initial Insurgency

The Soviets invaded in December and there was little initial resistance. However, with the spring thaw, resistance began to mount. Initially, tribal leaders assembled large armies (*lashkars*) that marched on the Soviet garrisons. They were easy targets for Soviet artillery and air power. It became obvious to the tribal leaders that large tribal armies could not oppose the Soviets and DRA, but that guerrilla warfare offered possibilities. They turned to the Mujahideen who were already conducting guerrilla war.

Pre-invasion Soviet military planning estimated that they would need 30-35 divisions to conquer and control Afghanistan completely.⁹ It soon became clear that the initial three Soviet divisions were inadequate. Eventually, the Soviets fielded five and 2/3rds division equivalents in Afghanistan.¹⁰ They needed far more; however, this was the maximum amount that could be supplied over the over-burdened Afghan road network. Soviet efforts to use theater logistics from the Soviet military districts broke down at the Afghan border. Further, the international uproar over the Soviet incursion limited the number of divisions deployed.

The Soviet Union had a good deal of experience with guerrilla warfare. During the 1920s and 1930s, they conducted a successful counterinsurgency in

Central Asia against the *Basmachi*.¹¹ During World War II, the Soviet Union fielded and directed the largest partisan force ever deployed in wartime. Following World War II, the Soviets conducted successful counterinsurgencies in the Ukraine and Baltic Republics. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union provided instruction and support to fledgling guerrilla movements around the planet. Yet, when the Soviets entered Afghanistan, they were unprepared to conduct a counterinsurgency in this theater. Their divisions were designed for conventional war against NATO or China, so they had all their tanks, chemical defense and air defense units with them. The Soviet intention was to hold the operational key terrain and ward off the hostile neighboring states of Pakistan and Iran. The Armed Forces of the DRA were supposed to fight the counterinsurgency. However, as the countryside rose in revolt, it became obvious that the DRA could not handle the counterinsurgency alone and that the Soviets would have to participate--as the main partner.

The initial Mujahideen resistance to the Soviets was based on a popular uprising. Hundreds of small bands took to the field. The guerrillas were local and their leaders were local-village chiefs, tribal leaders, prominent family elders. The revolt was secular and the leadership was secular. The local mullahs and imams might accompany the guerrillas, but seldom in a leadership role. Since the guerrillas were local, the support base was built in. Food, water, shelter, and medical aid were readily available and the neighbors provided intelligence on Soviet and DRA movements. The guerrilla's weapons were what they had on hand--primarily WWI-era British Lee-Enfield.303 bolt-action rifles and older British Martini-Henry single-

shot breech-loading rifles from the 1880s. Lucky units seized DRA district headquarters, looting their arms rooms and liberating AK-47 Kalashnikov assault rifles and some WWII-era machine guns.

Belatedly the Soviets addressed the insurgency. Despite their past experience, they had forgotten their history. They read Mao Tse Tung's aphorism "the guerrilla is the fish that swims in the ocean of the people." The Soviets decided that the way to isolate the fish was to drain the ocean. The Soviet Air Force, which had readily ripped apart the Afghan *lashgars*, was useless against a guerrilla that it could not target. However, the air force could readily target irrigation systems, orchards, crop land, farms, villages, and livestock. The air force went after the Mujahideen support structure.

At this time, Afghanistan was a country of approximately 17 million people. Most lived in the country. Soviet bombing drove six million people out of the country and into refugee camps in bordering Pakistan and Iran. Another 2.3 million became "internal refugees" crowding into the shanty-towns and the suburbs of Afghanistan's cities to escape the Soviet Air Force. The guerrilla now had to carry his weapon, ammunition, food, and water with him. If he was hurt, his closest medical support might be in Pakistan or Iran. The rural social system was turned upside down and the guerrilla's support base was being closed down.

The Soviets soon learned that they did not want to be within 300 meters of the Mujahideen. The 300-meter mark represents the maximum effective range of the Kalashnikov assault rifle, the RPG-7 anti-tank grenade launcher against a moving

target and is well within the danger close area of supporting artillery and air power. The Mujahideen preferred the flat trajectory fight where the bulk of Soviet combat power was negated. Where possible, the Soviets bulldozed orchards, villages, and other cover and concealment some 300 meters back from both sides of the road to create stand-off and aid in counter-ambush. In doing so, they completed the destruction of the rural economy. They laid millions of anti-tank mines around their garrisons, outposts, air fields, and other critical points to keep the Mujahideen at bay.

The Insurgency Matures

The insurgency was in trouble. The Mujahideen were unpaid volunteers who provided their own weapons and food. Their support base was being driven out of the countryside and, in places, it was difficult to get close enough to the Soviets to engage them effectively. The guerrillas needed weapons with greater ranges and destructive capability.

Afghanistan's neighbors were uneasy about the Soviet incursion. Pakistan, bracketed by India and Afghanistan was particularly threatened, since archenemy India was a close friend of the Soviet Union. Pakistan lost Bangladesh in the 1973 war and consequently recast itself from a secular to an Islamic state as a defensive move against India. Pakistan became an Islamic Republic to gain world-wide Islamic support to offset India's overwhelming advantages in manpower and economic viability. Iran was also threatened, particularly since they were fighting a bloody war with Iraq, a good customer and friend of the Soviet Union. Pakistan and Iran began providing aid to the Mujahideen. The United States, Peoples Republic of China,

Britain, France, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates began funneling military and humanitarian aid to the Mujahideen through Pakistan.

Pakistan's assessment was that the Soviet Union had come to Afghanistan to stay and it was in Pakistan's best interest to support those Mujahideen who would never accept the Soviet presence.¹² The Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) began to funnel aid through various Afghan political factions headquartered in Pakistan, with the most fundamentalist factions receiving the most aid.

Pakistan was faced with the difficulty of providing aid to hundreds of guerrilla bands scattered across Afghanistan. How could they distribute arms, ammunition, and training equitably and efficiently? Pakistan decided that such aid would only be distributed through seven major Afghan resistance factions which had set up in exile in Peshawar, Pakistan. The politics of these factions were determined by their leaders' religious convictions--three of which were Islamic moderates and four of which were Islamic fundamentalists. Pakistan required that the various ethnic and tribal Mujahideen groups join one of the factions in order to receive aid.¹³ The Pakistanis favored the most fundamentalist groups and rewarded them accordingly. This aid gave Afghan clerics accompanying the Mujahideen unprecedented power in the conduct of the war and eventually undermined the traditional authority of the tribal and village chiefs.¹⁴

The Mujahideen were unpaid volunteers with family responsibilities. This meant that they were part-time warriors and the spoils of war played a major role in military actions. Usually, one-fifth of the booty taken in an ambush belonged to the

ambush commander and the remainder was divided among the participants. Mujahideen sold captured weapons and equipment in the bazaars to support their families. As the war progressed, mobile Mujahideen groups emerged. The mobile Mujahideen groups were larger and consisted of young (under 25), unmarried, better-trained warriors. Sometimes the mobile Mujahideen were paid. The mobile Mujahideen ranged over a much larger area of operations than the local Mujahideen and were more responsive to the plans and desires of the factions.

The United States and Britain gave their aid in the form of weapons, equipment, and supplies. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates gave their aid in the form of cash. Often the aid that was available was inappropriate for the individual Mujahideen commander. For example, a commander might arrive in Pakistan seeking anti-tank mines, only to discover that no anti-tank mines were available, but heavy machine gun ammunition was being distributed. The commander might have no heavy machine guns, but he would take the ammunition anyway and take it down to the bazaar and sell it. There would be a resultant hue and cry that the Mujahideen were selling aid for personal gain. Actually, what usually happened was that the commander would then take the money to buy the anti-tank mines at the bazaar--where everything always seemed to be available.

Transporting weapons, ammunition, and supplies was also a challenge. Pick-up trucks, mules (in the mountains) and camels (in the desert) were optimum supply transport for the Mujahideen. As the supply convoy would move from one tribal area to another, the tribe would exact a 10 percent toll on the goods. Transport was paid

for in advance. Since the US and Britain gave no cash aid which could be used for transport fees, supplies were sold to pay for transport. Some Mujahideen groups tried to organize their own transport units, but quickly discovered that the local teamsters were strong and aggressive enough to make this an unviable option. Local teamsters hauled for the Mujahideen. As with all teamsters, negotiations were part of the process. The commander may want his supplies delivered to point A. However, no teamster likes to “run bobtail” and wants a return load. The teamster might want to deliver to point B instead, where he could pick up lumber, lapis lazuli, opium, or whatever the return cargo was.

Commanders were responsible for losses of transport mules, trucks, and camels to Soviet actions. Soviet helicopter gunships were quick to attack pack animals and trucks. The introduction of heavy weaponry created a surge in the demand for transport, but there was a decrease, rather than an increase, in available transport. By 1984, there were clearly not enough mules to meet the needs of the insurgency. The United States responded by buying large numbers of American mules to ease the crisis. The American mules were flown over to Pakistan, but there were still problems. The American mules were much bigger than the locals and ate twice as much as the locals. They also carried less--and they began to die from the many virulent diseases endemic to Afghanistan. Attempts to import other pack animals from China and around the Middle East were not much more successful.¹⁵

The Mature Insurgency

Eventually necessity compelled the Mujahideen to build a series of supply depots, supply points, and forward supply points inside Afghanistan to ease their logistics dilemma. They established these in remote, inaccessible areas in mountains and canyons. Tora Bora, Zhawar, and the Shar-i Kot Valley are prime examples. These sites aided supply but cost the Mujahideen mobility since they were forced to defend them. These sites gave the Soviets something to target.

The Soviets were not having an easy time of it either. The Soviets found that it took some 85 percent of their force and DRA forces to provide basic security--guarding cities, industry, airfields, garrisons, and outposts along the supply routes from the Soviet Union. This left 15 percent of the force available to go after the Mujahideen.¹⁶ The forces that fought the Mujahideen were primarily airborne, air assault and Spetsnaz. The two Spetsnaz brigades' primary mission was convoy and caravan interdiction.

Soviet forces were bleeding in Afghanistan, but the biggest threat was disease. Over 60 percent of the Soviet service personnel were hospitalized for disease during their normal two-year tour of duty. Shigellosis, amoebiasis, typhus, cholera, hepatitis, and other water-borne diseases plagued the force. Malaria was also a problem.¹⁷ However, Soviet casualties and disease were hidden from the Soviet people. The Soviet media did an effective job limiting the reporting on Afghanistan to positive events. The Soviet military also kept non-accredited foreign journalists at bay. Further, the hazardous trip inside and the lengthy process to get the story out

discouraged most Western journalists from covering the war effectively. Most preferred long-range reporting from Pakistan, relying on press releases from the factions.¹⁸

Mujahideen offensive tactics included the ambush, the raid, the shelling attack, mine warfare, attacks on strong points, blocking lines of communication, and conducting sieges. Mujahideen defensive tactics included defending against raids, fighting helicopter insertions, defending against a cordon and search, defending base camps, counter ambush and fighting in encirclement. They also developed a set of tactics for the urban guerrilla.¹⁹

Soviet offensive tactics included the combined-arms attack, the advance to contact, the cordon and search, the air assault, the base camp siege, the base camp attack, the clearing attack, the raid, the ambush, the artillery offensive, air interdiction, and encirclement. Soviet defensive tactics included mine warfare, march and convoy escort, strong-point defense, patrolling and mobile defense.²⁰ But wars are not usually determined by tactics as much as they are by logistics and politics.

By 1984, the war was primarily a logistics war with each side trying to strangle the other's logistics while striving to stay supplied and viable. The war was stalemated, but no one in the Soviet Politburo was making any decisions during the "twilight of the General Secretaries." Brezhnev, Chernenko, Andropov--one infirm Soviet leader after another tottered slowly to their deaths. Finally in 1985, a comparative youngster, Mikhail Gorbachev, came to power. Shortly after his assumption of power, the Soviet military launched the bloodiest fighting of the war.

The Mujahideen were badly battered and close to breaking, but the Soviets did not realize it. In 1986, Gorbachev announced “Afghanization” of the war and the eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Soviet combat fell off significantly.²¹

By 15 February 1989, the last of the Soviet combat forces had withdrawn from Afghanistan. However, confident predictions that the DRA would soon collapse after the withdrawal were not realized.²² The DRA outlasted the Soviet Union. The faction-ridden Mujahideen had difficulty converting from a guerrilla force to a conventional force to defeat the DRA and the conventional forces of the DRA controlled the cities and had the technological edge. As long as the DRA conventional forces were intact and in good order, the guerrillas were unable to contest ownership of the cities, lines of communication and airfields effectively.

Mujahideen Lessons Learned

1. Guerrilla warfare is a long-term proposition. Persistence and patience are required for victory. The occupier must be worn-down and demoralized. The battle can be won politically in the homeland of the occupier. Survival is more important than tactical victory.

2. The impact of high-technology weapons, such as jet aircraft and helicopters, can be negated by camouflage, heat shields, decoys and dispersion. However, these systems can have a major impact on the local populace.

3. The support or neutrality of the local populace is essential for logistics support, intelligence and survival. Local guerrillas have a natural advantage. Non-

local guerrillas gain or maintain support by frequently passing units through disputed areas, conducting shelling attacks and mining incidents to depict strength and activity.

4. Sanctuary is essential. Safe areas in Pakistan and Iran were vital to guerrilla bands for supply, medical treatment, resting, training and refitting. The Soviets carefully observed the international borders, although the locals and guerrillas did not.

5. Logistics support is essential, particularly as the insurgency grows and acquires heavy weapons. Logistics support may involve establishing depots and supply points inside the country and then defending them. Cash is often preferred to actual supplies. If aid is given in supplies, cash should also be provided for transport.

6. Close combat is the preferred option. It is best to get close to the enemy for the flat-trajectory fight where the enemy cannot use his artillery, mortars, and aircraft.

7. When deploying heavy weapons, firing sites must be carefully prepared so that the weapons or crews can be quickly moved out of the area or into a bunker or cave. Ambushes, raids, and shelling attacks must be rapidly executed and the sites rapidly evacuated to avoid retaliation.

8. Communications are hard to maintain and readily intercepted. Messengers, visual signals and meetings are more secure than radio.

9. Publicity and media support is essential but tough to attain. Western journalists do not always want to travel to where the fighting is.

10. Adjustments in tactics are necessary only when enemy technology dictates that change. The anti-personnel land mine and the helicopter gunship were new technology that threatened traditional war-fighting and forced changes in guerrilla tactics.

The Insurgency

There was both a religious-based and a secular insurgency. The religious-based insurgency began in the early 1970s on the campus of Kabul University. The Islamic Youth Movement found several adherents, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhanud-din Rabbani. After brushes with the law, they fled to the countryside and then on to Pakistan to oppose the King. When the King was overthrown, other dissidents joined their cause to fight the new president. However, the religious-based insurgency was a relatively small movement.

When the president was overthrown by a Communist coup, the insurgency grew with the addition of guerrillas opposing the atheism of the new movement. However, the main opposition was secular. It was a rural rebellion opposed to the Communist reforms in land ownership, women's rights and rural landlord-renter relations. When the Soviets intervened, the insurgency grew dramatically. Initially, however, it was a secular-led rebellion with the primary goal to expel the Soviets. The fact that the Soviet Union was an atheist state aided the cause. The insurgency became more of a religious struggle as the religious-based aid distribution scheme began to distribute significant amounts of military weapons and supplies to the most fundamentalist factions.

There was no common vision of the type government that a successful insurgency would create. Some factions wanted to restore the monarchy. Others wanted to create a secular republic. Others wanted to create a moderate Islamist state governed by Sharia law. Still others wanted to create an Islamic Emirate governed by strict Sharia law. Some of the most radical insurgents saw future Afghanistan as the center of a radical Islamist movement that would spread across the region and beyond.

The professional military officers who quit the Armed Forces of Afghanistan were generally kept from key leadership roles in the insurgency. The fundamentalist religious leaders saw them as threats to their positions and as being too secular. The secular leaders saw them as threats to their positions. Some military personnel led guerrilla bands, but many more served as staff officers--planning actions, coordinating logistics, conducting training, and providing intelligence analysis.

The insurgency enjoyed popular support throughout the country, but was centered in the rural villages. The more-liberal city dwellers were more tolerant of reform and change, but many still resented the presence of Soviet armed forces. Small urban guerrilla cells formed in the cities, but their freedom of movement, and prospects of survival, were limited. Throughout the insurgency, the guerrillas tried repeatedly to capture and hold the city of Orgun-i in which to proclaim a provisional government, but they never succeeded.

The Mujahideen were joined by foreigners from around the Islamic world. They brought money and international support with them. Their presence caused

friction with some factions, since they considered the foreigners to be prima donnas who were there for Jihad-credit. They were commonly considered ill-disciplined, unwilling to share the burdens of campaigning and had a reputation for executing DRA prisoners in front of video cameras. DRA prisoners were usually conscripts and the Mujahideen usually offered them a chance to switch sides and paroled them home if they did not. The foreigners' slaughter of the conscripts horrified many hardened Mujahideen.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA)

The DRA had most of its support in the cities. Although it tried to follow the Marxist-Leninist model for establishing socialism/communism throughout the countryside, its power in the countryside was limited to army garrisons, province capitals and district capitals, key economic facilities, and main roads. Many of the district capitals were not under DRA control. Several district "governments" might be crowded into one capital since the DRA officials could not govern, let alone survive, in their appointed place of duty.

The DRA, realizing that their atheist trappings were costing support, tried to incorporate Islam into the government. They created a Ministry of Religious Affairs to try to patch over differences and support friendly clergy. To garner the support of non-party members, non-Communist officials were designated throughout the government. However, the DRA government faithfully copied the Soviet model. The KHAD [*Kheda-mat-i-Etal'at-i-Dolati* or State Information Service] was a copy of the KGB--a strong, uniformed secret service that maintained a separate armed

force. The Sarandoy mimicked the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) as an armed police force with military capability. Young Afghan Communists copied the Soviet Komsomol members in trying to rally support to the government while spearheading movements in the countryside. DRA armed propaganda teams visited rural villages to put on plays, provide free food and medical aid and attempt to rally support.²³ The DRA also raised, armed, and funded local militias to protect their villages from the Mujahideen.

The KHAD (the WAD-*Wizarat-i Amaniyyat-i Dawlati* [Ministry of State Security] after 1986), provided the most accurate intelligence on Mujahdeen forces. The KHAD ran agent nets and paid informers to provide intelligence for DRA and Soviet forces to act on. The Soviets relied on more technical intelligence gathering means such as overhead imagery and radio voice intercept. The on-site agent intelligence was local intelligence [HUMINT or human intelligence in the current parlance] and was geared for the tactical fight. The most serious defect of the KHAD intelligence net was that agents were frequently days away from their handlers and by the time they had hiked out with the information, the information was dated and often useless. Still, the KHAD provided the best intelligence available to the DRA and Soviet forces. The KHAD also emulated the KGB in interrogation techniques and infiltration of the DRA Armed Forces. It was the regime's insurance that it would not be replaced in the same fashion that it had replaced the Daoud government.

The Sarandoy served as a national police force, but their armaments surpassed the traditional police arms of pistol, baton, and shotgun. The Sarandoy constituted a

third ground force within the DRA. They had heavy armaments, armored personnel carriers, and a separate command and control system. The DRA Army, KHAD and Sarandoy often worked together out of necessity, but they were separate, rival systems designed to counterbalance one another and prevent regime ouster. It was not an efficient, or particularly effective design, but the DRA was designed for regime survival, not efficiency or effectiveness. Furthermore, the DRA leadership saw their chief threat as internal subversion within the Communist party instead of the rural Mujahideen.

The DRA Armed Forces were also based on the Soviet Armed Forces model, and their organization, equipment, training, and command and control were Soviet-furnished or inspired. Soviet military advisers served down to the separate battalion level. The presence of air defense units, chemical units, armored and mechanized units emphasized that the DRA Army was organized for conventional combat, not counterinsurgency. Many, if not most, of the professional officer corps from the royal and Daoud regimes left to join the resistance or had been purged by the Communists. Many of the officers educated in the Soviet Union also left or were purged. Desertion, poor leadership and poor morale plagued this conscript-based army. DRA outposts were surrounded by dense anti-personnel minefields--emplaced as much to keep the conscripts from deserting as to keep the Mujahideen out. Loyalty within the DRA Army was suspect and riddled with Mujahideen sympathizers and informants. The Soviet military was reluctant to share operational data and planning

with the DRA, since the information was often leaked to the Mujahideen. There were some excellent Afghan Army units.²⁴

The government and economic structure of the DRA were also poor copies of the Soviet Union. Soviet political, bureaucratic, and economic advisers worked with their Afghan counterparts attempting to create another “socialist workers paradise” in Afghanistan. Although token non-Communists occupied some “show place” positions within the government, the Communist party was clearly in control. During the war, the DRA even allowed some non-Communist political parties, but they were controlled and directed by the Communists.

The Soviet 40th Army

The Soviet 40th Army was originally composed of the 5th Motorized Rifle Division and the 180th Motorized Rifle Division (both mobilization divisions) and the 103rd Guards Airborne Division. The first two divisions, drawn from the Central Asian Military District, contained a high number of Uzbeks, Turkmens, Tajiks and Kyrghiz--traditionally Islamic peoples. Shortly afterwards, the 201st Motorized Rifle Division entered the country. It was also drawn from the Central Asian Military District. Only the airborne division was a ready division. The others drew on reservists from the region--mostly Central Asians with some form of Islamic tradition in the family past. Most of these reservists were withdrawn within 12 months of their commitment and replaced by new conscripts drawn from across the Soviet Union. Much has been made of this replacement in the West. The inference drawn was that the Central Asians proved unreliable, sympathetic to their Islamic brothers or even a

fifth column for the propagation of fundamentalist Islam within the Soviet Union.

While there may be some elements of truth in these allegations, the simple fact is that they were reservists and their reserve time was up. The Supreme Soviet would have had to pass a law extending their time and there was no need to do so.

The Soviet 40th Army was outfitted for war on rolling plains with NATO or China. The 40th Army brought its full complement of tanks, air defense artillery, chemical protection units and all the other paraphernalia for conventional war against a modern mechanized force. Soon, the Soviets began sending home tank and air defense regiments and brigades and replacing them with more infantry. Tactics, troop formations and equipment were modified or replaced to meet the onerous conditions of Afghanistan. More helicopters and SU-25 close air support aircraft were brought into the fight. The Soviet Army was an artillery army with a lot of tanks.

Unfortunately for the Soviets, neither the tank nor the artillery piece was to dominate the fight. The Soviets needed lots of light infantry and engineers, which they never had enough of. Soviet war-fighting was built around operational success. The Soviets developed and perfected the operational art during World War II and intended to defeat NATO and China on the operational level. Operational flexibility demands a deal of tactical predictability and rigidity. Battle drills were the basis of Soviet squad and platoon tactics. Afghanistan could not be fought on the operational level. It was a tactical fight that demanded tactical flexibility. The Soviets had to reinvent tactics in the middle of a conflict.

It was also a secret war. During the first two years of the conflict, the Soviet press covered the death of some two dozen servicemen, though thousands had already died. Whenever Afghanistan was mentioned in the Soviet press, it showed happy Soviet servicemen building orphanages, while neglecting to mention their role in filling them. The Soviet public was kept in the dark. When a dead Soviet soldier was returned to his family, the family was sworn to secrecy in order to get the body back for burial. Even the earlier tombstones did not list where the serviceman had died, only that he had died “fulfilling his internationalist duty.”

Afghanistan was not a sought-after assignment. Parents paid hefty bribes to keep their sons away from the conflict. After initial training, conscripts spent the rest of their two-year obligation in the war. Unlike the US experience in Vietnam, the entire officer corps did not go to Afghanistan. Less than 10 percent of the motorized rifle officers served there, but over 60 percent of the airborne, air assault, and Spetsnaz officers served. Interestingly, the tactics of the airborne, air assault, and Spetsnaz changed after the war while the armor and motorized rifle tactics did not.

Soviet Lessons Learned from the War

1. Guerrilla war is a contest of endurance and national will. The side with the highest moral commitment will hold the ground at the end of the conflict. Battlefield victory is almost irrelevant, but important to the populace back home.
2. Air domination is irrelevant unless precisely targeted.
3. Secure logistics and lines of communication are essential.

4. Conventional tactics, equipment and weapons require major adjustment or replacement.
5. Conventional war force structure is inappropriate.
6. Tanks are of limited value except as mobile reserves and a security element in cities. Light infantry and engineers are at a premium.
7. Medical support is paramount.
8. Logistics determines the scope of activity and force size either side can field.
9. The information battle is essential to maintaining external and internal support. The Soviets did this by restricting access to only friendly journalists and keeping the war secret from the world and the Soviet citizens.

The Mujahideen Backers

Sanctuary, training, and logistics support were essential to the viability of the Mujahideen movement. Sanctuary was provided by Pakistan and Iran. Despite the uncertain borders, and the refusal of all Afghan governments to recognize the Durand line, the Soviets conscientiously kept their regular forces from violating the frontier and their air forces from over-flying the border. Naturally, the Mujahideen concentrated supplies and forces just over the border. The Pakistani ISI, the United States and Britain provided training. The United States, Britain, France, Italy, West Germany, China, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates provided logistics support. One of the more controversial systems provided the Mujahideen was the US Stinger shoulder-fired air defense missile. This deadly, man-portable

missile did not knock down anywhere near the number of Soviet aircraft that the Mujahideen and US backers claimed.²⁵ However, this does not mean that the Stinger was ineffective. The Soviets completely revamped their aerial tactics to avoid losses to Stinger. High-performance jet aircraft flew at 15,000 feet where they were safe from the Stinger, but also ineffective. Helicopter gunships no longer ranged over the countryside, but flew in the relatively safe air space above Soviet ground forces. Transport and passenger aircraft kicked out strings of decoy flares during takeoff and landing.

Despite the aid, the Mujahideen backers often had difficulty controlling or directing the actions of the resistance. The independent nature of the Afghans meant that outsiders were not calling the shots. The Mujahideen would cooperate with their backers when it was to their advantage or when the backer withheld aid to force compliance. For example, the Soviets ran tactical pipelines from the Soviet Union down the eastern and western corridors of Afghanistan. They pumped diesel and aviation fuel through these pipelines. The pipelines were an easy target and lost fuel had an immediate effect on the Soviet effort. The Mujahideen had no desire to attack pipelines since there was no glory in it. Their warrior mythos overrode military common sense. The Mujahideen backers bribed, cajoled, or withheld aid in order to get the pipelines attacked.

The backers had even less success in hammering together a workable coalition of Mujahideen to work together over an extended period of time. The Mujahideen were tactical fighters and extended operations had little appeal. The military officers

in the Mujahideen ranks were occasionally successful in mounting and sustaining an operation, but this was rare and limited to the static defense.

Most Mujahideen backers had promised some form of post-conflict aid once the DRA was deposed. Most analysts expected the DRA to collapse within months of the Soviet withdrawal. The DRA outlived the Soviet Union. The Mujahideen guerrillas were never united in their efforts and were unable to unite to destroy the DRA. Many Mujahideen went home. Their fight was with the Soviet invader and they had no interest in who was in control in Kabul. Often guerrillas returned home to join the DRA militia. The guerrillas were unable to change into a conventional military force. Independence, individualism and factionalism plagued these efforts. Gradually, the Mujahideen backers lost interest and turned to other pursuits. When the DRA finally fell and the Mujahideen crowded into Kabul, the backers were elsewhere and the aid never came.

Afghanistan lost over 1.3 million people, the bulk of them civilians, in pursuit of this war. The Mujahideen did not defeat a superpower, but they fought it to a standstill, then stayed in the fight until the Soviets tired and went home. The economy was shattered, the population was scattered in neighboring refugee camps and across the globe. The best and brightest were living in California; Virginia; Germany; Russia, France, and Dubai. The society was shattered. It was no longer a liberal Islamic country under secular rule. Tribal law and mores no longer controlled the rural youth. Now Afghanistan had a fundamentalist Islamic orientation and was rife with schism and lawlessness. The Mujahideen was no longer an unpaid

volunteer. Now, he was the man with the gun who could take what he desired. Anarchy rocked the nation and threatened its neighbors. Pre-war Afghanistan may have had a 10 percent literacy rate. Few children were properly educated during the war and fewer doctors, engineers, teachers, and scientists were produced. Farming was at a standstill due to the loss of irrigation systems, orchards, vineyards, and livestock. Mines and unexploded ordnance cluttered the fields. Warlords battled warlords as Afghanistan took the position as the one of the poorest countries on the planet--the country that led the world in infant mortality and death in childbirth. The Mujahideen could claim victory, but it was a hollow victory indeed--a victory that eventually spawned the Taliban movement and the bloodiest ethnic civil war in Afghanistan's history.

¹The ultimate English-language book for understanding the history, culture, economy, and geography of Afghanistan remains Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, 1978 or 1980 editions).

²Much of this chapter has been extracted from Lester W. Grau, "The Soviet-Afghan War: A Superpower Mired in the Mountains," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 1 (March 2004), 129-151. An excellent account of attempts to build railroads in Afghanistan is Andrew Grantham, "A Knife Pushed Into My Vitals: Railways in Afghanistan, Past and Future," <http://www.ajg41.clara.co.uk/afghanistan.html>.

³Les Grau's estimate based on his definition of literacy--the ability to read a newspaper and write a simple letter. Some estimates are as high as 24 percent, but their definitions of literacy are less stringent. Regardless of the definition, those Afghans who could read and write were clearly in the minority. Lack of literacy does not equal stupidity. Non-literate societies process information differently than literate societies. Afghans learn copious amounts of tribal and family history and genealogy by rote memorization. Many can recite the family genealogy back eight generations on both sides of the family tree. Few Westerners can. Westerners rely on written county records, family bibles, and now the internet to trace their ancestry. In Afghanistan, this knowledge lived in the collective memories of the family and village or else it would disappear. Afghanistan is a nation of poets who cannot read. Have tea with an Afghan and soon you will be getting a history lesson. By the third cup of tea, you are often listening to a poetry recital.

⁴A. E. Snesev, *Avganistan* [Afghanistan] (Moscow: Government Printing Office, 1921).

⁵Yuriy Tikhonov, *Afganskaya Voyna Tret'ego Reykha: NKVD protiv Abvera* [The Third Reich's Afghan War: The NKVD versus the Abwehr] (Moscow: Olma Press, 2003) provides a retrospective look at the battles between the secret services of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in the 1930s and early 1940s.

⁶Leon B. and Leila D. J. Poullada, *The Kingdom of Afghanistan and the United States: 1828-1973* (Lincoln, NE: Dageforde Publishing, 1995), 72-73.

⁷A good source on US construction aid to Afghanistan is Frank N. Shubert, "U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Afghanistan's Highways, 1960-1967," *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management* 117, no. 3 (1991): 445-459.

⁸For a detailed English-language discussion of the overthrow of Afghanistan's government, see Lester W. Grau, "The Takedown of Kabul: An Effective Coup de Main," *Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2003), 291-324.

⁹Makhmut A. Gareev, *Moya poslednyaya voyna* [My Final War] (Moscow: INSAN Press, 1996), 46-47. Soviet divisions, depending on the type, ranged from 10,000 to 13,000 soldiers.

¹⁰The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, trans. and ed. Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 315-322.

¹¹The best English-language account of the fight against the *Basmachi* is in Robert F. Baumann, *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1993).

¹²Material support of the insurgency came from a variety of states with a variety of motives: (a) The United States, smarting from the support that the Soviet Union had provided North Vietnam and the Vietcong during the Vietnam War, looked on aid as a way of reciprocating and giving the Soviet Union "a bloody nose." NATO allies Britain, France, Italy and West Germany provided varying amounts and types of aid in support of the United States effort. (b) China and the Soviet Union were competing for control of the world Communist movement and inroads into the third world. China and the Soviet Union had recently fought each other in border skirmishes along the Ussuri River in the Far East. China aided the insurgency to support its contest with the Soviet Union. (c) Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates supported the insurgency as a Sunni reaction to an atheist invasion of another Sunni state. Clergy within those states, particularly those of the Wahabbi sect, provided private funding, and proselytizing, to the insurgency. (d) Pakistan and Iran helped the insurgents since they felt their own borders were threatened by the Soviet Union. They were also maneuvering politically in order to strengthen their claims to disputed territory with Afghanistan. (e) Islamic clergy in many lands conducted fund raising in support of the insurgency. The Deobandi and Wahabbi sects provided funding as did Sufi and Shia communities. (f) The refugees in the Iranian and Pakistani camps provided aid--not so much financially as morally. Mujahideen families were usually in the camps. The camps were also fertile recruiting grounds for new Mujahideen.

¹³Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *Afghanistan-The Bear Trap: The Defeat of a Superpower* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 1992, 2001), 37-40.

¹⁴The seven factions in Afghanistan were: (1) The Afghanistan National Liberation Front (ANLF)--Jebh-e-Nejat-i-Melli Afghanistan was a moderate party founded by Sebqhatullah Mojadeddi. Primarily secular, it drew from the tribes, the old social order and the Sufi orders of the South. Its strength was in Kunar and Paktia provinces. It has Deobandi links. (2) The Islamic Party (HIH)--Hezb-e-Islamie-i-Gulbuddin founded in 1974 to fight the Daoud government. It later split as cofounders Rabanni and Khalis founded their own factions. Its leader, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar is a fundamentalist internationalist Pashtun. His radical Islamist party recruited heavily from among the government secular school and Kabul religious school graduates. Hikmatyar's party received more outside aid from Pakistan, the United States and Saudi Arabia than any other party. Its strength was in Nuristan, Nangrahar and around Kabul. (3) Islamic Party (HIK)--Hezb-e-Islami-Khalis was founded by Mawlawi Mohammed Yunis Khalis who left Afghanistan for Pakistan in 1973 after the Daoud coup. Khalis is from Nangrahar Province and is very anti-Shia. His most famous commanders included Abdul Haq in Kabul, Haji Abdul Qadir in Nangrahar and Jalladuddin Hagani of Paktia Province. The party is fundamentalist moderate. Its recruits came from graduates of government schools, religious schools of the Gilzai, Khugiangi and Jadran tribes as well as the Kabul and Kandahar regions. It also drew a lot of army deserters. Its strength was in Nangrahar, Kabul, Kunar,

Lowgar, and Wardak provinces. (4) Islamic Revolutionary Movement (IRMA)--Harakat-e-Inqilab-i-Islami was founded by Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi. The party is moderate (traditional Islamist) and primarily Pashtun. It drew recruits from the private seminaries, liberal intellectuals, and the Andar, Gilhzai, Mahmud, Hotak, and Durrani tribes. Its strength was in Lowgar Province and the Helmand valley. General Yahyah Nawroz was one of its most famous commanders. (5) Islamic Society (JIA)--Jamiat-i-Islami was founded by a Tajik, Burhanud-din Rabbani, who fled to Pakistan in 1974. His most famous commanders were Ahmed Shah Masood in the Panjshir valley and Ismail Khan in Herat Province. The party is primarily moderate fundamentalist and dominated by ethnic Tajiks, but has Uzbeks and Pashtun in its ranks. Its recruits came from the religious and secular government schools and northern Sunni religious schools and northern Sufi brotherhoods. Its strength was in northern Afghanistan. It had members throughout Afghanistan but was particularly strong in Lowgar, Samangan, Faryab, Farah and Nimroz provinces. (6) Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan (IUA)--Ittihad-I-Islami was founded by Abd Al-Rab Abdul-Rassul Sayyaf. This used to be called the Etehad-e Islami (EIA) until 1981. The faction is militant fundamentalist and anti-Shia. In the mid-1980s, they again changed their name to the Islamic Union of Afghanistan. The IUA was heavily financed by the Wahhabi sect out of Saudi Arabia. Sayyaf was known for recruiting motivated Arab youths for jihad in his organization. (7) National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA)--Mahaz-e-Melli was founded by Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani. This moderate party attracted a number of former officers from the Afghan Army and moderate technocrats. This royalist party recruited from the landed aristocracy, the tribes and the Sufi brotherhood. The primary power base came from the Zadran, Mangal, Jaji, Ahmadzai, Tareen, Kochi, and Sulemankhel tribes. The party was primarily Pashtun and its strength was in Paktia, Paktika, Ghazni and Kandahar provinces. (8) There were four major factions headquartered in Iran. They were smaller, less well-supplied, primarily Shia and their strength was in the Hazara-section of Afghanistan (the Hazarajat). They were: (a) Revolutionary Council of the Islamic Union of Afghanistan-Shura-i Inqilab-i Ittifaq-i Islami-i Afghanistan was a traditionalist Shia party led by Sayyad Beheshti. It recruited among the Hazara peasants and social elite. Many defecting Afghan Army officers led its ranks. It had wide support in the Hazarajat and Ghazni Province. (b) The Islamic Victory Organization of Afghanistan-Sazman-i Nasr-i Islami-yi Afghanistan was a radical Islamist party led by a council that recruited from young Hazara who were educated in Iran. This pro-Iran party was headquartered in Daykundi. (c) Islamic Movement (HI)--Harakat-i-Islami was founded by Ayatollah Asef Muhsini in Iran as a Shia faction. The party has a traditional Islamic orientation. It recruited educated Shia from all ethnic groups. Its most famous commander was Mohammad Anwari who fought in the Turkmen valley west of Kabul. (d) Army of the Guardians of the Revolution--Sepah-i Pasdaran is a radical Islamist party led by Akbari and Saddiqi. It had very close ties with the Iranian government. It had few fighters but drew from clerics who were disaffected with Beheshti's Shura. Information in this note compiled from J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1986), 87-125; Kamal Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush* (Lahore: Wajidalis, 1991), 63-84; Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), passim; and Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 226-246.

¹⁵George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003), 353-355; Milt Bearden and James Risen, *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown With the KGB* (New York: Random House, 2003), 310-317.

¹⁶This ratio of combat forces available for offensive combat may seem small. Similar statistics for coalition forces are not available, but, considering the number of troops available and the number of camps, airfields, and cities that the coalition currently garrisons, the number of troops available for offensive combat must be well under 15 percent.

¹⁷Lester W. Grau and Dr. William A. Jorgensen, "Medical Support in a Counter-Guerrilla War: Epidemiological Lessons Learned in the Soviet-Afghan War," *U.S. Army Medical Department Journal* (May-June 1995): 41-49.

¹⁸Even with improvements in communications and accessibility, many of the same problems still exist for the willing journalist.

¹⁹Mujahideen tactics are covered in Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau, "The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War" (US Marine Corps Special Study DM-980701, Quantico, 1998).

²⁰Soviet tactics are covered in Lester W. Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996).

²¹Detailed discussion of the Soviet phasing of the war is found in *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, by the Russian General Staff, trans. and ed. by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002). The US introduction of the "Stinger" shoulder-fired air-defense missile is trumpeted in the West as a war-winning technology. Stinger was introduced after the announcement of the planned Soviet withdrawal. Stinger did not down that many Soviet aircraft, but did force a rapid change in Soviet aviation tactics. Jet fighters and bombers no longer flew low altitude, but attacked from 15,000 feet. Helicopter gunships no longer flew free-range hunting over the countryside, but stayed over their own forces. Transports and passenger aircraft did rapid-ascent takeoffs, kicking a belt of heat-emitting flares behind them. Stinger made the application of Soviet air power less effective.

²²The Soviets conducted a superb operation for the withdrawal and continued support of the DRA. For details, see Lester W. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, no. 2 (April-June 2007): 235-261.

²³N. I. Pikov, "Vidi spetspropagandistskoy deyatek'nosti armii Respubliki Afganistan" [Views of the actions of the specialized propaganda elements of the army of the Republic of Afghanistan], Institute of Military History of the USSR Ministry of Defense, *Opit primeneniya Sovetskikh voysk v Respublike Afganistan: Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii* [Experience of the employment of Soviet forces in the Republic of Afghanistan: A Collection of material from a scientific-praxis conference] (Moscow: Military History Institute, 1990), 151-184.

²⁴The 38th Commando Brigade was a premier force until it was destroyed on hot landing zones during the opening of the Second Battle of Zhawar. The 15th Tank Brigade was a first-rate unit that became the regime's ready reaction force, moving from point to point where the demand was the greatest and armor could operate.

²⁵Aleksandr Lyakhovskiy, *Tragediya i Doblest' Afgana* [The Tragedy and Valor of the Afghanistan Veteran] (Moscow: Iskona, 1995), 713-714.

CHAPTER 2.

ENTER THE TALIBAN

The Soviets completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan on 15 February 1989. The withdrawal did not resolve the conflict. The DRA was still in power in the cities and the Mujahideen contested much of the countryside. The Soviet Union continued massive economic, military, and diplomatic support to their ally. The guerrilla forces shrunk as many guerrillas returned home. The jihad against the Russians was over. The former Secret Police Chief, Najibullah, was now the DRA President. He actively recruited returning guerrillas into the DRA militia forces to guard roads and villages. The first major tests of the DRA were just over a year away. The DRA Minister of Defense, Shahnawaz Tani and a major fundamentalist Mujahideen leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, joined forces in March of 1990 in an unsuccessful coup to overthrow the Najibullah government.¹ The DRA smashed the attempt. In April 1990, the Mujahideen massed forces outside of the garrison city of Jalalabad. It was a major Mujahideen attempt to unite as a conventional force and defeat the DRA. An estimated 12,000-15,000 Mujahideen with some 200 multiple rocket launchers, 280 artillery and mortar tubes, and 20 armored vehicles assembled against a DRA force of some 8,000 soldiers, 31 tanks (of which eight were running), 20 BMPs and 86 artillery and mortar tubes. Despite Mujahideen reinforcements, the DRA held out for some two months and then launched a massive counterattack on 5 July. The counterattack shattered the Mujahideen positions and scattered the remaining forces.²

Finally, in 1992, the Tajik commander, Ahmed Shah Masood and the Hezb-i Wahdat Shiite party engineered the downfall of the DRA Najibullah government. This move frustrated a UN plan for the peaceful transfer of power from the communist regime to a transitional government.³ The new government went through several iterations, but Masood and his Panjsher Valley Tajiks remained in charge, sharing limited power with the Hazara and Uzbeks. Afghanistan did not do much better under this arrangement. Afghanistan resembled Germany following the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) after the Treaty of Westphalia fragmented the Holy Roman Empire into over 300 duchies, kingdoms, electorates, city-states, and principalities. Afghanistan was splintered into small areas controlled by local forces. Sometimes the rule of the local militia commander [pejoratively termed “warlord” in the western media] was good and benevolent, but often it was evil.

The Mujahideen had fought the Soviet Union to a stalemate, at the cost of over 1.3 million Afghans. Afghanistan’s infrastructure was destroyed, the economy was shattered and the quarrelsome factions agreed on little. It was time for the United States to honor its commitment by helping restore governance, the economy and the countryside. But the United States did nothing. The United States was changing administrations. The new administration that ran on the campaign slogan, “It’s the economy, stupid,” had no interest in the plight of its wartime ally nor funds to help its recovery. Afghanistan was abandoned and a power vacuum resulted. The liberal Islamic country with the secular government of 1973 was no longer. Afghan tribal society was deformed by the refugee experience and Islamic fundamentalist clergy

were often in leadership positions. Chaos is a mild description of post-war Afghanistan. The Taliban emerged from this chaos.

The Taliban as Government

The Western media has written much about the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. The coverage has included the Taliban's genesis as a political/military movement and its rapid rise to power in the strife-ridden country. Reporters have addressed many important issues including the movement's fairly rigid and puritanical interpretation of Islam, its military and political significance, its human rights violations and its potential for spreading its brand of Islamic extremism to the neighboring countries, particularly to the newly independent states in Central Asia.⁴

In many instances, the description of the Taliban's behavior and the reactions of rival factions and individuals to the Taliban have been over-simplified. The cultural, religious, and political underpinnings of the movement's ideology are keys to understanding its policies and the movement's capacity to establish and administer a viable government in Afghanistan.

On the political side, the Taliban movement coalesced to bring order to a failed state. The original purpose of the Taliban was to bring peace and order to southern Afghanistan. The Taliban's commitment to fighting corruption and lawlessness won them broad popular support. Thousands of young recruits from the refugee *madrasas* (religious schools) across the border in Pakistan swelled their ranks. Many ex-army officers and disaffected former Mujahideen commanders, who resented the continued infighting among former Mujahideen groups also joined. This

popularity led to predominant military might and a tentative legitimacy to rule the country.

On the religious side, the Taliban represented the traditional clergy with historic roots in Afghan society. Talibs [students of the Koran] and Mullahs have historically mobilized the public to oppose both foreign invasion and encroachment on traditional societal values by the state. As the Mujahideen leaders, in pursuit of their personal and factional interests, failed to live up to their commitment to Islam and national ideals, the moral core elements of the Taliban's declared political program paved their way to political power. The Taliban were Sunni Muslim-the majority religious sect in Afghanistan. The Taliban enjoyed financial support from the Wahhabi clergy in Saudi Arabia.

On the ethnic side, the Taliban movement was Pashtun, the plurality ethnic group that ruled Afghanistan for the past two and one-half centuries. During the civil war following the collapse of the Communist government, the struggle for power between rival factions developed ethnic underpinnings. Continued control by the Tajik-led government of Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masood created discontent and a sense of powerlessness among the Pashtun. The emerging Taliban movement began in the Pashtun area of Kandahar and then received extensive support from Pashtun across the country who thought that the movement might restore their national dominance. Even Pashtun intellectuals in the West, who seriously differed with the Taliban on many issues, expressed support for the movement on purely

ethnic grounds. Conversely, non-Pashtun intellectuals opposed the Taliban, again for ethnic reasons.

Beginning in 1994, the emerging Taliban movement gathered military power backed by popular support. They drew their legitimacy from their commitment to end corruption. As they brought security, law and order to the areas under their control, public support grew.

However, the same factors that helped the Taliban to seize control of about 80 percent of the territory in less than four years, mitigated against their efforts to establish an Islamic government in Afghanistan.

In matters of politics, the Taliban's restrictive policies, their lack of administrative skills, their economic failure, their dependence on Pakistan, and their international isolation cost them a lot of popular support that they enjoyed at the beginning.

In matters of religion, their enforcement of a rigid, pre-modern interpretation of Islam, which prevailed mostly in Pashtun rural areas, clashed with accepted Islamic norms in the cities and other more-developed areas. The Taliban's imposition of far-reaching social restrictions changed public perception of the movement. Many came to consider the Taliban as a reactionary and anachronistic force incapable of meeting the challenges of modern life.

In matters of ethnicity, the continued monopoly of power by the Pashtun in the Taliban movement blocked its acceptance as a national force. The opposition was primarily ethnic Tadjik, Uzbek, and Hazara. The Hazara had another reason to

distrust the Taliban since they are Shia Muslim. These three aspects--political, religious, and ethnic-cultural--showed that the Taliban conquest of most of the country did not mean the end of Afghanistan's misery, nor did it mean peace.

Despite negative press coverage in the West, there were many positive aspects to the Taliban cause. First, the Taliban brought order, security, and purpose to large sectors of Afghanistan. Second, the Taliban disarmed large sectors of Afghanistan and brought hundreds of local commanders (warlords) to heel. Third, the Taliban tried to impose peace. However, as the Taliban became more of an ethnic movement, the opportunity for real peace lessened as the Taliban were determined to impose their particular beliefs and ethnic dominance on the entire country. The Taliban rejected peace and unification proposals from many sources, including moderate Afghan Islamic leaders. The Taliban firmly believe that what they are doing was right and the only way. This set the movement in ideological rigidity and made them reluctant to change. Further, should they compromise, they ran the risk of splitting the movement and disintegrating into factions.

The Taliban could not rule Afghanistan exclusively for the following reasons: The Taliban brokered many of their conquests through moral persuasion, bringing peace and security to areas controlled by corrupt petty-warlords, buying out certain local commanders and other arrangements with a war-weary populace. The ultra-traditionalist Taliban imposed strict Islamic law which in many cases included banning television, music, smoking, women's schools, games, chess, kite-flying, and anything else that could be construed as entertainment. They tried to disarm the

populace. The Taliban imposed their parochial interpretation of *Shari'a* [Islamic law] and cited it to stone women suspected of adultery, to death and to hack off the limbs of thieves. Many people who have lived under Taliban rule found the atmosphere stifling.

The Taliban had little practical experience in government and much of their leadership was barely literate. The leaders were primarily rural clerics. Without participation from other groups, what government there was ground to a halt. There was little-enough talent to draw from. Pre-war Afghanistan barely had more than a ten percent literacy rate. Many of the best and brightest had emigrated.

The Taliban represented only the largest ethnic group, but hardly the mores of that group. Afghanistan, once one of the most liberal of Islamic societies, wanted peace but was not eager to live under a puritanical regime which controlled every facet of life. Further, all tribes and ethnic groups wanted representation.

Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates recognized the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.” Its seat at the United Nations was held by the opposition. Some of its nervous neighbors (Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as India and Russia) felt that Pakistan was behind the Taliban (and supported the Taliban to further their own national objectives in the Northwest Frontier Province). Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the military intelligence agency that was active in providing aid and training to the Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War was closely involved with the Taliban. Pakistan did not want a strong, competent Afghanistan to challenge its western and southern borders. Pakistan’s primary

concern is India and Pakistan wanted to stay focused on India. Pakistan wanted a friendly cooperative western neighbor that would support its policies and not challenge its borders. Pakistan supported and funded the Taliban, with the assumption that the ISI could always control the Taliban. It was a wrong assumption.

The Taliban were accused of condoning production of narcotics. While the use of drugs is not allowed by the Islamic religion, it brought the Taliban cash at the expense of “infidel” society and led to the deterioration of that society. With Afghanistan’s poppy fields rivaling the “golden triangle,” the world did not consider this view favorably. However, public Taliban statements condemned the use and production of drugs and actually curtailed narcotics production for a year. Their goal was to gain the UN seat held by the opposition. This “altruism” is tainted by the fact that the Taliban had a glut of narcotics warehoused and were faced with a potential catastrophic fall in narcotics prices without such “moral” intervention. When the UN failed to transfer Afghanistan’s seat in the UN to the Taliban, they resumed narcotics production after reversing the drop in street value for narcotics.

The United States was much less committed to and much less involved with the future of Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal. After Osama bin Laden was booted out of Sudan, he established his headquarters in Afghanistan and reached an accommodation with the Taliban. US non-involvement in Afghanistan left him a sanctuary. When the US embassies were bombed in East Africa, the United States held Osama bin Laden responsible and demanded his extradition. The Taliban refused, replying that under the laws of traditional Pashtun hospitality, they could do

no less for their staunch supporter during the Soviet-Afghan War. United States missile attacks and press attacks on Afghanistan for harboring terrorists further poisoned the relationship.

Most international organizations withdrew from Afghanistan and ceased to provide aid due to the lack of security and the Taliban policy toward women. This policy also prevented recognition by many governments of the world.

The Taliban and the Teamsters, the Drug Lords and Fundamentalist Islam

Afghanistan's geographic location has always been important to regional trade. The Silk route linking China and Europe in the Middle Ages ran through Afghanistan and Central Asia. In 1950, Pakistan granted permission for Afghanistan to import duty-free goods through the port of Karachi under an Afghan Transit Trade (ATT) agreement. Truckers would pick up sealed containers in Karachi, drive through Quetta and the Bolan Pass into Afghanistan. Some goods would go to Kabul for sale, but the bulk would return to Pakistan for sale in Pakistani markets. Pakistani customers could thus buy inexpensive, duty-free goods. The ATT expanded to other Afghan cities during the 1980s DRA rule. When the DRA collapsed, the ATT expanded to the newly-independent countries of Central Asia.⁵

The chaos of Mujahideen rule played havoc with the transportation industry. Dozens of non-government toll stations were set up on the roads to shake-down drivers for tolls and goods. The Quetta-based transport "mafia" was unhappy with this situation and sought safe routes through Afghanistan to Iran and Turkmenistan. The Bhutto government in Islamabad, Pakistan also supported this goal.⁶

The Quetta mafia began to provide financial aid and a monthly retainer to the Taliban. As the Taliban expanded their control, the Taliban demanded more monies. These monies eventually approached four million US dollars per month, in addition to the individual truck tolls that the Taliban collected from every driver. Transport fees were the Taliban's main source of official income. In return for these fees, the Taliban provided secure routes to Iran, Turkmenistan, and by extension Central Asia and Russia. Trade expanded tremendously. After the Taliban took Kabul, the average truck toll was 6,000 rupees (\$150) for a truck traveling from Peshawar to Kabul. Under the old regime, the trucker would have paid 30,000-50,000 rupees. The Quetta mafia cemented their relationship by assisting Taliban leaders in purchasing vehicles and joining the transport business.⁷

Transportation was not the only source of Taliban funds. Narcotics provided a major source of funding for the Taliban. The Koran forbids Muslim production or use of intoxicants, but the Taliban sanctioned the production of opium. In the words of Abdul Rashid, the head of the Taliban's anti-drug task force, "Opium is permissible because it is consumed by *kafirs* [unbelievers] in the West and not by Muslims or Afghans."⁸ The Taliban anti-drug task force spent its time suppressing the conversion of opium to hashish which is used by Muslims and Afghans. The Taliban milked their narcotics cash cow by declaring a *zakat* (charity tax) on opium. *Zakat* is a normal mandatory tax of 2.5 percent of wealth levied on Muslims. The money is supposed to be used for charitable purposes. The Taliban *zakat* on a truckload of opium was 20 percent of the value and it went straight into the Taliban

coffers! Under Taliban encouragement, the production of opium soared to rival that of Burma--the leading producer. Much of the opium was converted to heroin.⁹ The United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) estimated that in 1995, Afghan-Pakistani drug exports were worth some 50 billion rupees (\$1.35 billion) a year. ATT and smuggling brought an addition \$3 billion to the Afghan economy.¹⁰ The Taliban drug and ATT monies were further augmented with Deobandi and Wahabi contributions and Al Qaeda contributions.

In 1996, the *raison d'être* of the Taliban in Afghanistan changed dramatically. The Taliban mission of bringing peace and order to Southern Afghanistan was accomplished. Their coffers were full. They had captured Jalalabad and Kabul. Their new mission was to purge Afghanistan of non-Taliban, non-Pashtun elements. Taliban forces poured into Kabul from their strong points in Kandahar and the south and began to push north, northeast, and northwest.

The Taliban Military

Beginning in 1994, the Taliban leadership formed its military first as a force to bring peace to southern Afghanistan. The puritanical Sunni militia core element was supported extensively by the Pashtun masses that had been victimized by infighting and lawlessness and longed for an end to chaos in a broken state and looked for a resumption of Pashtun national dominance. Pakistan provided significant support to the Taliban as did ethnic Pashtun Pakistanis. Within four years, the Taliban controlled over 90 percent of the country--defeating the forces of Pashtun Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (Hezb-e-Islamie-i-Gulbuddin), Uzbek Abdul Rashid Dostum

(Jonbesh Mili Islami), and the Hazara Hezb-e Wahdat. The remnants of these forces, plus those of Pashtun Abd Al-Rab Abdul-Rassul Sayyaf joined with Ahmed Shah Masood, the Tajik commander under the so-called Northern Alliance (United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan).¹¹ When the Taliban forced Ahmed Shah Masood out of Kabul, the nature of the Taliban changed from being a force to bring peace to southern Afghanistan to an ethnic Pashtun force seeking to dominate the country. The longest, bloodiest ethnic civil war in the history of Afghanistan ensued.

The Taliban was not a guerrilla force nor was the Northern Alliance. Rather, they were conventional forces employing mounted rifle/light cavalry tactics based on Toyota pickup trucks and left-over Soviet kit. Their formations were shallow and linear. The Taliban were not Mujahideen, although many of the commanders were former Mujahideen. The bulk of the combatants were the “lost boys”--the children of the refugee camps who had grown up without tribal lore, law, and discipline. Some had found free education in the fundamentalist Deobandi and Wahabi *madrassas* that had sprung up along Pakistan’s western border, but many more were uneducated and unemployed with few prospects. Given a Kalashnikov and a “holy” cause, these youngsters became zealous combatants.

The Army of Afghanistan no longer existed, but the Taliban and Northern Alliance expropriated the unit designations of the old regime. The Central Army Corps of Kabul, the 2nd Army Corps of Kandahar, the 3rd Army Corps of Paktia, the 4th Army Corps of Herat and subordinate divisions and regiments graced the Taliban, although they did not have the mission, size, organization, equipment, or training of

the original army units. The Parwan 5th Corps and Northern 6th Corps lived on in the Northern Alliance, but also had none of the attributes of the original. Forces merely adapted the unit designations of the old military bases. Actual units varied in size from a few dozen to several hundred, depending on the influence of the leader and available equipment. Larger units had artillery and armored vehicles. Several units were grouped together temporarily for major combat actions.¹² There was no unifying doctrine, tables of organization and equipment or standardized training. Training was a local problem and depended on the background and instincts of the local Taliban commander. There was enough ammunition and small arms for everyone. Maintenance, however, was a problem and spare parts were problematic.

Al Qaeda Armed Forces

Al Qaeda forces were made up of foreigners--primarily Arabs and Pakistanis. They were a cut above the foreigners who had fought *jihad* with the Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War. During the war, most Mujahideen wanted little to do with the foreigners. They viewed them as spoiled, soft, undisciplined, and interested only in *jihad* credit. There were some Mujahideen who welcomed the "Arabs" and their cash. Abd Al-Rab Abdul-Rassul Sayyaf's Ittihad-I-Islami--Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan (IUA) did. Hezb-e-Islamie-i-Gulbuddin--the Islamic Party (HIH) of Gulbuddin Hikmatyar also welcomed Arab and Pakistani jihadists--who then joined HIH in fights against other Mujahideen. The IUA and HIH were heavily financed by the Wahhabi sect out of Saudi Arabia. Sayyaf was known for recruiting motivated Arab youths for *jihad* in his organization and had close ties with

Osama Bin Laden during the Soviet-Afghan War. The faction is militant fundamentalist and anti-Shia but lost its ties with the “Arabs” when Sayaff joined the Northern Alliance. Hikmatyar is Pashtun, but did not want to share power with the Taliban, so he did not get the “Arab” volunteers who joined the Taliban. Hikmatyar fought the Taliban and lost. He did not join the Northern Alliance, although some of his followers did. Hikmatyar had fought most of the Northern Alliance commanders in the past and was *persona non grata* in the Northern Alliance.

Malawi Nasrullah Mansoor, the head of the Shar-i Kot Valley, was another exception to the “no foreigners” policy. During the war, he welcomed the foreigners and their money. Indeed, he financed his war with Wahhabi and Deobandi cash, although he was a member in good standing with Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi’s Harakat-e-Inqilab-i-Islami--Islamic Revolutionary Movement (IRMA). Following his assassination in 1993, his son Mullah Saifur Rahman Mansoor, took over the valley and the links with foreign cash. He turned the valley into an Al Qaeda support facility, forcing out the locals and providing a place for Al Qaeda to train and bring their families. He joined the Taliban and served as the commander of the military garrison at Kargha, near Kabul until the collapse of the Taliban regime.¹³

The forces of Al Qaeda were different than the foreign *jihadists* of the Soviet-Afghan War. They were trained, disciplined, organized, and well-led. Some were veterans of the Soviet-Afghan War, Somalia, Kashmir, and other hot spots. Some had trained in the Afghanistan training camps built by Osama Bin Laden, that trained volunteers bound for Chechnya and the Kashmir.¹⁴ Most went directly to Al Qaeda-

run training camps immediately upon arrival in Afghanistan. At the camps, the combatants learned combat skills, a standardized way of doing things and military discipline. Military discipline was the primary differential between Taliban and Al Qaeda forces. Al Qaeda had it. The Taliban did not. Consequently, Al Qaeda forces were often used to spearhead attacks since their cohesion, standardized training, and discipline marked them as better forces on the battlefield.

Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan were roughly divided into two groups--the maneuver combat group and the security group. The maneuver combat group fought with the Taliban against the Northern Alliance. The 55th Brigade was the best known of the Al Qaeda maneuver forces. It was normally based out of the old Rishkor army garrison near Kabul and had gained a reputation by massacring Shia Hazaras in the north.¹⁵ The size of the 55th fluctuated between 300 and 800. It represented the best-disciplined and best-trained element in the Al Qaeda and Taliban forces and was usually used to spearhead Taliban offensives against the Northern Alliance.

The Al Qaeda security group protected Osama Bin Laden. After his expulsion from Sudan, Osama returned to Afghanistan and lived in Jalalabad from May 1996. He developed a friendship with Mullah Omar and moved to Kandahar in 1997, with his three wives, 13 children, and a large entourage.¹⁶ They moved into Tarnak Farms, a large, once fairly-modern complex used to produce quality seed for Afghan agriculture but now a garrison and training camp that had earlier housed troops of the DRA. Unconfirmed reports state that Osama Bin Laden cemented his relationship with Mullah Omar by giving him \$3,000,000 and his just-teenaged daughter in

marriage. Other unconfirmed reports have Osama Bin Laden marrying one of Mullah Omar's pubescent daughters.

Other Armed Forces

There were other forces that trained in Afghanistan that were not necessarily part of Al Qaeda or the Taliban. Uzbeks from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Uigher separatists from China's Xiangang Province had a sizable presence. The Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Al-Ansar Islamic Movement also maintained training camps in Afghanistan.¹⁷ Kurds from Turkey, Yemenis, Bangladeshis, Malaysians, Sudanese, Kenyans, Algerians, Filipino Moros, and African-American Muslims added to this international presence. Many of these people were not training to fight with the Taliban, but rather in their own or in other foreign countries. The Harakat ul Ansar political party from Pakistan used their Afghan camps to train Pakistani and Arab combatants for fighting Indian forces in the Kashmir.¹⁸

By 2000, there were fourteen separate jihadist groups training or working in Afghanistan. Abu Mus ab al-Suri lists the Uzbeks of the IMU, the Uigher separatists and a combined Turkish/Kurdish force. Among the Arabs, al-Suri lists Al Qaeda, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, The Islamic Fighting Group from Morocco, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad Group, the smaller Egyptian Islamic Group, the Algerian Jihadi formation, the Tunisian Jihadi formation, the formation of Mujahideen from Jordan and Palestine, the Khalden camp (estimated to have trained 20,000

combatants), the Shaykh Abu Khabab al-Masri training camp (which specialized in the production and use of chemicals and explosives, and the al-Ghuraba camp.¹⁹

The Northern Alliance (The United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan)

The United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (renamed the Northern Alliance by the Taliban and picked up as an easier shorthand by the West) was a marriage of necessity. The Taliban defeated the forces of Pashtun Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (Hezb-e-Islamie-i-Gulbuddin-HIG) in Jalalabad, conquering that city in September 1996 and then moved on the capital city of Kabul. Kabul was controlled by a Tajik, Burhanud-din Rabbani, the founder of Jamiat-i-Islami-Islamic Society (JIA). Rabbani's defense minister was the famous commander Ahmed Shah Masood. Another of his famous commanders, Ismail Khan, controlled Herat. When the Rabbani government was forced out of Kabul by the Taliban, they made common cause with other ethnic forces that had been defeated by the Taliban-Uzbek Abdul Rashid Dostum (Jonbesh Mili Islami) and the Hazara Hezb-e Wahdat. The remnants of these forces, plus those of Pashtun Abd Al-Rab Abdul-Rassul Sayyaf, and some of the Pashtun HIG remnants joined with Ahmed Shah Masood, under the so-called Northern Alliance (United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan).²⁰ Thus, the United Islamic Front represented more than the northern peoples and was an alliance of survival in a bloody ethnic civil war.

The Northern Alliance was not much of an alliance and frequently the leaders of the various ethnic groups quarreled with one another. Sometimes they fought and

occasionally the ethnic groups fought internal battles for control. The Tajiks ran their logistics back across the Amu Darya River into Tajikistan itself. The Uzbeks ran their logistics lines back into Uzbekistan. The Hazara, being Shia, looked west toward Iran for aid. The Northern Alliance was backed by Russia, Iran, and India and tacitly backed by Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The battles between the Taliban and Northern Alliances seesawed back and forth, but the Northern Alliance was slowly, inexorably being crowded out of the country. Taliban forces entered non-Pashtun regions and carried out brutal massacres and atrocities against the populace. The locals responded in kind when and where they could. Northern Alliance requests for assistance from the West were generally ignored, although Russia, Iran, and India provided some aid. By fall of 2001, the Northern Alliance was holding on by a shoestring and waiting for the winter snows to slow down the Taliban advance.

On 9 September 2001, two Belgian journalists, who were born in Morocco, were allowed to interview Ahmad Shah Masood, the Tajik Northern Alliance Commander. Masood was one of the major commanders in the war against the Soviets and now held the alliance together. The interview room was large with Western furniture--a small, two-seat sofa, several chairs, and a coffee table. Masood was joined by Khalili, his personal advisor; Engineer Aref, head of intelligence; and Dr. Abdullah, foreign affairs. The clean-shaven journalists, who had been waiting several weeks, stepped into the room. They were dressed in the baggy trousers and long shirt of the Pakistani *Shalwar Kameez* with black sleeveless vests. The

cameraman carried in a tripod, camera, battery pack and other gear. He took a long time setting up.²¹

The journalists were not Belgian, nor were they journalists. They were Al Qaeda operatives and their video camera, stolen in France in 2000, was crammed full of explosives. During their interview, they detonated the bomb killing one Arab and wounding everyone else. Masood died of the blast two days before the attack on America.

¹Makhmut A. Gareev, *Moya poslednyaya voyna* [My final war] (Moscow: INSAN Press, 1996), 132-150.

²*Ibid.*, 237-251.

³Ali A. Jalali, "Afghanistan: The Anatomy of an Ongoing Conflict," *Parameters* (Spring 2001), xx. The Hezb-i Wahdat party is a consolidation of the four Iranian-based factions discussed in chapter 1. The consolidation took place in 1991. Kamal Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush* (Lahore: Wajidalis, 1991), 78.

⁴Much of this section developed from Ali A. Jalali and Lester W. Grau, "Taliban—A Model for 'Islamicising' Central Asia?," *The Cyber Caravan*, 6 March 1999.

⁵Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 190.

⁶*Ibid.*, 190-191.

⁷*Ibid.*, 191. The main loser in the Taliban transport arrangement was the government of Pakistan. Pakistan lost major customs revenue, its border and government officials were thoroughly corrupted and the Pakistani black market zoomed. Ahmed Rashid covers this chaos in pages 192-195. Author Les Grau was in the Hyatabad bazaar outside Peshawar in 1996 and observed the sprawling black market where everything was for sale and there was no government control or presence.

⁸*Ibid.*, 118.

⁹*Ibid.*, 118-120.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹Ali A. Jalali, "Afghanistan: The Anatomy of an Ongoing Conflict," 85-98.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³BBC News, "Profile: Leader of Al-Qaeda's Last Stand," 7 March 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1860199.stm (accessed 3 February 2006).

¹⁴Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 380.

¹⁵Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, 139.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 133.

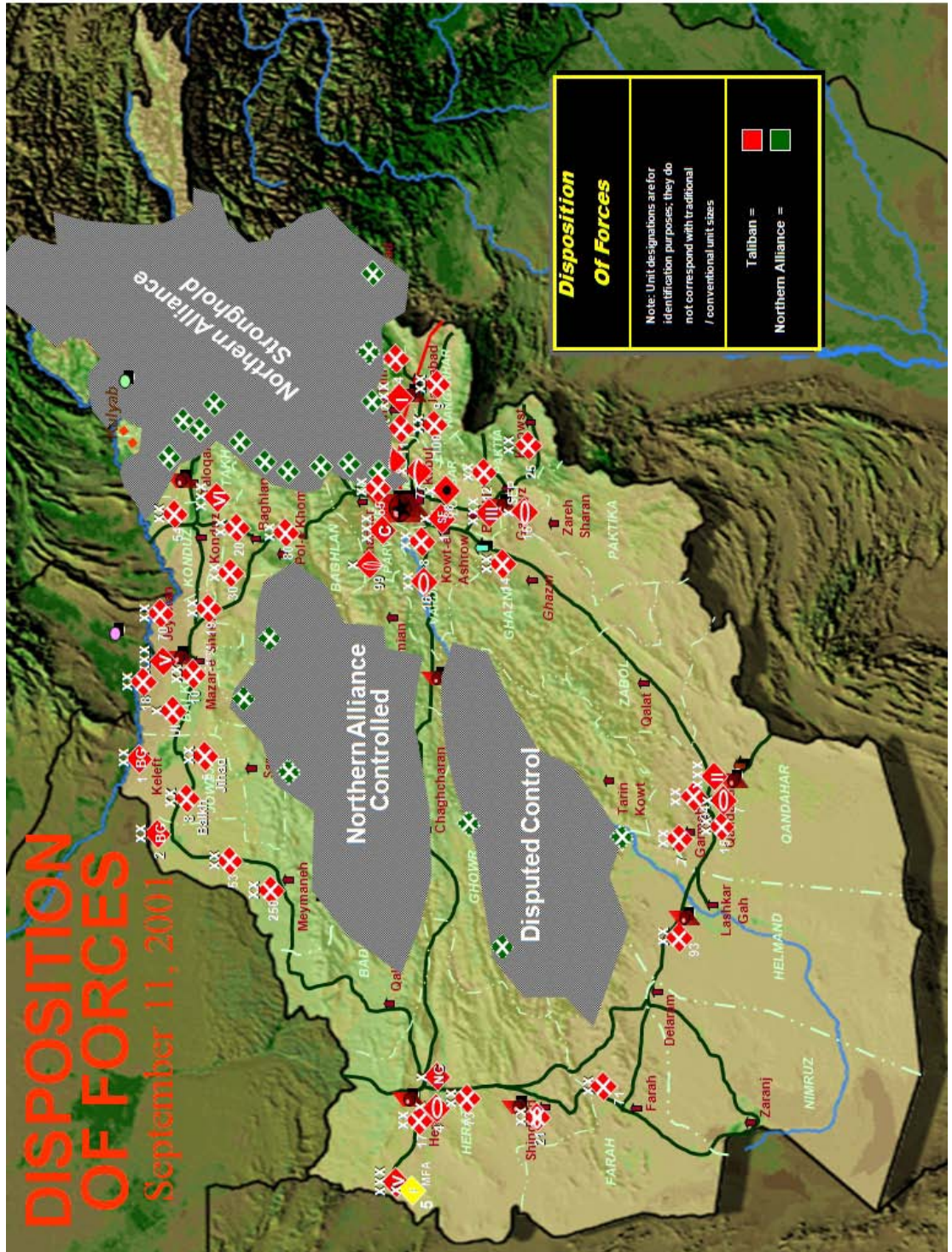
¹⁷Adam Robinson, *Bin Laden: Behind the Mask of the Terrorist* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 239-240.

¹⁸Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, 134.

¹⁹Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 246-250.

²⁰Ali A. Jalali, "Afghanistan: The Anatomy of an Ongoing Conflict," 85-98.

²¹Gary C. Schroen, *First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 3-8.



CHAPTER 3.

9/11 AND THE TAKEDOWN OF THE TALIBAN REGIME

Tuesday, 11 September 2001

Fort Campbell, Kentucky

Being a light infantryman is like being a professional athlete. Regardless of your particular skills, you have to be in peak physical shape to use your skills effectively. Unlike a professional athletic team, everyone in the light infantry has to be in shape, the pay is worse and the penalty for losing is much higher. There are no paunchy coaches in the light infantry. Whether you are 18 or 48, you have to be able to run for endurance; to do broken field running; to do repetitious push-ups, sit-ups, and pull-ups; and to march forever carrying seventy, eighty, ninety or more pounds on your back and shoulders. It is tough enough being a young infantryman and meeting the physical standards. When you are an older infantryman, it is really tough. Colonel Francis J. Wiercinski, the Commander of the 3rd Brigade, 101st Air Assault Division was out with some of his troops on the morning of 11 September, 2001. It was already hot and hazy. Sweat poured off Frank as he did PT (physical training) with his troops, proving once more, that the old man could hang in there and still best many of the youngsters. After the morning workout, the former West Point quarterback jumped into his pickup truck and drove off post to his home. While he was showering, the phone rang. A friend was calling and asked if he knew what had happened.

“No.”

“Turn on the TV.”

Frank turned on the television. The first tower of the World Trade Center was burning and as he watched, a second plane slammed into the World Trade Center. Frank’s brigade was destined for more than stateside duty. His “Rakkasans” were a famous unit and were getting yet another rendezvous with destiny.¹ Frank would soon send a battalion to Pakistan to guard Jacobabad Airfield. On Christmas Day, he and his advance party would fly to Kandahar, Afghanistan to prepare the way for the Rakkasans to follow.²

The Deserts of Kuwait

It was brutally hot in Kuwait and he missed the green hills of Fort Campbell, Kentucky. LTC Chris Haas was the Commander of the 1st Battalion, Fifth Special Forces Group stationed in Fort Campbell. His battalion was on “green cycle” which meant that his soldiers were in a busy deployment cycle. The Fifth Special Forces Group specializes in the Middle East and has many Arabic speakers. One of Chris’ companies was here in Kuwait for Operation Desert Spring. Other detachments were scattered throughout the Middle East and Central Asia training with the local forces. When the news arrived about the attack on America, he and his men were ready to get into the fight, but they were also stuck. Nothing was flying. It took over a week for Chris to get back to Fort Campbell, get his command assembled and go to Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa to join in planning for the deployment of his battalion. He eventually left for

Uzbekistan on 12 October, his son's birthday. On 26 October, he was in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley where he helped control four Special Forces teams (ODAs-Operational Detachment Alphas) already on the ground. His battalion would follow him and move into southern Afghanistan.³

Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia

Captain Nate Self, a wiry, tough infantryman grew up in Central Texas in a small town near Waco. He lived there until he graduated from high school and went to the United States Military Academy at West Point. He was commissioned in the infantry and married his high school sweetheart two weeks after graduation. He was stationed in Germany and went to Kosovo as a scout platoon leader. After Kosovo, he applied for assignment to the tough 75th Ranger Regiment. He was accepted and became a platoon leader in the 1st Battalion near Savannah. On 11 September 2001, he had almost five years in the army and a two-month-old baby. By 31 December, he and his platoon were in Bagram, Afghanistan while his wife and baby were back in Central Texas.⁴

Fort Drum, New York

Major General Frank L. "Buster" Hagenbeck was a light fighter--all his assignments were with light infantry units. He was on his third assignment to the famous 10th Mountain Division--this time as the division commander. On 11 September, he had been in command for a month and four days. Unlike most divisions, the 10th was short a brigade--it only had two. And the 10th Mountain Division was seldom at home in upstate New York. Right now, the division was

spread across the globe in eleven countries. Fully two-thirds of the division was already deployed in Kosovo, the Balkans, the Sinai, across the Persian Gulf region, and Central Asia. There were only two combat battalions on post.

As he gathered his remaining troops and sent them off to guard critical installations, General Hagenbeck sensed that his division might soon be involved in Afghanistan. He arranged to have Dr. Bob Baumann, a noted Central Asian and Afghan specialist from Fort Leavenworth come out to give an OPD (Officers' Professional Development) full-day session on Afghanistan in October. During the middle of the session, General Hagenbeck was summoned to the secure voice telephone to talk to the XVIII Airborne Corps commander. He was ordered to send a battalion to Karshi-Kanabad (K2) Airbase in Uzbekistan, just north of Afghanistan. On 7 October, the 1-87th Infantry Battalion left for K2. LTC Paul La Camera, the battalion commander, would next see General Hagenbeck at Thanksgiving dinner on the austere former Soviet airbase. Army Chief of Staff, General Eric K. Shinseki, flew in with General Hagenbeck to have dinner with the troops. When General Hagenbeck returned to Fort Drum, he found out that he and his division headquarters would deploy to Karshi-Kanabad to serve as the ground tactical headquarters.⁵

Edmonton, Canada

Friends of Pat often saw him with a black eye, bruises or a body part in plaster. A skilled practitioner of the martial arts, Pat was always sparring and pushing himself to the limits. It was appropriate for the leader of one of Canada's toughest light infantry units. Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Stogran commanded the 3rd Battalion

of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3PPCLI). The future of light infantry in the Canadian Army was in doubt, but Pat kept pushing his folks to ready them for combat. The Canadian Army had not fought since the Korean War and, in the interim, had developed a reputation as excellent peacekeepers. The lawmakers in Ottawa looked at humanitarian missions and peacekeeping as some of the primary functions of their army. Pat seemed to be out of step with the times. However, on 11 September, Canada was wondering if they were next on the terrorists' hit list and rugged warriors seemed to be a good thing to have after all. The 3PPCLI was Canada's immediate reaction unit and Pat was ordered to ready his battalion to join the British contingent preparing for Afghanistan. However, the British were not particularly keen on having Canadian infantry along and the orders were changed. Pat learned that his battalion would now join the Americans bound for Afghanistan.⁶

Fort Campbell, Kentucky

Major Dennis Yates is a New Jerseyite, a proud artilleryman and the ultimate "go-to" guy. He was assigned as the fire support officer to the 3rd Brigade, 101st Air Assault Division in April 2001. On 11 September, he joined the rest of the shocked Rakkasans as they prepared for whatever would follow. Immediately, the emphasis was on installation security and rugged training. Dennis was key in helping the brigade train. As he prepared the brigade for deployment, he noticed that the brigade's request to bring along its supporting artillery battalion had been denied. An expeditionary force never deployed without artillery, but the higher powers had

decided that the Rakkasans were going to Afghanistan without any! Denny was going to be an artilleryman without any artillery.⁷

Fort Drum, New York

John Lockwood was celebrating his birthday on the 11th of September. John is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Staffordshire Regiment--a proud infantry regiment in the British Army. In his 26 years of service, he had been posted overseas in Northern Ireland, Hong Kong, Brunei, Belize, and Germany. Now he and his family had been posted overseas again. This time they were part of the 10th Mountain Infantry Division in upstate New York. They arrived on the 12th of August and were still getting settled in. John was the new British liaison officer to the division. There was one other foreign liaison officer with the division, Major Hector Preschi from Argentina. Everyone expected the two of them to be at odds as an aftermath of the Falklands (Maldives) War, but they got along famously. In November, both of them would accompany the division headquarters to K2 and later into Afghanistan.⁸

Al Jaber Airbase, Kuwait

Matt Neuenswander is a big guy--a tall, sandy-haired, broad-shouldered West Kansan. He knows his way around the cockpits of the USAF F-16 Fighter-Bomber and the A-10 Close Air Support aircraft. He also knows more about the US Army than most air force jet jockeys since he is a Fellows graduate of the prestigious, US Army School of Advanced Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He finished his Masters Degree in Military Art and Science at Fort Leavenworth before reporting for duty in July 2001 as the Deputy Commander of the 332nd Expeditionary

Air Group in Kuwait. The 332nd, which traces its lineage to the historic all-black Tuskegee Airmen, had been flying on Operation Southern Watch--patrolling the airspace over a hostile Iraq. Matt was no stranger to the Middle East with previous tours in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. On the afternoon of 11 September, Matt was having a meeting with some 60 members of his evaluation team. The Chief of Intelligence came into the meeting. "Hey, a plane just crashed into one of the twin towers."

"We'll be done here in five minutes. Go back and see if there are any alerts or if we are increasing our THREATCON or anything else." As the meeting concluded, the Chief of Intelligence returned.

"Turn on the TV. Another plane has just crashed into the other twin tower."

Matt put out a recall to all personnel and increased the unit THREATCON. The base was plenty secure and had armed helicopters, A-10s and a security force on alert, but it was still a good idea. Soon the 332nd would be flying into battle--this time over the high mountains of Afghanistan.⁹

Paterson, New Jersey

PFC Shkelqim Mahmuti was home on leave. A "born-in-the USA" Muslim with Albanian parents, Mahmuti had joined the Army to turn his life around. Growing up in New Jersey, he had been on the wrong side of the law far too many times. His recruiter and he collected six waivers just to get him enlisted. He finished his basic and AIT infantry training at Fort Benning, Georgia and was home on graduation leave before reporting to his first duty station, the 10th Mountain Division

at Fort Drum, New York. He was catching up on his sleep when his brother woke him up. “Come upstairs.”

He walked upstairs in his boxer shorts and looked out the window at New York City. There, 15 miles away, was a large plume of smoke. “Holy shit! What happened?”

“The building fell down.”

“Holy shit!”

A week later, PFC Mahmuti would report to B Company, 1-87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division. The unit was getting ready to move and PFC Mahmuti would move with them. Soon, he would fight in two different battalions belonging to two different divisions.¹⁰

Souda Bay, Crete

General Tommy Franks commanded CENTCOM, a major joint combatant command located at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida. CENTCOM is responsible for planning and conducting operations in an area encompassing the Middle East (except Israel), the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, South Asia (except India and Sri Lanka), and the Seychelles Islands. Crete was not in CENTCOM’s area, but it was a handy stop after a ten-hour flight from Andrews Air Force Base in Washington, DC. The four-star-general’s plane had stopped for crew rest before continuing the flight on to Pakistan. Tommy is a lanky native of Midland, Texas who plays “the good old country boy” quite well, but there is nothing slow or simple about Tommy Franks. At 1600 local, he was awakened from his nap in the Kydon Hotel by

a banging on the door. His executive officer, Navy Captain Van Mauney stood in the doorway. “Sir, you’d better check the TV. An airplane just crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center in New York.”

In the hotel room that served as a temporary communications center, Tommy and his traveling staff watched as the second plane slammed into the other tower. “Osama bin Laden. Son of a bitch!” Tommy muttered. Tommy got on the civilian telephone to his headquarters while his personnel set up an encrypted satellite link on the hotel roof. Tommy went to the roof top of the hotel to begin issuing the orders that would put CENTCOM on a war footing and would become Operation Enduring Freedom.¹¹

Fort Campbell, Kentucky

When CSM Jimmy Taylor opens his mouth, there is no hiding his Midland-Odessa West Texas twang. Lean and tough as a mesquite tree, Jimmy is the ideal professional NCO. A career-long paratrooper, he had been a Sergeant Major since 1999 when he joined the Rakkasans straight out of the Sergeant Majors Academy. He was now the senior NCO of the 1st Battalion of the 187th Infantry. In his office is an enormous transparent bowl containing thousands of miniature bottles of McIlhenny’s Tabasco® sauce, each a souvenir of a field meal from a MRE. The MRE (Meals Ready to Eat in government parlance, but Meals Rejected by Ethiopians in soldier parlance) is hardly a gourmet experience, but it keeps a soldier alive and the Tabasco sauce helps it go down. Clearly, Jimmy had spent a lot of time in the field. When he heard about the Twin Towers, he knew he was about to spend a lot more

time in the field. His beloved Harley-Davidson motorcycle would have to wait in the garage. There was a tougher road ahead.¹²

Moving to the Fray

Radical Islam had been at war with the United States long before 11 September 2001. Some trace it back to the Iran-backed Hezbollah (Shia) attack on the Marine Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon on 23 October 1983 which killed 220 Marines and 21 other servicemen. Some trace it back to the 14-month long Iran hostage crisis of 1979-1981, when a radical Shia movement seized Iran and the US Embassy and held 52 Americans. Others trace it back to Operation Blue Bat in July-October 1958 when the US Army and Marine Corps landed in Beirut to support the pro-Western government of Lebanon that was under attack by a Sunni movement backed by the United Arab Republic (a one-time alliance of Egypt and Syria). The US long-term support of Israel has always been a rationale for anti-US activities. Radical Sunni Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda's quarrel with the US began no later than 26 August 1996 when he issued his 12-page "Declaration of War"--two months after the attack on the Khobar Towers.¹³

Regardless of when some fundamentalist radicals felt they were at war with the United States, the United States did not take them too seriously. When 214 people were killed in the Al Qaeda bombings of the US Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on 7 August 1998, the eventual response was an expensive, but ineffective Tomahawk cruise missile strike against the Afghan caves of Zhawar and a Khartoum pharmaceutical factory. In the United States, the effects

of the strikes were muted by the sordid details of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. In Afghanistan, the strikes cost the US much of the remaining good will from its support of *jihad* against the Soviet Union. On 12 October 2000, Al Qaeda attacked the *USS Cole* in Aden's harbor killing 17 sailors.¹⁴ Yet, only the attack on America itself galvanized American will to deal directly with Al Qaeda's and other's attacks.

It was soon obvious that the fight would first occur in Afghanistan. Afghanistan had provided sanctuary to Osama Bin Laden and had refused to hand him over or evict him for the attacks on the embassies or the *USS Cole* . If Osama was not coming out, the United States was going in. The Taliban and Al Qaeda forces were deployed against the Northern Alliance forces and along the ring road. [See Map 3-1: Disposition of Forces: 11 September 2001.]¹⁵

The United States prefers to take its time and organize thoroughly before it launches forces into battle. It also prefers to deploy to developed theaters with ports, harbors, airfields, roads, electricity, and a modern transportation system. None of these were available in Afghanistan. If the United States were going to take quick action in Afghanistan, it would be a pick-up game involving what forces were immediately available and what limited infrastructure it could press into support. Afghanistan was in CENTCOM's area of responsibility and CENTCOM would organize the game.

There were not a lot of immediately available forces for combat in remote Afghanistan. Clearly, Afghanistan is a long way from a seaport or a major airport where the US had basing rights. Mechanized and armored divisions were

inappropriate for Afghanistan's terrain, and practically impossible to deploy and maintain in an undeveloped theater. Ground forces would come from the US Marine Corps, Special Forces or the Army Light Divisions (10th Mountain, 82nd Airborne and 101st Air Assault). In order to streamline the response, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ran much of the war planning and execution directly with General Tommy Franks, the CENTCOM Commander. This put a lot of noses out of joint, since everyone in Washington was full of good ideas and no senior officer wants to miss "one last fight." In fact, the direct Secretary of Defense to CENTCOM Commander interface saved a lot of time and interservice end runs. On 20 September 2001, General Franks was flying to Washington to brief the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld on his campaign plan. He would brief President Bush the following day. The Campaign Plan had four phases:

1. Set Conditions and Build Forces to Provide the National Command Authority Credible Military Options.
 - a. Lay the groundwork for the operation;
 - b. Obtain basing and staging agreements with Afghanistan's neighbors;
 - c. Insert advance teams of CIA officers into Afghanistan to bolster the fractured Northern Alliance and other anti-Taliban opposition with money and communications;
 - d. Begin moving large quantities of former Soviet weapons and ammunition into theater and communications gear into northern Afghanistan;

- e. Arrange for active military participation by coalition allies; and,
- f. Prepare to alleviate a civilian displacement crisis through humanitarian assistance.

2. Conduct Initial Combat Operations and Continue to Set Conditions for Follow-on Operations.

- a. Destroy Taliban and Al Qaeda command and control facilities, radar and air defense systems with cruise missiles and aircraft;
- b. Move the *USS Kitty Hawk* aircraft carrier from Japanese waters to international waters off the coast of Pakistan;
- c. Following the reduction of the anti-aircraft threat, fly over Western Pakistan and attack targets within Afghanistan; and,
- d. Deploy Special Forces teams to join Northern Alliance Forces which would conduct the offensive.

3. Conduct Decisive Combat Operations in Afghanistan, continue to build coalition, and conduct operation throughout the area of operation.

- a. Following the rout of the enemy by the Northern Alliance, introduce American conventional soldiers and marines to eliminate pockets of resistance (10,000-12,000 personnel).

4. Establish capability of Coalition Partners to prevent the re-emergence of terrorism and provide support for humanitarian assistance efforts.

- a. Three-five year period to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan using counter-insurgency and civil affairs military forces.¹⁶

The Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense heard the plan before the President. The President listened carefully to the briefing, asked many questions and approved the plan. CENTCOM was leading the charge.¹⁷ It was a good thing that CENTCOM was leading the charge. The United States has never had a true “General Staff”--a central integrating joint staff to fight wars by integrating and directing the nation’s ground, air and naval forces. Instead, the United States has the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which lacks the staff, procedures, direction, and motivation to fight America’s wars jointly. Despite the Goldwater-Nichols bill, each service chief of staff is still looking out primarily for the interest of his service, and a larger piece of the budget.¹⁸

CENTCOM was one of four major combatant commands--each responsible for a region of the world.¹⁹ Unfortunately, CENTCOM does not have its own dedicated armed forces but has to draw them for the mission. Naval, air, and ground forces had been rotating regularly into CENTCOM for Operation Southern Watch, which excluded Iraqi aircraft from their southern region. However, CENTCOM had little say in the training and preparation of these units before they rotated into theater for short tours. Although some air and naval forces were currently stationed in CENTCOM’s area of responsibility, CENTCOM was woefully short of ground forces. CENTCOM would have to pull in available units, many of whom had no experience in the region, and deploy them for battle. The ground war, in particular, was going to be a pick-up game. And, due to the nature of the ground and the inaccessibility of Afghanistan, the troops were going to be light-fighters, light

infantry, marines, special forces. There was only a small pool of light-fighters available.²⁰

The CIA deployed the first personnel into Afghanistan. On 26 September 2001, Gary Schroen's seven-man "Jawbreaker" group flew into the Panjshir Valley with \$10 million in cash.²¹ Their mission was to convince the Northern Alliance to work with the CIA and accept US military forces into the Panjshir Valley so that it could be used as a base for operations.²² They would also attempt to locate Osama Bin Laden and his lieutenants for elimination and conduct GPS mapping of Northern Alliance positions to prevent aerial fratricide.²³ The CIA linked up with Engineer Aref, started making more contacts and distributing stacks of money.

At the time, there were five "fronts" confronting the Taliban. [See Map 3-2: Anti-Taliban Forces.]²⁴ The first, and most important, was the Panjshir Front. It was a Tadjik Front, commanded by the famed Ahmed Shah Masood until his assassination on 9 September 2001. His second-in-command, General Mohammad Fahim now commanded an estimated 15,000 combatants and was slowly pushing out of the Panjshir Valley onto the Shomali plain.

The Uzbekistan Front was commanded by General Rashid Dostum. Dostum had been a DRA commander and General prior to joining the Mujahideen and precipitating the overthrow of the Najibullah government. Now Dostum was holding on along the Afghan border with Uzbekistan and trying to retake Mazir-i Sharif, a city that he lost to the Taliban earlier. Dostum's forces were reported as being 10,000 or 15,000 strong, but these figures are guesses at best.

The Herat Front was commanded by Ismail Khan, a legendary Tajik Mujahideen and the former governor of Herat Province. Iran equipped and assisted his 7,000-man force. Ismail Khan's forces were crowded against the Iranian border and in the interior but hoped to recapture Herat.

The Fourth Front was located in the remote province of Ghowr. Ghowr is located in Central Afghanistan but is very isolated due to the lack of roads and infrastructure. The Taliban held the Province Capital of Chaghcharan, but some 2,000 Shia, loyal to Ismail Khan, tied them down.

The Fifth Front was the Bamian Front--a Hazara Shia effort headed by Mohammad Karim Khalili. The front resulted as a reaction to Taliban massacres of Hazara populations and the widely publicized Taliban destruction of the Bamian Buddha statues.²⁵

Enter the Special Forces

Colonel John Mulholland commanded the 5th Special Forces Group at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The 5th Special Forces Group was assigned the Middle East and Central Asia as an area of concern and study. However, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and the Persian Gulf area were far more familiar to the 5th Group than the rest of the CENTCOM region, particularly Afghanistan. US interest in Afghanistan had plummeted since the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. However, since the attack of 11 September, US interest was again high and Colonel Mulholland felt "it was apparent we'd be going into Afghanistan." The 5th Special Forces Group would be subordinate to SOCCENT (Special Operations Command Central), located in Tampa,

Florida next door to CENTCOM. Its commander was Rear Admiral Bert Calland. SOCCENT was responsible for conducting all special operations in the CENTCOM area of operations.²⁶

The wartime mission of SOCCENT was to convert into a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) headquarters to direct special operations forces from the army, navy, and air force. However, Rear Admiral Calland had other ideas. He felt that SOCCENT should not convert to a JSOTF for Afghanistan, but should continue to oversee special operations in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Southwest Asia. Colonel Mulholland's 5th Special Forces Group would become the JSOTF.²⁷ The 5th Group was designated the JSOTF on 13 September 2001.²⁸ This was the start of some major command and control problems. Special Forces Groups are lightly manned and do not have sufficient personnel, equipment, logistics, and training to manage all the duties of a theater-level JSOTF. Further, the JSOTF would be running operations that would require assets from other commands--assets that would be hard to get without "star power." A pick-up game is hard enough to put together, but when the command and control arrangements are changed at the start of the war and the necessary assets are withheld, it really gets unnecessarily complicated and makes life unnecessarily difficult for the participants.

But Colonel Mulholland had his orders, so he started training his troops for Afghanistan, incorporated some additional staff he was able to snag from another command and prepared to move to K2 in Uzbekistan. By 16 September, his headquarters was packed and ready to deploy. He dispatched a liaison/planning

officer to Uzbekistan on 22 September, but it took him a week to get there. From 2 to 8 October, 5th Group deployed headquarters personnel, two ODA and communications and support personnel to Uzbekistan. On 15 October, 5th Group assumed command of JSOTF operations from Karshi Khanabad in Uzbekistan. Their designation was Task Force Dagger. On 19 October, the first two Special Forces ODA teams entered Afghanistan.²⁹ ODA 595 flew into the Dari-a-Souf Valley on a MH-47E helicopter flown by the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. ODA 595 would join the Uzbek forces of General Rashid Dostum and ride on horseback to battle.³⁰ ODA 555 flew into Astana in the Panjshir Valley on two Pave Low helicopters. They were met by the CIA “Jawbreaker” team that was resident with the forces of Fahim Khan.³¹ These two 11-man ODAs were the first of 21 ODAs that would deploy to help the Northern Alliance drive the Taliban and Al-Qaeda from the cities of Afghanistan. [See Map 3-3: First Infiltrations.]³²

The Air War Begins

On 11 September, CENTCOM had significant air power available in theater. The US Air Force and British RAF had been flying Operation Southern Watch over Southern Iraq since the end of the Gulf War in 1991. The mission was to control and monitor Iraqi airspace south of the 33rd parallel. These missions were flown out of Kuwait-currently by the 332nd Expeditionary Air Group and the 9th Aerospace Expeditionary Task Force-Southern Watch out of Prince Sultan Air Base in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. B-52 bombers and B-1B Stealth Bombers could move to the island of Diego Garcia and B-2 Stealth bombers could fly missions all the way

from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri. The US Navy carrier battle groups surrounding the *USS Enterprise* and *USS Carl Vinson* were also in the vicinity.³³ Tomahawk land-attack missiles (TLAMS) were available on the *USS McFaul*, *USS John Paul Jones*, and *USS O'Brien* destroyers, the *USS Philippine Sea* cruiser and two US and UK nuclear attack submarines.³⁴ The air war began on the night of 7 October using TLAMS, B-52s and B-1B or B2 Stealth Bombers, and some Navy F-14 and F/A-18 Fighters. An immediate difficulty was getting combat search and rescue (CSAR) teams in the vicinity so that any downed aviators could be rescued.

On 7 October, 350 US Marines and several helicopters staged into the Jacobabad airbase in Pakistan to provide security alongside Pakistani forces for future missions. Their presence was not a secret for very long and soon Pakistani police had to subdue demonstrations near the airbase.³⁵

Significant air power moved into theater to support the effort. On 15 October, AC-130 Spectre gunships began to fly missions from K-2. These four-engine, turboprop, slow-moving gun platforms were employed at night under no or low lunar illumination. Their sensors and night vision devices provided targets for their 7.62 mm miniguns, 20mm and 40mm cannon and a 105mm howitzer. However, there were still no US ground forces in position to work with these lethal aircraft. Further, the most effective day-time close support aircraft, the A-10, was in Kuwait, but did not have the combat radius to support combat in Afghanistan from the Persian Gulf.

The US Air Force and Navy have lots of experience planning air campaigns in theaters with developed infrastructure. There is a pattern. The planners first destroy

the enemy integrated air defense system, then they go after major infrastructure and political targets, finally they go after enemy ground forces. This might work against Serbia (where they destroyed the air defense system and the economy but not the army), but it was clearly inappropriate in Afghanistan. The effort was impressive, but the target list was not. There was no integrated air defense system, major infrastructure, significant economic targets, or political targets. The target set was exclusively enemy forces. Still, the bombers and cruise missiles smashed the non-existent integrated air defense structure, hammered non-existent tank-repair facilities and shot up old military garrisons and one-time command and control bunkers. Due to lack of current intelligence and the fog and friction of technology, they also killed four UN workers in a UN-facility, bombed residential neighborhoods, and the International Committee of the Red Cross warehouse facilities, twice in ten days despite protests and the Red Cross symbol painted on the roofs. Naturally, the Taliban claimed that thousands of civilians were killed in these attacks.³⁶ Enemy troops were seldom taken under fire--and then with a paucity of aircraft. The front-line Taliban and Northern Alliance commanders usually talked to each other over their radios. The Taliban now began mocking the Northern Alliance about the impotent and feckless US air power. This continued for 24 days, although they were running out of targets after 11 days. Finally, the air planners tired of reducing rubble to granular rubble and chasing trucks. They turned their attention to the real target--the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces deployed against the Northern Alliance. The ODAs were getting on the ground and in position to call in fire on the dug-in Taliban.

Special Forces ground spotters and air power would eventually prove a lethal combination against the dug-in, linearly arranged Taliban and Al Qaeda forces. However, now all the air support they got was from aircraft that had attacked all their assigned targets and had ordnance left to expend before they returned to base. This meant that only one or two aircraft were available and that they had already expended their primary, heavy ordnance.³⁷

The ODA are on the Ground

It had been difficult getting the ODA into Afghanistan. The flying weather was iffy, K2 was not ready to support the aircraft of the 160th SOAR and the Taliban controlled several key areas along the flight routes. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld was impatient and let General Franks know it.³⁸ As the first two ODAs arrived and linked-up with their Northern Alliance leaders on the night of 19/20 October, they brought the ability to bring down accurate, deadly fire from British and US aircraft. The weather was still lousy, but on 26 October, the 585 ODA flew in and linked up with Burillah Khan near Konduz. Khan was one of General Fahim's lieutenants. LTC Chris Haas and his command group from the 1st Battalion, 5th Group, ODC 51 (codename Shark) also flew into the Panjshir Valley to link up with ODA 555. LTC Haas established SOCCE CC005 (Special Operations Command and Control Element) to work with Fahim Khan and command the four ODAs that would eventually support Fahim's effort.³⁹

Getting the ODAs to Fahim, Dostum and Burillah Khan was more than just a physical effort. There had been a policy debate in Washington, particularly in the

National Security Council, Department of State, and CIA, as to what groups to support in the fight against the Pashtun-based Taliban and foreign-based Al Qaeda. Although there were Pashtun forces within the Northern Alliance, the majority were Tadjik, Uzbek, and Hazara. The CIA station chief in Islamabad argued vociferously that the Pashtuns needed primary backing because backing the Northern Alliance would allow the Northern Alliance to capture Kabul and the northern half of Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance might even sweep into Pashtun areas to gain political advantage and settle old scores before getting down to overturning the Taliban. The CIA station chief and his allies felt that the Northern Alliance should be held in place while Pashtun forces in the south were built up. In the meantime, “strategic bombing” against Afghanistan’s “fixed military structure” would weaken the Taliban. Finally, when Pashtun resistance to the Taliban was raised and rallied, a coordinated nation-wide bombing campaign could be launched against the Taliban. This would give the Pashtuns better positioning in the post-Taliban government. Naturally, this was also Pakistan’s position.⁴⁰

The favorite candidate of the Pashtun advocates was Abdul Haq, a favorite Mujahideen commander in the United States and United Kingdom. He was a member of the Islamic Party (HIK)--Hezb-e-Islami-Khalis that was founded by Mawlawi Mohammed Yunis Khalis. He lost a foot fighting the Soviets but was always an intrepid warrior. Now he was a portly warrior, but he commanded the respect of anti-Taliban Pashtun. He also served as an emissary for the former king, Zahir Shah. He was back in Peshawar, Pakistan after a self-imposed ten-year exile in Dubai. Abdul

Haq was generally pro-US but spoke out publicly against the US air campaign in Afghanistan. He felt the on-going air campaign was creating support for the Taliban without attacking any targets of military value. Rather, the main recipients of aerial bombardment were the innocents--civilians, aid workers, and the like. With some backing from Washington, Abdul Haq held meetings and rallies to try to raise Pashtun forces in Peshawar, Pakistan to fight the Taliban. However, there was no immediate response. Pakistan was a recent ally of the Taliban and certainly did not want to encourage Pashtun nationalism inside an ethnically-tense country. Pakistan saw the logical rallying point as Islam, but the Taliban had already co-opted that approach. Failing to raise a Pashtun *Lashkar* (tribal army) in Pakistan, Abdul Haq and 17 followers went inside Afghanistan to raise the Pashtun resistance. But the effort was slow and not too promising.

So, there was a reason for the lock-step approach to the set-piece air campaign against Afghanistan. The politicians had not sorted out who they were going to support in Afghanistan, so they did not allow a concentrated, effective campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces until they had sorted it out politically. The air campaign reflected the *ad hoc* nature of the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF--the overall US and coalition effort in Afghanistan) planning on the heels of the 11 September attack. The initial air campaign against the enemy forces was impotent and feckless because some policy makers in Washington feared the consequences of a Northern Alliance breakout!

CENTCOM had a plan and concept, but the details were lacking and the US military was still uncertain what the US ground force effort would be and how many troops of what type that would entail. While these issues were debated, the 5th Special Forces Group and elements of the 160th SOAR deployed to K2 airfield and waited to begin inserting ODAs into Afghanistan. The initial 20 October insertion marked a conditional, but not a whole-hearted support of the Northern Alliance.

Rangers in the Night

The night of 19/20 October was an especially busy night for the Special Operations Community. Following a B2 bomber strike and landing zone preparation fires by USAF AC-130 Spectre gunships, Task Force 3/75 Ranger conducted a night combat parachute assault from 800 feet above the desert. Four USAF MC-130 Talon aircraft dropped 199 Rangers under zero illumination to seize Objective Rhino--an isolated desert airstrip southwest of Kandahar. The aircraft were flying so low that, as the jump doors opened, dust blew into the aircraft. The Rangers hit the four landing zones hard, cleared the objective, destroyed some vehicles and enemy. Air Force specialists did an airfield survey to determine the landing strips capability to handle large aircraft. Five hours and twenty-four minutes after the parachute assault, the Rangers boarded returning MC-130s and flew out of Rhino.⁴¹

Unfortunately, night operations are hazardous. The Quick Reaction Force's (QRF), twenty-six soldiers of B Company, 3-75 Rangers landed on a separate objective inside Pakistan (Objective Honda) in support of the main landing. Two MH-60K flew onto the objective. The 160th SOAR pilots are the best in the

business, but night observation goggles are worthless in a “brown-out” where the dust from a landing helicopter completely obscures the ground. The second helicopter hit hard and tilted over on its side. Several soldiers were pinned in the wreck. Specialist John Edmunds and Private First Class Kristofer Stonesifer were the first Americans killed in Operation Enduring Freedom and they died in Pakistan.⁴²

While the Army Rangers were landing at Rhino, the U.S. Army Special Forces elite Delta force conducted a heliborne raid on Mullah Omar’s compound on the outskirts of Kandahar. Unfortunately, Mullah Omar was not there, but some of his adherents were. Several Delta Force soldiers were wounded during the fighting. A USAF AC-130 Spectre Gunship helped the Delta Force disengage and killed an estimated 30 Taliban in the process.⁴³

Getting Ready for Breakout

Despite Washington’s indecision on who to back in Afghanistan, the ODAs were ready to strike the Taliban. The 595th had originally been sent to K2 to accompany army helicopters conducting combat search and rescue (CSAR) missions. However, army participation in CSAR was cancelled and the highly-skilled soldiers of the 595th were initially put to work erecting tents for the JSOTF headquarters. The 595th finally got the word that they would join the forces of General Dostum. Unlike most of his team, the 595th Commander, Captain Mark Nutsch, was a skilled horseman, and was pleasantly surprised to learn that Dostum’s forces were horse-mounted. On 21 October, the 595th landed where they were met by Special Forces Captain Justin Sapp, a string of horse and mules and some curious Uzbeks and

Hazaras. Nutsch and Sapp were horsemen, but the rest were not, and they were riding on unfamiliar Afghan saddles on diminutive local horses. Saddle sore troopers finally unmounted and met General Dostum. Dostum accompanied ODA 595 to the front lines to direct aviation strikes on the Taliban. One B-52 was available flying at an altitude of 20,000 feet above them. They tried to hit a bunker with JDAM smart bombs. Despite their best efforts, none of the six dropped came close to the target. Several were over two miles off. The Taliban in the bunker exited it to taunt and jeer.⁴⁴ It was an inauspicious start. Dostum was unimpressed with American airpower. Days later, a USAF combat controller arrived with a laser designator. The airstrikes began hitting targets but was not on call for support of an offensive.

General Dostum was not going to wait for Washington's blessing. He would start the breakout without air support--with his own artillery and tank fire and an old-fashioned cavalry charge. On 23 October, Dostum positioned his forces for the attack. The Taliban were dug in and had T-55 tanks and some murderous ZPU-1 anti-aircraft guns. The ZPU-1 is a single-barreled ground-mount anti-aircraft 14.5mm heavy machine gun that has an effective range of 1,400 meters and a practical rate of fire of 150 rounds-per-minute. It is designed for air defense but is murder on troops in the open. Half of ODA 595 was with Dostum while the rest of ODA 595 was now away with Commander Atta--one of General Fahim's Tadjik lieutenants. Dostum opened his attack with a limited barrage of D-30 122mm howitzer fire, 120mm mortar fire, and fire from his 14.5mm machine guns. Two columns of cavalry (some 200 in all) moved onto the battlefield from behind a hill. They formed into two lines

and charged. All in all, some 600 men in six lines would advance over the uphill, open ground. As Dostum's artillery and mortar fire lifted, the Taliban boiled out of their bunkers and into their fighting positions. Taliban artillery began to fall and small arms and ZPU-1 fire ripped through the advancing cavalry.⁴⁵ Captain Mark Nutsch and half of his detachment rode with the charge.⁴⁶ Dostum's mounted charge cleared the Taliban forward positions and the Taliban broke. The immediate objective was in the hands of the Northern Alliance.⁴⁷ It was a small victory, but there would be more of them, and the US Special Forces had been part of it. And it had been a long time since US soldiers had participated in a combat cavalry charge--probably not since the Pershing Punitive Expedition into Mexico in 1916.

Mission to Rally the Pashtun

It was Tuesday, the 23rd of October in Peshawar, Pakistan. Abdul Haq and his aide, Major Hamed, along with 16 followers began the 30-mile drive to the Afghan border. They drove through the small, dusty town of Parachinar and then drove the final five miles on a rugged dirt road. There were no problems at the Pakistan border checkpoints and the convoy drove on to the town of Jaji--the scene of heavy fighting during the Soviet-Afghan War. Abdul Haq was known and respected there. It was a good place to spend the night.

The next day the convoy drove ten miles north to Azra. Abdul Haq expected to gather a large force of Pashtun there. These people were his Ahmedzai tribesmen. However, despite his efforts, only about 50 men rallied to his cause. He parked his convoy there. On the morning of the 25th, Abdul Haq and his group mounted horses

and rode toward Hesperak on the plain south of Jalalabad. Whether they got there is a mystery. What is known is that the group was returning to Azra and entered the Alikhel Gorge around noon. Suddenly shots rang out. The entrance and exit to the gorge were sealed and Abdul Haq and his followers were caught in an ambush. They would fight until midnight. Abdul Haq pulled out his satellite phone and called his office. His office called James Ritchie, an American friend of Haq's who was visiting Peshawar. Ritchie called Robert McFarland, Ronald Reagan's Adviser on Afghan Affairs, in the United States. McFarland called the CIA Operations Center in Langley. The embattled Pashtun fought on. Major Hamed kept in contact with Haq's Peshawar office on the phone. The office talked to Ritchie and Ritchie talked to the CIA. The agency knew Haq coordinates from the satellite phone, but they stated that they could not get a helicopter to Haq due to the nature of the terrain.

Shortly before midnight, Major Hamed made his last telephone call. "They are 200 meters away! They've captured four of us already! Help us please!" American aviation attacked shortly after that, but it was too late.⁴⁸ A Hellfire-armed Predator MQ-1 UAV attacked some Taliban vehicles, but to no real purpose.⁴⁹

In the early hours of the morning, Haji Din Mohamed's telephone rang. Mohamed was Haq's brother. The Taliban were calling from Haq's phone. Abdul Haq was their prisoner. He did not remain a prisoner for long. The Taliban executed him slowly, along with Major Hamed and his nephew Isatullah. More executions followed.⁵⁰ The hope for raising a large Pashtun popular force to oppose the Taliban died with Abdul Haq.

Bombs and Back Room Politics

The only other non-Taliban Pashtun leader with some clout was Hamid Karzai, but he was a political leader, not a seasoned field commander. At best, Karzai could field 300 to 500 men. The Taliban, moreover, still enjoyed considerable regional support. Shortly after Abdul Haq's death, a "*jihad*" brigade of some 5,000-10,000 Pashtun from Pakistan reportedly crossed into Afghanistan--to fight for the Taliban.⁵¹ The bombing campaign was clearly not going to produce a surrender and the air campaign was short of targets--targets that is that were not the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces faced off against the Northern Alliance.

Pakistan's leader, General Pervez Musharraf, insisted that two-thirds of the new Afghan government be Pashtun. However, there were not enough anti-Taliban Pashtun forces and the US administration needed some victories--not merely the continued expenditure of bombs. The Northern Alliance would have to be brought into the fight and supplied and supported. The support would have to include air power. On a press conference on 22 October, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld stated "The reason for the air attacks on Taliban and al Qaeda forces is to destroy Taliban and al Qaeda forces. It happens that they are arrayed against, for the most part, Northern Alliance forces north of Kabul and in the northwest portion of the country. And our efforts from the air clearly are to assist those forces on the ground in being able to occupy more ground."⁵² By 31 October, the administration had reluctantly decided to support the Northern Alliance and began targeting enemy forces.⁵³

The harsh flying conditions over South Asia began to exact some tolls. There were other crashes besides the MH-60K helicopter that had crashed in Pakistan in support of the Ranger assault on objective Rhino. On 20 October, a USMC Harrier from the *USS Pelelieu* went down. Two USMC CH-53 Super Stallion helicopters, with 24 marines on board, flew to the crew's rescue. Ground fire was intense and the initial rescue attempt (tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel--TRAP in USMC parlance) failed. A few days later, a subsequent rescue attempt rescued the crew. An F-14 subsequently bombed the downed Harrier to keep the Taliban from capturing it.⁵⁴ On 4 November, two USAF MH-53 Pave Low helicopters were sent to rescue a Special Forces soldier suffering from High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE)--a form of mountain sickness. One crashed in the freezing rain. The other helicopter rescued the crew members but was unable to get to the soldier. A subsequent CH-47 rescue mission extracted the soldier and an F-14 destroyed the downed helicopter.⁵⁵ Flying conditions were generally bad and impeded the insertion of ODAs. Taliban ground fire added to the difficulties.⁵⁶

The Northern Alliance was expected to first retake the city of Mazar-i Sharif. The forces of Uzbek General Dostum and Tadjik General Atta were the logical forces to accomplish this mission. Dostum had his ODA, but Atta did not and this was a source of contention within the alliance. Consequently, ODA 595 was split in two--one part stayed with Dostum, while the other went to Atta.⁵⁷ The cold, rainy weather continued to hamper the insertion of another ODA into the theater. Still, the Special Forces soldiers could now get to the business of finding targets for aircraft. The ODA

and US airpower proved to be a lethal combination. After less than a week of bombing, the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces dug in on the approaches to Mazar-i Sharif began to falter. Dostum's force was supplied with an emergency drop of Russian-made RPK machine guns. Dostum and Atta began their advance on 5 November. On the same day, the State Department assigned Ambassador James Dobbins as Special Representative to the Afghan Opposition.⁵⁸ The United States was backing the Northern Alliance, but very reluctantly.

Let Loose the Dogs of War

On 2 November, ODA 553 landed in the Bamian region to support General Kareem Kahlili, the Hazara military commander. On 4 November, ODA 534 landed in the Balkh Valley to support the forces of General Atta.⁵⁹ On 8 November, the weather cleared enough for helicopters to bring in the 586 ODA to work with General Daoud in the vicinity of Talaqan. On the same day, ODA 594 flew into the Panjshir Valley to join ODA 555 in its work with General Fahim Khan. [Map 3-4: The Early Battles.]⁶⁰ In addition to the Chinook helicopters of the 160th SOAR, the Special Forces were using Soviet-built Mi-8MT HIP helicopters, which could fly at higher altitudes than the US-made helicopters--but only during daylight hours.⁶¹ USAF enlisted combat controllers joined the ODAs. The ODAs split into three-four man teams which used laser-designators and satellite-linked global positioning systems to attack the enemy. ODA 555 called in B-52 heavy bomber attacks on the Bagram Airfield defenses. ODAs 595 and 534 used more precise air strikes to destroy enemy bunkers, artillery emplacements and armored vehicles. These strikes were called in

during the mornings. The forces of General Dostum and Atta attacked in the early afternoon. When their attacks were successful, the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces were generally unable to launch a counter-attack before sundown. Coordinated night attacks were beyond the enemy capability and, by the next morning, the Northern Alliance forces had dug in and were hard to move. On 9 November, Dostum's and Atta's forces broke out of the Balkh valley at the Tangi Pass. On 10 November, they moved into the city of Mazar-i Sharif--the second largest city in Afghanistan. Several hundred Al Qaeda from Pakistan held a strong point in a former girls' school and swore a fight to the death. The Northern Alliance sent some Mullahs forward to negotiate a surrender, but they were gunned down by the defiant Pakistanis. ODA 595 put smart bombs directly into the strong point, and Dostum's forces moved in to kill the surviving defenders. Shortly after, up to 3,000 enemy surrendered. The city and its airport were in General Dostum's hands. Special Forces helped broker a power-sharing agreement to prevent Northern Alliance forces from bickering over the prize.⁶²

The Taliban/Al Qaeda lines began to crumble. [Map 3-5, Second Week in November.]⁶³ General Fahim Khan launched attacks against Talaqan and Bagram on the 10th. Bagram fell and the Northern Alliance forces continued southwest toward Kabul. Washington and Islamabad went in a high state of diplomatic dither, trying to prevent the Northern Alliance from entering Kabul until a "representative force" (i.e. Pashtun) could be formed to help retake the capital in a power-sharing arrangement. The Northern Alliance could not be bothered with diplomatic posturing. Fahim

Khan's troops entered Talaqan and Kabul on the 13th. The Taliban kicked out rear guards and went to the mountains. On 11 November, ODA 554 landed and linked up with the forces of Ismail Khan. By the 13th, they had accompanied Khan's forces as they stormed into Herat. The Taliban kicked out a rear guard and went to the mountains. ODA 553 accompanied General Kalili as his forces approached Bamian. The Taliban Governor, Nabi Islam, changed sides and welcomed the Hazara force while the Taliban kicked out a rear guard and went to the mountains.⁶⁴ On 14 November, the city of Jalalabad fell to the force of Yunis Khalis. On 15 November, coalition forces started landing at the Bagram airbase. ODA 575 and ODA 550 landed at Bagram to link-up with Fahim Khan's forces. Some 100 British Marines flew into Bagram as well.⁶⁵

Taliban and Al Qaeda resistance was now fragmented. The largest fragment was the Taliban forces holding Konduz. On 17 November, Northern Alliance forces commanded by Dostum, Atta, Moheqqeq, and Daoud surrounded Konduz. It would fall on the 26th. [Map 3-6, Third Week in November.]⁶⁶ In an indication of just how complex the political situation was, on the night of 23 November, two Pakistani aircraft reportedly landed in Kunduz to extract several high-ranking Pakistani ISI and Taliban officials. The ISI had a long relationship with the Taliban and obviously the relationship had not completely ended on 11 September. The ISI certainly did not want their agents captured by Northern Alliance or US forces.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, in the South

Most of the action had been in the North. On the 14th of November, ODA 574 joined an anti-Taliban resistance leader and his force of 20-something near Tarin Kowt. On the 16th, Hamid Karzai and his followers entered Tarin Kowt unopposed. The Taliban in Kandahar reacted with a good-sized force mounted on some 100 vehicles. On the morning of the 17th, ODA 574 directed air-strikes with USAF and USN fighters. The enemy lost some 30 trucks and retreated. Some of Karzai's fighters had retreated as well, so the ODA and Karzai had to get them in hand. After seizing and holding Tarin Kowt, Karzai's popularity grew and his force grew to over 100 in two-weeks time.⁶⁸

There was another Pashtun leader in the South. Gul Agha Sherzai, the former governor of Khandahar Province, was now living in exile in Quetta, Pakistan. When Kabul fell, Sherzai gathered a force reported between 200 and 2,000 and crossed back into Afghanistan. ODA 583 joined Sherzai on 19 November and called air strikes on Taliban forces as Sherzai fought to dominate the road between Spin Boldak and Kandahar. Sherzai was approaching Kandahar from the Southeast while Karzai was approaching Kandahar from the North.

The pressure on the South mounted as a rifle company of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) from the *USS Peleliu* helicoptered into Objective RHINO on Thanksgiving Day. Their trip involved a 441-mile night flight from their carrier on six CH-53E *Sea Stallion* helicopters. After the company secured the airfield, plane loads of Marine KC-130s and USAF C-17s began landing troops, equipment

and supplies. The MEU had landed much of its heavy gear in Pakistan prior to the assault. This gear was flown in from the Jacobabad airbase. Some 125 Seabees eventually joined the 15th MEU at dusty RHINO.⁶⁹ Carrier Task Force-58 (CTF-58) had boots on the ground. [Map 3-7, Late November.]⁷⁰

Insurrection at Qala-i Jangi

The weather had cleared and the limited Taliban anti-aircraft capability was destroyed or scattered. More Special Forces came into theater. ODA 533 and 592 flew into Mazar-i Sharif. ODA 532 flew into Pul-i Khamri to join Commander Jafari's forces. Additional Special Forces joined Hamid Karzai to control the effort in the south.

By the third week in November, Konduz was the last major city in the north still in Taliban hands. In traditional Afghan style, the Northern Alliance began to negotiate the surrender of the city while their forces tightened the circle around the besieged city. Within the ranks of the Taliban holding Konduz were a number of foreign Al Qaeda fighters. Most were Arabs and Pakistanis. Reportedly there were also Uzbeks, Uighurs, and other nationals within the ranks.

The foreigners were a sticking point in the negotiations. Since they were not local, they could not simply lay down their weapons and slip back into the population, nor could they join the Northern Alliance. The Taliban leaders in Konduz negotiated the surrender of foreigners among them. One Al Qaeda group, up to five hundred strong, would surrender to General Dostum. General Dostum was quite active in the negotiations for Konduz as he asserted his position in the north and positioned

himself for the “land-grab” that was going on in Afghanistan following the retreat or elimination of Taliban forces.

In the early morning hours of Saturday, the 24th of November, these 500-odd Al Qaeda foreigners were stopped and surrounded by Northern Alliance forces north east of Mazar-i Sharif. There was some initial confusion as to whether this was the group of surrendering foreigners. They had arrived earlier than expected and were not at the agreed meeting place. After a few hours of negotiations, the matter was resolved. General Dostum’s commanders wanted to transfer the prisoners to the Mazar-i Sharif airfield but the forces controlling the airport prevented this.⁷¹ Instead they would be transported to Qala-i-Jangi, an 18th century star-shaped fortress located southwest of Mazar-i Sharif.⁷² The prisoners were told to throw their weapons in the back of some designated trucks. There was no check to make sure that they were completely disarmed despite immediate indicators. Even before boarding the trucks, one Al Qaeda detonated a grenade killing himself and two other Al Qaeda. The grenade blast also wounded a Northern Alliance commander and an ITN reporter covering the surrender.

The situation did not improve once the prisoners reached the fortress, roughly an hour’s drive from their meeting place in the desert. Again an Al Qaeda prisoner produced and detonated a grenade, killing himself and two of General Dostum’s commanders.⁷³ It was getting dark and Northern Alliance guards herded the remaining prisoners into an underground cell complex beneath the “pink house”--a building in the center of the fortress’s southern courtyard--where they were left

overnight. Qala-i Jangi fortress is an adobe edifice that has walls that are 45 feet thick and 30 feet high. It doubled as an arsenal and contained huge stocks of arms and ammunition. Commander Fakhir and some 100 troops secured the prison while the bulk of General Dostum's forces were engaged at the siege of Konduz.

The next morning was Sunday, 25 November. A CIA agent known only as Dave and fellow agent Johnny Spann arrived at Qala-i Jangi to begin interrogating the prisoners. They had not worked together before and arrived in separate vehicles, which they parked in the north half of the fortress near an entrance to the southern courtyard. Johnny Spann left his communications gear in the back of his pickup truck in the north courtyard and walked into the southern courtyard.⁷⁴ The guards led the prisoners in ones and twos from the underground cells below the pink house. According to "American Taliban" John Walker Lindh, his hands were tied as they surfaced from the cells below.

Up to then, this was the largest group of foreign prisoners captured during the war and the CIA agents were anxious to find out who was included in the group. Dostum's Chief of Intelligence, Sayed Kamal accompanied the CIA agents into the southern courtyard and watched as they began talking to the prisoners.

At one point Johnny Spann singled out John Walker Lindh, who was sitting in front of a row of prisoners. "Hey you, Right there with your head down. Look at me. I know you speak English. Look at me. Where did you get the British military sweater?" John Walker remained expressionless while being separated from the prisoners and brought to a blanket spread on the ground. His elbows were tied behind

his back. He sat cross-legged, his hair obscuring his face. Spann started again.

“Where are you from?” You believe in what you’re doing here that much, you’re willing to be killed here? How were you recruited to come here? Who brought you here? Hey!”⁷⁵

Sometime during the interrogation, the Al Qaeda revolted killing CIA officer Spann, and wounding Dostum’s Intelligence Chief Sayed Kamal. They also killed a number of Northern Alliance guards as they took possession of the southern courtyard. Dave, the other CIA agent, managed to fight his way out of the southern courtyard and run to a main building along the north wall. Inside the north courtyard were also members of the Red Cross, who had arrived to make sure that the prisoners were being fairly treated, German ARD TV and at least one local TV crew.

The Al Qaeda inside the southern courtyard and the 100 Northern Alliance troops guarding the prisoners began a brisk firefight. During the struggle, the Al Qaeda freed their comrades still under restraint and found a large cache of weapons and ammunition stored along the south side of the wall dividing the northern and southern courtyards. Now, armed with mortars, RPGs and small arms, they took control of the entire southern courtyard and continued to exchange fire with Northern Alliance troops positioned along the north wall and on the roof of the main building. Two Northern Alliance T-55 main battle tanks moved into positions on the fortress’s north wall and in the courtyard below, and began firing 100mm shells into the Al Qaeda-held southern section.

Dave did not have his communications gear and used the German TV's satellite phone to call for help. Around 1400, U.S. and British Special Forces personnel arrived at the fortress. After conversing briefly with Northern Alliance commanders, they occupied positions in the northern towers and on the roof of the main building and began calling for air support.⁷⁶

Around 1600, the Special Forces teams guided the first of several air strikes on the fortress. Dave, wounded Northern Alliance troops, the Red Cross, and the television journalists, climbed over the back wall from their position along the inner parapet and left the fortress going north to a near-by road. The air strikes had mixed success. A number of the strikes missed the southern courtyard but Northern Alliance soldiers on the spot stated that the mere occurrence of the air strikes helped contain Al Qaeda in the southern section of the fortress.

Meanwhile, a frustrated Dodge Billingsley had finally gotten across the Amu Darya river. He had gotten to Uzbekistan in early October--only to hit a wall--the Afghan border was sealed tight. Dodge linked up with some opium smugglers trying to get into Afghanistan through Turkmenistan. That fell through. Then he linked up with Dostum's people and got as far as the border town of Termez--and no further. Dodge had been in Uzbekistan for over a month. Finally, the Uzbek authorities reopened the border to media. Dodge crossed into Afghanistan and headed straight for Mazar-i Sharif. As the crowded bus bounced and swayed in Mazar, Dodge could hear the sounds of the fight going on at Qala Jangi, but he did not know what Qala

Jangi was, or that there were prisoners there in full revolt, or that there was an American casualty.

Early the next morning (Monday, 26 November) Dodge took a taxi to Qala-i Jangi. It dropped him north of the fortress. By now battle lines had solidified. Al Qaeda fighters still controlled the southern courtyard--roughly half of the approximately 500 meter long fortress--while Northern Alliance troops had reinforced their positions at the main gate, along the northern walls and just outside the southern walls of the fortress. A T-55 main battle tank remained on the northeast tower wall, while the second tank remained below in the courtyard with its barrel controlling the alleyway into the southern courtyard.

Al Qaeda firepower was significant and included RPG-7 rockets and mortars in addition to small arms. However, a lower interior wall dividing the northern and southern courtyards severely reduced Al Qaeda's field of fire. Much of the firing was directed down the alley way, since attempts to fire over the interior wall sent rockets and bullets arcing over the north wall and into nearby fields. Dodge walked from the taxi drop-off through those fields just as some Al Qaeda rockets streaked over his head and exploded in the field behind him. Dodge crouched behind a tree, and then moved through the cotton fields to the northeast. He would try to get to the fortress from a safer direction.

Agent Spann's body was still in the southern compound. Around 1100, U.S. and British Special Forces returned to retrieve Spann's body.⁷⁷ They entered the fortress through the main gate and split into two positions designated CAS 1 (Close

Air Support) above the main gate and CAS 2 at the northeast tower.⁷⁸ A Quick Reaction Force (QRF), a squad from the 10th Mountain Division, set up on the road a couple hundred meters north of the fortress.

As the CAS 2 team moved into position, it became obvious that they could not hope to retrieve Spann's body during a firefight. They tried to get the two Northern Alliance tanks into the fight but they were both out of main gun rounds. The team decided to call in close air support to suppress the fire coming from the southern courtyard.⁷⁹ The radios crackled between the CAS teams and the QRF. "We are at the front gate and are setting up comms now. Over." "The front gate is secure." "Major Mitchell is inside but there is still significant small arms and RPG fire."

Minutes later the radio crackled again, "Be advised, there are about ready to drop. Pull back, pull back at this time. Over." With a flash, the bomb struck the fortress, but not the pink house or the southern courtyard. A 2,000-pound Joint Direct Attack Munition, or JDAM, GBU-32 struck the north wall, only meters from the northeast tower, falling basically on top of CAS 2. "Shrapnel inbound, shrapnel inbound" yelled one of the SF operators at the QRF, while pulling Dodge, who was still filming, down behind the wall with him. The radio was active again. "Styverson are you okay? Anyone on this net? Anyone on this net?" Dostum's commander on the ground Olim Razum was frantic. "This is wrong. This is wrong. Please cut it this one. This is wrong, very very wrong." Another Special Forces soldier signaled the 10th Mountain Division soldiers yelling, "Hey 10th, let's go." The QRF got up and headed to the fortress' main gate.⁸⁰

The entire CAS 2 team was wounded. The QRF evacuated them from the fortress immediately. Some British SBS troops may also have been wounded. Two Northern Alliance soldiers inside the T-55 tank on the northeast tower wall were instantly killed when their tank was flipped. The blast ripped the turret from the hull. Dodge had used the same tank for cover less than an hour ago while filming down the narrow corridor into the southern courtyard. He had moved from the tower minutes before the bomb strike. Dozens of other Afghans, many of them bloody and covered in dust, scurried off the wall and stumbled into the nearby cotton fields. Most of the Northern Alliance soldiers along the north wall left the fortress fearing further bomb strikes.

The friendly fire incident marked the end of any Afghan or U.S. military actions during the remaining daylight hours on Monday. There was a steady stream of mortars and rocket fire coming from the southern courtyard. At dusk, Special Forces soldiers returned to the fortress to talk to Northern Alliance commanders and survey the bomb damage, and discuss the next step.

Dodge was debating whether or not to brave the cold and continuing Al Qaeda firepower to stay out at the fortress for the night. A Special Forces soldier told him quietly that he should stay out of the fortress that night. Dodge responded, “are you bringing in AC-130s?”[Spectre gunships]. The operator replied, “I just wouldn’t be in the fortress tonight.” It was an easier decision now. In a few hours there would be few cars on the road and limited opportunities for a ride. Dodge headed back to Mazar. From his hotel rooftop, Dodge watched two AC-130 gunships pound the

southern courtyard with 40mm and 105mm rounds. At about 0230 hours, they hit the ammo dump, detonating the entire cache of weapons and lighting up the night sky. The light and the exploding ordnance forced the aircraft to leave the airspace above the Qala-i Jangi fortress.⁸¹

Tuesday morning dawned. The mood of the Northern Alliance soldiers at the fortress was optimistic because of the AC-130 strikes. Some Afghan soldiers suggested there might be a handful of Al Qaeda still alive and able to fight, but no more than that. The Afghans prepared for a final assault on the southern courtyard. Northern Alliance commander Majid Rozi gave orders to his commanders for the final push to retake the southern courtyard and end the insurrection. The attack was scheduled to begin at 1000 but ran a little late, waiting for U.S. and British Special Forces personnel to arrive. The Special Forces personnel reestablished their position on the roof of the main gate. One could hear aircraft overhead, probably on station for the push.

Northern Alliance soldiers massed inside the main gate and along the north side of the interior wall. Additional Northern Alliance troops moved outside the fortress wall and took up positions south of the fortress. The plan was that the Northern Alliance troops would storm the Taliban-held area from both the northern courtyard and over the southern fortress wall. A T-55 and a T-62 main battle tank drove into the fortress through the main gate to support the push into the Taliban controlled area while Northern Alliance troops kept the Taliban from escaping over the southern wall.

The fighting commenced in fits and starts and dead and wounded were carried out through the main gate or over the southern wall. The wounded included an Al Qaeda shrapnel casualty that the Northern Alliance soldiers identified as Tajik.

By noon, the Northern Alliance had penetrated the southern courtyard through the alleyway and controlled the western half the southern courtyard all the way to the pink house, as well as the parapets above on the southern wall of the fortress.

However, the east end of the courtyard, protected by trees and various buildings, was not easy to clear and the Al Qaeda continued to put up a stiff resistance. Eventually Northern Alliance troops worked their way down the wall and began clearing the courtyard meter by meter. Dodge, who had climbed over the southern exterior wall to join Northern Alliance forces, followed the first groups of fighters down the parapet. Progress was frequently interrupted by soldiers stopping to loot the dead and scavenge weapons and other valuables off the battlefield, despite the remonstrations of their commanders. Eventually, Dodge and a handful of fighters were up against the wall of the pink house. There was still intermittent fire and Northern Alliance soldiers were firing into the basement through the windows. An unidentified soldier lay a few feet away, shot and mangled but still breathing. There was some discussion amongst the Northern Alliance soldiers and it seemed they wanted to put him out of his misery. One of the soldiers picked up a large rock and dropped it on the dying man's head. Dodge was disgusted. Why didn't they use a bullet instead?

Just when it appeared that the battle was over, Al Qaeda emerged from the stables and other buildings on the east edge of the courtyard, opening fire on the

Northern Alliance soldiers in the courtyard. Dodge and the others at the pink house were cut off. Their only choices were to hold fast or run for it across the body-strewn courtyard to the west side, out of the crossfire. Within minutes all the Northern Alliance had retreated back up the parapet. The courtyard would have to be cleared all over again.

Unwilling to risk more close-quarters combat, the Northern Alliance moved in the T-62 tank from the northern portion of the fortress, and fired a series of rounds into Al Qaeda positions along the eastern wall of the southern courtyard. By dusk, Northern Alliance forces finally overran the courtyard. The insurrection at Qala Jangi was all but over.

On Wednesday, 28 November, General Dostum, who had been in Konduz during the uprising, returned to Mazar-i Sharif. He then went to the fortress and was mobbed by dozens of journalists who had been following the story and just arrived at Mazar. Hundreds of bodies lay strewn about the fortress: Al Qaeda, Northern Alliance, and somewhere, one American.⁸²

On Thursday, Afghan Red Cross workers entered the basement of the pink house and were shot. There were still Al Qaeda holed up there. For the next two days, the Northern Alliance tried to flush them out by firing rockets into the basement or pouring oil into the basement and setting it on fire. Finally, they pumped water into the basement and over eighty Al Qaeda emerged from below into the courtyard. The American Taliban, John Walker Lindh, was among them.

While the American public mourned the loss of CIA operative Johnny Spann and wondered how John Walker Lindh could have gone so wrong, Dodge finished filing his report for CBS. His satellite phone, which really belonged to CBS, was broken. His camera was dust encrusted and not working right. It was time to regroup and refit. Dodge began making his way out of Afghanistan, back across the Amu Dari River and into Uzbekistan. He would be back in three months, this time at Operation Anaconda.⁸³

Winning Big in December

The only major city not yet under Northern Alliance control was Kandahar. Karzai's and Sherzai's forces were drawing close. Karzai's force was coming from the north from Tarin Kowt, Sherzai's force was coming from the southeast and the Marines remained a potential threat from the south. Karzai's close friend and ally, Mullah Naqib, controlled Arghandab, northwest of Kandahar with his Alokozai Pashtun tribesmen.⁸⁴ [Map 3-8: First Half of December.]⁸⁵ Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden had two possibilities to stop the advance. First, they commanded a larger force than the ones that were approaching them. However, coalition air power had already damaged this force. The better hope was to inflict a catastrophic kill on the Marines located at Objective RHINO. They could not hope to achieve this with a ground attack since the Marines would see them coming and obliterate them. What they needed to do was to shoot down a CH-53E *Sea Stallion* helicopter full of marines. It was almost an article of faith with Osama bin Laden that the United States was a paper tiger--it was casualty averse and would turn tail and withdraw after

suffering only a few casualties. He based his belief on the US pullout following the death of 19 servicemen in Somalia.

We think that the United States is very much weaker than Russia. Based on the reports we received from our brothers who participated in jihad in Somalia, we learned that they saw the weakness, frailty, and cowardice of US troops. Only 80 US troops were killed. Nonetheless, they fled in the heart of darkness, frustrated, after they had caused great commotion about the new world order.⁸⁶

Muhammed Atef, Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda military commander, was originally charged with bringing down an American troop transport helicopter. Atef (an Egyptian) had learned his craft fighting against the Soviets and was supposedly in Somalia where he was instrumental in training Somalis for the attack on the American helicopters. Atef had deployed air-defense hunter-killer teams to southern Afghanistan and elsewhere. However, on 19 November, the anti-aircraft specialist was killed near Kabul--ironically by an American air strike. Atef was bin Laden's designated successor.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the marines seemed perfectly content to remain in RHINO while Afghan columns inched toward Kandahar. The chance to down a helicopter full of marines passed. The Al Qaeda began a phased withdrawal. The women and children of Al Qaeda had left the Shar-i Kot Valley with the start of the bombing campaign. Osama bin Laden's bodyguard began evacuation plans as well. Osama bin Laden was in Jalalabad on 12 November--the day before Kabul fell.⁸⁸

There was still a chance of stopping Karzi's and Sherzai's forces. Unlike the Northern Alliance forces to the North, Karzai's and Sherzai's forces were not seasoned veterans who had fought as units against the Taliban for years. These southern Pashtun forces were an *ad hoc* group and, surprisingly, in the gun culture of

Afghanistan, many of them had never fired a gun before. They certainly had not fought together as an integrated unit, and they were outnumbered by the Taliban. The Taliban dispatched a force north to deal with Karzai and alerted Taliban Forces in the East to deal with Sherzai. Karzai's force numbered some 200 and was accompanied by ODA 574.⁸⁹ The Special Forces soldiers were kept busy training the new volunteers in the rudiments of rifle fire. Sherzai's force, which numbered up to 800, were only slightly better trained, and were accompanied by ODA 583.

Karzai's force had the nastiest terrain to deal with. They were working their way south through the mountains above Kandahar. On 17 November, American air power, guided by the team members of ODA 574, stopped a Taliban advance of a reported 1,000 Taliban mounted on 100 trucks. The numbers were imprecise, but the results were not. Some 30 trucks were destroyed along with some 300 Taliban. Karzai's forces were not particularly valorous during this encounter, but nothing emboldens like success.⁹⁰ Karzai's force grew as it slowly moved the 58 miles south to the town of Sayyid Kaly and its nearby bridge over the Arghandab River at the town of Sayyid Alim Kaly. They reached it on 2 December. They were now 15 miles north of Kandahar. This time they were opposed by Al Qaeda fighters. The next two days involved some fairly heavy infantry fighting, supported by American air power. Finally, the force took the bridge and crossed the dry river bed of the Arghandab. A member of ODA 574 was wounded in the fighting. While celebrating their victory, the team received an order from Colonel Mulholland, the JTF Commander, to withdraw a half-mile back to the town of Sayyid Kalay. The team

asked for verification of these orders, but lost communications for the next three-and-one-half hours. They obeyed orders and withdrew and consolidated their positions, waiting for supplies and additional Special Forces personnel from SOCCE 52 to arrive by helicopter that night. That evening, Hamid Karzai received a cell phone call telling him that the next day, the Afghan delegates meeting in Bonn, Germany would proclaim him the interim leader of Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai's duties would soon take him elsewhere and his force was stuck north of the Arghandab River bed.⁹¹

On 5 December, the reinforced and supplied force were preparing to resume the offensive. Enemy fighters were visible on an opposing ridge line and near a cave. The close air support team called in USAF F-18 bombing attacks on the target while the tactical air control party (TACP) attached to ODA 574 talked to circling B-52 bombers. At 0930, a thousand-pound JDAM guided bomb fell directly on the friendly force. MSG Jefferson Donald Davis, SFC Daniel H. Petithory and SSG Brian Cody Prosser were killed along with six Afghans. Eight Americans and some 40 Afghans were seriously wounded. ODA 574 was *hors de combat* and Hamid Karzai was wounded. Evidently, the TACP had recently changed batteries on his global positioning system (GPS) and the battery change meant that the system needed calibration and the reentry of old targeting positions before use. Otherwise, the GPS system automatically transmitted the user's position.⁹² Inadvertently, the TACP had called the bomb onto his own friendly position and almost killed the new leader of Afghanistan. Shortly after the fratricide, a bleeding Hamid Karzai received another cell phone call confirming his selection as national leader.⁹³ The northern attack was

stymied. Karzai called Mullah Naqib by satellite phone and told him to meet with the Taliban in Kandahar and arrange for their surrender. Mullah Naqib was to be Karzai's governor of Kandahar Province. Gul Agha Sherzai was to be the commander of the Kandahar airbase. Mullah Naqib brought several Taliban negotiators to the bandaged Karzai to discuss surrender.⁹⁴ On 6 December, Hamid Karzai announced the surrender of Taliban forces in Kandahar. The Taliban were offered amnesty in return for their surrender and the surrender of their weapons, although some 650 Al Qaeda "would be brought to justice" and handed over to President Karzai's forces. US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld promptly vetoed Afghanistan's leader. He rebuked the amnesty for the Taliban. "Would an arrangement with [Mullah] Omar be consistent with what I've said? The answer is no."⁹⁵ The opportunity to bag 650 Al Qaeda and to positively identify the key Taliban was lost.

Gul Agha Sherzai's force and ODA 583 advanced along Highway 4, the main road running between the Pakistani city of Quetta and Kandahar. The terrain is easier once past the Khojak pass in Pakistan. Once past Spin Boldak in Afghanistan, the road goes through rolling hills flanked by mountains. There are two places where a mounted force could expect trouble. The force found trouble at both of them. Sherzai's 100-odd vehicle convoy crossed into Afghanistan on the morning of 22 November. The vehicles included Toyota Hilux pickup trucks, large long-haul ornately decorated Ginga trucks, and farm tractors pulling trailers. Late in the afternoon of 23 November, the convoy was 35 miles inside Afghanistan and facing

the low mountain pass five miles east of the Taliban garrison at Takhtepol. The force sent a negotiating team forward to negotiate a Taliban surrender. The Taliban talked and talked, while they deployed forces to the over-watching high ground. At 2000 hours, the Taliban abruptly rejected Sherzai's surrender demands and Sherzai's negotiating team had to flee the area as the Taliban began their attack. An AC-130 Spectre gunship was able to silence the Taliban firing and allowed the fleeing negotiators to rejoin their force. The Taliban then launched three mounted attacks in the dark--each of which was stopped by the AC-130. Six trucks were destroyed. The next morning, Sherzai's force split into three to advance on Takhtepol. They found that the Taliban had abandoned the town. The force consolidated and then began a slow seven-mile advance to the Arghestan Bridge.⁹⁶

The Arghestan Bridge is nearly a mile long. It spans the usually dry Arghestan River. It is a sturdy bridge of Portland cement and was built as part of the US International Cooperation Program. The American firm of Morrison-Knudsen built the first Kandahar-Spin Boldak road in 1948-1949 and the bridge was part of that effort. The US rebuilt it in 1962.⁹⁷ The northern end of the bridge is about two miles from the southern edge of the Kandahar airbase. The enemy decided to fight for the bridge and the airbase. It was going to be tough to take. There are limits to what an untrained force, backed by a high-technology air force, is able to do against a determined, better-trained force that has developed work-arounds against high-precision weapons. Sherzai's force was stopped dead in its tracks. ODA 583 and USAF and USN fighters and bombers took over with a week-long, round-the-clock

bombardment of the Taliban and Al Qaeda defenders. The enemy responded with artillery, multiple rocket barrages and air defense missiles and anti-aircraft artillery fire. It was an inelegant slugfest.⁹⁸ Finally, the pounding succeeded. Sherzai's force cautiously entered the airfield on 2 December but was bloodied and pushed back. The air bombardment resumed. Sherzai's force again advanced slowly across the airfield. There were dead Arabs everywhere. There was little ground fighting--just mopping up and the killing of wounded. Sherzai held the airfield--the limit of his advance by President Karzai's orders. Kandahar city had already fallen to Mullah Naqib.

Mullah Naqib had the fortune to be strong enough and influential enough to retain power over his Alokozai tribesmen and the Arghandab region during the Taliban rule. He was not Taliban, but they left them alone as long as he left them alone. He was a long-time ally of Hamid Karzai. However, Mullah Naqib was not totally fortunate. He did not have the fortune to have a US ODA assigned to him. On 5 December, the Taliban and Al Qaeda were in a panic to leave Kandahar. When Secretary Rumsfeld vetoed the surrender, the Taliban mostly went West and the Al Qaeda went East--many of them headed for the Shar-i Kot Valley. Acting under Karzai's orders, Mullah Naqib and some 50 Alokozai tribesmen moved into Kandahar and started to get the subsequent rioting and looting under control. By 7 December, Kandahar was his. On 8 December, Gul Agha Sherzai moved from the airfield and occupied the governor's palace in Kandahar. He declared himself in charge. President Karzai faced his first mutiny. He directed Sherzai to hand back control to Mullah Naqib, but Sherzai openly defied him. Smarting from his rebuff by

Secretary Rumsfeld, President Karzai realized that he was not complete master of his own house and would have to compromise. Sherzai had an ODA and coalition air power backing him. Sherzai was conducting his own disinformation campaign against Mullah Naqib, claiming that he was a Taliban leader. Karzai accepted Sherzai's coup de main and ordered Mullah Naqib to stand down and withdraw to the Arghandab.⁹⁹ Mullah Naqib obeyed his president. Sherzai had stolen the governorship and kept the air base. On 14 December, Marines from the 15th and 26th MEU began arriving at Kandahar air base. Sherzai began a long-term economic relationship supplying the US forces on his air base with vehicles, gravel and labor at exorbitant prices.

By 8 December, all of Afghanistan's major cities were under Northern Alliance control. The United States, like the Soviet Union and the British Empire, considered this as victory in Afghanistan. What was left to do was to clean up the remnants of the enemy force. In reality, the enemy was still intact and its senior leadership even more so. When the cities had fallen, the enemy had kicked out a rear guard and gone to the mountains to the old logistics sites like Tora Bora and the Shar-i Kot Valley.

Tora Bora and All That

The Taliban were local and so most of them went to ground in their own neighborhoods. The Al Qaeda were not local and no longer welcome. They had to exit Afghanistan. Shia Iran was not an option for the Sunni Al Qaeda. Pakistan's rugged frontier with its Northwest Frontier Province and Waziristan offered the best

immediate sanctuary. A logical exit point was along the old supply trail that ran from the Tora Bora into the Parachinar Valley of Pakistan. Tora Bora had been a supply depot during the Soviet-Afghan War, so it was hard to get to and easy to defend.¹⁰⁰ The natural defensive features of the terrain had been reinforced with bunkers, strong points, permanent firing positions, and other field fortifications. The area has many natural caves and ledges. Many of these had been expanded and improved, but none to the fanciful standards of the “cave-opolis” creations that adorned the pages of the news magazines of the time. Many of the caves contained large stores of ammunition and other supplies. Local guides conducted the Al Qaeda forces into the White Mountains. The mountains were snow-covered and bitter cold. The survivors of the 55th Brigade took up positions to cover the withdrawal. The field positions were well-engineered with interlocking fields of fire and cover. The caves provided some respite from the biting cold and wind. Osama bin Laden and his entourage entered the Tora Bora region on 13 November and passed through the town of Melava. Bombing of the Tora Bora region began about the same time. Osama bin Laden was still in the region on 26 November, when he had a warm cup of tea with some Yemeni Al Qaeda in one of the caves. It was the 11th day of Ramadan. He told them “hold your positions firm and be ready for martyrdom.” Two to four days later, Osama bin Laden and four lieutenants walked toward the border of Pakistan. Sometime, between 28 November and 30 November, bin Laden arrived in Pakistan. A mass exodus ensued behind the rear guard. Fleeing Al Qaeda personnel paid top dollar for Afghan

guides and mules to get them safely out of the region. Some fled despite the effort of Al Qaeda commanders to keep them in position.¹⁰¹

Up to this point, the marriage of coalition air power, ODAs, and Northern Alliance forces had worked well. There were still few American forces on the ground in Afghanistan. The Special Operations community numbered less than 500. The marines were in the lowlands of the Registan desert with something over 1,200 personnel. ODA 572 had linked up with the forces of Hazarat Ali on 2 December who was already pursuing the enemy forces into the mountains. On 5 December, the ODA joined Hazarat Ali's offensive. Osama bin Laden was already across the border. On 7 December, CIA Field Commander Gary Bernstein requested that CENTCOM produce a battalion of Rangers to drop into the Tora Bora region to block the escaping Al Qaeda.¹⁰²

General Franks decision not to employ a blocking force later became a political football in the 2004 presidential election and the subject of much armchair generalship. Many accused the US leadership of being casualty averse and letting an opportunity slip by. Most spirited debaters ignore the physical geography, logistics, and fire support. It was winter and the Tora Bora region has peaks of over 14,000 feet. The 75th Ranger Regiment is headquartered at Fort Benning, Georgia which has an elevation of 300 feet. One of its battalions is at Fort Benning; another is at Fort Lewis, Washington (elevation 380 feet) and another is at Fort Stewart, Georgia (elevation 89 feet). The only other candidate for such a long-range insertion mission is the 82nd Airborne Division, stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (elevation 187

feet). There were marines of the 15th MEU poised at RHINO (approximate elevation 3,500 feet) but without the necessary aircraft and parachute training.

In the mountains, being well-trained and physically-fit is only part of the answer. A force also has to acclimate to the altitude, especially to altitudes over 10,000 feet. Most US travelers are aware of the effect of flying into the mile-high city of Denver (5,280 feet) from the lowlands. The effects are much more pronounced at higher elevations. People tend to tire easily, become disoriented and lethargic. Any time a person travels to an elevation above 8,000 feet, the atmospheric pressure change and the available oxygen causes physiological changes which attempt to ensure that the body gets enough oxygen.¹⁰³ Humans and animals need to acclimate to cold and altitude before they can perform at altitude. It is not a quick process. The Pakistani Army conducts a seven-week acclimatization course for all personnel before they report for duty in the high-altitude Siachin glacier region. When these personnel leave the mountains, they need to acclimate again before they return to altitude. High-altitude acclimatization cannot be achieved in less than ten days.¹⁰⁴ Clearly, the optimum position for a blocking force is on the high ground behind the defending enemy. Acclimated paratroopers could do that. The 82nd Airborne and Rangers were trained paratroopers, while most of the marines were not. It made little sense to fly in troops on helicopter to lower ground where the helicopters would have to fly close to or even below enemy air defenses and then have the troops fight uphill to finally achieve a blocking position, but only after having pushed the

enemy past the blocking position. The United States needed a light infantry unit on standby at the top of the Rockies for a quick Tora Bora insertion, but there were none.

The problem of thrusting troops suddenly onto mountain tops goes beyond the fact that they will be slow, confused, and lethargic while their acclimated foes, who are dug in and prepared, are not. There is the very real problem of mountain sickness which may lead to high-altitude cerebral edema or pulmonary edema. Non-acclimated soldiers rapidly transported to elevations above 11,000 feet can develop mountain sickness symptoms within six to twelve hours. The two-three percent of mountain sickness casualties who further develop high-altitude pulmonary or cerebral edema are at high risk since there is an approximate 20 percent fatality rate.¹⁰⁵ One of the earliest US casualties in Afghanistan was a non-acclimated Special Forces soldier who developed high-altitude cerebral edema. An unsuccessful attempt to rescue him led to the crash of a MH-53 Pave Low helicopter. Since much of the Tora Bora region is beyond the maximum altitude of US helicopters, medical evacuation is problematic at best.

Besides the medical problems of fighting without acclimatization at altitude, there is the question of logistics support. Unlike Al Qaeda, the US did not have stockpiles of food, clothing, bedding, fuel, and ammunition in the mountains. Much of the Tora Bora region is too high for helicopters, so supplies would have to be parachuted or dropped from fixed-wing transport aircraft. Once the troops were on the mountains, they would be foot mobile and fairly stationary. Supply drops that did not land with pin-point accuracy (few do) would have to be found and dragged in by

combat soldiers, who presumably should be fighting rather than chasing errant parachutes. Once deployed in the mountains, the US forces would have been less mobile than their opponents due to the difference in acclimatization, supplies, and the heavy gear that the US soldiers would have to carry with them. Resupply helicopters could only supply the lower reaches, at increased peril from enemy air defense fire.

A primary consideration in mountain combat is fire support. There was no US artillery in Afghanistan and all fire support was provided by air craft. Air strikes are difficult to control in the mountains, particularly when the strikes go near friendly troops. GPS does not always work accurately in the mountains. Air strikes are also highly weather dependent and weather changes rapidly in the mountains. A prudent commander would think hard before inserting his forces (outnumbered by definition) into the middle of a prepared enemy mountain defense where accurate close air support is difficult and could be cut off completely by a sudden change in the weather.

In short, the Northern Alliance/Special Forces/coalition air power combination had worked well up to this point and there was no apparent need to stop and change in the middle of a pursuit. The President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, had assured General Franks that the Pakistani Army's 11th Corps was sealing its side of the border and had rounded up hundreds of fleeing Taliban and Al Qaeda. "We have about seventy Arab prisoners. They're al Qaeda, mostly Saudis and Yemenis. I will turn them over to you."¹⁰⁶ Air power was ripping the enemy apart. Parachuting US soldiers in the middle of prepared mountain defenses was a high-risk venture.

There seemed to be no reason to drop non-acclimated troops in the middle of a prepared mountain defense where the enemy would enjoy the advantages of position, the fire power advantage would be severely restricted or negated and the force would be immobile and possibly hostage.

The forces of Hazarat Ali, amply aided by coalition air power, advanced on the White Mountains. It was not an ideal situation. It was a deliberate attack against a dug-in army in a prepared mountain defense. It was a slow uphill fight against a tough rear guard. There was another problem--there were three commanders, two forces and one ODA on the coalition side. Hazarat Ali had seized most of Jalalabad when the enemy vacated it on 13 November. He was designated security chief of the Eastern Shura. Haji Zaman Ghamsharik, a known smuggler back from exile in France, was designated the Jalalabad commander of the Eastern Shura. The job descriptions were fuzzy, but the US wanted the urbane Ghamsharik as a balance to the barely-literate rough Ali. The force now had two commanders who disliked each other. There was a smaller second force, commanded by Haji Zahir, the son of Haji Abdul Qadir, a former commander of Yunis Khalis--a patriarchal leader of Jalalabad who had earlier befriended the Taliban and Osama bin Laden.¹⁰⁷

As the forces of Ali and Ghamsharik advanced behind the airstrikes, Osama bin Laden tried to rally his rear guard with a radio message from Pakistan on 10 December. Intercepts of this call gave US planners hope that Osama was still in Tora Bora. On 13 December, the force of Haji Zahir joined the effort. However, many of the Al Qaeda escaped. Reportedly Hazarat Ali took payment for the safe passage of

three Arabs. Ilyas Khel, one of Ali's sub-commanders was dispatched to block escape routes into Pakistan, but was bribed by Arabs to let them escape.¹⁰⁸

Reportedly Osama bin Laden had given approximately \$1,400 to each of his followers at Tora Bora. They were using it to buy their survival. By 17 December, the fighting was over. [See Map 3-9: Second Half of December.]¹⁰⁹ On 20 December, ODA 561 joined the effort and helped in site exploitation.

Many Al Qaeda were killed or wounded at Tora Bora. Others escaped into Pakistan. One group, fleeing from Kandahar, saw that it could not get out through Tora Bora because of the fighting. They turned back south and headed to the Shar-i Kot Valley to join another group from Kandahar that was already there. Along the way, the returning group was joined by some of the survivors of Tora Bora who could not escape into Pakistan.¹¹⁰ The Shar-i Kot Valley was filling up with combatants who had nowhere else to go and were in a position to conduct a deliberate set-piece battle.

The battle of Tora Bora hurt the Al Qaeda force in the mountains. Not all died there and many clearly escaped, but it was no longer a coherent conventional force. The Pakistani Army 11th Corps did block the Parachinar valley, but did not go deep into the mountains where it would have had to fight with the fractious local villagers even before it tangled with Al Qaeda. The villagers had no allegiance to Pakistan or Afghanistan and opposed government incursions onto their land.¹¹¹ They would have opposed a US force just as readily, or even more so. They were a law

unto themselves and they welcomed the cash that Al Qaeda was using to buy its way out.

Embassy Row, Kabul

On 11 September, CW3 Jerry Philbrook was stationed at the US Embassy in Moscow. After the bombings, he was ordered back to Washington, DC to DIA Headquarters. “Get yourself ready. We are going to reopen very quickly in Afghanistan. I want you to take the mission.” After CIA, DIA, and the State Department agreed, Jerry was given the mission, a wad of cash, a weapon, and two cases of communications gear. On the evening of 19 November, he caught a flight from Baltimore to Mildenhall, England. From there, it was his responsibility to get to Kabul. He arrived in Mildenhall and was snowed in for a day. He then wangled flights from the United Kingdom to Turkey, from Turkey to Uzbekistan, and from Uzbekistan to Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. It was night, it was cold, and he found an old friend, Brigadier General Gary Harrell, a long-time Special Forces soldier. He slept in the general’s quarters that night, a bombed-out building disintegrating at the edge of the airstrip.

The next morning, Jerry was in the market for a car. He was carrying a wad of dollars and was soon the owner of an ancient Land Cruiser. He headed solo for Kabul on the bombed-out roads. The Northern Alliance was already in Kabul and there was little traffic on the way. All the bridges between Bagram and Kabul were destroyed, so it was a slow drive. He finally reached the traffic circle by the Kabul airfield. After stopping to ask directions several times, he found someone with a little

English who pointed him in the right direction. The Embassy gate had been destroyed during a Taliban-inspired riot in October, so he drove right in. The Northern Alliance was hunting down remaining pockets of Taliban and Al Qaeda and there was active fighting southeast of the embassy.

Jerry entered the embassy. It was a time capsule. Apparently no one, but the nesting birds, had been in the building since it was evacuated in 1989. Thirteen years worth of fine, black, dust coated everything--the books in the library, the bust of Thomas Jefferson, the Marine Corps bar, the red-and-white-checked table cloths on the tables of the embassy cafeteria. Most of the embassy motor fleet had been burned in the October riot, but in the drive-in basement, under sheets, were five brand-new 1988 Volkswagen Jettas. Amazingly, after pumping up the original tires and putting in new batteries and fuel, they ran.

Jerry set to work and was soon joined by three other Americans from State Department and other agencies. Jerry had Iridium-based and INMARSAT-based communications gear. He needed to set up the INMARSAT antennas, but small arms fire rattled across the embassy grounds. Jerry waited until night to set them up, but the red lens on his mini-mag flashlight still drew fire. After establishing communication, Jerry used a snow shovel that he found in the basement to shovel out the dirt, debris, and bird leavings to clear a sleeping area.

The four occupants of the embassy did not remain Lords of the Manor for long. The embassy soon filled with embassy personnel. Within a month, there were almost 200 people including the Marine Guards. Other embassies were opening--

Germany, Iran, China, Pakistan. United Nations personnel were coming as well. Living and working space was soon at a premium. Office supplies were a valuable commodity. Janine Jackson of the State Department was the first charge.¹¹²

On 17 December, a smiling Jerry Philbrook watched Ambassador James F. Dobbins, the Special Envoy to Afghanistan, officially reopen the US Embassy in Kabul. On 22 December, the 30-member interim government of Afghanistan formally took their offices and the United Nations Security Council authorized the creation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to maintain security in Kabul for the interim government. Both were authorized to last for six months. A British-led force was the first to take up duties in ISAF.

It was a new hopeful time for Afghanistan. The Taliban no longer controlled the cities and government of Afghanistan. Al Qaeda, for the most part, was no longer resident in Afghanistan. There was a new, friendly government forming in Afghanistan. It looked like victory. It looked like it was time to move on to consolidating victory and assisting the new government in establishing itself. Special Operations Forces had, for the first time in history, controlled a theater of war and fought a successful campaign in it using indigenous conventional forces and coalition air power. It was a remarkable achievement, but it was not victory. Like the British and Soviets before them, the United States confused control of the cities with control of Afghanistan. The Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership had escaped fairly intact. The Taliban network was still intact and controlled large parts of the country. The Taliban and Al Qaeda had been severely damaged, but they were not out of the fight.

The United States prepared to move conventional forces into Afghanistan to help consolidate the victory. In late December, SOCCENT made another decision. 5th Group would now be JSOTF-North--responsible for Northern Afghanistan above the 34th parallel. JSOTF-South would be formed from the headquarters of Naval Special Warfare Group-1 (NSWG-1) out of San Diego, California.¹¹³ This was a training command that had no assigned combat units. The “Desert-1” syndrome was forming.¹¹⁴ Every service wanted a piece of the action and, in the spirit of jointness, everyone was going to get a piece, whether it was totally appropriate or not. This time, the “jointness” was better, but JSOTF-South was a naval command dealing with a land-locked country. Navy SEALs had no experience in training and fighting with local forces. Commodore Robert S. Harward commanded JSOTF-South from the remote island of Misirah off the coast of Oman,--a favorite staging area for the Navy SEALs since the 1960s. LTC Chris Haas was told to detach his A Company to JSOTF-South, bringing a ground mobile strike element to the command. Like 5th Group, Commodore Harward’s command also lacked sufficient personnel, equipment, logistics, and training to manage all the duties of a JSOTF. But, he had personal knowledge of Afghanistan. When his father worked in Tehran, young Robert had gone hiking through the Afghanistan of the 1970s. He had also been an instrumental part of the planning process in Bagram during November and December. The JSOTF-South personnel actually in Afghanistan were concentrated in Kandahar. [See Map 3-10: SF Disposition, 31 December 2001.]¹¹⁵

¹Rakkasans is Japanese for “falling umbrellas.” The Rakkasans are the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Air Assault Division and gained their nickname during the occupation of Japan after World War II. The 3rd Brigade contains the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions of the 187th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The 101st Air Assault Division gained fame during World War II as the 101st Airborne Division and was featured in the HBO series “Band of Brothers.”

²Interview with BG Wiercinski, Schofield Barracks, 13 January 2006.

³Interviews with LTC Haas and 1SG Danny Lynn Van Allen, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

⁴Interview with CPT Nate Self, Fort Leavenworth, 24 March 2003.

⁵Interview with MG Hagenbeck, Bagram, 20 May 2002.

⁶Interview with LTC Pat Stogran, Williamsburg, 25 May 2004.

⁷Interview with Major Yates, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

⁸Interview with LTC Lockwood, Kuwait Staff College, 27 November 2005.

⁹Interview with Colonel David M. Neuenswander, Fort Leavenworth, 24 April 2006.

¹⁰John Sack, “Anaconda,” *Esquire* (August 2002): 135; and Interview with PFC Shkelqim Mahmuti, B Company, 1-87, Fort Drum, 12 June 2002.

¹¹Tommy Franks with Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier* (New York: Regan Books, 2004), 238-246; and meeting with Tommy Franks, 23 September 2001, MacDill.

¹²Interview with CSM Jimmy Taylor, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

¹³Adam Robinson, *Bin Laden: Behind the Mask of the Terrorist* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 207.

¹⁴Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 404-412 and 532.

¹⁵Map courtesy of Joe Celeski, “Operationalizing COIN-CJSOTF Afghanistan 2003” briefing

¹⁶Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, 269-272.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 272-282.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 269-282. When author Les Grau visited Washington, D.C. during this time, he talked to a variety of services staffs and intelligence directorates/agencies. Each had their own independent approach. There was even a working group seriously advocating a nuclear response. Few audiences were as interested in the theater as much as their service’s or organization’s potential role in the theater. For example, when Les briefed the Air Staff, he started out explaining a bit about the geography, culture, and history of Afghanistan. Within three minutes, he was interrupted by a USAF Lieutenant-General with the words: “We don’t have time for this bullshit. Just tell us the fifteen key things we have to destroy in this goddamn country in order to eradicate it.” It did little good to explain that Afghanistan had been “bombed back to the Stone Age” numerous times and that little remained in the way of viable infrastructure targets. Indeed, the initial air campaign in Afghanistan concentrated on “the Afghan integrated air defense system, command and control headquarters, tank maintenance facilities, and staging areas.” They treated the Taliban/Al Qaeda as a coherent, functioning system in a developed theater and initially devoted little effort to the main (and virtually only) target--the actual Taliban and Al Qaeda forces deployed on line against the Northern Alliance. The shift in targets occurred only when it finally became obvious that bombers were destroying rubble. Then, with the aid of Special Operating Forces forward air controllers operating with the Northern Alliance, air power blasted the Taliban and Al Qaeda from their fixed positions. The way was now finally open for the Northern Alliance to force the enemy out of the cities and into the mountains.

¹⁹European Command (EUCOM) was responsible for Europe and SubSaharan Africa. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) was responsible for the Caribbean and Central and South America. Pacific Command (PACOM) was responsible for China, India, and the Pacific Region. Central Command (CENTCOM) was responsible for planning and conducting US operations in a region consisting of 27 countries in Northeast Africa, Southwest and Central Asia, and the island nation of the Seychelles. Another major combatant command, the Northern Command (NORTHCOM) would be added in April 2002 to handle the North American continent and Caribbean. EUCOM and PACOM had permanently assigned forces that belonged to each command.

²⁰The Army was down to only three light divisions--the 82nd Airborne, the 101st Air Assault and the two-brigade 10th Mountain Division. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld came into office seeking to reduce the army by two-three divisions to save money for some high-technology buys. Any or all of these three divisions were in danger of disappearing until 9/11.

²¹Gary C. Schroen, *First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 179.

²²*Ibid.*, 38.

²³*Ibid.*, 90.

²⁴Celeski.

²⁵“Pyat’ frontov grazhdanskoy voyny: mezhdynarodny novosti” [Five Fronts in the Civil War: International News], *Izvestiya*, 6 October 2001, 7. The variance between the US Army estimate on the map and the Russian estimate is common and reflects the difficulty in establishing detailed facts in Afghanistan.

²⁶Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder, and Kalev I. Sepp, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 52.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 53.

²⁸Celeski, “Operationalizing COIN-CJSOTF Afghanistan 2003” briefing.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Briscoe et al. 122.

³¹Schroen, 213.

³²Map courtesy of Joe Celeski, “Operationalizing COIN-CJSOTF Afghanistan 2003” briefing. Map modified by authors.

³³Franks, 287.

³⁴Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror: America's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2005), 80.

³⁵Arthur P. Brill Jr., “Afghanistan Diary: Corps Considerations: Lessons Learned in Phase One,” from *Marine Air-Ground Task Force Concepts*, BOK8605 Student Handout, Quantico, 2005, USMC Basic School, 13.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 100-101. Lambeth also points out that the President and Secretary of Defense took part of the air war planning out of the hands of CENTCOM on the 10th day of the air campaign. Air Force General Charles Holland, the commander of Special Operations Command (SOCOM), became the senior operational commander for part of air campaign and bypassed General Franks, reporting directly to Secretary Rumsfeld and President Bush, 94.

³⁷Schroen, 240-241.

³⁸Franks, 296-301.

³⁹Celeski; and Interviews with LTC Haas and 1SG Danny Lynn Van Allen, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002. Two ODAs (555th and 585th) were on the ground and two more (586th and 594th) would join on 8 November.

⁴⁰Schroen, 146-147.

⁴¹Briscoe et al. 109-113.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 113; and Franks, 305.

⁴³Gary Berntsen and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al Qaeda: A Personal Account by the CIA's Key Field Commander* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005), 82.

⁴⁴Interview with Major Justin Sapp, Task Force Dagger in Kuwait City on 27 November 2005. Briscoe et al. 124-126.

⁴⁵Sapp; and Schroen, 247-252.

⁴⁶Robin Moore, *The Hunt for Bin Laden: Task Force Dagger* (New York: Random House, 2003), 66.

⁴⁷Sapp; and Schroen, 252-255.

⁴⁸Jason Burke, “Desperate Call from the Valley of Death—‘Help Us...,’” *The Observer* (28 October 2001), <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,,582247,00.html> (accessed 25 August 2006).

⁴⁹Schroen, 267.

⁵⁰Burke.

⁵¹Briscoe et al. 98.

⁵²Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, DOD Press Briefing, 1325 hours, 22 October 2001. This was a joint briefing with General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

⁵³Joseph Fitchett, “Major Drive Seen for Afghan Cities,” *International Herald Tribune*, 31 October 2001.

⁵⁴Cesar G. Soriano, “Elite Marine Unit Makes First Strike at Taliban,” *USA Today*, 5 November 2001.

⁵⁵Lambeth, 111-112.

⁵⁶Briscoe et al. 132-140.

⁵⁷Sapp; and Schroen, 247-248.

⁵⁸State Department Press Statement by Richard Boucher in Washington, D.C. on 5 November 2001.

⁵⁹Briscoe et al. 98.

⁶⁰Celeski. Map modified by authors.

⁶¹Briscoe et al. 99. The Mi-8HT HIIP export model is the Mi-17.

⁶²Briscoe et al. 101-102.

⁶³Celeski. Map modified by authors.

⁶⁴Michael Griffin, “The Storm of Airplanes,” In the Position website, <http://www.nthposition.com/stormofairplanes.php> (accessed 20 September 2006).

⁶⁵Briscoe et al. 103.

⁶⁶Celeski. Map modified by authors.

⁶⁷Berntsen, 241.

⁶⁸Briscoe et al. 106-107.

⁶⁹Brill, 14-15.

⁷⁰Celeski. Map modified by authors.

⁷¹Paul Yule interview with General Fausi and Mr. Sayed Noorullah in Mazar-i Sharif, 2002.

⁷²See video footage of the scene ARD TV (Germany).

⁷³Yule.

⁷⁴Details provided by Johnny Spann’s father as told to him by the second CIA operative Dave in January 2002. Dodge Billingsley, 2002.

⁷⁵The incident is shot on video by an Afghan cameraman injured in the fighting and subsequently hospitalized for a couple of weeks. Consequently the tape did not surface for a few weeks after the fact.

⁷⁶Conversation with 5th SFG operator Aaron who was part of the team responding to CIA Dave’s call for help, Con-432969C51\c\s\lDodge Billingsley, 2002.

⁷⁷According to the *London Daily Telegraph*, March 26, 2002, the British Special Forces personnel at Qala-i Jangi were six members of the Special Boat Service (SBS).

⁷⁸CAS 2 were U.S. personnel from the 5th Special Forces Group at Fort Campbell Kentucky. Captain Paul (30 years old), Captain Kevin (who would suffer a fractured pelvis), Sergeant First Class Paul Beck, and First Sergeant David. There was one U.S. Air Force Combat Controller, Sergeant Mike (27 years old).

⁷⁹Interview Sgt Mike, Air Force Combat Controller, CAS 2 team inside the fortress on Monday 26th November, “Americas New War,” *CBS News Productions*, for The Learning Channel, 2002.

⁸⁰All dialogue captured on Dodge Billingsleys video tape of the incident.

⁸¹Dodge Billingsley on-site interview with Special Forces soldier at Qala Jangi.

⁸²There are competing stories as to when Johnny Spann’s body was finally retrieved.

⁸³Some have characterized Qala-i Jangi as a deliberate massacre. It was more the result of a series of mistakes. First, the Al Qaeda prisoners were never adequately searched. Second, the Northern Alliance guards were outnumbered, by at least four to one in a fortress that was not designed to be a large prison. The Al Qaeda were housed less than 20 meters from stockpiled weapons—although they were probably unaware of this upon entering the fortress. Third, the prisoners were not given adequate guarantees for their safety, and being foreigners, may have felt they would surely be killed and therefore had nothing to lose by revolt. Al Qaeda who survived the uprising claim that some in the group cried as they were being led into the courtyard Sunday morning—sure that they were going to be killed. Once the uprising began Northern Alliance soldiers on the scene resolved to quell it. There were no surrender negotiations. This is understandable. Less than two weeks before, Dostum’s emissaries were executed when they went to discuss surrender of the forces in the Girl’s School in Mazar-i Sharif. General Dostum’s forces, backed by three of four US-dropped JDAMs, attacked and destroyed the school until all 600 Pakistanis inside were killed. Fourth, the CIA agents in the fortress did not have adequate back up once the uprising began—there was no quick reaction force outside the fortress walls. Plus, they were without vital communications equipment and were forced to rely on a journalist’s satellite phone to bring in the Special Forces. There were rumors during the battle that the initial cause of the uprising may have been aggressive reporting. However, since the journalists within the fortress on Sunday morning were not present in the southern courtyard when the shooting began this is not possible and may have been the result of the CIA agents using their digital camera during interrogation. Or, it may have been the Afghan cameramen who were working for the German ARD TV. They were filming the interaction between the CIA and the prisoners. Finally, there is the question of the number of prisoners. If, as General Dostum’s Political Officer, Olim Razum, claims, there were up to five hundred prisoners in the fortress at the insurrection’s beginning, then a significant number remain unaccounted for. Pakistanis have surfaced in Pakistan since the incident claiming to have been part of the group taken to the fortress. They claim that they escaped during the night and eventually made their way out of Afghanistan. Some Al Qaeda were lynched blocks from Qala-i Jangi by local residents and at least three were found dead outside the fortress walls near an open drain pipe.

⁸⁴Sarah Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 48.

⁸⁵Celeski. Map modified by authors.

⁸⁶Osama bin Laden, transcript of “Usamah Bin-Ladin, the Destruction of the Base.”

Interview with Usamah Bin-Ladin, presented by Salah Najm, conducted by Jamal Isma’il in an unspecified location in Afghanistan, aired 10 June 1999.

<http://www.aldridgeshs.qld.edu.au/sose/modrespg/terror/life> accessed 23 October 2006. Bin Laden’s math is obviously different than that of the world press.

⁸⁷MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, <http://www.tkb.org/KeyLeader.jsp?memID=5823> (accessed 23 October 2006).

⁸⁸Phillip Smucker, “How bin Laden got away,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 4 March 2002.

⁸⁹ODA 574 was commanded by Captain Jason Amerine.

⁹⁰Briscoe et al. 156-157.

⁹¹Ibid., 175-178.

⁹²This is the same reason attributed to the JDAM strike that went astray during the Qala Jangi uprising.

⁹³Ibid., 179-181; and Berntsen, 288.

⁹⁴Chayes, 44-47.

⁹⁵September 11 News.com, December 2001 Timeline, <http://www.september11news.com/DailyTimelineDec.htm> (assessed on 28 December 2006).

⁹⁶Briscoe et al. 167-169.

⁹⁷Frank N. Shubert, “U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Afghanistan’s Highways, 1960-1967,” *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management* 117, no. 3 (1991), 451.

⁹⁸Briscoe et al. 170.

⁹⁹Chayes, 44-49; and Briscoe et al. 182-183.

¹⁰⁰During the Soviet-Afghan War, the Tora Bora region was known to the Soviets as the Melava fortified region. The Mujahideen referred to the region as the Maro stronghold. For accounts of fighting in the region during the Soviet-Afghan War, see “Conducting a tactical air assault in the ‘Melava’ fortified region,” Lester W. Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996), 103-106; and “Air Assault on Maro Stronghold,” Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau, “The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War,” (US Marine Corps Special Study DM-980701, Quantico, 1998), 236-238. Melava and Maro are both small towns that are near each other.

¹⁰¹Smucker.

¹⁰²Berntsen, 290-291.

¹⁰³Lester W. Grau and Dr. William A. Jorgensen, “Medical Implications of High Altitude Combat,” *U.S. Army Medical Department Journal* (April-June 2003), 2 reprinted in *Journal of Special Operations Medicine* (Fall 2003).

¹⁰⁴Lester W. Grau and Hernan Vázquez, “Ground Combat at High Altitude,” *Military Review* (January-February 2002): 24.

¹⁰⁵Grau and Jorgensen, 5.

¹⁰⁶Franks, 323.

¹⁰⁷Mary Anne Weaver, “Lost at Tora Bora,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 11 September 2005.

¹⁰⁸Smucker.

¹⁰⁹Map courtesy of Joe Celeski, “Operationalizing COIN-CJSOTF Afghanistan 2003” briefing. Map modified by authors.

¹¹⁰Franks, 377.

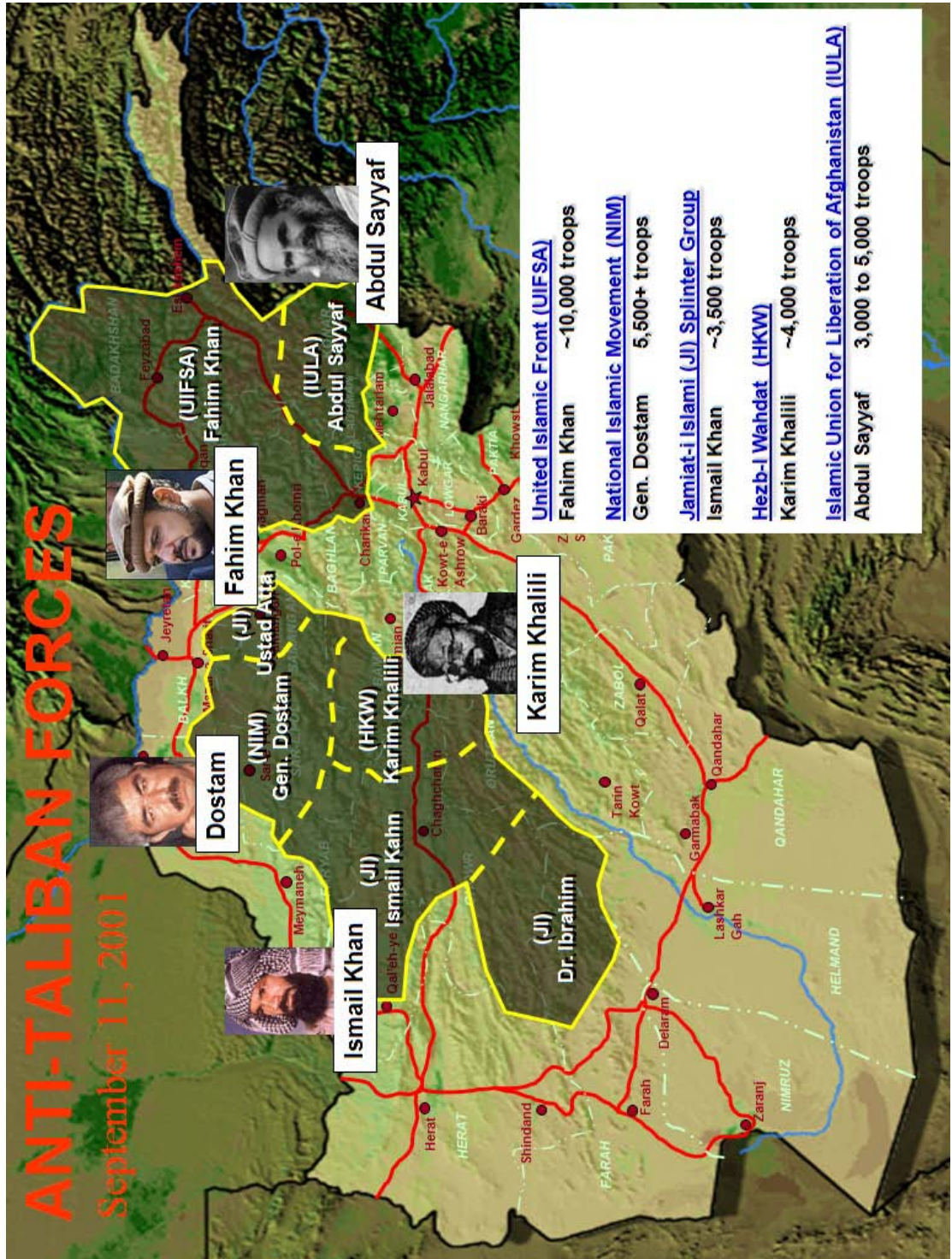
¹¹¹Jed Babbin, “The Legend of Tora Bora,” *National Review*, 1 November 2004, based on an interview with CENTCOM Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Michael “Rifle” DeLong.

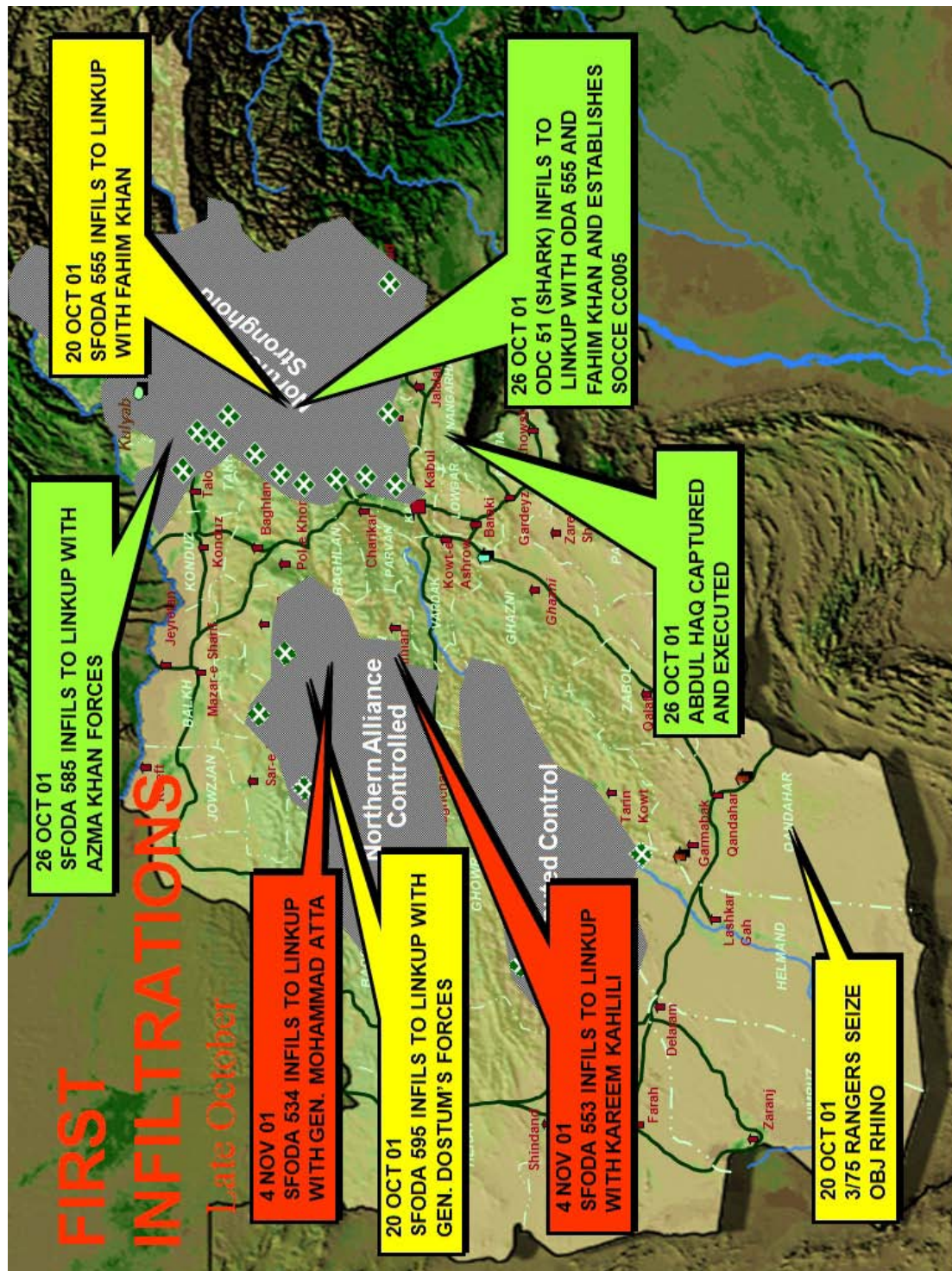
¹¹²Interview with CW3 Jerry Philbrook, Kabul, 14 November 2005.

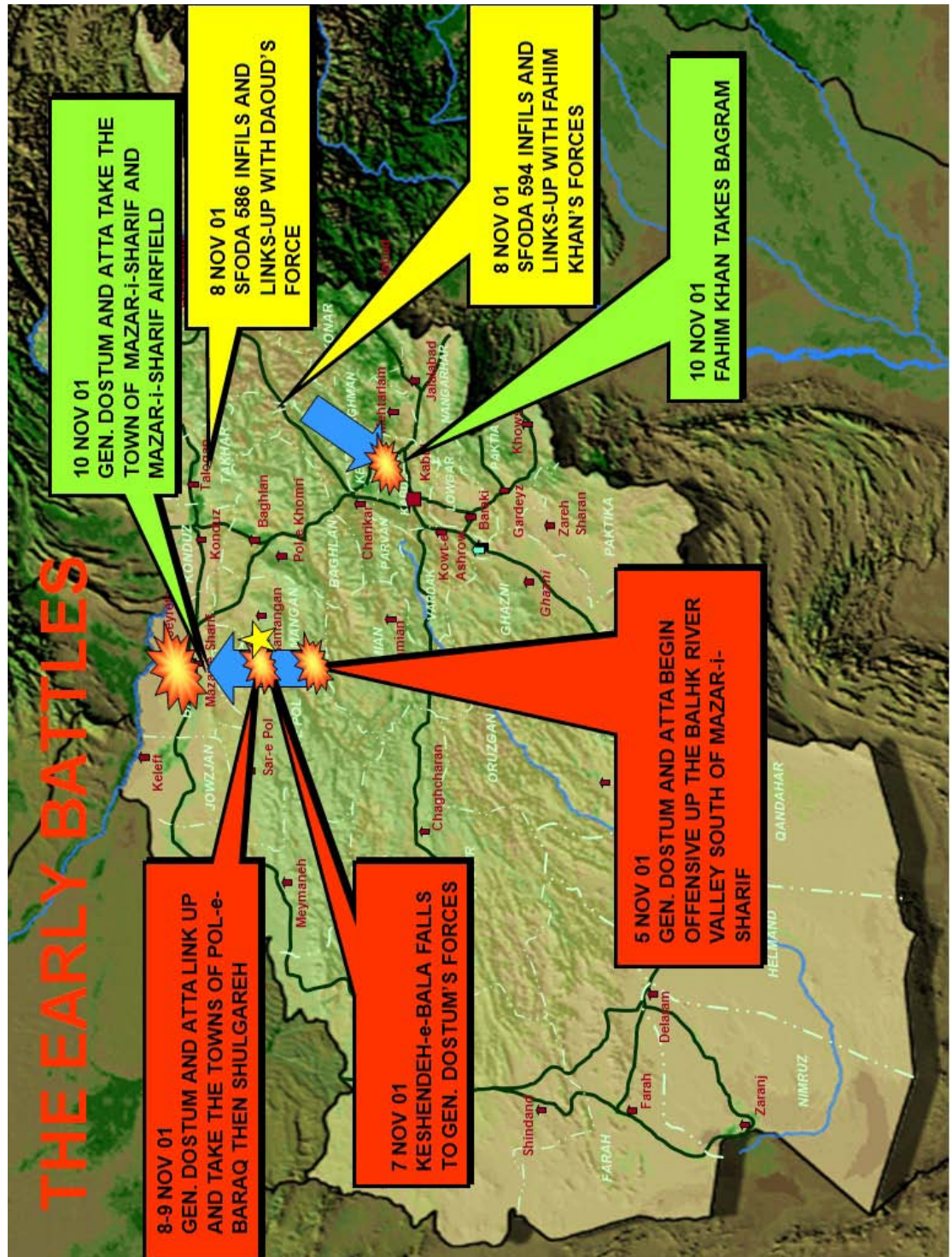
¹¹³Briscoe et al. 54.

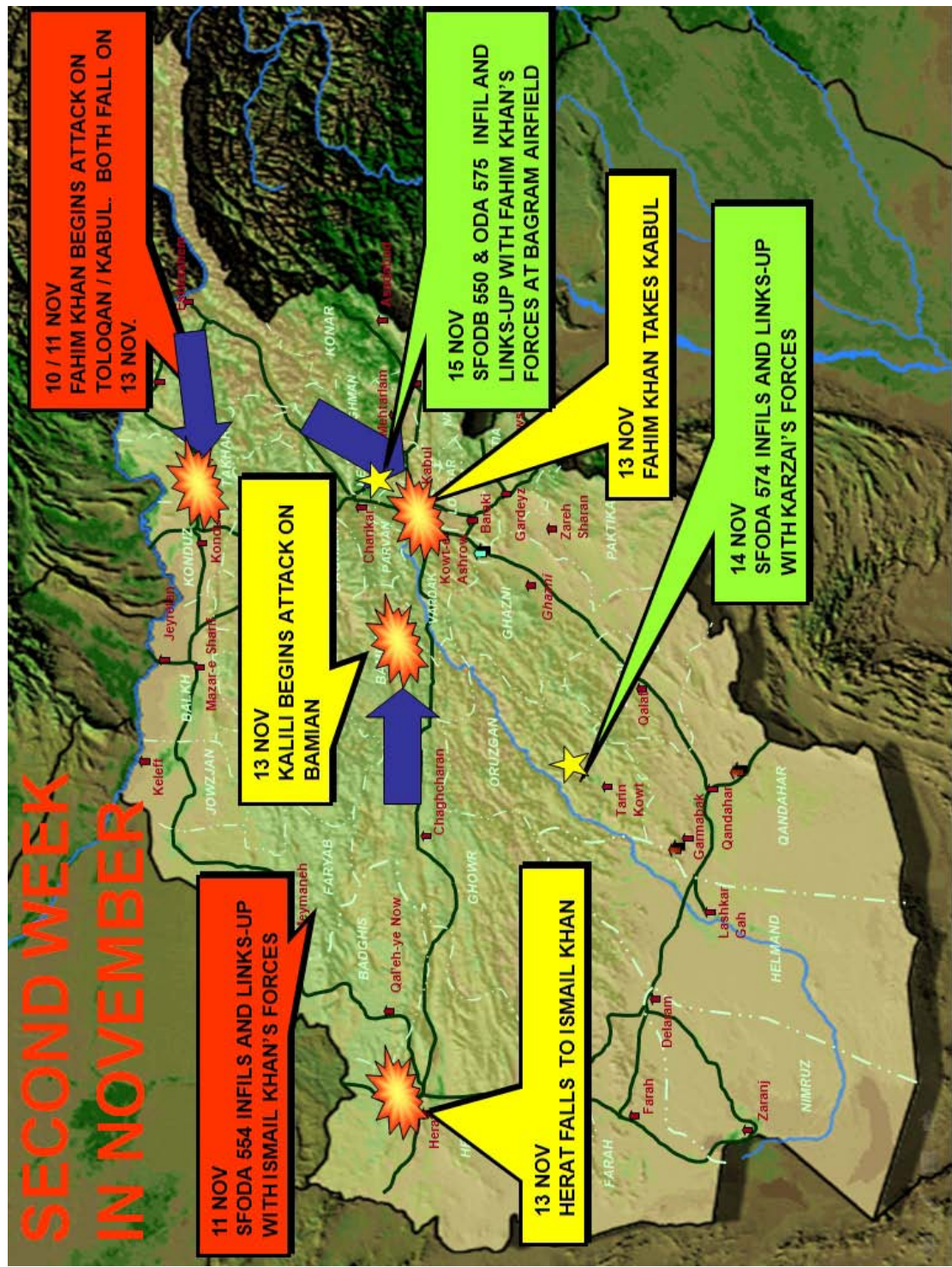
¹¹⁴Desert-1 was the staging site within Iran that US Armed Forces used for the 1980 abortive rescue attempt of the 53 American hostages from the US Embassy in Tehran. Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine forces were used in the rescue attempt, but the services did not work smoothly together. Two of eight helicopters were lost in a dust storm and another helicopter was broken. When the mission was scrubbed, a helicopter flew into a C-130 transport aircraft. Eight servicemen were killed, four were injured, five helicopters were abandoned, along with classified documents. It was one of the low points of the Carter administration.

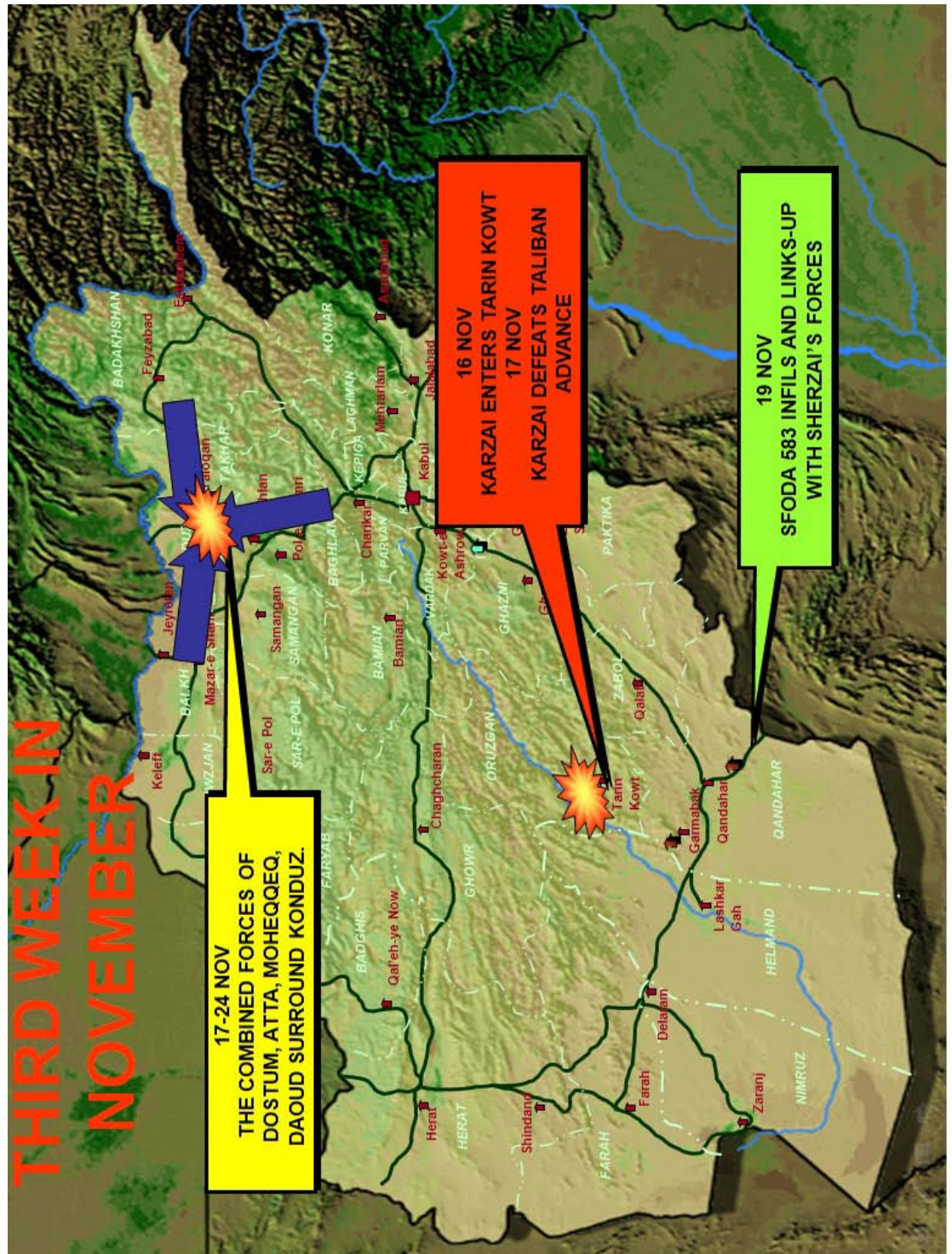
¹¹⁵Celeski. Map modified by authors.

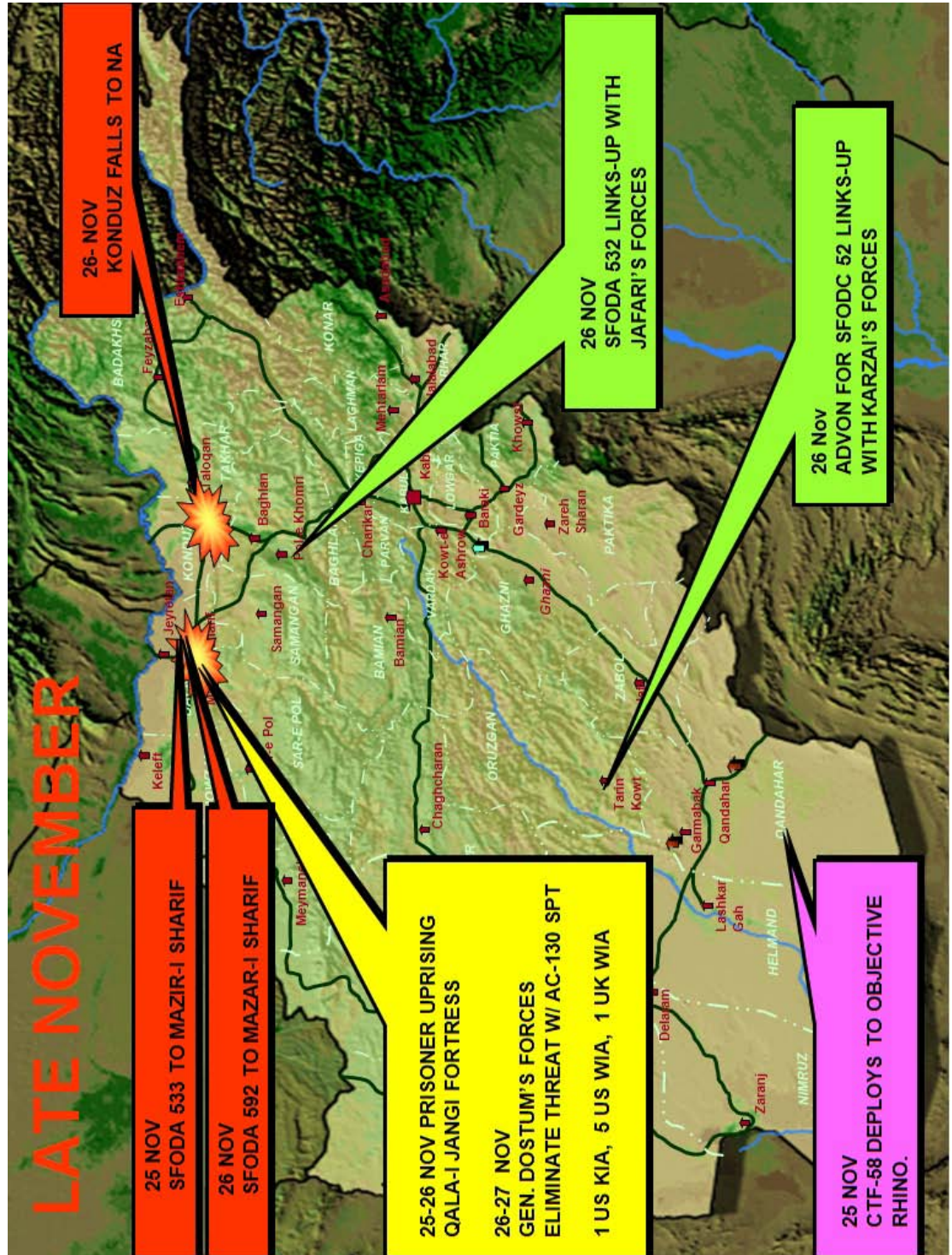


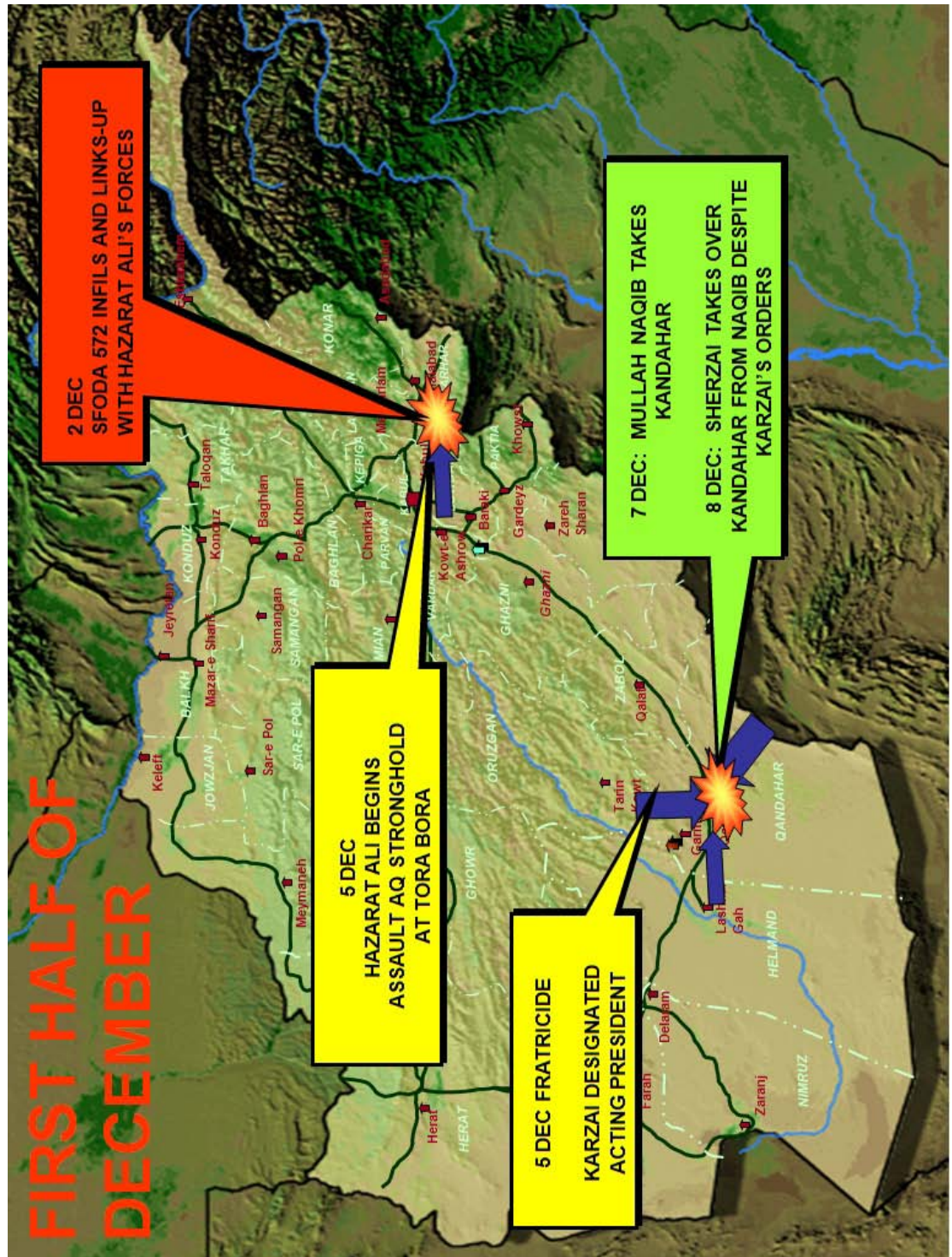


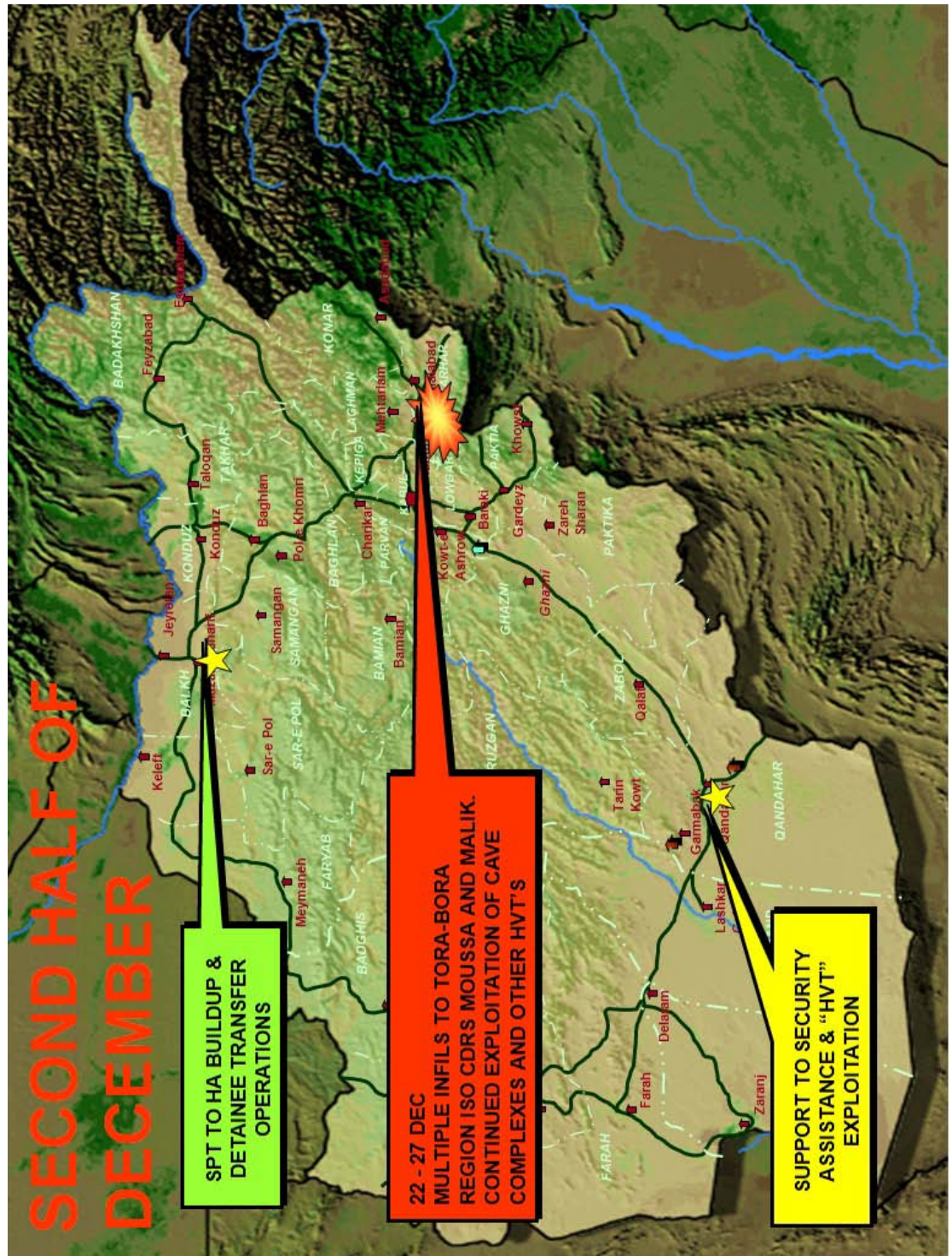










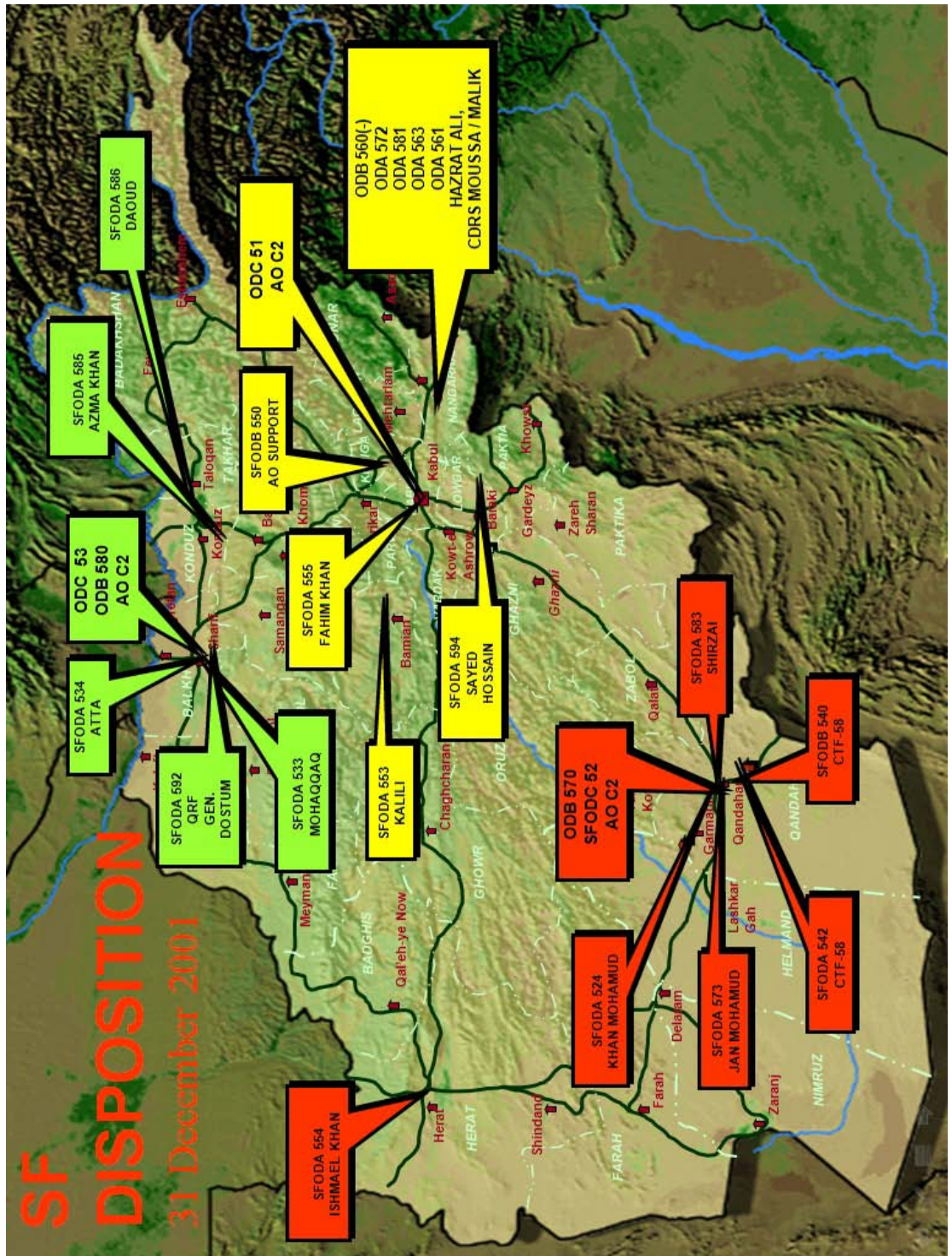


SECOND HALF OF DECEMBER

SPT TO HA BUILDUP & DETAINEE TRANSFER OPERATIONS

22 - 27 DEC
MULTIPLE INFILTS TO TORA-BORA REGION ISO CDRS MOUSSA AND MALIK. CONTINUED EXPLOITATION OF CAVE COMPLEXES AND OTHER HVT'S

SUPPORT TO SECURITY ASSISTANCE & "HVT" EXPLOITATION



CHAPTER 4.

MOVING INTO AFGHANISTAN

Events had moved along much faster than anyone had anticipated. Initial planning envisioned a winter stalemate and build-up period followed by a spring offensive. However, once the focus of the air operation shifted to the enemy, the Northern Alliance was able to break out and swiftly seize the cities. During October-November 2001, while the combination of Northern Alliance troops, Special Operations Forces, and coalition aircraft were driving the Taliban out of the cities of Afghanistan, the follow-on forces were assembling in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain and were making their way to Afghanistan. There was a rush to get conventional units close to and eventually into Afghanistan, but the conventional force that entered Afghanistan was fairly light. Most pundits and planners considered that the departure of the Taliban and Al Qaeda from the cities was proof that the war was over (a mistake made earlier by British forces and later by Soviet forces). The units that deployed were not allowed to bring all of their combat kit. Their role was going to be mopping up and temporary occupation--it was going to be a repeat of Kosovo. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 of 20 December 2001 authorized the formation and deployment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Initially some eighteen countries began to deploy troops to Afghanistan to provide security for Kabul. The initial ISAF force was supposed to have 5,000 troops, although it took until August 2003 to achieve that standard.

Part of the 10th Mountain Division Goes to the Hindu Kush Mountains¹

Major Jay Hall is a 1982 graduate of Auburn University and a native of Greenville, South Carolina. He did not plan on a military career and started a civilian career after graduation. He enlisted in the Army in 1985, and after a tour in the 82nd Airborne Division he went to Officer Candidate School. He had a string of light infantry assignments while also managing to pick up a Masters Degree in International Relations. He mastered the Thai language at the Defense Language Institute in the Presidio of Monterey, California and was designated an Army Foreign Area Officer. During a tour in Laos, he worked with Wendy Chamberlain at the embassy. Wendy would become US Ambassador to Pakistan just after 9/11. In 1999, Jay was assigned to the 10th Mountain Division as the G5. He deployed with the division to Bosnia, where he ended up working for a Norwegian Colonel! In March 2000, Jay became chief of G3 Operations for the division. In January 2001, he became the S3 of the 1-87 Infantry. In May 2001, his new battalion commander was LTC Paul La Camera. There were only two battalions on post on 11 September--the 1-87th Infantry and the 4-31st Infantry. The division was scattered in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Sinai, and eight other countries. The 1-87th was immediately designated the Division Reaction Force. There were some initial alerts to prepare to guard key installations in the United States. Most of these did not occur except for the mission to provide security to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. Many troops were hoping to go to New York City to help in the search and rescue effort. After several alerts and false starts, the battalion was locked down on post

during the third week of September. During the fourth week of September, the battalion began loading the gear of A Company on pallets and issuing the desert camouflage field uniform (DCU) to the soldiers.

On Sunday night 30 September, LTC Paul La Camera and Major Jay Hall were called into the office of the 1st Brigade Commander. The 1-87 belonged to the 2nd Brigade, but the 2nd Brigade was deployed to the Balkans. The 1st Brigade Commander asked how their preparations for possible deployment were proceeding. The next morning, at the 0645 Physical Training (PT) formation, the 1st Brigade Commander gave Paul and Jay the word that they were deploying to Uzbekistan. They had to deploy the battalion in 16 hours! The Division Reaction Force is supposed to deploy a company in 16 hours. The battalion had to do four times as much preparation in the same constrained period. It was a zoo, an organized zoo, but a zoo nonetheless since only five people in the battalion were allowed to know what was going on (the Commander, the Executive Officer, the S3, the Command Sergeant Major, and the S3 Air). Everyone else thought it was an exercise instead of an actual deployment, which made it very difficult getting the support needed without disclosing the urgent need. There was no written order, just a verbal order to have the first aircraft load at the airfield by noon. By late afternoon, the battalion had all six aircraft loads at the airfield, and the aircraft did not arrive. Fortunately, the 1-87 was used to deploying and had already made up manifests and loads for whatever type aircraft would finally arrive.

The battalion's deployment to Uzbekistan was a secret and the division and 1st Brigade were keeping it so. However, USAF lieutenants began calling the unit for information on the unit deployment to Uzbekistan. Dog handlers and their dogs arrived from Fort Bragg who knew all about the mission. Special Forces doctors began calling the battalion surgeon to coordinate the medications needed for Uzbekistan. It was a secret, but apparently only for the 1-87th. The battalion moved out to the airfield and waited. On Monday night, they finally got a copy of the FORSCOM order. They were to send a company team to Uzbekistan. The company team would be attached to the 5th Special Forces Group. On Tuesday, they got maps but still no orders. On Wednesday morning, LTC La Camera sent most of the battalion back to barracks except A Company and the battalion headquarters. On Wednesday, the 3rd of October, A Company finally was ordered to fly to Uzbekistan. Although it was still a secret, CNN was broadcasting the details to the world. Most of the battalion was notified by CNN. As A Company boarded their C-17 aircraft, Jay was handed an envelope with classified documents and instructions to secure the large Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Field in Uzbekistan. The envelope also contained an aerial photograph of K2. It was far too large for a single company to secure.

The company flew to Charleston, South Carolina and then to the Azores. Then the aircraft flew on to Sigonella, Italy (Sicily) and then to Turkey. Finally, they flew into Uzbekistan. They landed at K2 during the night of 5 October. There were already some 30-40 US personnel there--Special Forces and Air Force. The Uzbek military were already securing the airbase. Captain Roger Crombie, the A Company

Commander, coordinated with the Uzbek military, determined where his sector was and began to dig in a small sector on the northwestern side of the airfield. The rest of the battalion and the battalion commander were still in Fort Drum.

Major Hall checked in with LTC Jeff Rehorn from the Joint Forces Command (JFCOM). Jeff was setting up the Joint Operations Center (JOC) for the JSOTF. Jay was delighted to meet the local JSOTF commander, USAF Colonel Kisner. When Jay was an aide-de-camp to the Deputy Commander of JSOC, Major Kisner worked in J3 plans. Now Colonel Kisner had a Special Operations Wing (SOW) out of Hurlburt Field, Florida. It's always nice when the new boss knows you and your capabilities. Jay had ready access to the boss and enjoyed the boss' confidence that he understood the USAF world of Special Operations.

Major Hall then met with the Uzbek authorities and began negotiating. The portion of the airfield that the 1-87 was guarding was enough for two companies. He wanted a bigger piece of the action. When the entire battalion deployed, it had to have enough for the soldiers to do. Further, Jay began pushing for the creation of a joint Uzbek-US TOC to coordinate the actions of the US forces and the nine Uzbek military and other agencies represented on the airfield. Jay was able to get a larger piece of the airfield perimeter and, once his TOC was established, move the Uzbek forces outside to provide longer-range security for the airfield through patrols and checkpoints.

The rest of the battalion joined A Company. This was a real combat mission, but the battalion really wanted to get into Afghanistan. Colonel Mulholland, the

commander of 5th Group, was the overall JSOTF commander. The security situation at K2 was improving and the Joint TOC was a big factor in its success. The battalion felt that they could contribute to the fight in the South. Colonel Mulholland agreed and asked the 1-87 to designate and train a platoon as the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) for the JSOTF. This was a demonstration of major trust by the Special Operations Community and was a reflection of the special relationship between members of the 1-87, such as LTC Paul La Camera and CSM Grippe and the Special Forces leadership who had served together in the Ranger Regiment. On the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, Colonel Mulholland deployed forward to Bagram. He brought a forward TOC to the recently liberated airfield and took along another platoon from the 1-87. The QRF deployed to Mazar-i Sharif. A squad of the QRF was present at Qala Jangi.

On 7 November 2001, the 507th Corps Support Group deployed to K2 from Fort Bragg. Colonel Love, the commander, took over responsibility for support operations at K2. The 92nd Engineers of the 507th Corps Support Group were kept busy improving the base. The 160th SOAR was the only resident aviation asset. There were no fighter aircraft, only C-130s transiting the area. K2 was growing and 1-87 found that it was now serving two masters. By orders, they belonged to Colonel Mulholland, the JSOTF Commander. By mission, they belonged to Colonel Love. 1-87 continued to grow. In November, they were joined by C Company, 4-31 Infantry, 10th Mountain Division. Air Defense units, chemical units and a decontamination platoon also joined the 1-87.

Major Hall and LTC La Camera had earlier fought to get a bigger piece of the K2 security mission for 1-87. Now they wanted to convince their leaders that K2 was secure and their services were required south--in Afghanistan. One platoon from B Company, accompanied by CSM Grippe, deployed to Bagram as the QRF. Colonel Mulholland asked for the rest of the company to deploy to Bagram to provide security. On Thanksgiving Day, the rest of B Company loaded onto MC-130 aircraft and were prepared to fly when orders come to stand down as a British Royal Marine company was going to do the mission. After a meeting with Colonel Love, LTC La Camera got permission for B Company and Major Hall to fly to Bagram. They landed in the dark and were once again in the company of 30-40 Special Forces personnel. The welcoming party included LTC Chris Haas, Commander of the 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group and Colonel Mulholland, the 5th Group Commander. Uniformed US conventional soldiers were now in Afghanistan. The rest of the battalion would follow throughout December, January, and February.

Back at K2, the rest of 1-87 sat down for a Thanksgiving meal with MG Hagenbeck, the 10th Division Commander and General Eric Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff who flew into K2 to eat with their troops. Clearly, the 1-87 had an important mission. It had been awhile since LTC La Camera and MG Hagenbeck had seen one another and Thanksgiving meal with your army family is almost as good as Thanksgiving with your immediate family.

The Rakkasans are Coming!

The 3rd Brigade of the 101st Air Assault Division was ready and eager to go. In March, it had completed a successful deployment to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) in Fort Polk, Louisiana. Shortly before 9/11, the Brigade had started on the “White Cycle”--the reduced-training phase when the brigade stands down from active unit training so that it can support Fort Campbell in the many routine tasks that need to be accomplished on a military base--from range maintenance to providing guards, escorts, and funeral details. The brigade did not stay on white cycle long-- General Cody designated the 3rd Brigade the quick reaction brigade for the division on 12 September. Immediately, the brigade went back into an intense training mode. Soldiers went back to the ranges for day and night live fire exercises. NCOs redoubled their efforts to monitor field hygiene, hydration, and personal skills of their soldiers.² Afghanistan was on everyone’s minds and they trained for the new terrain.

Major Michael L. Gibler is an Air Force “brat” who was commissioned an Army infantry officer at Texas A&M in 1986. This “Aggie” loves the field and soldiers. After basic airborne and ranger school at Fort Benning, Georgia, he reported for duty to Fort Bragg, where he spent his formative years with the 82nd Airborne Division. In 1991, he returned to Fort Benning for the Infantry Officers Advanced Course and returned to Fort Bragg, where he commanded two companies. He continued in the light infantry mode with a three year assignment to the JRTC. He then had a year’s tour in Korea before he joined the Rakassans. He had been in the brigade since May 2000, when he was assigned as the Battalion Executive Officer for

the 2nd Battalion, 187th Infantry. The Third Brigade “Rakkasans” is unique in that all its infantry battalions traced their lineage to the same regiment--the 187th Infantry Regiment. Mike became the Brigade S3 on 22 May 2001. Mike’s follow-on assignment was going to be that of a student at the British Command and Staff Course. Mike’s peers gave him grief about learning to drink tea with an extended pinky finger. But that was all in the future for this tough field soldier. Training the brigade was Mike’s job and his full-time priority.

The Rakkasans designation as the Division Ready Brigade meant that they would be the first brigade to deploy from the division in the aftermath of 9/11. This gave them priority for training areas. The brigade commander, Colonel Frank Wiercinski and Mike were trying to figure out where they would deploy, what their mission might be, and what the world would look like in the near future.³ Captain Eric Haupt and his intelligence section were hard at work making target folders on Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia.⁴ The unit was ready to go. The brigade had gone through some intense JRTC training rotations in February and August. The brigade now conducted an aggressive training program focusing on the platoon and company. The brigade just had to figure out where they were going to go and how they had to prepare for it. The brigade brought in outside speakers to help. One of those speakers was Les Grau out of the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth. Les had written three books on the Soviet-Afghan War. The Rakkasans brought him back for a second session the day before the advanced party deployed to Afghanistan.⁵

A lot of the brigade planning was conducted in the dark. The brigade was not allowed to see the army plan for its deployment until 20 December. It was hard to get aircraft priority since everyone needed aircraft and moving forces into Afghanistan was just one of many priority missions. As a result, it would take over a month to deploy the brigade into Afghanistan--and it was a very truncated brigade! Meanwhile, the Marines in Kandahar had been asking about their replacement. The security concerns meant that neither the 3rd Brigade nor Marine Task Force 58 was told who was going to Kandahar until 20 December, and this further delayed their getting in the queue for transport aircraft. And even if there is a war on, it is hard to get 100 percent support during the Christmas holidays. In this day of e-mail, there was virtually no contact between the units until the Rakassan's advanced party arrived in Kuwait for briefings. The 3rd Brigade had its equipment on pallets awaiting transport aircraft. The 3rd Brigade felt that the key element to first get into Kandahar was communications gear. Had they been able to coordinate with the Marines, they would have discovered that the Marines wanted to front-load the delivery schedule with infantry so that the Marines could get outside the perimeter and conduct combat missions. In retrospect, logistics and engineers needed to be brought in earliest of all. The slow arrival of the 3rd Brigade meant that the Marines got little opportunity to go beyond the wire and their withdrawal to their ships was delayed. By the third week of January, the Marines were standing down, but their withdrawal would be postponed. Fortunately for the Marines, they have their own transport aircraft, so they had more flexibility.⁶

1st-187th Infantry

The first deployment of the 3rd Brigade was not to Afghanistan, it was to Pakistan. Pakistan had given the US use of its Shahbaz airbase at Jacobabad. The airbase is located at the northwest corner of Sindh Province, just next to Baluchistan Province on the road to Quetta. This airbase was important to the US effort as it provided an intact, operable airbase capable of handling large aircraft that is close to Eastern Afghanistan and only 300 miles from Kandahar. Colonel Wiercinski sent his 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry. All the battalions were combat ready, but the 1-187th Infantry was first in the queue. The battalion was commanded by LTC Ron Corkran and its Command Sergeant Major Jerry Taylor was its senior NCO.⁷

Ron Corkran was a career infantry officer finishing up his 20th year of service. He was commissioned out of the ROTC program at Old Miss and had served in a variety of Mechanized Infantry and light infantry jobs. He was a product of the Cold War. His first tour of duty was in 1982 in Baumholder, Germany where he commanded a platoon mounted on M113 Armored Personnel Carriers. After completing the infantry officers advanced course at Fort Benning, Georgia, he moved into light infantry with the 10th Mountain Division where he was assistant S-3 and company commander.⁸ He stayed in the light infantry with a move to the Joint Readiness Training Center where he was an observer/controller for exercises and commanded his second company--a company of OPFOR [Opposing Forces--US soldiers who portray the “enemy” during exercise training. Like an enemy, OPFOR tactics are different from US tactics. The OPFOR are first-rate soldiers who do very

well due to their extensive field time]. Following JRTC, Ron moved his family to Fort Leavenworth for the Command and General Staff College. The Corkran family made their next home in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where he joined the 1st Brigade of the 101st Air Assault Division for a three-year tour. While there, he was selected for duty in Australia as an exchange officer for two years. The Corkran family fell in love with Australia and Ron vowed to retire there. The family stayed in Australia when Ron came back to the states. He returned to Fort Campbell, this time to the 3rd Brigade where he took command of the 1st Battalion 187th Infantry in September 2000. The battalion had just returned from Kosovo. The brigade commander, Colonel Wiercinski, had taken command the month before. Though Wiercinski and Corkran had never worked together before, they were a good fit. Ron had extensive infantry experience-mechanized, light, air assault, cold weather, jungle--the same rugged background that Frank Wiercinski had experienced.⁹

Naturally, the deployment was secret. Pakistan did not want to advertise the presence of US forces inside Pakistan, nor did the US want to advertise where all its units were. The families of the 1-187th were not told where their husbands were going. The battalion had a good family support group to help the families through the ordeal, but military deployment is never easy on the families.¹⁰ It is even tougher when the nation has been attacked and the soldiers leave for a contingency operation at an unknown location. The battalion flew out in groups. The first group of 350 left on 12 November and arrived on 15 November. That group had Charlie Company and headquarters personnel. Bravo Company followed. The battalion took a while to

arrive. Some flights were delayed a day or two waiting for country clearance into Pakistan. One flight was delayed for two weeks in Rota, Spain awaiting aircraft repairs. The flight route was from Fort Campbell to Charleston, South Carolina; from Charleston to Rota, Spain; from Rota, Spain to Sigonella, Italy (Sicily); from Sigonella to an unknown desert country where they stayed on the aircraft and refueled, and from there on to a nighttime landing in Jacobabad. The battalion had left the chilly late fall weather of Kentucky and landed at Jacobabad where it was still warm. The forward elements of the battalion relieved a USMC force and took over security duties at the airbase while the rest of the battalion continued to move into the country. The day before Thanksgiving, General Eric Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, visited the battalion personnel at Shahbaz airbase. Delta Company arrived in Pakistan after Thanksgiving and Alpha Company arrived after Christmas. The battalion was close to Afghanistan, doing a necessary job, but they wanted to get closer. Charlie Company would get closer. Charlie again took the lead and flew into Kandahar, Afghanistan in early January to assist in the relief of the marines holding that airbase. CSM Taylor went along with Charlie Company to wait for the arrival of the 2-187--their sister battalion from the 3rd Brigade.¹¹

Life in Shabaz Airbase was not bad. The water was suspect and produced skin rashes and the plumbing went directly into a nearby malodorous effluent lagoon, but the food was okay. Shabaz is a large airbase that had been built on former rice fields to house the F-16 aircraft that Pakistan bought from the United States. The airfield had numerous hardened aircraft shelters designed to protect the precious F-

16s from a sneak attack by India. Unfortunately, after Pakistan had ordered and paid for 71 F-16s, the US declared an embargo on Pakistan due to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. The United States refused to deliver the aircraft or refund the money. Naturally, Pakistan was not pleased. Pakistan already had 30 F-16s (some of which saw action against Soviet and Afghan aircraft that crossed from Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War). But, most of the hangers for the F-16s at Shabaz were empty and now housed American soldiers, airmen, sailors, and marines. The thick concrete walls maintained a reasonable temperature for sleeping.¹²

Life in Kandahar was rougher. The marines are a no-frills service and land duty with the MEF is clearly back-to-basics. The MEF is an expeditionary force based on ships. It is designed for six weeks deployment on land and then must return to its ships for refitting and repairs. Consequently, they do not carry much in the way of spare parts, supplies, or creature comforts. Marine efforts at Kandahar were limited to security and rudimentary field hygiene. Kandahar airfield was trashed. Burned-out vehicles and aircraft littered the base and unmarked minefields were everywhere. Only the terminal building and air control tower were still standing relatively intact. A shot-up mosque, some half-destroyed buildings and a few partial hangers completed the real estate. The United States had originally built the Kandahar airfield in 1956-1962 as part of the USAID program. It was capable of handling piston-engine aircraft. The airfield was expanded in the 1970s, again as part of the USAID program, to handle the larger commercial jet aircraft. Interestingly, the expansion resulted in the field being built to Strategic Air Command (SAC)

standards. The air terminal architecture is a 1950s-modernist creation resembling half-buried cylinders and joined elongated McDonald's[®] arches, sort of a "Jetsons-meet-the-Mid-East" motif. The two scenic spots remaining in the entire airfield were the long driveway of large flanking coniferous trees that led from the airport entrance to the terminal and the rose garden near the terminal center. The grounds keepers had stayed at their posts even when no one was paying them. Now, Marine Corps engineers chainsawed down the magnificent trees (a rarity in this arid stretch of Kandahar) to clear fields of fire. The rose garden remained as the site for the piss tubes of the MEF urinal. There was little tentage. Meals were MREs and bottled water.¹³

Back at Fort Campbell, Colonel Wiercinski was alerted that his brigade would deploy to Kandahar to relieve the Marines of Task Force 58 (the 26th MEU was part of this task force) that was securing the airfield. Actually, he would only get to deploy one infantry battalion, some logistics and engineer support, and a small aviation component to conduct the relief. Colonel Wiercinski wanted two infantry battalions, his artillery battalion, his support battalion, an attack aviation battalion, and a transport aviation battalion to do the mission. The assumption at CENTCOM and above was that the war was over and so the Rakkasans were ordered to deploy with only one battalion, no artillery, no air defense, and limited other assets. In fact 70 percent of the brigade's equipment was cut from the brigade load plans. The number of C-17 loads required to move the brigade went from 500 to 98.¹⁴ Colonel Wiercinski designated the 2nd-187th Infantry battalion for deployment.

2nd-187th Infantry

LTC Chip Preysler was in command of the 2nd Battalion, 187th Infantry. A graduate of Michigan State University ROTC, Chip had an infantry career in both light and mechanized infantry units and the special operations world. He was a graduate of the prestigious SAMS course at Fort Leavenworth. Before 9/11, he was preparing his battalion for a tour with the MFO (Multinational Forces and Observers) to provide forces and observers in the Sinai Peninsula adjacent to the international border between Egypt and Israel. The MFO mission was canceled for the 2-187 along with the battalion's scheduled training rotation to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk. Battalion rotations to any of the training centers were almost never cancelled, however this was war and the 2-187 was clearly going somewhere. Chip came up with an intensive seven-week training plan at Fort Campbell. There was a lot of range firing and field time. His battalion had to be ready to go by Christmas.¹⁵

CSM Mark Nielsen was the Battalion Sergeant Major. He enlisted in the Army in June 1973 and, after training, arrived in Wiesbaden, the Federal Republic of Germany to serve with the 1st Battalion, 509th Airborne. He was not there long. He and the battalion moved to Vicenza, Italy. He later returned to Fort Benning, Georgia, as a light weapons instructor. Then, he began a 15-year tour with the 75th Ranger Regiment! He served in all three battalions of the Ranger Regiment as well as the headquarters. He was selected for Sergeant Major and attended the Sergeant Majors Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. He then served for two years as the CSM for

the 1st of the 509th Infantry--now the OPFOR battalion at the JRTC. Following that tour, he became the CSM for the 1st of the 508th Infantry Battalion back in Vicenza, Italy. He and his wife then went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to join the 2nd of the 187th Infantry on 9 August 2001. Mark has spent his entire career as a light infantryman. LTC Preysler had been training the battalion for a mission with the Multi-National Force in the Sinai. That changed on 11 September 2001. The battalion had a very different mission and the battalion went to the field for weeks of intensive field training. Two weeks before Christmas, the battalion learned that it was going to Afghanistan.¹⁶

Two days before Christmas, Chip sent CPT Tecklenberg along with the Brigade advance party to Kandahar. The advance party spent Christmas at Doha, Qatar and then flew into Kandahar at night. The first element of the battalion flew on the 9th of January. CSM Nielsen was on that C-17 flight from Fort Campbell to Rhein Main, Germany and then directly to Kandahar, Afghanistan. LTC Preysler followed on a flight on the 10th. This flight first went to Torrejon, Spain before flying another 11 hours to Kandahar. Charlie Company, 1st of the 187th had arrived earlier from Jacobabad. Charlie Company became part of LTC Preysler's command. Kandahar was cold and windy at night and got up to the mid-40s during the day.¹⁷

Colonel Wiercinski and his staff flew to Kandahar as well. Enroute to Kandahar, Colonel Wiercinski, Captain Eric Haupt (the S2), and Captain Clint Cox (the Assistant S3) stopped by Kuwait to meet with LTG Mikolashek and MG Edwards on 29 December. At Kuwait, it was already apparent that everyone

considered Afghanistan a closed issue. Planning was going on for the next event-- what would become the Iraq invasion.¹⁸ The Rakkasans were not used to being the B Team, but it was obvious that they enjoyed no priority on forces and resources.

As the battalion began to close, it began to take over sections of the perimeter from the marines. The marine battalion had 1,100 personnel and was about double the size of the 2nd-187th Infantry. Two platoons from B Company took over the main gate from the marines, 68 guys relieving a 200-man front. It was much the same during the rest of the relief. The soldiers were impressed with the marines' professionalism and the marines were very willing to cooperate. They wanted to get back to the ships. Manning the perimeter took all of the available army manpower. The battalion hoped to train as well as man the perimeter, but there were not enough personnel. There was the perimeter, the requirement to maintain a company-sized QRF and patrols. Further, there were immediate demands for improved field sanitation and cleanup. The numerous unmarked minefields were also a problem. A marine lost a leg to one.¹⁹

The relief in place went fairly smoothly despite the differences in the units in terms of size, communications protocols, logistics setup, and command and control. Substituting infantry on the ground proved the easiest part of the process. The marines were glad to leave. The weather was foul and a lot of their material needed repair.²⁰

Task Force Talon

Task Force Talon was a composite aviation unit primarily designed to transport infantry. It had CH-47 Chinooks and Blackhawks from the 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment and AH-64A Apaches from the 3rd Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment. On 15 December 2001, the 7th Battalion was designated as the task force aviation headquarters and assigned its assets. LTC James Marye commanded the 7-101 Battalion and would now command Task Force Talon. It was unusual for a transport battalion to provide the controlling headquarters for a Task Force. Normally a transport battalion provided assets (resourcing headquarters) but not command and control (warfighting headquarters) to other aviation task forces, however, since the deployment emphasis was on occupation, not fighting, there were more transport aircraft than attack aircraft in the task force, probably the reason that LTC Marye was in charge. Task Force Talon had A Company, 7-101 (a CH-47 Chinook company of eight aircraft commanded by Major John Davidson), A Company, 3-101 “Killer Spades” (an AH-64A Apache gunship company of eight aircraft commanded by Captain Bill Ryan) and a detachment of five UH-60 L Blackhawks and three UH-60A Blackhawks for medical evacuation, a total of 24 helicopters. The Task Force never got a chance to train together as a task force before they deployed.

On Christmas day, LTC Marye, his S3 Major Scott Kubica, and 11 other members of Task Force Talon flew to CFLCC headquarters in Kuwait to design a force package for Kandahar and then on to Seeb airfield in Muscat, Oman to get a

flight to Kandahar. It took three days to get out of Seeb. They finally landed in Kandahar on 3 January. Chief Merrill began working air control issues with the USMC aviators and USAF airfield controllers.²¹

The helicopters were flown over on C-5 transport aircraft to Diego Garcia where they were reloaded onto C-17s for movement to Kandahar. On 19 January 2002, the first army helicopters began to arrive. There were more missions than birds available. Task Force Talon was flying missions before all the aircraft and personnel had arrived. It took until the middle of February for all of the Task Force to arrive. The hangers were full of mines, so the mechanics had to do all their work on the strip in the freezing weather. On 19 January, Task Force Talon had its first aircraft accident as part of its first mission in country, at night. Four CH-47s were carrying infantrymen from the 2-187 to Khost on the eastern border, a two-and-a-half-hour flight. The fine dust on the landing zone flew up creating a “brown-out” and the aircraft landing gear went into a ditch, flipping the bird. Sixteen people were injured. It was an inauspicious start, but the other aircraft crews and passengers reacted professionally, pulling people out, administering first aid, establishing security, and doing the other needed tasks for crash response. Everything was over within 20 minutes and the injured were being flown to Bagram where first-class medical care was waiting for them. The hour-long flight to Bagram took only forty minutes. The task force was down one helicopter. In February, Task Force Talon would get seven more CH-47s. Bravo Company, 159th Aviation Regiment an XVIII Airborne Corps unit from Savannah, Georgia joined the Task Force. Major “Jamie” Jamison was the

company commander and was located in Jacobabad with three CH-47s. He was able to bring his other four helicopters into theater and reassemble his company at Bagram airbase. Task Force Talon now controlled 14 Ch-47s.²² There were additional MH-47s in theater belonging to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. One of their MH-47s also had a night landing accident south of Kandahar that also took out their landing gear.

The CH-47s were flying before the Apaches. Due to problems in getting the Apaches into theater, the CH-47s that flew to Khost were not escorted by Apaches. In fact, no one planned on CH-47s or Blackhawks being escorted by Apaches. The war was over. However, whenever the Chinooks or Blackhawks flew to Khost, they were fired on from the areas around the Shar-i Kot Valley. Apaches were never attacked, for obvious reasons, so the Apaches began flying escort missions for the other helicopters. The six USMC AH-1 Cobra helicopter gunships with TF 58 had only flown in around the Kandahar region due to maintenance and operating radius concerns. The demands on the army aircraft were greater and soon the special operations forces in the region began asking for Apache support. Clearly, eight Apaches were not enough. The Apache company flew more missions in late January-early February than an entire Apache battalion would be expected to fly. On 18 February, Colonel Wiercinski requested that CFLCC authorize another Apache company for the task force. The request was not acted on.²³

On 11 September 2001, CW2 John Hamilton was assigned to C Company, 3rd Battalion 101st Aviation Regiment. He was an excellent attack helicopter pilot, but

now he was out-processing from the Army. His tour was over and he was ready to try a civilian career. However, as soon as he heard about the attack on America, he changed his mind. His country was under attack and he was trained to defend her. After talking to his wife, he started the process of withdrawing his paperwork. It was not easy. Bureaucracy is bureaucracy and the system was intent on putting him out. John talked to a lot of folks and called in a lot of favors before he finally was able to stop the process. John's efforts to get at the enemy was still stymied. The battalion was on alert, but then the powers-that-be decided to only send one AH-64 Apache Company--A Company, the "Killer Spades." John promptly volunteered to accompany A Company to Afghanistan. That also required lots of conversation and calling in lots of favors. Finally, he was on his way to Afghanistan. The whole process had taken time, so the rest of A Company was already there.²⁴

Logistics Task Force 626

LTF 626 was based on the 626 Forward Support Battalion, which habitually supported the 3rd Brigade with medical, maintenance, and supply support to the 3rd Brigade. It was commanded by LTC Thomas Pirozzi. The battalion sent an eight-man maintenance support team along with the 1st-187th Infantry to Jacobabad. On Christmas Day, three task force officers accompanied the Rakkasan's advance party to Afghanistan. The senior member of these was Major Sherrie Bosley, the battalion support operations officer. The rest of the task force arrived throughout January and early February. LTF 626 assumed support missions as part of the relief-in-place of

Task Force 58. These missions included water production and purification as well as the receipt, storage, and distribution of food, ammunition and fuel.²⁵

Charlie Company, 326th Engineer Battalion

Captain Mark Quander was the commander of Charlie Company, 326th Engineer Battalion, the engineers that usually accompanied the 3rd Brigade. A West Pointer of the Class of 1995, Mark had served in engineer units in the 82nd Airborne Division and the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea. After 9/11, Charlie Company participated in the same accelerated training as the rest of the brigade and in November, the first platoon accompanied 1-187 to Jacobabad. In early January 2002, the rest of the company, including the headquarters platoon with attached mechanics, two sapper platoons, and an attached light equipment platoon deployed to Kandahar. There was plenty of engineer work to do. The place was a shambles and the airfield had to be kept operable. Still, Mark suffered a bit of concern when he learned that much of the brigade did not deploy and were back at Fort Campbell without their habitual engineer support. If these units had to deploy elsewhere, it could have been a problem, but things worked out.

Just before the company deployed to Kandahar, the light equipment company bought some Bobcat earthmovers which they assigned to the platoon accompanying Charlie Company. These machines proved essential. The ability to reach back via laptop computer and video-teleconferencing to other engineers was just as critical, since many of Charlie Company's problems were analyzed by engineers around the world. Charlie Company had to get electricity started, water running, bivouac areas

cleared of mines, garbage and debris collected, and buildings erected or repaired. The task was to build a city of 5,000 to 8,000 people around a 5,000 foot runway in the middle of the desert. This was a city that required bunkers, field fortifications, and trenches. Just keeping the equipment running was a full time concern.²⁶

The 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3PPCLI)

Canada was going to get involved in Afghanistan, but the question was when and where. The 3PPCLI was on year-long duty as the Immediate Force Readiness (Land)-IFR(L) unit for the Canadian Forces. This meant that they were the infantry battalion with the highest readiness in the force and the first to be deployed in an emergency. They enjoyed priority for training and equipment, particularly since they were scheduled to participate in an exercise in Norway in March 2002.²⁷ Still, the IFR(L) was short-handed. The battalion's A Company and B Company were up to strength, but C Company was not. C Company had to be brought up to strength and trained to the same standards as the rest of the battalion. This meant that the 3PPCLI would initially deploy with two infantry companies.²⁸ In mid-November, Canada was approached to be part of the NATO-led, United Nations authorized International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul. At first, the battalion was supposed to join a British force in Kabul. However, Britain wanted to provide all its own infantry and use select pieces of the Canadian forces--medics, engineers and the like. Canada intended to employ its force as a complete force under its own flag.²⁹ Canada would deploy its force as Operation Apollo.

The 3PPCLI was ready to deploy, but governments were wrangling, transport was in short supply and the process was going to take awhile. After the battalion reassembled, it went to the field to train at Camp Dundurn in Saskatchewan. Live fire training is essential and the battalion did that, but LTC Stogran also wanted to do force-on-force training. The Canadian Armed Forces operate on the narrowest of budgets and the government had been continuously slashing the defense budget for a decade. The Canadian soldier is accustomed to doing without and has a perverse pride of doing without and in being the “poor cousin” of their southern neighbor. Their southern neighbor had been conducting force-on-force training for decades using a rugged militarized “laser tag” system called MILES (Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System). MILES uses blank ammunition and lasers to simulate actual combat--whether tank-on-tank or rifle squad-on-rifle squad. The soldiers wear a harness of laser sensors placed all over the body. The sensors determine whether lasers “fired” at a soldier during a mock battle are a hit or a miss. LTC Stogran used the impending deployment of his battalion to get funds to rent a battalion’s worth of MILES gear from the USMC. Soon the “Patricia’s” were maneuvering throughout the bad-lands plains and ravines of Camp Dundurn and improving their fire and movement techniques.³⁰

The battalion also acquired a “buy and try” of Simunitions®.³¹ The battalion had almost 500,000 rounds of Simunitions® and abandoned farmhouses were acquiring paint marks during training for the under-50-meters fight. The battalion worked on meeting engagements. They even got some scarce helicopter support from

408 Squadron in Edmonton. The battalion did not waste the four helicopters on insertions--trucks would work as well. Instead, LTC Stogran insisted on using them to train soldiers in medical evacuation procedures--establishing a landing zone, conducting triage, first aid, and evacuating the wounded. The battalion trained for casualties; Corporals were commanding platoons; and sergeants were commanding companies. The 3PPCLI finished training at Camp Dundurn on Halloween, but the battalion deputy commander, Major Steve Borland, stayed on for two more weeks to put a company from the 2PPCLI through much the same training--in case a fourth infantry company was needed to reinforce the 3PPCLI.

The Canadian light infantry battalions concentrate different skill sets in their companies. In the 3PPCLI, A Company is the paratrooper company, B Company is the mountain warfare company and C Company is the amphibious warfare and NEO (NonCombatant Evacuation Operations) company. However, most of the battalion NCOs were experienced mountaineers and many were airborne qualified.³² Besides the three infantry companies, the battalion had a battalion headquarters and administration company and a combat support company.³³

The battalion would require additional capabilities. The 3PPCLI became a battle group (see chart 4-1).³⁴ The 1st Canadian Mechanized Brigade assigned a squadron of 14 armored cars from Lord Strathcona's Canadian Horse; a squadron of Engineers from the 1st Canadian Combat Engineer Regiment; four mortars from Charlie Battery, First Royal Canadian Horse Artillery; a Forward Support Group from the 1st Service Battalion; a Public Affairs detachment; a combat camera crew;

signalers; an electronic warfare detachment; a medical group and a dental group. The Battle Group was 850 strong and portions of the battle group joined the battalion for pre-deployment training.³⁵ The logisticians began to buy and pack expendable supplies for their deployment.

Christmas season was approaching and no final decision had been made as to when and where the 3PPCLI would deploy, but Kabul looked like a sure bet. The battalion had done some Afghanistan-specific training for ISAF. They started lessons in Dari--the language of Northern Afghanistan. They did some Bosnia-type peace-keeping training with a supposed Afghan flavor.³⁶ The battalion returned to barracks prior to the holidays. They held the traditional battalion hockey games and the soldiers' Christmas dinner.³⁷ LTC Stogran's last words to his troops were "I'll see you in Kabul." The battalion went on block leave from mid-December to 6 January. Not all the battalion got its block Christmas leave. The battalion staff and commander worked through the holiday. On 6 January, the reassembled battalion learned from the Canadian television news that the 3PPCLI was deploying to Kandahar as part of the United States 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne!³⁸ It was a surprise for everyone in the battle group.

On 6 January, the Battle Group got its official warning order confirming that it was, indeed, going to Kandahar and the next day, LTC Stogran left for Ottawa for instructions. "Don't screw this up or it will be the last nail in the Patricia's coffin" was the most direct order. The light infantry was in danger of disappearing from the Canadian force structure and the 3PPCLI was full of stalwart supporters and former

members of the dismantled Airborne Regiment. They were “viewed as the anti-Christ” in many government circles in Ottawa and marked for the budget cutter’s scalpel.³⁹ After Ottawa, LTC Stogran and his Operations Officer and company commanders flew to Kuwait City and waited five days for a C-130 flight into Kandahar. LTC Stogran was carrying a biography of Colonel Wiercinski--the result of an internet search by a young soldier in the headquarters.⁴⁰ It was mid-January.

LTC Stogran was afraid of being treated like “a third-world peacekeeper,” but Colonel Wiercinski welcomed LTC Stogran and put him “front and center” in the brigade update briefings (BUBs) and immediately treated him like a member of the team. The Canadian Strategic Reconnaissance Team had fifteen members, six from the 3PPCLI and the rest from National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) in Ottawa. The NDHQ members, mostly air force, had no idea how to wear field gear or handle weapons. One of them even asked Colonel Wiercinski about the availability of television sets and satellite channels! To compound the difficulty, the Canadian field uniform is forest green, which really stood out in the desert. The Patricias were appalled and embarrassed, but Colonel Wiercinski recognized the headquarters types for what they were and concentrated on the warfighters.⁴¹

The Canadian force slowly arrived at Kandahar. The unit prepared to go several times, but each time the deployment was scrubbed due to lack of transport. The battalion was flying on US transport and getting priority to fly was a problem. On 29 January, Bravo Company boarded C-5 aircraft at Edmonton and flew to Gander, Newfoundland to refuel. They then flew on to Frankfurt am Main. There

they switched to C-17s since the Kandahar airfield would not handle C-5s. They landed in Kandahar in mid-day on the 30th. LTC Stogran met them, briefed them and moved them to their camp ground. They pitched their four-man tents and settled in for the night. Firing broke out on the perimeter that night and a parachute flare set an ammunition stack on fire. The Canadians stayed on this site for two weeks while gravel was laid on their permanent tenting area.⁴² The Canadian Battlegroup closed into Kandahar on the 11th of February.⁴³

The 3PPCLI was anxious to get its troops in and pull its weight. Troop flow was slow, but when the battalion had enough troops to assume the airfield perimeter mission, there was one more problem. The battalion lacked ammunition and batteries! These were on the first priority pallets loaded by the battalion in Canada. However, logistics planners in Ottawa changed priorities. To the embarrassment of the battalion, the first Canadian supplies and equipment unloaded in Kandahar were toboggans and snow shoes!

The Canadians took over the perimeter on Valentine's Day. When the Canadians began to relieve the Americans on the line for airfield security, they discovered that the American fighting position and the Canadian fighting position were different. The US used the "Dupuy foxhole," a two-man position with firing positions at each end of a short trench. The riflemen could only engage targets on their flanks, but not directly to their front. Conversely, the attacker could not attack the position directly in the line of his advance. The Canadians were used to shooting directly at their attackers, so they rebuilt the fighting positions.⁴⁴

The battalion needed more troops to secure the airfield. LTC Stogran asked Colonel Wiercinski to get his C Company deployed. Colonel Wiercinski made the request and Ottawa agreed. C Company finally joined the battalion just before Operation Anaconda.⁴⁵ Despite the rough start, it was a good marriage between the Rakkasans and Patricias. The Canadians were seen as a competent member of the force that wore a forest-green uniform. Captain Jeff Wilson, the Canadian LNO to the Rakkasans did a great job and LTC Stogran developed a close, personal relationship with Colonel Wiercinski. The two forces soon understood how each other did business. Even though the two forces both spoke English and were from neighboring countries, there were marked differences in their background and training.

Meet Some Canadian Patricias

Major Mike Blackburn comes from a ranching family from Saskatchewan. He did not come from a military family, but he joined the Canadian Militia in 1982 after graduating from high school. He went on to complete his University studies. He enjoyed infantry training and decided to expand the experience. He was accepted into Canadian officer commissioning program, but he contemplated some military experience outside Canada. He considered joining the United States Army and the USMC, but a friend of his who had served in the USMC talked him into joining the French Foreign Legion with him. They joined and ended up in the Parachute Regiment of the Legion stationed in Corsica. Mike spent about four months of every year in Africa, doing tours in Djibouti and Chad. In 1990, he got out and joined his

father who was then working in the oil business in Djakarta, Indonesia for six weeks. When he got back home to the family ranch in Saskatchewan, he applied for active duty in the Canadian infantry. He had a university degree, an old acceptance letter for officer training, and five years experience in the French Foreign Legion. The recruiter turned him down until he realized that he spoke fluent French! Mike completed Officer training in 1992 and was posted to the 2nd Battalion, Royal 22nd Regiment, the French-speaking Vanduz regiment, where he served two years. Following his tour with the Vanduz, Mike joined the airborne regiment (1st Commando). After 18 months with the airborne regiment, he returned to the 3rd Battalion of the Vanduz Regiment. In 1996, he asked to change his regimental affiliation. He loved the Vanduz, but at that time the referendum on Quebec's separation from Canada was ongoing, and Mike did not want to end up living in Quebec. He took over a Company of the 3PPCLI in 2001. He was back in Edmonton, about two hours from the family ranch. On 11 September 2001, Mike and his company were training in the Canadian Rockies with an exchange company from the British Army. The training was cut short when they heard the news about the attack on the United States and Mike and his troops returned to Edmonton.⁴⁶

Warrant Officer Mike Robitaille joined the Canadian Army in 1988 in Edmonton. He initially served with the Second Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment and then joined the Canadian Airborne Regiment. After the dissolution of the Airborne Regiment, Mike joined the 3PPCLI. He was assigned to B Company, Major Blackburn's command. During a deployment to Bosnia, Mike commanded the

battalion's sniper section and then rejoined 5 platoon in B Company as the platoon Second in Command. Mike had several deployments behind him including a deployment to the Gulf in 1990, two tours in Croatia, two tours in Bosnia, and a tour in Germany. On 11 September, he was conducting a training session in patrolling in the mountains. After the initial flurry following 9/11, Mike took an eight-man patrol to the Brecon Beacons region of Wales to compete in the United Kingdom Cambrian Patrol, a rugged patrolling competition held annually in the rugged Sennybridge training area in the Cambrian Mountains. The competition involves weapons firing, obstacle crossing and a 64 kilometer patrol. Mike's patrol completed it in 36 hours. They returned from the competition on the 11 November (Remembrance Day) holiday. The following Monday, they got the news that the battalion would deploy to Afghanistan.

On 11 September, Master Corporal Dennis Eason and the rest of the battalion snipers were at an international sniper competition in Gagetown, New Brunswick. Like many of the Canadian soldiers, Dennis is comfortable living outdoors and is sports mad. A Newfoundlander, he joined the army after getting his university degree. He completed the sniper course in Wainwright, a course with about a 40 percent completion rate. He had served as a sniper in Bosnia. When Dennis heard about the first plane crashing into the twin tower, Dennis was waiting to do his urban shoot for the competition. There were four teams left to fire and they finished. The 3PPCLI snipers finished in 12th place out of 26 teams in competition.⁴⁷

In September, A Company, along with Captain Todd McClure, the Battalion adjutant, were in England on exercise. They were preparing to defend a village when they learned about the attack on America. Soon they got word that the exercise was shut down. A Company needed to get home, but it would be three days before the company could fly. The troops enjoyed the sights and pubs of London while waiting for flights to resume.⁴⁸ Not all of A Company was in England. Sergeant Lorne Ford and his section were in Austria for the 2001 Peace Support Operations Competition on 11 September. They crowded around a television set and tried to make out what the German newscasters were saying. A veteran of Bosnia, Sergeant Ford was a master mortar man. When the Canadian Army took the 81mm mortar away from the infantry and gave it to the artillery, Sergeant Ford then became an airborne infantry NCO and commanded a section. Sergeant Ford was hoping that Canada and he would be involved in the international response to the attack on America. They would be. He would be critically wounded and lose many of his friends in A Company--to the United States Air Force.⁴⁹

General Zia's Force

When SOCCENT created JSOTF-A and JSOTF-B in mid-December 2001, they assigned responsibility for special operations in Southern Afghanistan to a navy special operations headquarters and filled the task force with navy SEALs units. These units had no experience in land combat, so JSOTFA had to assign army special forces to JSOTFB. LTC Chris Haas assigned ODA 594 from the 3rd Special Forces Group as one of those units. ODA 594 began gathering information on the region

around Gardez. There was a large force of enemy in the Shar-i Kot Valley and it would require a lot combat power to move them. Commander Zia Lodin, a Pashtun commander from Gardez, was unable to get spies and scouts into the Shar-i Kot, but they did know that Zurmat was daily catering meals for 500 into the valley. ODA 372 from the 3rd Group joined ODA 594 to help control Zia's local Pashtun force of some 450 in the upcoming fight.⁵⁰ LTC Haas' C Team joined the two ODAs to provide support and coordination. There were 30 Special Forces soldiers and some 450 Afghans.⁵¹

Sakhi Jan, Nisar Jan, Shamo Jan, Delawer Khan, Mhamd Asif, and Mhamd Sharif were all members of Commander Zia's force. They were all Pashtun from Gardez and fighting was nothing new to them. The Special Forces soldiers kept wanting to train them, but they looked at training as pretend games. "We already know how to fight" was their attitude. They had heard the rumors in the bazaar as to who was in the valley--foreigners. If there was anything that they preferred, it was fighting foreigners.⁵² The US military had their own ideas about how they should fight the foreigners. The Special Forces brought force structure and began organizing Zia's force into companies and platoons. They instituted a three-week training program that culminated in a live-fire exercise. A Company was commanded by Rasul (a cousin of Zia's), B Company was commanded by Khoshkeyar and C Company was commanded by Zia Abdullah. The organized approach to warfare was alien to the Afghans, but the Special Forces starting issuing sleeping bags,

camouflage uniforms, boots and other equipment--which brought in more recruits to Zia's force. The weapons were all Soviet-designed.

JSOTF

Colonel Mark Rosengard is a legend in the Special Operations community. He is flamboyant, brash, and bright. He is always "switched on" and moving fast. A master of multi-tasking, which is essential since the JSOTF was very understaffed and under-equipped, Mark does the work of ten but also leaves an impressive wake behind him. A bear of a man and the antithesis of a wallflower, he was infamous for using the laser indicator on his pistol for a briefing pointer. This sounds bizarre, but it was one of those cases where "you had to be there to get it." Mark had been in Afghanistan for much of the defeat of the Taliban regime. The special operations forces had conducted a successful campaign. It was now time to deal with the remnants of hostility. The conventional forces were moving in, but there was still a need for special operations. He was on his way to meet with representatives of the 10th Mountain Division. He reviewed the situation as he understood it. "Most of the Taliban had gone to ground, but they continued to exert local control over select areas. There were pockets of Al Qaeda as well. Paktia Province seemed to be the center of the remaining resistance. Analysis of communications networks provided indications of where the nodes of continued organized resistance were. There were indications of Arabs and their families in Sherkhankheyl village in the Shar-i Kot Valley. Sherkhankheyl was a major node. There were indications that a major Taliban or Al Qaeda figure might be in Sherkhankheyl. It might even be Jalaluddin

Haqani. He was a Zadran tribesmen from the Khost region. It was possible.⁵³ The situation inside the Shar-i Kot Valley remained ambiguous. There was something or someone of significance there. The finest surviving Al Qaeda soldiers were apparently holed up there with their families and coerced locals. Why? Well, it was their fortress and they had few other options. How many combatants were there? Reports ranged from 20 to 800. The bulk of the reports centered around 200 to 300 or 500 to 600, but accurate numbers are always difficult to obtain in Afghanistan.”

What do you do about the Shar-i Kot? We need more information, but reconnaissance and agent efforts are being stymied by the enemy minefields being laid out on the approaches as well as the checkpoints that kept popping up--checkpoints backed with heavy crew-served weapons. What are they protecting? How do we conduct the operation? A prime concern is the presence of civilians. We will need to weed the combatants from the civilians. We don't want a US soldier to have to decide who is a civilian and who is a combatant. We need an indigenous main effort to minimize civilian casualties. How many American lives have we lost while insuring that innocent, and not-so-innocent civilians survive? Not that the damned NPR journalists give us any credit. They seem to assume that our purpose is to murder innocents.

The area is going to be tough to operate in, but we can use geography to our advantage. There are lots of Rat lines [paths that can be used for infiltration, movement, supply and escape] going in and out of the valley. One goes all the way to the Parachinar Valley in Pakistan. The major entrances and exits into the valley are the north and south. [See Map 4-1, Area of Operation]. We want to drive them east and northeast. We want them to think that the valleys through the upper Shar-i Kot are open. We want the high-value assets and non-combatants to “squirt” east and northeast. If we could put hidden blocking positions into the upper Shar-i Kot valley, we could nab the high-value assets. Al Qaeda would be busy fighting a rear guard action to protect their escaping leaders and families, so we would not have to fight the bulk of their combat power until after we nabbed their leaders. We need to use the Australian SAS to move on the southern approach to drive them into the mountains.⁵⁴

The Gathering Storm

US, Canadian, Afghan and Special Operations Forces were assembling for a showdown in the Shar-i Kot Valley. This would be battle on a shoestring. Planning for entry would hinge on good intelligence. But not much was known about who or what was waiting in the valley. It was clear that the terrain was tough and high. [See Map 4-2, Terrain Analysis.]

¹Interviews at Fort Drum with 1-87 personnel: Major Jay Hall, S3, 30 July 2002; Cpt McClaughlin, S2, 11 June 2002; SFC Healy, Operations NCO, 11 June 2002; Cpt Gittins, S3 Air, 11 June 2002; Cpt Taylor, Fire Support Officer, 11 June 2002; Cpt Frank Ranero, SIGO, 11 June 2002; SFC Michael A. Peterson, Heavy Mortar Plt Ldr, 11 June 2002; SP K. C. Thomas, Sqd Ldr, Heavy Mortar Plt, 11 June 2002; SP Guy Adamez, Heavy Mortar Plt, 11 June 2002; PFC John Anthony Irizary, Heavy Mortar Plt, 11 June 2002, MG Franklin Hagenbeck, 10th Mountain Division Commander, 20 May 2002; LTC Paul La Camera, 11 June 2002.

²Interview with CSM Iuniasolua Savusa, CSM 3rd Brigade, 101st Air Assault Division, Bagram, Afghanistan, 14 November 2005.

³Interview with Major Mike Gibler, S3, 3rd Brigade, 101st Air Assault Division, Kandahar, 17 May 2002.

⁴Interview with CPT Eric Haupt, S2, 3rd Bde 101st Div, Fort Campbell, 13 August 2002.

⁵Gibler.

⁶Interview with LTC Jim Larsen, XO 3d Bde, 101st Air Assault Division, Fort Campbell, 12 August 2002.

⁷Interview with Colonel Frank Wiercinski, CO, 3rd Brigade, 101st Air Assault Division, Schofield Barracks, 13 January 2006.

⁸The US Army has three light infantry divisions—the 10th Mountain Division, the 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Air Assault Division. The 82nd Airborne is a paratroop division and the 101st is brought into combat on helicopters. The 10th Mountain gets to the fight on whatever is available. Whatever the case, when the soldiers are on the ground, they are foot mobile. The US Army has debated about retaining or disbanding light infantry divisions since the 1950s. Clearly, light infantry was far better suited to the fights in Korea and Vietnam, but had no apparent role in a fight with the Soviet Union on the rolling plains of Europe. Many US Army infantry officers tried to serve exclusively in the light infantry or mechanized infantry units. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Kosovo air campaign, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld doubted the efficacy of tanks, mechanized infantry, artillery and light infantry. His vision was to mount a smaller army on wheeled lightly-armored vehicles that would avoid contact with heavy enemy forces through air interdiction. His vision was disrupted by the events of 9/11, yet Secretary Rumsfeld still disbanded two heavy brigades during the middle of campaigns in both Afghanistan and Iraq during a time when the army's need for more boots on the ground was apparent to everyone else. Secretary Rumsfeld had entered the job with the intention of disbanding two or three divisions in order to buy high-technology systems—many of which were dependent on science that had not yet been developed. The light divisions were reportedly high on his hit list.

⁹Interview with LTC Ron Corkran, CO, 1-187 Infantry, Kandahar, 12 May 2002.

¹⁰Wiercinski.

¹¹Interviews with LTC Ron Corkran, CO, 1-187 Infantry, Kandahar, 12 May 2002; and CSM Jimmy Taylor, CSM, 1-187 Infantry, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

¹²CSM Jimmy Taylor, CSM, 1-187 Infantry, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

¹³In an interview on 14 August 2002 at Fort Campbell, Major Harry Sisson provided a copy of the survey photos taken of the airfield when the Rakkasans first arrived. The airfield was still in fairly rugged shape when Les Grau arrived in May 2002.

¹⁴Major Dennis Yates, Rakassans Fire Support Officer, "Indirect Fires in Operation Anaconda," powerpoint brief created 2 June 2002.

¹⁵Interview with LTC Chip Preysler, CO, 2-187 Infantry, Bagram, 19 May 2002.

¹⁶Interview with CSM Mark Nielsen, CSM, 2-187 Infantry, Bagram, 19 May 2002.

¹⁷Preysler.

¹⁸Haupt. On 11 September, the CENTCOM war plan for Iraq was three years old. On 17 September 2001, President Bush issued a secret directive for the military to review its plans for an invasion of Iraq. On 26 November, during the middle of the fighting at Qala Jangi prison, Secretary Rumsfeld told General Franks that the president wanted to see his new plans for invading Iraq. The president had not made up his mind to invade yet, but at this critical juncture in Afghanistan, the demands of Iraq began to be felt. General Franks briefed the president on the plan on 28 December. Since much of the CENTCOM staff was forward in Kuwait, when the Rakkasans commander and staff arrived on the 29th, the staff would clearly be focused on Iraq. Afghanistan was winding down into an ill-defined Phase IV Operation. Dale R. Herspring, *Rumsfeld's Wars: The Arrogance of Power* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 89, 90 and 94.

¹⁹Preysler.

²⁰Gibler.

²¹Interview with LTC James Marye, CO, 7-101st Aviation, CO TF TALON; Major John Davidson, A Company Cdr, 7-101st Aviation; Major Scott Kubica, Major Scott Kubica, S3 and later XO, 7-101st Aviation; and CPT Thomas Carlson, Brigade LNO and then S3, 7-101st Aviation; at Fort Campbell, 12 August 2002.

²²Ibid.

²³Interview with CPT Butch Whiting, Aviation LNO from the 3rd Bn 101st Avn Rgt to Task Force Rakkasan, Fort Campbell, 16 August 2002.

²⁴Interview at Fort Leavenworth with CPT Gabe Marriott, 1st Platoon Leader, A/3-101 Aviation Regiment, 11 June 2004.

²⁵Larsen.

²⁶John McCool, "Interview with MAJ Mark Quander" as part of the Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 7 March 2007.

²⁷Interview with Major Mark Campbell, Combat Support Company Commander, 3PPCLI, Calgary, 8 January 2006.

²⁸Interview with CPT Todd McClure, Battle Adjutant, 3PPCLI, Calgary, 6 January 2006.

²⁹Interview with LTC Pat Stogran, Commander 3PPCLI, Williamsburg, 25 May 2004.

³⁰McClure.

³¹Simunitions® are an advanced form of paint-ball. The wax bullets are far more accurate than paint ball and provide great training for the close fight. Simunitions® require a special barrel and receiver group for the M-16 rifle.

³²Stogran.

³³The administration company has a maintenance platoon, a logistics platoon, a transport platoon and a personnel service platoon. The Combat Support Company has a reconnaissance platoon with a sniper group, a direct fire support platoon (machine guns, 60mm mortars, and anti-tank systems—Karl Gustav, TOW and ERYX), a signals platoon, a military police section.

³⁴Slide from "Operation Apollo Mission Briefing" by Major Mark Campbell presented to the United Service Institute of Fredericton Area on 20 November 2002.

³⁵The Canadian Forces had recently removed the 81mm mortar from the infantry battalion and assigned them to the artillery. The small 60mm mortars remained with the infantry, but Canadian

infantry lacked the punch of dedicated fire support enjoyed by the infantry of most armies. During the deployment, Captain Doug Clark, a former mortar-man from the 3PPCLI, commanded all the mortars.

³⁶Campbell.

³⁷Stogran.

³⁸Campbell.

³⁹Elite forces and light infantry were viewed with suspicion by many policy makers in Ottawa particularly after the Canadian experience with their Airborne Regiment. The elite Canadian Airborne Regiment was a natural draw for tough, adventurous soldiers and enjoyed a great deal of loyalty and comradeship. Unfortunately, its aggressive, paratrooper elan was out of step with the peace-keeper image preferred by the Canadian liberal government. By 1992, the regiment had been reduced to battalion size. In 1993, the unit was deployed to Somalia to provide humanitarian aid and restore order as part of the larger US Operation Restore Hope. The unit had been experiencing some discipline problems. Although the Canadians brought order around the area of the town of Belet Huen, the local warlords were siphoning off aid and some of the local residents were stealing everything they could from the soldiers. Canadian paratroopers caught a Somali teenager in the act of stealing and two of them slowly beat the thief to death. An inquiry into the death revealed a cover-up and incriminating photographs. The government disbanded the regiment in 1995. It was a black day for the Canadian Army. Many of the members of the regiment left the army. Others joined the third battalions (light infantry) of the Royal Canadian Regiment, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and 22nd Regiment (Vanduz). Policy makers in Ottawa regarded the light infantry battalions as carrier of the airborne virus. Indeed, there was a great deal of sympathy for the airborne—particularly in the light infantry. A Company is the paratrooper company of the 3PPCLI.

⁴⁰Stogran.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Campbell.

⁴³Interview with WO Michael Robitaille, Plt 2IC, 5/B/3PPLIC, Calgary, 6 January 2006.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Stogran.

⁴⁶Interview with Major Michael Blackburn, CO, B Company, 3PPCLI, Calgary, 6 January 2006.

⁴⁷Interview with Master Corporal Dennis Eason, Sniper, 3PPCLI, Calgary, 6 January 2006.

⁴⁸McClure.

⁴⁹Interview with SGT Lorne Ford, Section Commander, 3/3/A/3PPCLI, Calgary, 6 January 2006.

⁵⁰Interview with LTC Christopher K. Haas, Cdr, 1st Battalion 5th SF Group, and 1SG Danny Lynn Van Allen, 1SG, 1st Bn 5th SF Group, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

⁵¹Haas and Van Allen.

⁵²Interview with Sakhi Jan, Nisar Jan, Shamo Jan, Delawer Khan, Mhamd Asif, and Mhamd Sharif in Gardez, 24 November 2005.

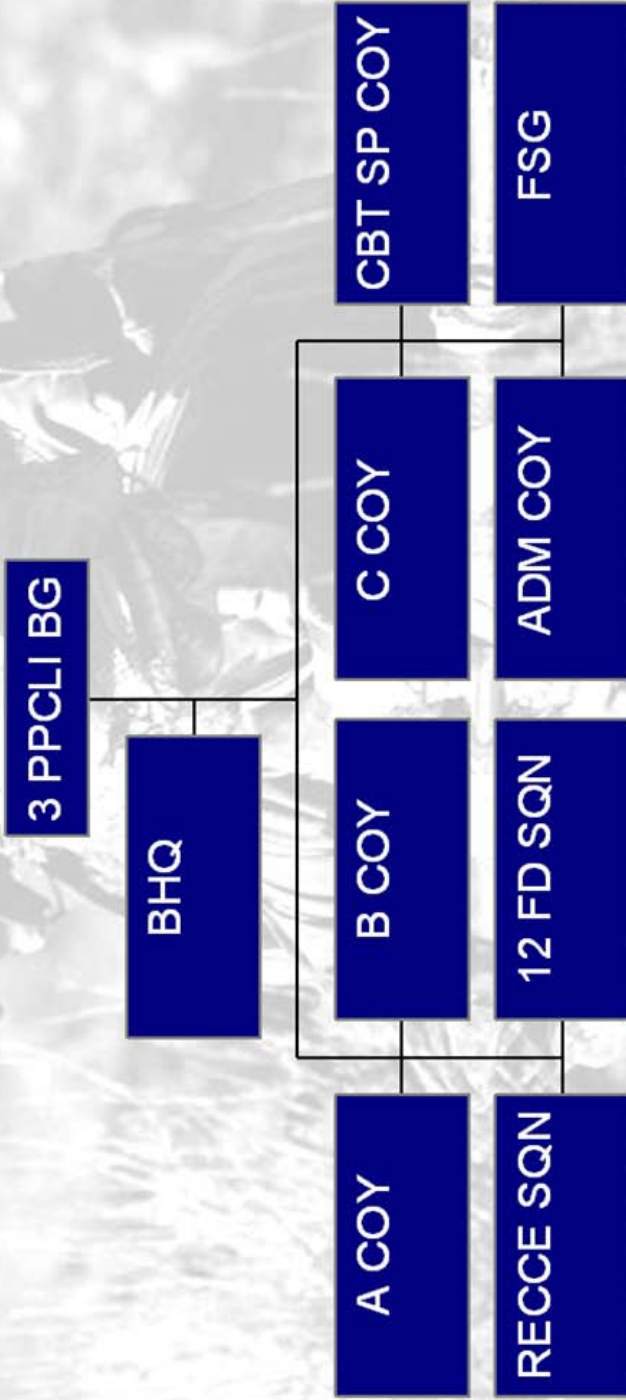
⁵³Malawi Jalaluddin Haqani was a major commander during the Soviet-Afghan War. He belonged to Abdul-Rab Russul Sayyaf's Islamic Union of Afghanistan (IUA). He was prominent during the siege of Urgan, the Soviet Operation "Magistral" to open the road to Khowst, and the Battles of Zhawar 1 and Zhawar 2. He joined Mullah Omar's Taliban movement where he continued to be a prominent commander.

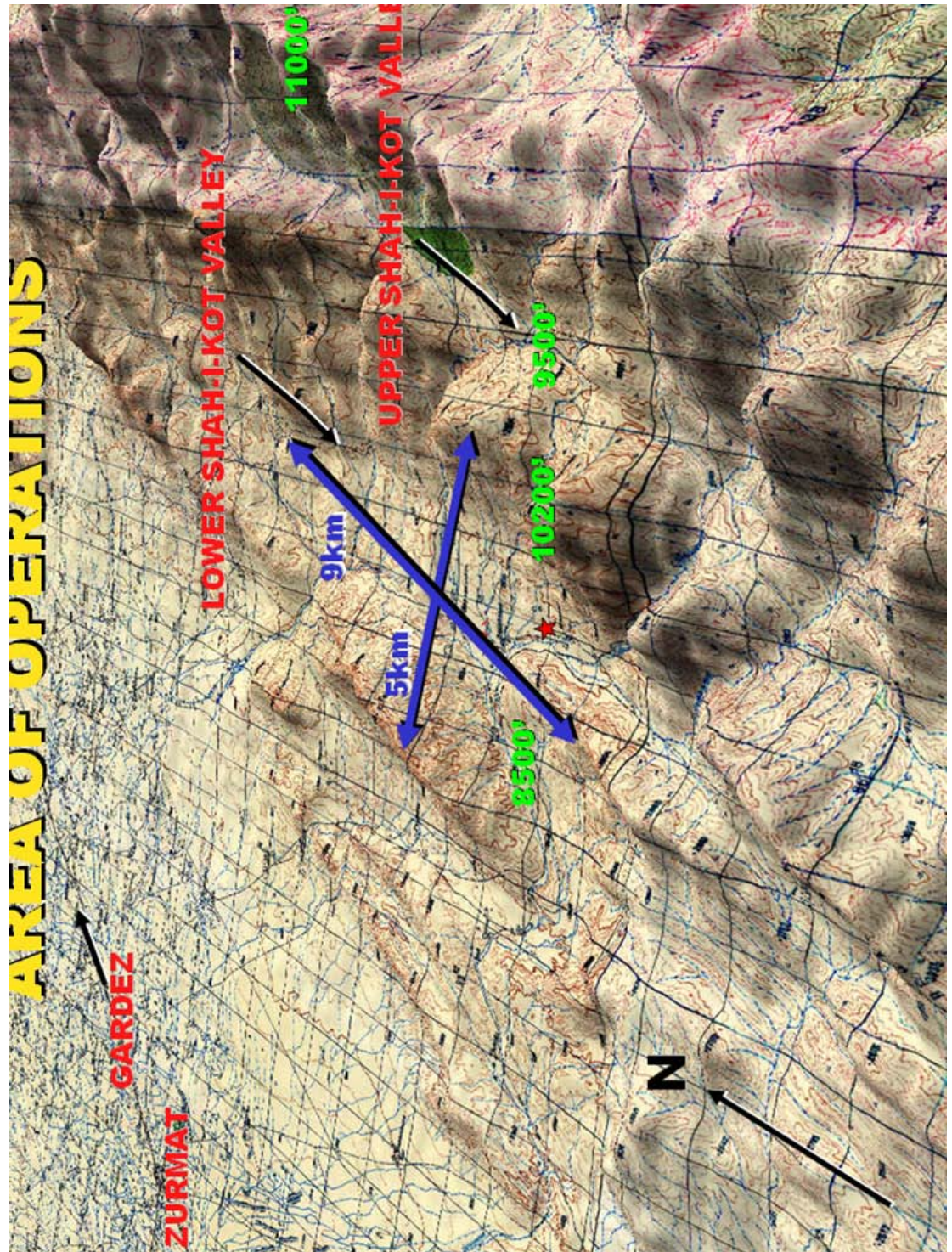
⁵⁴Interview with Colonel Mark Rosengard, Task Force Dagger, Kabul, 21 May 2002. The paragraphs in quotes are actually a compilation of his remarks.



3 PPCLI Battlegroup

Order of Battle





Terrain Analysis

Elevation

LOCs

Legend

2,750m – 3,000m

8,200ft – 9,000ft



3,000m – 3,500m

9,000ft - 10,500ft



3,500m (+)

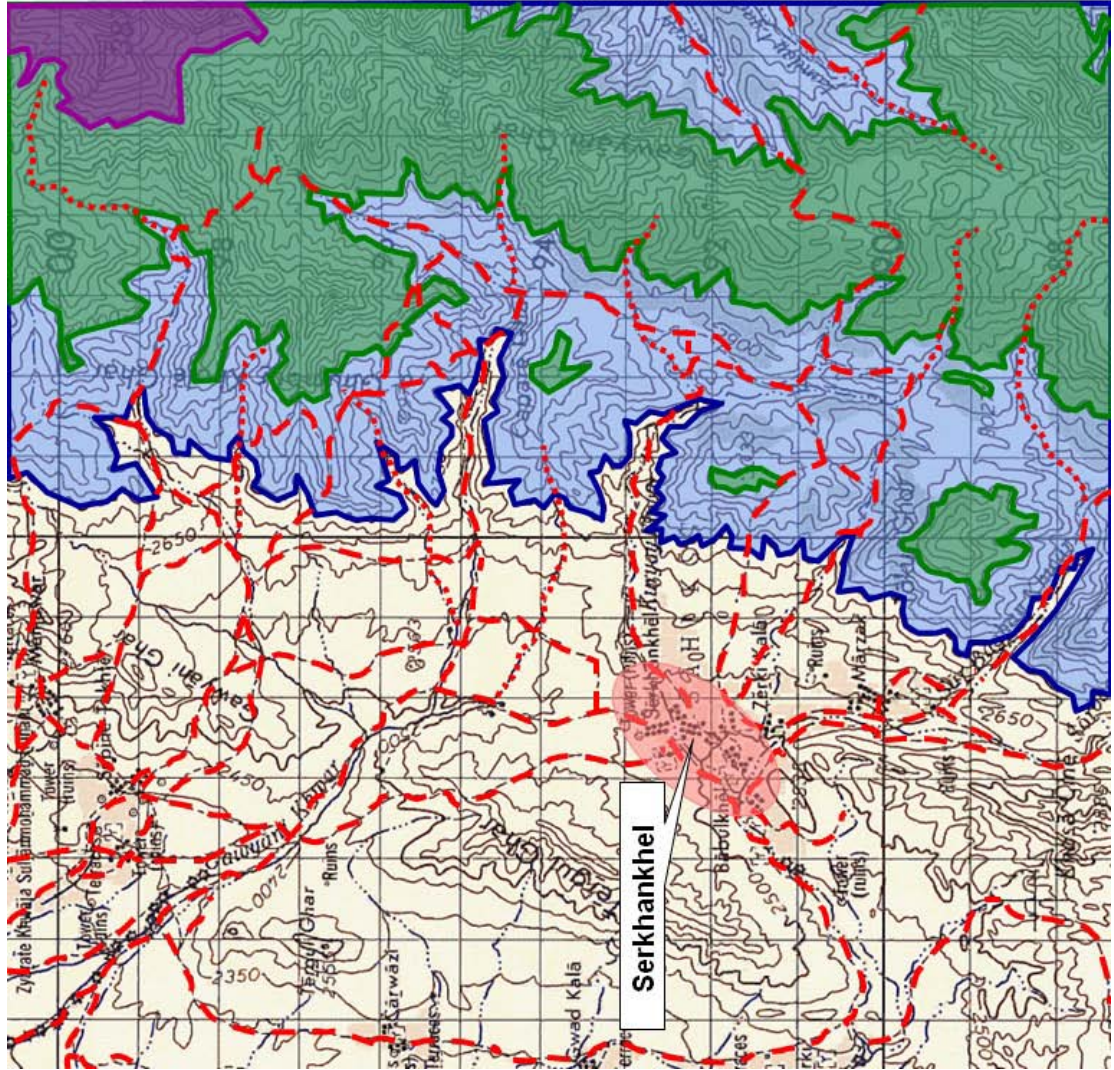
10,500ft (+)



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CHAPTER 5.

INTO THE VALLEY

Had they said there's going to be a thousand or two thousand Muldoons all up there in the rocks and they're going to fight to the death and, oh by the way, bin Laden is there, I guarantee that there would have been more concern between the Army and the Air Force and they would have been a lot more responsive.¹

— Captain Butch Whiting

The United States now had a small presence in Afghanistan--it was nothing like the scope and scale of Soviet involvement. Kandahar airfield, now the home of the truncated 3rd Brigade, 101st Air Assault was once the home of the Soviet 70th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade. The 3rd Brigade had the combat power of one full-strength US light infantry battalion, two-thirds of a Canadian light infantry battalion, eight Apache helicopter gunships, no artillery, no armored vehicles, and no heavy mortars. The allied ground forces of Gul Agha Sherzai were lightly armed, partially trained and numbered some 800.²

The combat power available at Bagram was less impressive than that at Kandahar. There were pieces of the scattered 1-87th Infantry Battalion slowly reassembling at the airfield. There were no helicopter gunships, no artillery pieces, and no armored vehicles. However, the 1-87th had been issued 120mm mortars--an upgrade that had not yet occurred in the 3rd Brigade.³ Besides the forces of the Northern Alliance, the coalition could muster maybe 3,000 personnel countrywide.

Although the conventional forces were closing into Afghanistan, the theater military effort was commanded, conducted, and directed by special operations forces.

In addition to the United States special operations forces, there were some 200 special operations forces from Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom.⁴ ISAF forces were beginning to arrive, but Afghanistan was still unsettled.

Initial Rumbblings about the Shar-i Kot Valley

LTC Jim Larsen, the Brigade XO of the Rakkasans, and Major Sherrie Bosley, the battalion support operations officer of the Rakkasans Logistics Task Force 626, flew up to Bagram at the end of January 2001 to coordinate the movement of a company from Kandahar to Bagram. The Rakkasans needed a forward operating base from which to stage their company as a Quick Reaction Force. Most of the targets in Afghanistan seemed to be too far away from Kandahar. In fact, most targets were in Paktika and Paktia Provinces, especially around Khost. It was just too hard to fly there from Kandahar due to the fuel constraints. All the aviation fuel in Afghanistan was flown into Bagram, Kabul, and Kandahar airfields. Aerial supply of fuel is a chump's game. An aircraft burns more fuel getting it there than it can actually deliver and there is a problem with transporting bulk liquids. Airborne liquids have a shifting center of gravity unless you put them in small containers, which is not always the most convenient form for easy delivery and use. Fuel on the airfields was scarce and, until there was enough security to be able to truck fuel in, getting forces to the enemy areas would be dependent on the on-hand fuel supply. It would be more efficient to go after the enemy in the eastern provinces from Bagram. While Jim and Sherrie were conducting initial coordination for real estate and

logistics support for C Company, 1st-187th Infantry, Jim ran into some old friends from his days with the Ranger Regiment. They were now with the JSOTF, Task Force Dagger. Jim sat down with his friends and learned about some on-going mission analysis concerning suspected Al Qaeda and Taliban personnel in the Shar-i Kot Valley. Lieutenant General Paul Mikolashek, the CFLCC Commander, was contemplating a conventional operation in the valley. The Special Operations mission analysis was called Operation SWAK. Jim and the JSOTF planners looked at the initial CFLCC guidance and began early planning. Jim outlined what the Rakkasans could bring into the fight. At the end of January, Jim would be practically a full-time resident of Bagram as he joined special forces and conventional force staff officers in planning for the fight.⁵ Sherrie would develop a logistics support plan to help tie it all together.

The oddities of the theater command structure in Afghanistan were already evident. They would become glaringly obvious as more forces arrived and more missions were planned. When the SOCCENT Commander, Rear Admiral Bert Calland, dodged his wartime mission of becoming the JSOTF for CENTCOM and dumped this responsibility on Colonel Mulholland's 5th Special Forces Group, he set in motion a process that would result in a major command and control nightmare. Rear Admiral Calland designated the 5th Group as the JSOTF on 13 September 2001.⁶ Special Forces Groups are lightly manned and do not have the personnel, equipment, logistics, and specialized training to manage all the duties of a theater-level JSOTF. SOCCENT had all those assets and kept all those assets. Now, the

JSOTF was running operations that required assets from other commands inside and outside CENTCOM--assets that were hard to get for a Colonel but easy to get for a two-star flag grade officer. Managing this theater was going to be tough enough, without the command and control arrangements being changed at the start of the war and the necessary assets being withheld. Colonel Mulholland is an impressive soldier that gets the job done despite all obstacles, but SOCCENT created major obstacles for him with this decision. An ad hoc headquarters and ad hoc command and control arrangements make work unnecessarily complicated and unnecessarily difficult for the participants.

After the fall of the Taliban regime, SOCCENT made command and control and operations more difficult yet again. SOCCENT decided to create a second JSOTF in Afghanistan! The 5th Group (Task Force Dagger) became JSOTF-North--responsible for Northern Afghanistan above the 34th parallel. The headquarters of Naval Special Warfare Group-1 (NSWG-1) out of San Diego, California, became JSOTF-South.⁷ This was a training command that had no assigned combat units and also lacked the personnel, equipment, logistics, and specialized training needed to manage all the duties of a theater-level JSOTF. SOCCENT again kept its assets. Navy SEALs have no experience in infantry sustained combat; training and employing local forces in combat; or in conducting civil affairs and psychological operations.⁸ Commodore Robert S. Harward, the commander of JSOTF-South received some SEALs, but needed experienced soldiers. LTC Chris Haas, Commander of the 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group, was ordered to detach his

A Company to JSOTF-South, bringing a ground mobile strike element to the command. The 3rd Special Forces Group, trained for deployment in Africa, also deployed some of its ODAs to Task Force K-Bar. The command and control assets of the special operations forces were being further stretched, strained, and diluted.⁹ This was further complicated by the location of JSOTF-South's air component headquarters--the Joint Special Operations Air component-South (JSOAC). It was located on Masirah Island, Oman and Qatar, far off in the Persian Gulf. All of its USAF special operations aircraft went with it.¹⁰ Unlike JSOTF-North, where the JSOAC-North headquarters were co-located with it in Bagram, this separation produced an additional coordination and response time problem and put even more demand on the aircraft of the conventional force. To further complicate command and control, most of the non-US SOF were also assigned to JSOTF-South. These non-US SOF were excellent soldiers, but each country had its own caveats as to their use.

There was yet another Special Forces Task Force in Afghanistan--Task Force Bowie. Task Force Bowie (also known as Task Force 11), commanded by Brigadier General Gary L. Harrell, was a "black SOF" task force. "Black SOF" perform direct action and deep reconnaissance missions using units like Delta Force and the 160th SOAR while "white SOF" train foreign militaries, conduct civil affairs actions to win hearts and minds and fight beside the foreign militaries they have trained when necessary. Task Force Dagger was "white SOF" and Task Force K-Bar was supposed

to be “white SOF,” although their SEALs and non-US SOF were solely trained for and disposed to the direct action and reconnaissance missions.

Someone had to coordinate and control the SOF in Afghanistan. Task Force Dagger had been running the theater and was headed by Colonel Mulholland. He was out-ranked by Brigadier Harrell and Commodore Harward, but he was basically running the show until the creation of JSOTF-South. There is nothing magic about the 34th longitude line and the enemy was wandering back and forth across this imaginary line. Who was responsible for dealing with these folks? How do you coordinate between the JSOTFs and among the special operations task forces? Who is in charge in Afghanistan?

CENTCOM came up with a solution. They had earlier created yet another ad hoc headquarters, this one in Kuwait called CFLCC, the Coalition Forces Land Component Command. “Sea-flick” was in charge of the forces in Afghanistan and reported directly to CENTCOM. Lieutenant General Paul T. Mikolashek was the CFLCC Commander.¹¹ Although he was in charge of operations in Afghanistan, the special operations task forces were also reporting to SOCCENT and CENTCOM.

There was a very peculiar command and control relationship above CENTCOM. CENTCOM had a straight line to the Secretary of Defense. It bypassed the services and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Pentagon was cut out of war planning! Under the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the Service Chiefs were relegated to a support and advisory role while the regional Combatant Commanders, such as CENTCOM’s General Franks, fought the wars.¹² Still, the service chiefs wanted to be part of the

process and, after the budget starvation years of the Clinton administration, rebuild their anemic forces. The war was an opportunity to acquire the funds to make the services healthy again, but each service chief was looking out for the interests of his own service.¹³ Further, the byzantine budget arrangements put the various service chiefs in charge of the funds for the Combatant Commands. The Air Force provided CENTCOM's funding, the Army provided EUCOM's funding and the Navy provided PACOM's funding.¹⁴ CENTCOM had to be nicer to the Air Force than to the Army or Navy.

There is rational thought behind how combat units and staffs are organized. There is rational thought behind the military educational and training system. TO&Es, regulations, training plans, and manning documents are designed to put the right people with the right backgrounds in the right positions prior to combat. The units are nestled within each other and certain levels handle certain jobs and do certain types of coordination. There is redundancy built into the system so that certain jobs and certain types of coordination will still be done after losses. Militaries spend a lot of time and intellectual energy designing headquarters and training the personnel who will serve in them. Much of that automatic coordination, consistency and redundancy is lost when ad hoc units and headquarters are deployed. Ad hoc arrangements may work well in the short term, but over time they tend to fray and come apart.

The conventional forces were arriving in Afghanistan, but it was a slow, piecemeal effort. There were ISAF forces coming into theater under UN auspices and

British command. The ISAF forces were restricted to Kabul. US conventional ground forces were not under ISAF. The US forces were the severely truncated 3rd Brigade of the 101st Air Assault Division and one battalion, the 1-87th Infantry, of the 10th Mountain Division. These were joined by a truncated 3PPCLI from the Canadian Forces. Who was going to command these soldiers? The 10th Mountain Division headquarters was eventually given the mission. This made a lot of sense, but there was one flaw. The 10th Mountain Division headquarters was not intact. Major General Franklin “Buster” Hagenbeck, the division commander, asked to bring his entire headquarters, but this was denied by the “tyranny of the C-130.” The United States was transporting everything into Afghanistan by air on its aging transport aircraft. There were far more demands than aircraft. Consequently, organizations were ruthlessly stripped of people and equipment before shipping. The loss was combat power and staff capability.¹⁵

MG Hagenbeck had asked to bring along his air-planning cell, but this was denied, the war was over. Why waste the space? Ground-air coordination for a theater-level operation is normally done at corps and higher. There was no corps. There was no regular army chain of command. MG Hagenbeck did not have a complete division headquarters in Afghanistan, he had a division tactical command post, about one-third of his staff with no depth or redundancy. CFLCC eventually put the conventional US and Canadian forces under the 10th Mountain Division truncated headquarters and designated it “Task Force Summit.” There were now four ad hoc Task Forces in Afghanistan under the command of an ad hoc headquarters in Kuwait.

CENTCOM was the only regular headquarters in the chain and it was ten time zones away.

Who and What is in the Shar-i Kot?

Alexander the Great and the British probably did not enter the Shar-i Kot Valley for combat. In 1981, Soviet intelligence did not recognize organized Mujahideen resistance in the valley and bypassed it during four operational sweeps through the area (*Udar 1, Udar 2, and Udar 3*) in late 1980, early 1981, and during operation *Kvadrat* (10 March-20 April 1981).¹⁶ The valley remained a sideshow during the war, although there were major battles fought to the northeast of the valley as the Soviets tried to open the road between Gardez and Khost. During November-December 1987, the Soviets launched the largest operation of the war (other than the incursion and withdrawal) to open the road.¹⁷ It was called *Magistral* [highway]. During operation *Magistral*, the Soviets launched a supporting attack that took the west side of the Shar-i Kot Valley (the “whale”) on 4 December, but did not go up the east wall of the mountains.¹⁸

That does not mean that the Shar-i Kot Valley was not important during the Soviet-Afghan War. During the war, Malawi Nasrullah Mansoor ran the valley and the guerrilla movement that was based out of it. He was a member of the *Harakat-e-Inqilab-i-Islami*, Islamic Revolutionary Movement (IRMA), founded by Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi Mansoor himself was a follower of the Deobandi movement, a fundamentalist Islamic movement that originated in India. Unlike most Mujahideen commanders, Mansoor welcomed foreign jihadists and funded his fight in the Gardez

region from the funds brought in by the foreign jihadists. He was not dependent on IRMA for funding as Deobandi and Wahabi money supported his cause and paid for his foreign jihadists. Mansoor began using the valley as a base camp and supply base as he laid in large amounts of ammunition, weapons, and supplies. He engineered and fortified the base, constructing bunkers, trench lines, an underground hospital, obstacles and the like.¹⁹ He was an important commander, but managed to stay somewhat hidden from Soviet intelligence. He does not show up on the Soviet intelligence maps as Mansoor, but under the codename Tuti with 280 followers.²⁰

After the Soviet withdrawal and the eventual collapse of the DRA, Nasrullah Mansoor became Governor of Paktia Province under the Rabbani government. He died on 9 February 1993 when a car bomb exploded in his vehicle. Many suspect that the henchmen of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar were involved, but that has never been proved.

After Nasrullah's death, one of his sons, Saifur Rehman Mansoor, took over the Shar-i Kot.²¹ Saifur was an enthusiastic supporter of the Taliban movement. When Al Qaeda came to Afghanistan, Saifur recognized an opportunity. Al Qaeda would need a rest and recreation site and he owned the Shar-i Kot Valley. It had housing, a hospital, strong defenses, stockpiles of munitions, mosques. It was also full of Afghans. Saifur began buying out or forcing out the Afghans to make room for his paying guests. As Al Qaeda moved into Afghanistan, many of them moved their wives and children into the Shar-i Kot Valley.²² The valley was a convenient

and safe place to leave their families as they supported the Taliban in their control and conquest of Afghanistan.

Once the United States began its air operation against Afghanistan, the Shar-i Kot Valley became vacant. Al Qaeda families fled over the border into Pakistan. But, the valley would not remain vacant for long. When Kandahar fell, the Taliban fled west. The Al Qaeda fled east. Part of Al Qaeda fled toward Tora Bora. The rest moved into the valley and began setting up positions. The group heading for Tora Bora arrived too late. The fighting had started at Tora Bora and there were no guides to get them out. They headed back south and joined their comrades in the valley.²³ Al Qaeda was trapped. They were no longer welcome and they had no guides. What they did have was a mountain valley engineered for a conventional mountain defense. Osama bin Laden had stated that the United States was a paper tiger and all it would take was a single catastrophic kill of US troops to have them turn tail and leave the country. It had happened in Somalia.²⁴ This was the place to orchestrate a catastrophic kill of US forces and get them to leave Afghanistan. Since most of Al Qaeda viewed this as a holy war, it was a good place to kill infidels and perhaps go to paradise to the waiting 72 dark-eyed virgins.

The valley was engineered for a stiff conventional fight. [See Map 5-1, Enemy Defenses.] There was a forward security element of approximately a company and a half on the Tir Ghol Ghar low mountain that dominated the northern and southern approaches into the valley. The valley itself served as a security zone and a logistics receipt area. The main defensive positions were on the mountains in

individual strong points. Each strong point was designed to be capable of sustained, unsupported combat since mountain terrain makes interlocking supporting positions almost impossible to build and maintain. The strong points were well constructed and consisted of bunkers, trench lines, crew-served weapons positions, and individual fighting positions. The combatants slept on site in tents and in bunkers. Meals were delivered from the villages to the fighting positions. There were a series of ammunition bunkers throughout the complex and there was an underground hospital that was powered by a generator and well-stocked with modern medical equipment.²⁵

The enemy had an early warning system that started in the outlying villages. It had a light screen of forces forward of the valley manning road blocks on the northern and southern approaches. The forward security force on Tir Ghol Ghar was deployed for both early warning and determined combat. Since the northern and southern entrances were key, they were covered. Land mines were laid on both routes where the roads narrowed to enter the valley. There was a mortar park of 82mm and 120mm mortars positioned on the northeast side of Tir Ghol Ghar. The mortar emplacements were well designed. The mortar base plates were cemented into the ground to maintain the accuracy of the weapon registrations. The crews had dug small caves into the side of Tir Ghol Ghar where they stored mortar ammunition and where mortar crews could shelter from counterbattery fire and air strikes. A similar mortar park was situated in the southeast pass leaving the valley, an area that would become known as the "Ginger pass." In addition to the mortar parks, the enemy had a lot of other 82mm mortar emplacements. Three of these were located on

Tir Ghol Ghar. Two were located in the village of Sherkhankhel. Up to five of them were located on Takur Ghar. The southern approach was the more accessible approach. Consequently, a ZIS-3 76mm M1942 divisional gun, four D-30 122mm howitzers, and a M-30 M1938 122mm howitzer were dug in for direct fire coverage of that approach. A cave contained another two D-30 122mm howitzers laid for a keyhole shot on the southern approach. Two other 122mm howitzers were positioned in the northeast pass covering the northern approach.²⁶

The valley's air defense posture was impressive. They had a S-60 57mm Automatic Antiaircraft Gun located in the northeast pass, an area that would become known as "Amy pass." There was a ZPU-1 14.5mm automatic antiaircraft gun on Tsapare Ghar Mountain. The mountains of the east wall each mounted one or two M38/46 DShK 12.7mm heavy machine guns, many on the special aerial engagement tripod. Tir Ghol Ghar had two M38/46 DShK 12.7mm heavy machine guns and a SA-7 Strella shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile. There was also a M38/46 DShK 12.7 mm heavy machine gun on Khosa Chinah ridge and another one in Sherkhankhel village. The defending commander knew how the USAF conducted SEAD (suppression of enemy air defense) missions, since he did not position the weapons on the top of the mountains, where they had 360 fields of observation and fire. The USAF goes after mountain tops first. Rather, the weapons were offset onto the military crest of the mountains and oriented into the valley bowl.²⁷

There is not an exact count of enemy in the valley. A jihadist article about the fight claims that there were only 250 combatants, 150 Uzbeks, 50 Arabs, and 50

Taliban.²⁸ This is clearly low. At a minimum, there were initially some 500 in the eastern wall of mountains and Khosa Chinah ridge, probably another 100 on Tir Ghol Ghar and some 80 or more headquarters, security and logistics personnel in the villages.²⁹ The enemy command and control situation is a little murky. The same jihadist publication claims that the overall commander was Malawi Jawad. There were Uzbek forces from the IMU, reportedly commanded by Qari Muhammad Tahir Jan. The Arab contingent was reportedly commanded by Ghazi and the Taliban contingent was commanded by Saifur Rehman Mansoor.³⁰ The first three of these are code names. The overall commander was clearly professional and this was not his first mountain defensive battle. The most likely candidate is Jalaluddin Haqani. He knew the area well as a local leading commander during the Soviet-Afghan War. This is the back side of the area he commanded during the defense against Operation *Magistral* and not too far from his defense of the caves of Zhawar.³¹ He is a Taliban commander and the defenses of the valley are similar to those in other mountain defenses he conducted. “Malawi Jawad” is probably Jalaluddin Haqani, his brother or one of his deputies. If not, “Malawi Jawad” could be one of five former Pakistani officers who trained the Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War. There were Uzbeks in the valley, probably led by the IMU deputy Tahir Yuldashev (arguably the codenamed Qari Muhammad Tahir Jan). Yuldashev was a political leader, not a military leader. There have been frequent rumors about Chechens in the Shar-i Kot Valley. If there were any, they were few in number. Most likely, anyone with Cyrillic-lettered identification from the old Soviet Union was pegged as Chechen.³²

The Uzbeks had USSR identity papers. The Al Qaeda contingent was the largest contingent. It included the Uzbeks, but had many other adherents from the Arab-speaking world and Pakistan. The Taliban contingent was initially the smallest. Saifur Rehman Mansoor was in the Kabul area during the start of the air campaign. He returned to Gardez and then the Shar-i Kot to keep an eye on his real estate and rally his forces. But he was not the overall commander.

The Shar-i Kot Valley was important to the Al Qaeda and Taliban because it also held a great secret, a secret that must be preserved and protected from the Americans. This was the situation in the Shar-i Kot Valley before the battle. Unfortunately, the coalition forces getting ready to enter the valley did not know about it.

Learning to Drink from a Fire Hose

The United States spends a lot of national treasure on intelligence organizations. These organizations gather a lot of material but they all jealously guard their own turf. They treat important intelligence data as a commodity that should be disclosed and shared only at the highest levels possible. If the first time important data is shared is when it is briefed to the president, it is a home run for that agency. The CIA, the DIA, the DEA, the FBI, State Department Intelligence, Army Intelligence, Navy Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence, and Special Operations Intelligence were all present in Afghanistan. Intelligence agencies of other coalition forces and intelligence agencies of other countries were also present in Afghanistan. They were all gathering data and passing it up their organizational chains in separate

“stove pipes.” When the US datum got up to Washington, D.C., the senior officials of these organizations would meet to produce “agreed-upon” intelligence. As the name implies, “agreed-upon” intelligence has all the controversy and disagreements removed, so it is pretty bland stuff. The pertinent details, where the devil resides, do not get passed back down the other stove pipes where they might be helpful or vital. Instead, they are used in the production of lesser reports and analysis. The details about what was going on the Shar-i Kot Valley were scattered among the various agencies, but they were never assembled at the senior levels and they certainly never reached the forces that were going into harm’s way.³³ This is not to say that the combatants did not receive reports from all the agencies, they were inundated with interagency intelligence reports concerning virtually anything to do with Afghanistan or the region. Task Force Rakassan was a brigade headquarters dealing with an area almost the size of Texas. That size area would normally be the business of a corps or army headquarters. These senior headquarters intelligence offices would normally assist the brigade by screening out much of the extraneous material. This did not happen due to the ad hoc chain of command. Everything went to the brigade. It was a struggle to get through it all, let alone pull together a comprehensive picture from it.

The best intelligence data that the brigade received was through unofficial relationships. Many of the officers and NCOs of the brigade had done a tour or more in the Ranger Regiment. Many of the officers and NCOs in Task Force Dagger had also done a tour or more in the Ranger Regiment. There were a lot of friendships between the light infantry community and the white special forces community and the

planners used those friendships to get intelligence data before it went up the special operations intelligence stove pipe to disappear or be subsumed in a general report. There was little unofficial intelligence exchange with the black SOF.³⁴

There was one Special Forces Captain whose analytical abilities really helped develop the intelligence picture. In civvies, Captain Brian Sweeny often is mistaken for “Mr. Saville Row,” a dapper urbane figure, yet he is a hardened special operator. He is also an experienced analyst who can pick out enemy networks, command and control links and organizations from the jumbled mess of reports, sightings and rumor that permeate the intelligence business. Brian sifted through the reports and identified the enemy transportation system, logistics points, safe-houses, and escape routes (ratlines). There were three of them in Eastern Afghanistan. One was tied directly into the Shar-i Kot.³⁵

Intelligence support for the 3rd Brigade rested on the shoulders of Captain Eric Haupt. A native of Elmira, New York, Eric enlisted in the army and served in the 82nd Airborne Division’s and the 25th Infantry Division’s long range reconnaissance units before he was commissioned in Military Intelligence branch (after graduating from Officer Candidate School). He had served as the Executive Officer of the 82nd Airborne Division’s Long Range Surveillance Company at Fort Bragg before he moved to Fort Campbell to become the intelligence officer (S2) of the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry. He became the Brigade S2 in March 2001. He had been in the army for some 14 years. He had five children, ranging in age from one to nine years old. There were not a lot of quiet spells in the Haupt household. This may

have been good training for dealing with all the demands that would be made of the S2. Eric can deal with a lot of input from several sources almost simultaneously, and he can tune out everything when required. Eric brought along a lot of technical gear to help his effort including the AN/PRD12 (later AN/PRD 13) for voice communications intercept and radio direction finding; the AN/TRQ-32 IEW radio receiving set for receiving, recording, and determining the direction of transmitted radio communications of enemy transmitters; the “steamroller” cryptology system; a CSRT (quick reaction team) from the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA); a TROJAN SPIRIT II AN/TSQ-190(V)3 satellite communications system; and three Interrogation Prisoner of War (IPW) teams (one from Fort Campbell, one OSSI team from the USAF and one from the 202nd MI Battalion). The list of equipment is impressive, but most of it was Cold War legacy material, great for finding a second-echelon tank army, but not much use against small groups of irregulars. It was also very bulky and most of it would have to stay in Kandahar during the fight. The best equipment and key analysts were supporting CENTCOM’s next fight. Eric’s main shortage was linguists. He had Arab-speakers, but even Al Qaeda avoided using Arabic as Arab-language radio conversations invited air strikes. The Canadians had one native-born Afghan, now a Canadian soldier, who was from the area. Everyone desperately needed his services and he was over-committed for his entire tour. Besides, due to US intelligence regulations, the Rakkasans could not share intelligence with the Canadians who brought an impressive Signals Intelligence capability.³⁶

When Task Force Summit and Task Force K-Bar began planning for Operation Anaconda, the first question was how many enemy combatants are in the valley? There were many estimates and they varied between 20 and 800. This is not a good spread to plan against. The brigade requested a good estimate on the total population in valley. The report came back that there were some 1,000 Afghans resident in the valley villages (500 in Sherkhankhel, 300 in Marzak, and 200 in Babukhel). Captain Eric Haupt did what any good intelligence officer would do, he consulted an average regional demographic spread and after he eliminated the old men, all the women and all the children, he was left with between 250 and 300 men capable of bearing arms. The fact that there were little to no old people, women and children left in the valley was known to the local Afghans and this fact had been passed up several stove pipes, but it did not reach the combatants.³⁷ This was a critical piece of information. When Mansoor returned to the valley, he forced out the remaining Afghans and they ended up in Zurmat and Gardez. The CIA first detected the gathering of the enemy forces in the Shar-i Kot Valley from the displaced persons in Gardez.³⁸ They began reporting this about 2 January 2002.³⁹ What they did not note was that these were the final evacuees from the valley, the Afghan people who had provided the services to the Al Qaeda wives and children when they lived in the valley.

The next piece of intelligence judgement was what will the enemy do? Will they defend or retreat? Up to this point, they had refused to stand and fight. Their response was survival and they would kick out a rear guard and go to the mountains.

Even the group that had been turned back from Tora Bora had not looked for a fight, but turned and fell back into the Shar-i Kot. The judgement was that the enemy in the valley would also choose survival, kick out a rear guard and go to the mountains.⁴⁰ Since the population of the valley was reported as predominantly Afghan, that conclusion made sense. If the planners had known that the population of the valley was almost all Al Qaeda, with their backs to the wall, and no where to go, their judgement would have been different.

The brigade wanted to know where the enemy combatants spent the night. Did they sleep in the villages and go into the mountains during the day or did they stay in mountains? The answer they received from intelligence agencies was that they were unsure; however, they believed that they spent the night in the villages. A three-letter agency knew that some 30-40 cooks from the nearby urban area of Zurmat entered the valley daily to cook meals for 500-700. They were closely monitored and kept in the village of Marzak. They never saw the combatants, just the local security and the porters who carried the meals up into the mountains.⁴¹ People in this region like to cook their meals on site. This meant that there were 500-700 people who were located where they could not easily cook their own meals. They were up in positions on the eastern wall of mountains and on the Khosa Chinah ridge. They did not come down into the villages to sleep at night. The forces on the Tir Ghol Ghar and in the villages apparently prepared their own meals, but only headquarters, support, and security personnel spent their nights in the villages.⁴² Afghans have a tendency to exaggerate numbers and so the number of catered meals

was discounted as an exaggeration by intelligence personnel.⁴³ However, when large amounts of food are prepared daily, experienced cooks should have a good idea of the number of people they are serving.

There was an urgency to get into the valley. The precautions that the enemy was taking to keep people out of the valley meant something. There were plausible reports that key Al Qaeda and Taliban figures had taken refuge there. Osama Bin Laden's escape from Tora Bora was known but his present whereabouts were not. Many reports speculated that he was in the valley. Other major enemy figures believed to be sheltering in the valley included Tahir Yuldashev, the head of the Independence Movement of Uzbekistan and Jalaluddin Haqani, a major Taliban commander.⁴⁴ These were priority targets and they had to be moved against quickly and in force. Up to this point, Task Force Dagger had conducted successful operations against the Al Qaeda and Taliban. They had used local Afghan and Northern Alliance soldiers to provide the bulk of the ground combat element. However, after Tora Bora, there was a reevaluation of the utility of these Afghan forces. They worked out well at pushing and displacing the enemy, but they had rarely, if ever, been in decisive close combat for any length of time. General Franks and LTG Mikolashek reportedly decided to use US conventional forces for the close combat fight.⁴⁵

Putting a Plan Together

Up to this point, the Special Operations had been running the theater. Now, there were conventional forces on the ground and command and control arrangements

were changing. Special Forces Task Force Bowie and what would become conventional forces Task Force Summit had forces on both sides of the 34th parallel. CFLCC was supposed to be in charge of Afghanistan, but they were located in Kuwait. Task Force Dagger took the lead in special operations planning for the Shah-i Kot Valley even though the action would now take place outside their area of responsibility. They had the experienced staff and had been running theater operations. Task Force Rakkasans took the lead in conventional forces planning. Task Force K-Bar and Task Force Bowie participated. CFLCC, as the overarching command, did not do the planning, but were in the support and approving role.

When LTC Jim Larsen, the Brigade XO of the Rakkasans, and Major Sherrie Bosley, the battalion support operations officer of the Rakkasans Logistics Task Force 626 became involved in the initial planning at the end of January, Jim radioed Kandahar and asked that Colonel Wiercinski, the Brigade Commander; Major Gibler, the Brigade Operations Officer; Major Dennis Yates, the fire support officer; and Captain Eric Haupt, the Brigade Intelligence Officer come to Bagram. He e-mailed the mission analysis to them. The brigade officers flew to Bagram on 13 February and Colonel Wiercinski had a reunion and initial conference with his old friend, Colonel John Mulholland. The 10th Mountain Division headquarters was still at K2 in Uzbekistan. Jim briefed Colonel Wiercinski and the staff on the concept of the operation. The commander and staff returned to Kandahar, while Jim remained at Bagram to work on the courses of action. Eventually the scouts from the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry (LTC Ron Corkran's unit) built a sandbox terrain model to

assist the planners.⁴⁶ There were some concept differences between Task Force Dagger and the Rakkasans. The SOF thought that the Rakkasans should land out of view in the upper Shar-i Kot Valley and then walk over the mountains down to the blocking positions. The Rakkasans argued that increased elevation would reduce the troop load carried by the Chinooks, drop the troops in some very deep snow and deprive them of Apache helicopter support. In the end, the Rakkasan view carried.⁴⁷

Ad hoc headquarters are not equipped to function as full headquarters. Consequently, the planning process was flip-flopped. Usually the planning process is top-driven and the lower headquarters make plans based on the plans of the senior headquarters. Instead, CENTCOM and CFLCC would communicate directly with the 3rd Brigade headquarters “we are thinking of doing such-and-such. Come up with what your plan would be and we’ll let you know if we approve it.” This is military planning stood on its ear! But, the 3rd Brigade had the only complete headquarters other than CENTCOM. When the 10th Mountain Division headquarters arrived, it also was not a complete headquarters. Consequently, much of the planning was bottom-driven by the 3rd Brigade. There are difficulties with such a process. When the plan requires outside assistance, such as air transportation or close air support, it does not have the command authority to get the attention and priority required from the other services. Their requests are requests by units, not by the CENTCOM commander. Thus, the normal CENTCOM process that would get that attention and priority was bypassed.⁴⁸ Another problem is trying to interface “a 16 byte system with a 32 byte system.” Normally there is a corps and division headquarters between

a brigade headquarters and CENTCOM or CFLCC. Until 10th Mountain Division assumed command and control on 22 February, CENTCOM and CFLCC communicated directly with 3rd Brigade, but a mobile brigade headquarters is not staffed or equipped to deal the demands of a large, stationary major headquarters.

The planning considered three enemy courses of action. First, the enemy would kick out a rear guard and the high-value targets and other combatants would exit the valley through the mountain passes in the eastern wall. Second, the enemy would defend in the villages. Third, the enemy would stand and fight in the mountains. The US Army rates courses of action from most likely to least likely. It also rates them from most dangerous to least dangerous. The first course of action was rated the most likely and least dangerous. The third course of action was rated the least likely but most dangerous. After the enemy course of action is selected, the battle plan is developed to accommodate the most likely enemy course of action. However, the plan includes “branches and sequels” that planners develop to deal with contingencies when the enemy does not act as predicted. The forces available for the operation are shown on Chart 1.⁴⁹

Jim Larsen and TF Dagger developed a plan based on the intelligence picture and the most-likely course of action. Task Force Dagger had the lead on the plan and had been working it for some time. [See Map 5-2, Routes for the Main Attack.] The plan was a “hammer and anvil” variation. The anvil would be Task Force Rakkasans. The task force would conduct an air assault at dawn using CH-47 Chinook helicopters to insert two battalions of infantry to occupy blocking positions that plugged the

passes through the eastern mountain wall.⁵⁰ Task Force Talon would make it possible. Task Force Talon was based on the 7-101 Transport Helicopter battalion headquarters, but many of the recent missions had involved attack helicopters. Major John White of the 3-101 Attack Helicopter Battalion joined the Task Force as the attack planner in the middle of February. Task Force Talon planned the maneuver and landing carefully.⁵¹ The CH-47s of Task Force TALON would be escorted by AH-64A Apache helicopter gunships and would be followed by a UH-60 Command and Control aircraft with the brigade Command Group on board. Chris Haas' special forces would accompany the Afghan forces of Commander Zia. Commander Zia's force would form the "hammer," sweeping through the north and south entrances to the valley and clearing the enemy from the villages and driving them toward the waiting US forces. Commander Zia had the main attack. To date, the Afghan forces had excelled at pushing and displacing the enemy. In addition, the Afghan forces would be better able to separate the combatants from the non-combatants than the US forces.⁵² More troops from the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry were needed from Jacobabad, Pakistan. Part of LTC Corkran's battalion would serve as the reserve and be prepared to back up Commander Zia's force.⁵³

The initial operation was expected to take three days. Commander Zia's force would make the main attack from the south while his northern force would initially establish a blocking position. By the end of the first day, Commander Zia should be in control of Babukhel and Sherkhankheyl. On the second day, Commander Zia would seize Marzak and on the third day, his northern force would enter the valley

and link-up with the main attack. It was going to be a fight for the villages.⁵⁴ There were two follow-on phases to the operation. The second phase would sweep east through the passes to clear the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley. The third phase would continue east to clear the Chmara valley that controlled the road to Khost.⁵⁵ [Map 5-3: Concept of the Operation.]

The operation was named Anaconda, because this attack was part of a larger effort that coiled around the enemy and applied pressure. The attack by Commander Zia and the Rakkasans provided the “inner ring” or coil. The “outer ring” was provided by coalition Special Operations Forces presumably from Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, New Zealand, and Norway. They were working in conjunction with additional Afghan forces under General Kamal Khan Zhadra and General Zhakim Khan. These units’ task was to stop small bands of the enemy from escaping to the north and east of the valley. Australian SAS (special forces), designated Task Force 64, would prevent enemy forces from escaping to the south. US and coalition “black SOF” from Task Force Bowie provided reconnaissance and direct action.⁵⁶

As the US forces were air assaulting into the valley, the helicopter aviation task force would simultaneously set up a Forward Arming and Refuel Point (FARP) about a 30-minute flight north of the valley. The aviation unit would transport fuel and ammunition to an abandoned airstrip south of Kabul. This FARP would give the AH-64As the ability to rearm and refuel and return to the fight quickly. A CH-47 FATCOW--a standard CH-47 equipped with 3,600 gallon internal tanks would provide the fuel. Additional aircraft would assemble at the FARP to provide rapid

casualty evacuation. First Lieutenant Matt Lowen's platoon of combat engineers would secure the FARP. The mountain passes were named after wives and sweetheart, in alphabetical order. Tir Ghol Ghar became "the whale," named after a well-known mountain at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California. Khosa China became "Rak 6 ridge."⁵⁷

Colonel Wiercinski's mission statement was: "Task Force Rakkasan air assaults H-Hour, D-Day into the Area of Operations to block Al Qaeda withdrawal from Objective REMINGTON in order to enable the combat operation of the local Afghan Forces (the main effort). On order, Task Force Rakkasan assists Afghan Forces to block Al Qaeda escape routes into Pakistan to complete the destruction of the enemy in the Area of Operations. On order, redeploys to Kandahar Airfield to prepare for future operations." A subsequent add-on mission was to provide humanitarian aid to the civilians.⁵⁸ It was a good plan, but it was a plan for a different enemy situation.

The underlying assumption of the plan was that the enemy was living primarily on the valley floor, in the villages of Serkhankheyl, Babukhel, and Marzak. The indications were that there 250 to 300 Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters living in these villages with their families, a total population between 800 to 1,000. Enemy weapons positions and bunkers were well-camouflaged and so only a few positions were known. The enemy, rather than stand and fight, would most likely try to melt away, as he had so many times in the past, through the mountain passes to the north, east, and south. Map 5-4 shows where the planners thought the enemy forces would

be located and how they would try to escape.⁵⁹ Clearly, the intelligence picture was that the bulk of the forces were in the villages and an air assault employing blocking positions would trap them in the valley. The planners expected the locals to use the passes instead of going straight over the mountains as shown in their briefing map. [Map 5-4, The Enemy.]

Colonel Frank Wiercinski and his intelligence officer, Captain Eric Haupt tried to figure out what the enemy would do. Frank figured that the enemy was used to the Soviet approach and in this plan, the Soviet approach was the ground attack through the north or south entrances to the valley.⁶⁰ Frank's plan differed from the Soviet model using an air assault to suddenly put a quantity of American troops at their "back door," thereby blocking their routes of escape.⁶¹ The original date for Anaconda was 25 February. Since this was the first day of the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca, the operation was subsequently changed to 27 February to show cultural sensitivity. The moon would be fairly bright during this time but US advantages in night vision could still play a key role. The question was whether to attack at night or during the day. To date, the enemy had been reluctant to operate at night and his nighttime actions were restricted to early evening or early morning. The US clearly had the advantage in night-vision gear, but landing troops at night on the rugged terrain of the valley was going to be a problem. The US had already had some bad experiences with rough landings and crashes of its Chinook helicopters. Doing a night landing was certainly adding risk. In normal planning, the ground maneuver plan drives the air assault plan. Colonel Wiercinski changed that. His orders were to

get the units on the ground safely. The maneuver units would adjust from that. So, the decision was to go in at dawn, landing from south to north in order to have a rear-quartering sunrise. Another advantage was that the helicopter landing zones would be in the shade and harder for the enemy to observe.⁶² The clincher to the day or night attack question was that the main attack force of Commander Zia had no night vision capability and were not skilled night fighters.

Up to this point, the 10th Mountain had not been involved in the planning. Major Jim Larsen, as the lead planner for TF Rakkasans, had provided the impetus for the 10th Mountain's involvement. Earlier, Jim was short on troops and visited an old friend, Major Jay Hall the S3 of the 1-87th Infantry. Jim was trying to scrounge at least a platoon. Jay was enthusiastic and contacted his Commander, LTC Paul La Camera, in Uzbekistan. Paul was another of Jim's friends. Soon the 1-87th Infantry Battalion was committed to the fight and the 10th Mountain Division agreed to provide top cover as the controlling headquarters, should CFLCC agree. But there was a problem. Only four platoons were in Bagram. Getting the rest of the 1-87th from Uzbekistan to Bagram. The battalion could not get any priority for flights, so they infiltrated the rest of the battalion on supply flights. The battalion would not close into Bagram until 25 February. It turned over security of K-2 to Charlie Company, 4th of the 31st Infantry, another 10th Division unit.⁶³

While planning went on, the troops were guarding airfields and pulling missions. The Shar-i Kot was just one of many concerns. The 3rd Brigade planned and conducted a series of 19 missions prior to Anaconda in addition to their airfield

security mission.⁶⁴ These included Brown Coyote that captured a local area fuel-air explosive cache; Black Horse that provided a QRF and possible exfiltration cover for SOF elements; White Fox that planned for and surveyed the establishment of a FOB at Bes near Khost and Gardez; Black Sheep; Grey Goose (also known as AQ008) that conducted a search and exploitation of the Zhawar Kili cave complex; Blue Whale which involved the destruction of the *karez* system around Kandahar; Black Dog that supported Task Force Bowie in their hunt for one of the very senior Al Qaeda or Taliban leaders; and Yellow Jacket that was a mission to Tarin Kowt which destroyed a collection of Soviet-designed shoulder-fired air defense missiles (SA-8s and SA-13s).⁶⁵ Everyone wanted the Rakkasans aviation as well. Task Force Talon pulled 11 missions in a 36-hour period!⁶⁶

The Plan is Blessed

On 17 February, LTG Mikolashek, the CFLCC Commander, flew into Bagram from Kuwait for a nighttime plan briefing. MG Hagenbeck, the Commander of the 10th Mountain Division, was there for the briefing as well. The SOF and Rakkasan planners briefed the plan. LTG Mikolashek had one reservation. “Aren’t we committing too many soldiers to this fight?” There was a concern that putting in too many soldiers in an area provided the enemy with additional targets. Colonel Wiercinski responded by pointing out that the intelligence picture was not too clear and always changing, there might be more enemy in the valley than they thought. Whereas his troops should be able to go toe-to-toe with a much larger force, this might put some soldiers in jeopardy. LTG Mikolashek agreed to let the plan stand.⁶⁷

The 10th Mountain Division would head CJTF Mountain. On 22 February, the 10th Mountain Division assumed command and control for the operation.⁶⁸ The operation would kick off in five days! LTC Gray, the 10th Mountain's G3, and LTC Briley and Major Platz, in the 10th Mountain G2 shop, got busy, but fortunately the basic plan was already put together. Now all the coordination had to take place in a very short time. Since the plan was a bottoms-up effort, the air force had not been formally brought into the planning. The 10th Mountain did not have its regular Air Liaison Officer (ALO) and his team when the division asked for them to go along, they were told that there was limited room for them on the passenger manifest and, besides, the war was over. There was no corps to assist. Troops and supplies needed to move from Kandahar to Bagram. A division commander has two deputy one-star commanders. Neither of the 10th Mountain Division Deputy Commanding Generals were in Afghanistan, one was in Kosovo and the other at Fort Drum. MG Hagenbeck requested the attachment of BG Gary Harrell, the commander of Task Force Bowie and BG Mike Jones, the military liaison officer to the CIA as his temporary deputies. It was a good choice, because it helped relations with the special operations community and CIA.⁶⁹

Colonel Wiercinski and his primary attack helicopter planning officer, Captain Butch Whiting conferred. They needed more helicopter gunships. On 18 February, Colonel Wiercinski made a formal request for another company of attack helicopters from Fort Campbell. This request was denied, again due to the lack of sufficient air transport for army requirements. But the division commander, MG Cody, was ready

and willing to help. Despite the refusal, MG Cody kept the unit ready to deploy.⁷⁰ Major John Lockwood, the British Liaison Officer to the 10th, was tasked with finding out if the British, or anyone in ISAF, had any artillery that they could borrow.⁷¹

The first problem was to move Task Force Rakkasans from Kandahar to Bagram. Initially this involved moving the headquarters, the 2-187th Infantry, Task Force Talon much of TF 626 and all the food, ammunition, and fuel necessary for the operation. Task Force Talon could move itself, but it could not move all the troops, gear and logistics required for the operation. TF Rakkasans requested USAF transport. The request went through 10th Mountain Division headquarters, CFLCC headquarters, and beyond. The request was turned down. The USAF would not provide the transportation. Operation Anaconda was a non-starter since the Rakkasans could not get to the starting point!⁷²

This Operation Made Possible by the United States Marine Corps!

The US Air Force, US Navy, US Marine Corps, and US Coast Guard all have their own long-range transport aircraft. Only the US Army lacks its own long-range transport aircraft. These are supposed to be provided by the US Air Force through the Transportation Command (TRANSCOM). However, the US Air Force has requirements of its own and US Army requests are often only that, requests. Now the US Army was stuck in Kandahar without sufficient trucks to drive the torn-up roads to Bagram and the US Air Force was not going to help out. LTC Jim Larsen is usually fairly upbeat and used to making things happen, but the USAF denial of

transport had him stumped. No help was coming from above and he needed a miracle. Jim walked the Kandahar flight line and saw the parked USMC KC-130 long-range transportation aircraft that were involved in extracting the last elements of the Marine Corps from Kandahar. He walked over to a Marine Corps Major in a flight suit. He explained his dilemma and asked if there was any way that the Marines could help. “No problem” was the Marine’s reply. Jim then asked what the procedure to get the help was, anticipating the reams of paperwork and days of phone calls that was the usual procedure for requesting air transport support. “Just give my guys a half hour to get their stuff together and then let’s start loading” was the Marine Corps’ mission-first reply.⁷³

Jim was elated. He jogged back to the brigade TOC and got the movement started. Colonel Frick of the USMC confirmed the aircraft. By 21 February, a camp of Rakkasan GP Medium tents stood in Bagram as troops and supplies moved to their staging area. The Canadian 3PPCLI took over airfield security at Kandahar.

Where, Oh Where, Is the Air?

Due to the lack of sufficient on-hand integrated air planners, the upside-down planning process, the intelligence picture, and the anticipated enemy reaction, the USAF formally came into the planning process late. However, the commander of the 20th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) and other airmen were assigned to the SOF in Bagram and were involved throughout the planning from the initial days in January. Task Force Summit issued the operations order for Anaconda on 20 February with a copy to CFACC. Yet, LTG Michael Moseley, the Combined Forces

Air Component Commander (CFACC, the senior USAF representative in Southwest Asia) did not learn of the operation until 23 February.⁷⁴ He was traveling at that time, so he was not formally briefed until 25 February.⁷⁵ The requests for air transport that the Rakkasans had been making since 17 February eventually went to TRANSCOM for denial. Evidently, there was no communication between TRANSCOM and CENTCOM/CFACC whenever air support was denied to CENTCOM forces, or these details were considered of little importance when briefing the CFACC. After all, Afghanistan was hardly the primary effort. The Rakkasans certainly could not communicate directly with the CFACC and Air Force personnel in Bagram and TRANSCOM did not succeed in communicating with CFACC either.

CENTCOM sent six airmen to Bagram from Kuwait to work with the 10th Mountain Division headquarters. Major Pete Donnelly led the team. They were volunteers, not all with a planning and targeting background, but they were welcome. Should close air support become necessary, managing air support in a five by nine kilometer box that contained friendly forces would be difficult. It would not have been so difficult a year earlier, but the USAF was in the process of deactivating the 42nd Airborne Command and Control Squadron (ACCS) and the squadron was no longer mission capable. The 42nd ACCS was a unique unit that provided commanders with an Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC) to control and direct friendly air forces against enemy ground targets. Using their EC-130 ABCCC aircraft, the squadron was designed to work closely with friendly ground units and other command and control assets to prioritize and allocate fighter aircraft

in direct support of friendly ground forces while destroying enemy forces. There was no ready substitute for the EC-130 ABCCC. The USAF would try to control the air-ground fight with AWACS, an aircraft optimized for controlling the air war, but unable to communicate directly with ground forces or even army aviation. Further, close air support would be a new experience to the AWACS crews who were trained for theater air operations--not close-in tactical work.⁷⁶

There was an excellent fire support planning team in Afghanistan. It belonged to the Rakkasans. Major Dennis Yates was the Fire Coordination Officer from the 101st Air Assault Division Artillery. Captain Butch Whiting was the Aviation Liaison Officer and helicopter gunship air support planner from the 3-101st Aviation Regiment. Captain Paul "Dino" Murray was the Air Force Liaison Officer from the 19th Air Support Operations Squadron at Fort Campbell. The eventual success of Operation Anaconda would depend on their combined efforts.

LTC Gray, G3 of the 10th Mountain Division, began working with his new air cell. The division had left their USAF TACP behind them at Fort Drum since their original mission was to guard the K2 airbase where, presumably, the USAF personnel could provide that service. There were limited seats on the transport and flying airmen to an airbase full of airmen while limiting mission ground combat power did not seem a good option. Of course, the situation was now changed, but Department of Defense had imposed a cap on the number of personnel allowed in Afghanistan. The division would have to send soldiers home to bring the airmen to Bagram. With only five days between the assumption of command for the mission and the start of

the mission, there was no sense or time for that, even though the division would have preferred to work with its own people. LTC Gray worked with his new air cell, the 20th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) and the Rakkasans fire support planning team.

There were some issues that the soldiers and airmen had to work out. The airmen thought that the operation should be preceded by an extensive 48-hour long saturation bombing attack to obliterate all resistance in the mountains surrounding the valley. The soldiers, believing that there were civilians in the valley, did not agree. An extensive air operation could kill civilians and spook the very people that the operation was trying to trap before the soldiers arrived. Furthermore, there was the over-arching issue of the rules of engagement. The rules of engagement allowed aviation assets to attack clearly-identified air defense weapons sites but did not allow them to attack anyone near a helicopter landing zone unless he was physically firing at them or at friendly forces. This was going into a gunfight where the other guy is always allowed to draw and fire first. There was one way around this. If CFLCC gave official approval to a list of designated helicopter landing zones, aviation could clear these zones ahead of time with fires and kill anyone nearby who subsequently appeared to be threatening the helicopter landing zones. CW2 Mike Campbell and CW2 Hector Cuevas working with the Rakassans intelligence cell had painstakingly determined helicopter landing zones for the assault. Captain Butch Whiting sent this list of designated helicopter landing zones to CFLCC for approval. It was never

approved. They were going to go into a gunfight and let the other guy draw and fire first! There would be no massive preparation on the surrounding mountains.⁷⁷

There were some DShK antiaircraft positions on “the whale.” The whale was particularly worrisome, and the planners requested a 55-minute aviation preparation on the whale to begin one hour before H-hour. Eighty-eight JDAMs would blanket the whale and provide protection for the main attack. The planners also wanted the eastern wall prepped to protect the helicopter landing zones. However, since CFLCC would not approved the Rakkasans list of designated helicopter landing zones, that was not to be. Since some air defense assets were reported (but not identified) in the passes near blocking positions Amy, Betty, and Ginger, the planners got approval for a single fuel-air explosive strike in each pass. Six Apache helicopters would fly in escort and provide close combat attack if needed.⁷⁸

Forging the Main Attack

LTC Chris Haas, the 1st Battalion, Fifth Special Forces Group Commander, had his hands full. He had arrived in the Panjshir Valley when he infiltrated on 26 October to coordinate the efforts of the four ODAs that were on the ground. He stayed with that task until the fall of Kabul, then shifted over to help coordinate the fight at Tora Bora. After Tora Bora, he shifted to back Bagram where he became Colonel Mulholland’s go-to guy. Much of what he had done was with troops outside his battalion. In early January, ODA 594 that belonged the 3rd Battalion, began to pick up indicators that there was something afoot in the Shar-i Kot Valley. ODA 594 was under LTC Haas’ tactical control, so an enemy buildup in the valley interested

him personally. ODA 594 was in Gardez supporting Commander Zia, a local leader who commanded some 400 men. Since the ODA was offering good pay and accouterments such as boots, uniforms, and sleeping bags, recruits arrived to bolster this force. Chris had ODA 372, out of 3rd Group, assigned to help the effort. He further assigned his C Team, some ten men, to help the two ODAs. The force that would make the main attack grew to some 450 Afghans and 30 Special Forces soldiers.

The Special Forces began an intensive three-week training program to convert Pashtun warriors into soldiers. They were organized into platoons and companies. ODA 594 trained an 82mm mortar section for fire support. The Pashtun were natural guerrillas, but getting them to accept a more-organized form of combat was difficult. Still, after three weeks, they culminated the training in a company-level live-fire exercise that went fairly well. Three days later, they would move from training ground to battle ground.

The Special Forces had also learned from the Pashtun. They seemed to have a “spider sense” that alerted them to something being out of place, being not quite right. Quite often they would stop a vehicle in which they were passengers to warn of mines or an ambush ahead. They were seldom wrong.

While this training was going on, Chris remained in Bagram to help plan the main attack. The drive from Gardez to the valley would take two-three hours. The road they took, dubbed Route Steel, was a dirt road that bypassed Zurmat to the East. Where the road branched off through the pass leading to the Shar-i Kot, the force

would divide onto Route Copper or Route Brass. Route Copper went north and would be taken by a company of 100 Afghans and ODA 372. The northern force would occupy a blocking position, over-watching the northern entrance. The main force of 350 Afghans and ODA 594 would move on Route Brass. The C Team would accompany the main attack. [See Map 5-2, Route for Main Attack.]

The size of the enemy force remained a mystery. In the past, Afghan numbers were wildly unreliable. A report of a 1,000 enemy had often proved to be ten. Now the numbers of enemy were reported were at 400 or more. Yet, despite all efforts of satellite photographs, predator UAV flights, and special reconnaissance actions, all they could detect were a few caves, a few groups of four to five men and three or four DShK machine guns. The enemy apparently had no more than 100 combatants.

LTC Haas briefed his part of the plan to LTG Mikolashek at Bagram. His part of the plan was also approved. On 25 February, Chris moved to Bagram to join the attack.⁷⁹

Prepping for Helicopter Fire Support

When the Rakkasans arrived in Bagram, they started an intense training period to integrate the 10th Division personnel with their own and to work as a brigade. There were extensive battalion rehearsals as well. Everyone knew their role in the upcoming fight. Army aviation worked with the key leaders on rehearsing close combat attack calls for fire and directing fire onto an enemy. All this activity was not lost on the locals who worked on and around Bagram.

Captain Butch Whiting had arrived at Kandahar on 7 January. His job was Aviation Liaison Officer from the 3rd Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, the parent unit of the eight AH-64A Apache gunships assigned to the Task Force. Butch is an avid hunter, a trained engineer, and a hot-shot Apache pilot. He brought over two years experience as an Apache platoon leader to the job. As liaison officer, he was also the aviation planner for Apache gunship deployment. Butch beat the Apaches to Kandahar, so he quickly linked up with the only gunships in town, those flown by the 25th MEU, United States Marine Corps. The Marines were flying the Sea Cobra, a venerable Vietnam-era gunship. Butch was soon flying Cobra missions with the Marines, learning the terrain and the peculiarities of flying in this remote country. Maintenance was tough in dusty Afghanistan and the Marine mechanics were performing daily miracles to keep the blades turning. Due to Afghanistan's elevation, hovering was not often an option and the only way to employ the helicopter was by running-gun engagement, a technique that Army Aviation quit teaching its pilots once the Army phased out the Cobra. The Marines still had the Cobra and were skilled in running gun engagements.⁸⁰

The Apache is designed to hover and kill enemy equipment at long-range. However, in Afghanistan, it is often too high to hover and it is hard to identify an enemy at 6,000 to 8,000 meters distance, particularly when the enemy is a master of camouflage and reflexively hides under a grey blanket to mask his location and body heat. The Apaches would have to get close to the enemy to identify him at which point it would be suicidal to hover, even if one had sufficient hover power. Captain

Butch Whiting and the “Killer Space” Commander Captain Bill Ryan worked together to incorporate the Marine Corps experience in the skies over Kandahar. When the Rakkasans moved to Bagram, the pilots worked closely with the key ground leaders so that they understood calls for fire and close combat attack. In order to avoid fratricide, the helicopter pilots would come over the top of friendly forces and then have the friendly forces talk them onto the target.⁸¹

The Apache carries an impressive array of armament. It carries the Hellfire missile, which is great for killing tanks and bunkers. It carries the 30mm automatic cannon, an impressive rapid-fire machine gun. It carries pods of the 2.75-inch folding fin rocket, a Vietnam veteran that the USAF abandoned after Vietnam over questions of accuracy but which still holds sway in Army Aviation. When the Apache was designed, it had external fuel tanks. Before 9/11, the “Killer Spade” Apaches were fitted with the internal-fuselage Robinson tanks. When something goes into a fuselage, something else has to give. In this case, it was ammunition storage. The Apache went from carrying 1,200 rounds of 30mm ammunition to 90 nine trigger pulls. The Apaches would have to do running-gun engagements and primarily with the 2.75-inch folding fin rockets.

Prepping for USAF Fire Support

Captain Paul “Dino” Murray knows close air support. He was an F-16 pilot with back-to-back assignments in Air Force units trained for close air support missions. He volunteered to serve as an air liaison officer with the Army. Consequently, on 11 September, Dino was at Army airborne school learning to be a

paratrooper. Every male who has ever been through airborne school remembers the suspended harness training. The candidate has a jump harness tightly strapped onto his body as he hangs from a beam and practices steering his parachute. The straps painfully compress one's testicles. The exercise is supposed to replicate the experience of hanging below an opened parachute, but there is a lot more "give" in a descending parachute than in a wooden beam. The troops call the experience "suspended agony" and hope that their time in the harness is limited. Dino was dangling in the suspended harness when someone ran up and yelled "hey, a plane just hit the World Trade Center." The cadre and students ran off to a television set, leaving Dino and a few other unfortunates dangling for a long while.

When Dino was finally let down, he found a telephone and called his new commander at the 19th ASOS in Fort Campbell. "Sir, we've only met once and that's when you sent me to jump school. I want to be part of this. When the 101st goes, I want to be a part of it. I may not have any experience in my new job, but I know close air support and I want to be part of it."

His commander replied, "Dino, great, love your enthusiasm. Thanks. I'll tell you what I'll do for you. Right now, you are going to be commander of C Flight in support of the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Air Assault Division. We'll see what happens from there. Go back to training and talk to me when you get back."⁸²

Attend an Air Force cocktail party and, about the time you are into your second vodka and tonic, an Air Force pilot will state "Well, in the Air Force, all our warriors are officers." This is not true, but it reflects an attitude. In the armed

service, the Air Force has the reputation as the country club service. Airmen do not live in barracks, they live in dormitories. Physical training standards are comparatively lax and a large number of airmen are actively pursuing higher education. The Air Force has always had the largest share of the defense budget and has spent much of it on their bases. Air Force bases are the nicest and best-maintained in the armed services. The average Air Force enlisted recruit is not primarily an outdoors man or a driven athlete. Air Force deployments to combat zones are three to six months whereas Army combat deployments are 12 to 15 months.⁸³ Officer pilots fly and the rest of the Air Force supports their flying. However, there are true rough-and-tumble warriors in the Air Force enlisted and NCO ranks. They are the combat controllers (CCT), pararescuers (PJs), and Enlisted Terminal Attack Controllers (ETACs). These airmen spend a lot of time with other services and are used to living lean and training hard. Dino was taking over a flight of 24 ETACS to support the Rakkasans.⁸⁴

Taking over a flight of ETACs is not always an easy job. The officer is coming from a flying job and is suddenly grounded on foreign soil, the US Army. His subordinates, the ETACs are the Air Force experts on the US Army. They have lived with, trained with, and partied with soldiers for most of their career. They know everything about the Army whereas the new commander knows next to nothing. The new commander has to plug himself into the close-knit organization of the ETACS as well as the Army staff. There are cultural differences between the two services. There are also practical differences. The Army uses UTM grid coordinates on their

maps. The Air Force uses latitude and longitude. Any close air support mission requires immediate conversion from UTM to lat/long, with a constant chance of fatal error.⁸⁵ Close air support techniques were developed in the days of the dumb bomb, but JDAMs and laser-guided bombs were now going to be used in the close air support role. The new technology had arrived, but that did not mean that the supporting technology was in place. The ETACs did not have laser range finders to provide precise coordinates for targets.⁸⁶

Dino arrived back at Fort Campbell in November. He started developing personal relationships in the Air Force and Army world. He trained his people on Air Force subjects one or two days a week, but the bulk of their time was out with the battalions, training and getting to know them better. This would pay dividends. When the Rakkasans began to deploy, C Flight was anxious to get to Kandahar. Dino expected to be on the first chalk along with the Brigade Commander and his staff, ready to work and help relieve the Marines. However, Dino and his ETACs were bounced from the first chalk to the tenth and beyond. It was the same story as with the 10th Division TACP. The USAF kept bouncing the Rakkasans TACP since the brigade was going to defend Kandahar airfield and there was no need for a TACP to defend an airfield. The USAF was not going to put more Air Force personnel on the ground than necessary. There were force caps in play and a TACP was not needed for airfield defense. Colonel Wiercinski kept insisting, however, and Dino and his flight finally arrived in late January.⁸⁷

Dino was brought in early on Operation Anaconda planning. Like everyone else, he expected the enemy to scatter and run. This was the experience to date. Further, the press was carping on about how Osama bin Laden had been allowed to escape at Tora Bora. If he was in the Shar-i Kot, he was not getting away this time. Planning for Anaconda was conducted just like the planning for any of the other on-going Rakkasan's operations. There did not seem to be a need for a lot of air support for Anaconda. Dino had three concerns. First, he did not have enough people. Everyone was committed and he did not have any backups in case anyone was hurt or sick. Second, they still did not have any laser range finders. The high-technology equipment was with the combat controllers who had been supporting the special operations community in what had been, up to now, a special operations fight. The third, and biggest, concern was how the operation was going to be commanded and controlled. It is one thing to have small groups of special operators scattered about a large area calling in airstrikes on one TACSAT frequency. It is quite another thing to share that frequency while trying to support 1,500 conventional soldiers and their command and control structure that are concentrated in a small area, but calling for air strikes in various locales and directions. Dino needed a dedicated TACSAT frequency only for conventional air support. Further, he needed an Air Support Operations Center to coordinate and prioritize all the requests that may arise.⁸⁸ He would get neither.

Dino's planning dealt with a variety of issues. Anaconda was designed to deal with a fleeing enemy, not one that was dug in for a fight. The valley was small and

the 500 pound bomb had a danger close area of 500 meters. How can you employ close air support in a narrow valley crowded with friendly troops? How could air be used against the identified air defense weapons without disclosing the attack and spooking the enemy? If air strikes precede the assault, what happens if the air strikes fail to destroy their targets? Is that a show stopper or does the attack continue anyway? When the plan was finished, Dino thought that it was a good one. The worrying piece was command and control of air assets. The major problem was aviation fuel. The operation was going to put 1,500 people into a valley 100 nautical miles away. Helicopters use a lot of fuel and that fuel was not at Bagram. Some was moved there by the USMC KC-130s, but more was needed.⁸⁹

Dino and his warriors accompanied the Rakkasans to Bagram. Two days before the operation, they finally received Mark 7 laser range finders. Unfortunately, there were only two to split among 24 ETACs and there was not enough time to train on them to the level desired, but at least they had the two.⁹⁰

Kuwait City, Kuwait

Task Force Mountain sent a classified Power Point[®] briefing to CFLCC over the SIPERNET for review. The Public Affairs staff under LTG Mikolashek mulled through it and cringed at a slide that, while well intentioned, raised a red flag.

“Media Deception Plan.”

The slide proposed using the media to cover the movement of troops from Kandahar to Bagram as a routine repositioning of forces. Beyond that, there was no real thought about media participation. There was no appreciation of the effect the

operation would have on the media who were hungry to cover the war. CFLCC saw Operation Anaconda as the first time that media could be appropriately integrated into the Army's war plan. Up until now, the war was primarily a special forces operation with almost an almost complete news black out.

A "media deception plan" is in direct violation of public affairs doctrine and laws regarding deceiving the public. Marine Corps Captain FIRST NAME? Pool drafted a new media plan. He understood that once word leaked that there was a major operation taking place in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan, the media would descend on Bagram from Kabul and beyond. They needed a plan to manage the inevitable. Captain Pool was packing to go to Bagram when the phone rang. Dodge Billingsley was calling to try to get into Afghanistan as an embedded reporter with US forces.

"Can you be here by next Tuesday?"

"Uh, why?"

"I cannot give you any details, but, don't worry, you will like it."

Dodge's next call was to the Discovery Channel. They liked his work at Qala-Jangi and hired him for whatever was going to happen. Dodge was in Kuwait City the following Tuesday. After meeting Captain Pool, Dodge had some time for himself, but soon he was on a C-130 flying to Bagram. With him were a dozen Australian SAS. They were friendly, but tight lipped. They were also heading to Bagram. Was it for the same reason?⁹¹

Weather Hold

Mother nature always has a vote and she stopped Anaconda dead in its tracks. The weather turned nasty and it rained hard in the Shar-i Kot region. It had not rained there for two years and now it was pouring, turning roads into mire, undermining bridges, turning gulches into rivers. It was a cold, icy rain that turned to heavy snow in the higher elevations. It made everyone miserable. Ration runs up the eastern wall were disrupted and the sullen enemy forces had to dig into their reserves of dried and canned food. At Bagram, the leaders postponed Operation Anaconda for two days. D-Day would be the 2nd of March.

Intelligence reports were now indicating that there were more than 200 combatants in the valley. There might be 700 or more. Since the number in the intelligence estimates had always fluctuated, this was not a major concern. American soldiers were well-trained and reasonably equipped. They could certainly handle a force equal to its initial entry size, especially a force that just wanted to escape. Zia Lodin's force was competent by local standards. The plan was laid and no one was willing to postpone the operation further and possibly let bin Laden escape again, just because the number of enemy might be greater than originally planned for.⁹² And, in fact, the key piece of missing intelligence was never the amount of enemy present. The key missing pieces were where the enemy were at and what they intended to do. They were thought to be in the villages, ready to run. In fact, they were dug in up on the mountains and ready to fight.⁹³

Task Force Rakkasans used the two days to good advantage. The Task Force loaded the first lift troops on board the Chinooks by movement chocks and conducted a fly-off to the north. The Catholic chaplain blessed the Chinooks. Troops received additional training, more aviation fuel arrived and “black SOF” moved into the valley area under the cover of the nasty weather.

On 1 March 2002, the evening prior to the operation, Colonel Wiercinski assembled the Task Force. He is an impressive speaker and he delivered one of his best:

Every one of our generations have been called on to do something for his country. We are no different. We’ve been called on to fight the war on terrorism. You are part of that fight. Every man and every woman has certain defining moments in their lives. Today’s one of your defining moments. You will never forget this. You’ll never forget the fact that you’ve stood here in Afghanistan right before your defining moment. Remember that for the rest of your life because it’s important. It’s very important. As the Sergeant Major said, you need to be proud of yourself. You are representing your country.

A lot of us have two questions always going through our minds. Why-and how will I do? Let me answer the why for you. Each and every one of you has to answer that for yourself. Sergeant Major talked about each and every one of us having raised our right hand and taking an oath. But there are other reasons. For me, it’s 9/11. For those families that watched for their loved ones who never came home. For those firefighters, emergency workers, policemen who charged up rather, than came down. We do this for them.

How will you do in combat? A lot of you are thinking “I have never been in combat. I don’t know how I will do.” I guarantee you that there are a lot of people out there that are driving cars every day that are shitty drivers. It has nothing to do with that. You will be good in combat because of a lot of reasons. The first one is because of who you are. You volunteered. You’ve got it in here. That’s what makes you good in combat. Your training. You look at all the logisticians, what they accomplished here in just a matter of days. Our aviators,

our mechanics, our medics, our infantrymen, our mortar men, all of us. What we have accomplished has come from great training.

You will be good in combat because of your equipment. You have the best in the world. And you will be good in combat for cause and comrade. There's a book out--*Cause and Comrade*. It's why people fight. You will do it for each other and you will watch out for each other. We have two missions tonight. One is to defeat an enemy. The second one is a goal. Bring everybody home. Never leave a fallen comrade. I know that you will do that.

There are two kinds of people out there tonight. There are innocents who don't want any part of this fight and there are those who want nothing better than to kill an American or a coalition partner. Do not be afraid to squeeze that trigger. You will know when. You will know why. Take care of one another. Take care of all of us. We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. I would not want to be anywhere else, anywhere else in the world, today but right here with you. Today is your climb to glory. Today is another chapter in Rakkasan's history. Today is our rendezvous with destiny. You all be proud of yourself. God bless each and every one of us. I'll see you when we come back. Remember our motto, let valor not fail. Rakkasan!⁹⁴

The Black SOF Goes into Action

The black SOF of Task Force Bowie and Task Force K-Bar had spent a lot of energy trying to discover what was going on in the valley. They had been unsuccessful. Enemy checkpoints and patrols were effective and strengthened the belief that a major Al Qaeda or Taliban leader was in the valley. Black SOF made one more concerted effort with the advent of bad weather. On 27 February, small teams began infiltrating the area from different approaches. The 160th SOAR flew insertion missions that put more than 25 special reconnaissance teams into the area.⁹⁵

James Hotaling was a State Trooper in Washington State. He was also a member of the Special Tactics Squadron of the Oregon Air National Guard. His unit was located in Portland, just across the river from his home in Vancouver. James had

joined the Air Force right out of high school in 1987. He enlisted to be a Combat Controller and went through two years of rugged training to qualify. His training included jump school, free fall school, combat diver school, survival school, air traffic controller school, and the combat controller school itself. This was lots more fun than high school in North Carolina! By 1988, James was a combat controller and in 1989, he put his skills to the test in Panama. In 1990, he served in Desert Storm. After Desert Storm, James met the love of his life and got married. James deployed on a number of missions in Haiti and South America. High operations tempo and repeated separations play havoc with family life in the special operations community, so in 1998, James hung up his red beret and put on the Smokey Bear hat of the Washington State Patrol. He and his wife enjoyed marriage and thought that living together should be part of it. Still, James missed the military and after a few years in the Coast Guard reserve, he learned that the Oregon National Guard was forming the first-ever reserve component Special Tactics Squadron. They sought him out and asked if he would be interested in joining them. "Heck yes, a chance to wear the red beret again, shoot, dive, jump, and blow things up on the weekend." He joined the unit in May 2001. On 11 September, he was at Hurlburt Field, Florida, doing his two weeks annual active-duty training. Before dawn, he and his comrades arrived at Duke Field, an airstrip back in the coastal piney woods. They were going parachute jumping and went through all the briefings and safety checks. They strapped on their parachutes and were walking out to board the aircraft. It was a beautiful, crystal-clear day. They were not allowed to board. All aircraft were grounded. They walked back

into the briefing room. CNN was showing both twin towers burning on the television set. The nation was at war. SMSgt Hotaling remembered explaining his decision to join the Oregon Air National Guard to his wife. “Honey, this is a reserve gig. It would take World War III for them to call me up as a reserve combat controller to go do anything. It’s impossible. This is just a chance for me to continue to live out my dream thing.”⁹⁶

SMSgt Hotaling’s dream thing soon took him to Masirah Island in the Persian Gulf, where he met TSgt John J. Wylie, a new Combat Controller. They were now JTACs- Joint Terminal Attack Controllers and they would work together as a team. Their call signs were Jaguar 11 and Jaguar 12. James and John flew into Rhino in December. They were not there to work with the Marines. They were there to link up with the Australian SAS, Task Force 64. They went out on several high-adventure missions with the highly-trained, very-professional Australians. On one mission, they were on four-wheel all-terrain vehicles being chased by four-wheel-drive pickup trucks mounting DShK machine guns. James and John directed fires from F-18s flying from the USS Stennis to help escape. On Christmas Eve, they were scaling a vertical peak to spy on a terrorist training camp. Everyone later referred to this mission as the WOD, “the walk of death” due to all the equipment they had to carry. James and John went on to work with other forces and were attached to the US Navy SEALs just before Operation Anaconda. When the Australians learned of their mission to seal the southern approach, they asked for James and John to return. They all linked up in Bagram. On the night of the first of March, Task Force 64 and their

JTACs boarded Russian-made Mi-8 helicopters and flew to an area south of the valley. There were no landing zones on Hotaling's flight, so the pilot backed the helicopter to a mountain peak and let his passengers off. It was cold, dark, and five kilometers west from where they were supposed to be.⁹⁷

Other teams from Task Force Bowie got closer to the objective. Some of them located enemy positions and, most importantly, anti-aircraft positions. The reconnaissance and direct action specialists would find and take out five DShKs prior to the assault.⁹⁸

On 1 March, Zakim Khan's force of something over 300 combatants left Orgun and took up blocking positions in the Naka Valley. ODA 542 and 381 accompanied them. Zakim Khan established his headquarters in the village of Zerok. On the same day, Kamel Khan's forces entered the Shimal Valley. They were accompanied by ODA 571 and 392.⁹⁹

H-6, D-Day

It was cold, snowy, and miserable. It was 0200 in the morning. Thirty-seven trucks were assembled in Gardez to carry the forces of Commander Zia Lodin and ODA 594 and ODA 372 to the attack. Eight of the trucks were the large Janga trucks. Six of these were loaded with combatants. The other two were spares. The remaining trucks were smaller Mitsubishi's, Toyotas, and even a few Mercedes. Route Steel was now a quagmire. The heavy rains had turned the fine road dust to glop. The column started out slowly. No headlights were on and the progress was slow. Twenty minutes into the drive, a Janga truck flipped over as it slid off the mud-

slick road. The medics got busy patching up the injured. Fifteen of the Afghans were too banged-up to go on and had to be evacuated back to Gardez on some of the smaller trucks. Most of the injuries were broken bones and crushing injuries, but there were some disturbing internal injuries. The survivors were loaded onto one of the spare Janga trucks. The convoy slowly moved out again. USAF Specter gunships provided on-call cover in case of ambush.

Twenty minutes later, a bridge collapsed under another Janga truck. The rains had loosened and undermined the bridge and the weight of all the passing trucks completed the job. The truck was stuck and the bridge was destroyed. Fortunately, there were no injured this time, but the column had to abandon the second Janga truck and load the combatants on the remaining spare truck. The column further had to find a way across the wadi for the remaining vehicles. The column finally reassembled and slowly started up again. In order to try to expedite movement, the column turned on the vehicle headlights. The column left Route Steel and split onto Route Brass and Route Copper. The main effort rumbled down Route Brass. Route Brass crossed an area of fine sand and soon vehicles were getting stuck in it. The column halted and then started shuttling combatants from stranded Janga trucks forward on the smaller four-by-four vehicles. There were four Janga trucks left. The supporting effort turned north, heading to little Tir Ghol Ghar where it would establish blocking positions. Both columns halted and waited for the air preparation on Tir Ghol Ghar. At 0500, the air preparation began. Six JDAMs hit the top of Tir Ghol Ghar taking out the known DShK positions. Then nothing else happened. The columns sat still

for 55 minutes, waiting for the remaining 82 JDAMs to suppress enemy defenses and cover their advance over open, exposed terrain. They did not fall. In the valley, fuel-air bombs were dropped in the passes beyond blocking positions Amy and Betty, but the requisite clouds did not form correctly, so they accomplished little. There was no fuel-air bomb dropped in the pass beyond blocking position Ginger.

Chris Haas was on the radio trying to get his critical air support. It was denied! The rules of engagement only allowed for an attack on enemy air defense weapons. Someone had decided that there would be no air support for the main attack, but they never told that to the main attack. The attack had lost its momentum and Zia Lodin was hesitant to go any further without some kind of support. Chris contacted Task Force Summit and asked for a tactical hold until someone would unleash the bombers and provide support for what was becoming a suicidal mission. The request for air support was reinitiated and the main effort sat on a tactical hold while far-off controllers debated the rules of engagement versus the wisdom of supporting a main attack. Meanwhile, the supporting effort resumed its advance up Route Copper and was rounding little Tir Ghol Ghar.¹⁰⁰ CW2 Stanley Harriman was in charge of this supporting effort and his vehicle was up front. Three other ODA 372 soldiers plus the Afghans would establish an observation post from where they could call in close air support on the enemy.¹⁰¹

The ground soldiers' favorite USAF aircraft is the AC-130H "Spectre" gunship. It is a lumbering C-130 aircraft that only flies in the dark of night when there is little illumination from the moon. It has excellent night-vision, infrared heat-

seeking and radar capability on board. What makes it so popular with the Army is its role as a side-firing attack aircraft. It carries a stabilized M102 105mm howitzer with 100 rounds of ammunition, a L60 40mm Bofors automatic cannon with 256 rounds of ammunition and two M61 Vulcan 20mm automatic cannons. The aircrew on the AC-130 look out for the infantry and when Spectre is flying, it is safe to sleep. Three AC-130H Spectre gunships were flying in support of Operation Anaconda. Their call signs were Grim 31, Grim 32, and Grim 33. Spectre is supposed to disappear before dawn, but their crews are very protective of the ground forces and they sometimes overstay their time. It was 0600 and dawn was breaking. Grim 31 had just finished helping a Black SOF team take on a DShK position and an enemy outpost and was now making its final turn when it spotted a convoy of vehicles below it. The crew consulted its GPS system to make sure that it was not the forces of the main attack. They then radioed a report about finding a convoy of Taliban vehicles and requested clearance of fires to engage it. Task Force Summit checked the coordinates. There were no US or coalition forces anywhere near those coordinates.

“There are no friendly forces at that location. You are cleared to engage.”

“Roger.”

The GPS system on board the technologically-advanced Spectre was acting up. Spectre thought it was well south of the Shar-i Kot. In fact, it had locked onto the forces of the main attack moving north on Route Copper.

H-2, D-Day

It was cold and windy at Bagram. The troops had been up for hours. Some reflected on last night's meal, hot chow! It had long been a bone of contention that the British troops on Bagram ate three hot meals a day since the Royal Air Force (RAF) transports would fly in supplies day and night. The USAF would only fly in at night, so supplies were always short and the rations were always MREs. But last night, they feasted on steak. "The condemned men ate hearty" was mentioned more than once.¹⁰² The soldiers were now crowding on board the six CH-47 Chinook helicopter transport aircraft. They loaded under black-out conditions, 40-45 passengers per aircraft. The US population at Bagram may have quadrupled over the past week and most everyone knew that something was going to happen, but they were not going to tip their hats further by loading under white light. Despite every attempt to lighten their load, the infantry was going into battle weighed down with more gear than their ancestors carried in World War I. Each trooper was carrying between 75 and 115 pounds of light-weight gear. Everyone got stepped on at least twice. Some were regretting that they had not made a final stop at the piss tube right before loading. Adrenaline and cold seem to overstimulate the kidneys.

Finally the turbines revved up and the big blades began to turn as one Chinook after another lifted into the night sky and turned Southeast. Six Apaches were lined up to escort the Chinooks, but one was having maintenance problems, its 30mm gun was leaking hydraulic fluid.¹⁰³ The plan was that two Apache's would clear the valley and check for enemy opposition prior to landing. Two Apaches would escort

the three Chinooks carrying the 1-187 soldiers while the remaining two Apaches would escort the three Chinooks carrying the 1-87 soldiers.¹⁰⁴ But CW4 Carr's bird, on crank up, was "barfing hydraulic juice all over the ground."¹⁰⁵ Five Apaches rose. The two lead Apaches would now clear the valley and cover the 1-187 insertion group in the north of the valley. The trailing three Apaches would support 1-87 insertion group in the south.¹⁰⁶ The supporting attack was on the move. The pilots were flying blacked out using night-vision devices. It was a quiet ride. Some troops slept or feigned sleep to show their confidence and unconcern. Others prayed quietly. It was too cramped to move much. The weather was not cooperating either. Everything was socked in by a thick layer of cloud. The helicopters flew over a cloud bank for 35 minutes and it seemed that the operation might have to undergo yet another weather delay. As the column came over the objective area, they caught a break in the clouds. CW3 Rich Chenault, the pilot in command of the lead Apache, and Captain Herman, the front seater, were the first into the valley. They flew from south to north examining the landing zones, looking for enemy troops or air defense systems. They saw none. At two minutes to H-hour, they had to make a cherry-ice call to the Chinooks--cherry--the landing zone is hot, ice--the landing zone is cold and clear to land. Rich's Apache and CW3 Hurley's following Apache flew to the north end of the valley, past the last landing zone and held in an attack-by-fire position. At two minutes to H-hour, they announced that the landing zones were ice.¹⁰⁷ CW3 Brett Blair, the pilot in command of the lead Chinook followed the Apaches into the valley.¹⁰⁸

The flight had taken about an hour. Dawn was breaking as the helicopters moved into the valley from the south flying north to the landing zones. Troops stared out the aircraft portholes and out the back ramp. Everything was quiet. No one fired at them. But something was wrong. There was no laundry flapping on drying poles and brush. There were no women, children, or even dogs about. There were no civilians! The Chinooks began banking for landing. It was eerily quiet.¹⁰⁹

¹Interview with Captain Butch Whiting, Aviation LNO from the 3rd Bn 101st Avn Rgt to Task Force Rakkasans and chief Rakkasans air planner for helicopter gunship employment, Fort Campbell, 16 August 2002.

²When the Soviet 70th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade was resident in Kandahar, it had the combat power of three motorized rifle battalions, an air assault battalion, a tank battalion, a reconnaissance battalion, an artillery howitzer battalion and a BM22 Multiple Rocket Launcher System (MRLS) Battalion. Lester W. Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996), 81. The force was 100 percent mobile mounted on armored vehicles. In addition, there was a separate motorized rifle battalion for airfield security and a helicopter regiment plus a squadron of fighter-bombers and a squadron of ground-attack aircraft stationed at Kandahar airfield. The Russian General Staff, trans. and ed. by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 319-320. The allied forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan stationed in Kandahar included two infantry divisions, a separate tank brigade, an air-assault regiment, an aviation regiment and a helicopter squadron. Lester W. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, no. 2 (April-June 2007): 243.

³During the Soviet occupation of Bagram, there was a division headquarters and division troops plus a parachute regiment and a separate motorized rifle battalion for airfield security. There was a Soviet fighter regiment, two squadrons of a ground-attack regiment and a helicopter squadron as well. The Russian General Staff, 319-320. The allied forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan stationed in Bagram included an infantry division, an aviation regiment and an aviation battalion. Lester W. Grau, "Breaking Contact," 242, 243.

⁴Sean M. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom: A Rogue Historian in Afghanistan* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2005), 49-50; Department of Defense Office of Public Affairs Fact Sheet dated 22 May 2002, entitled "International Contributions to the War Against Terrorism"; and Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder and Kalev I. Sepp, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 281.

⁵Interview with LTC Jim Larsen, Bagram, 13 November 2005.

⁶Joe Celeski, "Operationalizing COIN-CJSOTF Afghanistan 2003" briefing.

⁷Briscoe et al. 54.

⁸They were like "fish out of water," in the words of one of the Task Force Dagger planners.

⁹Interview with LTC Christopher K. Haas, Cdr, 1st Battalion 5th SF Group, and 1SG Danny Lynn Van Allen, 1SG, 1st Bn 5th SF Group, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

¹⁰Briscoe et al. 278.

¹¹General Mikolashek was wearing several hats at the time; he was 3rd Army Commander (Fort McPherson, Georgia), United States Army Central Commander (ARCENT), and CFLCC Commander in Kuwait. General Mikolashek split his headquarters in Fort McPherson to provide a staff in Kuwait.

¹²Tommy Franks with Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier* (New York: Regan Books, 2004), 207.

¹³*Ibid.*, 275-279.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁵Prior to 9/11, the Army was undergoing “transformation” to conform to the “tyranny of the C-130.” Following Kosovo, pundits, and the Secretary of Defense, judged the Army too big and cumbersome. The solution was to reduce the size of the Army and issue the Army less lethal equipment that could fit in the aging C-130. Tanks were out and Stryker wheeled, lightly-armored carriers were in. The Army was dismembering itself and was even looking at eliminating all traditional organizations such as the brigade and substituting the “maneuver unit of action” and other bizarre-sounding creations. The underlying assumptions were that in future war, the United States would have 100 percent knowledge of the enemy and his actions and that air power would be able to destroy that enemy in any weather long before the Army came into contact with it. It was a surrealistic time. It was a repeat of the ill-fated “Pentomic” division experiment of the 1950s. This is not the first time that the US Army has been truncated to accommodate the transport provided by other services. The US Army that fought in World War I was a “square division”—four infantry regiments. The division usually had two brigades, each comprised of two regiments. This is how they trained and fought. Just prior to World War II, the Army began converting to the “triangular division,” a three regiment division with greatly reduced combat power. The reason was that three-regiment divisions could be shipped more easily on US Navy transports. Unfortunately, the senior Army officers had spent their careers in the “square division” and were used to that division. Now, the new division commanders were fighting a new, less-capable organization that lacked the brigade structure to facilitate command and control. Part of the disaster of Kasserine Pass can be attributed to new commanders trying to deal with their new, unwieldy organizations—that were more convenient for naval shipment. The worst time to transform an army is right before or during a war.

¹⁶Map set to Aleksandr Mayorov, *Pravda ob Afganskoy voyne* [The truth about the Afghan War] (Moscow: The Rights of Man Press, 1996). *Razvedannaya gruppirovka myatezhnikov i ee chislennost' na 21 marta 1981g.* [Discovered groups of Mujahideen and their strength as of 21 March 1981]; *Plan boevykh deystviy voysk 40A i Afganskoy armii na noyabr' 1980g.* [Plan of the combat actions of the 40th Army and Afghan Army in November 1980—this shows *Ydar 1*—“Strike 1.” the major operation in Afghanistan in November 1980]; *Plan boevykh deystviy voysk 40A i Afganskoy armii na dekabr' 1980g.* [Plan of the combat actions of the 40th Army and Afghan Army in December 1980—this shows *Ydar 2*—“Strike 2”—again the major operation during the Month of December 1980]; *Plan boevykh deystviy na yanvar'-fevral'* [Plan of the combat actions in January-February—this shows *Ydar 3*—“Strike 3,” still the largest operation in January-February 1981, but the Shar-i Kot remains peripheral]; *Plan boevykh deystviy I usilennya prikrytiya gosgrantsy na mart-may 1981g.* [Plan of the combat actions and reinforcing the sealing of the state borders in March-May 1981—this shows *Kvadrat*—square, again the largest operation for those months]. This area was a hot bed, but the Shar-i Kot was not yet a recognized center of resistance.

¹⁷For Soviet and Mujahideen accounts of the battle, see Grau, *The Bear*, 61-66, and Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau, “The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War” (US Marine Corps Special Study DM-980701, Quantico, 1998), 165-173.

¹⁸Map drawn by General Gulzarak Zadran and in the possession of Lester Grau. The Soviet advance took the hill feature that later became known as “the whale.”

¹⁹Investigations by Lester Grau in Gardez, November 2005.

²⁰Aleksandr Lyakhovskiy, planning maps of the Soviet Ministry of Defense Operations Group in Afghanistan, headed by General V. I. Varrenikov.

²¹Saifur Mansoor claims that he fought a successful defense against the Soviets in his father's valley, if a totally slanted piece has any truth to it. "We were in Shahi-Koht during the first Afghan Jihad. There were six Mujahideen in total and we were surrounded by ten tanks. Over five air attacks were staged on us in a single day and there were about one hundred Soviet soldiers who attacked us from the land. But all Praise belongs to Allah alone - they were not able to set foot on a single hand-span of the village, and we remained in this same state for about one week." Saifur was probably a teenager at the time. "Abdul-"Adheem, "Operation Anaconda or Operation Giant Mongoose?," translated from Arabic by Azzam Publications, <http://www.islamicawakening.com/viewarticle.php?articleID=1055> (accessed 11 April 2006).

²²Conversations with Ali Jalali, Washington, DC, 30 April 2002.

²³Conversations at CENTCOM, December 2004; and interview with LTC Jim Larsen, 13 November 2005.

²⁴"The so-called superpowers vanished into thin air. We think the United States is very much weaker than Russia. Based on the reports we received from our brothers who participated in jihad in Somalia, we learned that they saw the weakness, frailty and cowardice of US troops. Only 80 US troops were killed. Nonetheless, they fled in the heart of darkness, frustrated, after they had caused great commotion about the new world order..." in Adam Robinson, *Bin Laden: Behind the Mask of the Terrorist* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 153. Actually, there were 19 US troops killed in Somalia, but the point remains that Al Qaeda hoped to achieve a dramatic kill of US personnel, so that the US would leave Afghanistan.

²⁵Les Grau observations made during a patrol and battlefield tour in the Shar-i Kot Valley on 23 November 2005 plus interviews with Sakhi Jan, Nisar Jan, Shamo Jan, Delawer Khan, Mhamd Asif, and Mhamd Sharif—all members of Zia Lodin's force who made a post-battle reconnaissance. Interviews conducted in Gardez on 24 November 2005.

²⁶Compilation derived from Les Grau's battlefield tour on 23 November, as well as interviews with LTC Jim Larsen, XO 3/101 Bde, Bagram, 13 November 2005; Major Dennis Yates, Fire Coordination Officer, 101st DIVARTY, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002; SSG Thomas Oldham, Mortar section leader, HHC 1-87, Bagram during March 2002; SFC Michael A. Peterson, Mortar platoon leader, HHC 1-87, Bagram during March 2002; CW3 Rich Chenault, Apache pilot, A/3-101 Aviation Regiment, Kandahar during March 2002; 1LT Matt Lowen, Platoon Leader, 3rd Plt, C Company, 326th Engineer Bn, Fort Campbell, 16 August 2002;

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸"Abdul-"Adheem.

²⁹Les Grau best estimate based on fighting positions, ration delivery and personal experience.

³⁰"Abdul-"Adheem. This citation lists seven of the Arab dead to show the international flavor of their force. "Seven of them were Arabs, these being: Abul-Baraa Al-Maghribi (Morocco), Abul-Baraa Ash-Shami (Syria), Abu Bakr Al-Maghribi (Morocco), Abul-Hasan As-Somali (Somalia), Khalid Al-Islambooli Al-Ghamidi (Arabian Peninsula), Abu Bakr Azzam Al-Urduni (Jordan), and Abdus-Salam Ghazi Al-Misri (Egypt)."

³¹For a look at Haqani's conduct of a mountain defense, see Ali A. Jalali and Lester W. Grau, "The Afghan War: The Campaign for the Caves: The Battles for Zhawar in the Soviet-Afghan War," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (September 2001).

³²This is not to say that the Chechen resistance did not have ties with Al Qaeda and Afghanistan, but they are hard to establish. James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007, states on page 101 that Shamil Basaev, one of the chief Chechen field commanders, participated in training at Zhawar, near Khost in April-July 1994. He had 30 of his followers with him for that training. He was also reported to have sent other personnel for training at Zhawar from 1992-1994. This statement is hard to corroborate since there is substantial evidence from multiple sources of Basaev and his followers being in Abkhazia from mid 1992 to Sept 1993. Basaev's whereabouts were also reported fairly regularly in the press during 1994. When asked about training in Afghanistan by Dodge Billingsley in 1997, Basaev responded negatively stating, "why train in Afghanistan after already fighting a war in Abkhazia? We didn't need to go to

Afghanistan to train.” In fact, although the Abkhaz have tried to distance themselves from association with Basaev, they initially gave him credit for winning the war against the Georgians, even honoring Basaev with their highest military medal. The press reports could have provided cover for the supposed 1994 trip, but Basaev’s eventual deputy, al-Khattab, who was an Al Qaeda representative and financier from either Jordan or Saudi Arabia (neither country wants to claim him) had not even heard of the Chechens until early 1995! Al-Khattab was wounded in fighting in Tajikistan and was hospitalized in Germany where he first learned about the Chechens on the television news. He decided to join the Chechens upon his release from the hospital (information from Dodge Billingsley’s Arabic-speaking Islamic translator who talked at length with Al-Khattab in 1997 and 1998).

³³Les Grau conclusions.

³⁴Interview with CPT Eric Haupt, S2, 3rd Bde 101st Div, Fort Campbell, 13 August 2002.

³⁵Conversations in CENTCOM and Brian Sweeney, “Information Operations and Warfare Support,” Issue paper prepared in 2002.

³⁶Haupt.

³⁷It was known to the Afghan diaspora in America (conversations with Ali Jalali, Washington, DC, 30 April 2002) and it was even in *Time* Magazine right after the battle (Michael Elliott, “Deadly Mission: The battle for Shah-I Kot began as an attempt to take out pockets of al-Qaeda resistance. But the enemy turned out to be numerous, well armed and not afraid to die,” *Time* 159, no. 11 (March 18, 2002), 44-45.

³⁸Interview with CPT Eric Haupt, S2, 3/101 Brigade, Fort Campbell, 13 August 2002; and LTC Jim Larsen, XO 3/101 Brigade, Bagram, 13 November 2005.

³⁹Larsen.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Haas and Van Allen.

⁴²Grau analysis.

⁴³Haas and Van Allen.

⁴⁴Interview with CPT Eric Haupt, S2, 3rd Bde 101st Div, Fort Campbell, 13 August 2002; and Colonel Mark Rosengard, TF Dagger, Kabul, 21 May 2002.

⁴⁵Larsen.

⁴⁶Larsen, interview with BG Francis J. Wiercinski, CO, TF Rakkasans, Schofield Barracks, 13 January 2006; interview with Major Dennis Yates, Fire Coordination Officer, 101st DIVARTY, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

⁴⁷Yates.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹The 2-187 Infantry battalion, the aviation assets of Task Force Talon and the logistics units were located in Kandahar and had to be moved to Bagram. 1-87th Infantry of the 10th Mountain Division was moving from Uzbekistan to Bagram. The Canadian 3PPCLI were also eventually brought up to Bagram for a follow-on operation. Another company of the 1-187th Infantry was brought from Pakistan.

⁵⁰Yates after-action briefing.

⁵¹Interviews with LTC James Marye, Commander, 7-101st Aviation and Task Force TALON; Major John Davidson, A Company Commander, 7-101st Aviation; Major Scott Kubica, XO, 7-101st Aviation; Captain Thomas Carlson, S3, 7-101st Aviation at Fort Campbell, 12 August 2002; Interview with Major John White, Kandahar, March 2002.

⁵²A moot point since there were no Afghan non-combatants in the valley.

⁵³Yates after-action briefing.

⁵⁴Haas and Van Allen.

⁵⁵Haupt.

⁵⁶Yates after-action briefing.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Colonel Wiercinski studied *The Bear Went Over the Mountain* and *The Other Side of the Mountain*—two books about Soviet and Mujahideen tactics during the Soviet-Afghan War. *The Bear Went Over the Mountain* even started out with a Soviet unsuccessful attack against Sherkhankheyl, unfortunately it was another Sherkhankheyl in another part of Afghanistan. Lester W. Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996) and Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau, “The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War” (US Marine Corps Special Study DM-980701, Quantico, 1998).

⁶¹Haupt.

⁶²Whiting.

⁶³Larsen; Interview with Major Jay Hall, S3 1-87, Fort Drum, 30 July 2002.

⁶⁴Larsen.

⁶⁵Haupt. For a discussion and diagrams of the *karez* system, see Mr. Lester W. Grau and Ali Ahmad Jalali, “Underground Combat: Stereophonic Blasting, Tunnel Rats and the Soviet-Afghan War,” *Engineer* (1998).

⁶⁶Larsen.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Haupt.

⁶⁹Whiting.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹LTC John Lockwood, UK LNO to 10th Mountain Division, Kuwait City, 27 November 2005.

⁷²Larsen. A side benefit of launching from Bagram was that it moved the troops from 3,000 feet of elevation at Kandahar to 5,800 feet of elevation at Bagram. It was not enough time or elevation to prepare the troops for the 8,500 feet that they would experience, but it was a start.

⁷³Larsen.

⁷⁴United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 7 February 2005), 6, 25.

⁷⁵United States Air Force, 36-37.

⁷⁶The USAF continued to disband the squadron and completed its retirement in September of 2002.

⁷⁷Whiting.

⁷⁸Whiting. Under Title Ten, the USAF provides close air support to the US Army. The army helicopter gunship community provides close air support but cannot call it that. Therefore, they use the term Close Combat Attack.

⁷⁹Six paragraphs from Haas and Van Allen.

⁸⁰Whiting. Air density is a function of altitude. The higher the altitude, the thinner the air. At higher altitudes, thin air and diminished oxygen supply reduces engine performance. Rotor blades also “grab” less air. This affects a helicopter’s ability to hover. Helicopters cannot hover at high altitude. Rather, the engines and rotor blades are straining just to keep them airborne. Maneuverability is also significantly impaired. Thin air restricts the payload of a helicopter, forcing a trade-off between fuel and payload. In warm or hot air, air density drops and helicopters are unable to operate at the altitudes that they could in cold weather.

⁸¹Whiting.

⁸²Three paragraphs, interview with Major Paul “Dino” Murray, Air Liaison Officer, 19th Air Support Operations Squadron, Boston, 24 March 2007.

⁸³This is an unfair characterization. The maintenance airmen working in the sub-zero cold of the Dakotas, the air security police guarding the Baghdad airbase in 130 degree heat, the logisticians working at forward bases at remote locations, the airmen providing convoy security and support for an over-stretched Army in Iraq and Afghanistan—none of these men and women have it knocked. Myth and lore hide the reality of what many service personnel are required to do on a daily basis.

⁸⁴A USAF ground flight is a unit roughly equivalent to an army platoon.

⁸⁵In 1939, the German army and air force used different maps with different scales. Following their test of Blitzkrieg in Poland, they decided that this was the wrong way to use cartography to support combined air and ground forces. The German army and air force began using a common map with a common numbered grid to plot locations, plan strikes, improve coordination, simplify reconnaissance, increase accuracy and reduce fratricide in the heat of battle. Seventy years later, the US Armed Forces have not yet moved in that direction. See James S. Corum, *Wolfram von Richthofen: Master of the German Air War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 191, and author conversations with David Glantz, US expert on the Red Army during World War II.

⁸⁶Murray.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Billingsley.

⁹²The US reason for entering Afghanistan and overthrowing the Taliban regime was to kill or capture Osama bin Laden. The enemy was holed up in the Shar-i Kot Valley for some reason, and many analysts believed that reason was that Osama was there, having accompanied the group that did not make it out through Tora Bora and looped back into the valley. Osama was not there, but the US did not know that for sure. This operation was going to happen as soon as possible and, if there were more enemy than originally thought, it was a bigger opportunity to avenge the attack on America and hopefully capture its leader.

⁹³For a similar view, “The Spartans do not enquire how many the enemy are, but where they are.” Agis II, 427 B.C.

⁹⁴Colonel Frank Wiercinski, taped by Dodge Billingsley at Bagram Airbase on the evening of 1 March 2002.

⁹⁵Briscoe et al. 281. The black SOF was an amalgam of special operations forces from various countries and services. Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom all had special operations personnel in country, most of them with Task Force K-Bar. The United States contributed special operations forces from the Army, Navy and Air Force.

⁹⁶Interview with SMSGT James Hotaling, CCT 125th STS, Oregon Air National Guard, Hurlburt Field, 6 June 2007.

⁹⁷Hotaling.

⁹⁸Haas and Van Allen. Sean Naylor does an excellent job describing the Special Operations missions supporting Anaconda, as well as the sometimes rancorous headquarters infighting in *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005). Since the authors did not enjoy Sean’s access to the special operations community, they do not go into the detail that Sean does.

⁹⁹Briscoe et al. 282.

¹⁰⁰Preceding three paragraphs, Haas and Van Allen.

¹⁰¹Briscoe et al. 285.

¹⁰²Interview with CPT Gabe Marriott, 1st Plt Ldr, A/3-101 Aviation Rgt, Fort Leavenworth, 11 June 2004.

¹⁰³Interview with CW3 Rich Chenault, Apache pilot, A/3-101 Aviation Regiment, Kandahar, March 2002.

¹⁰⁴Whiting.

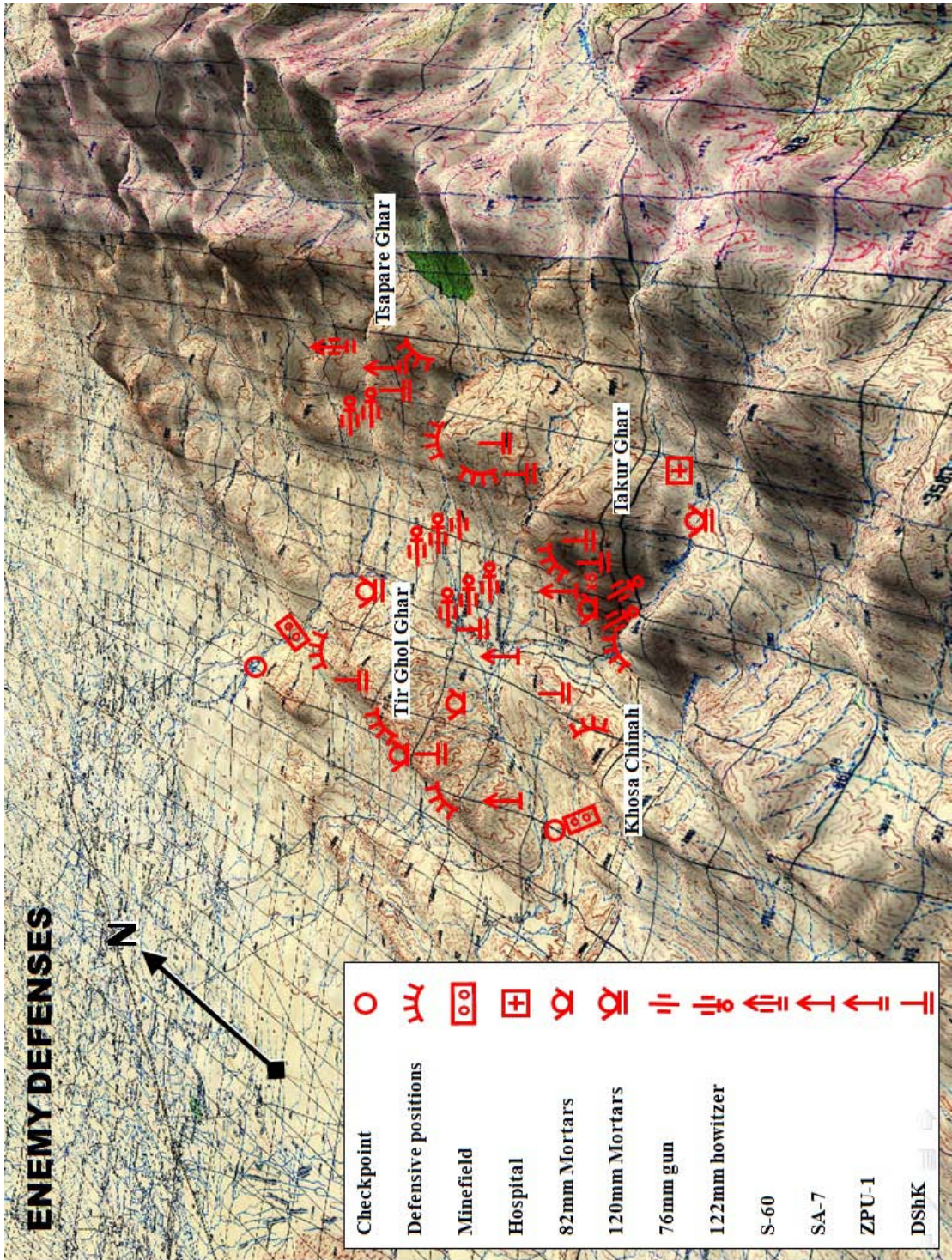
¹⁰⁵Marriott and interview with CW4 Bob Carr, Apache pilot, A/3-101 Aviation Regiment, Kandahar, March 2002.

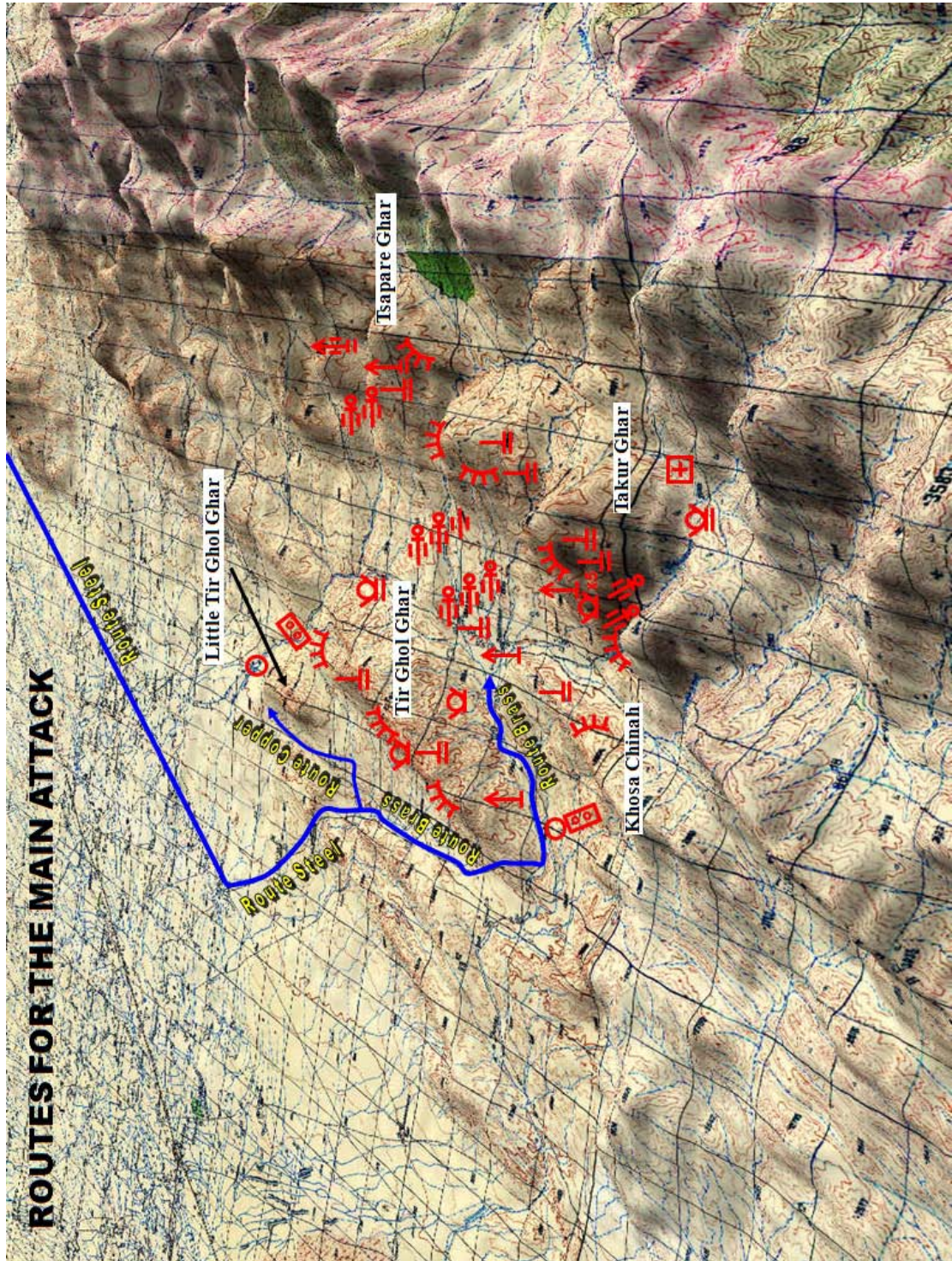
¹⁰⁶Whiting.

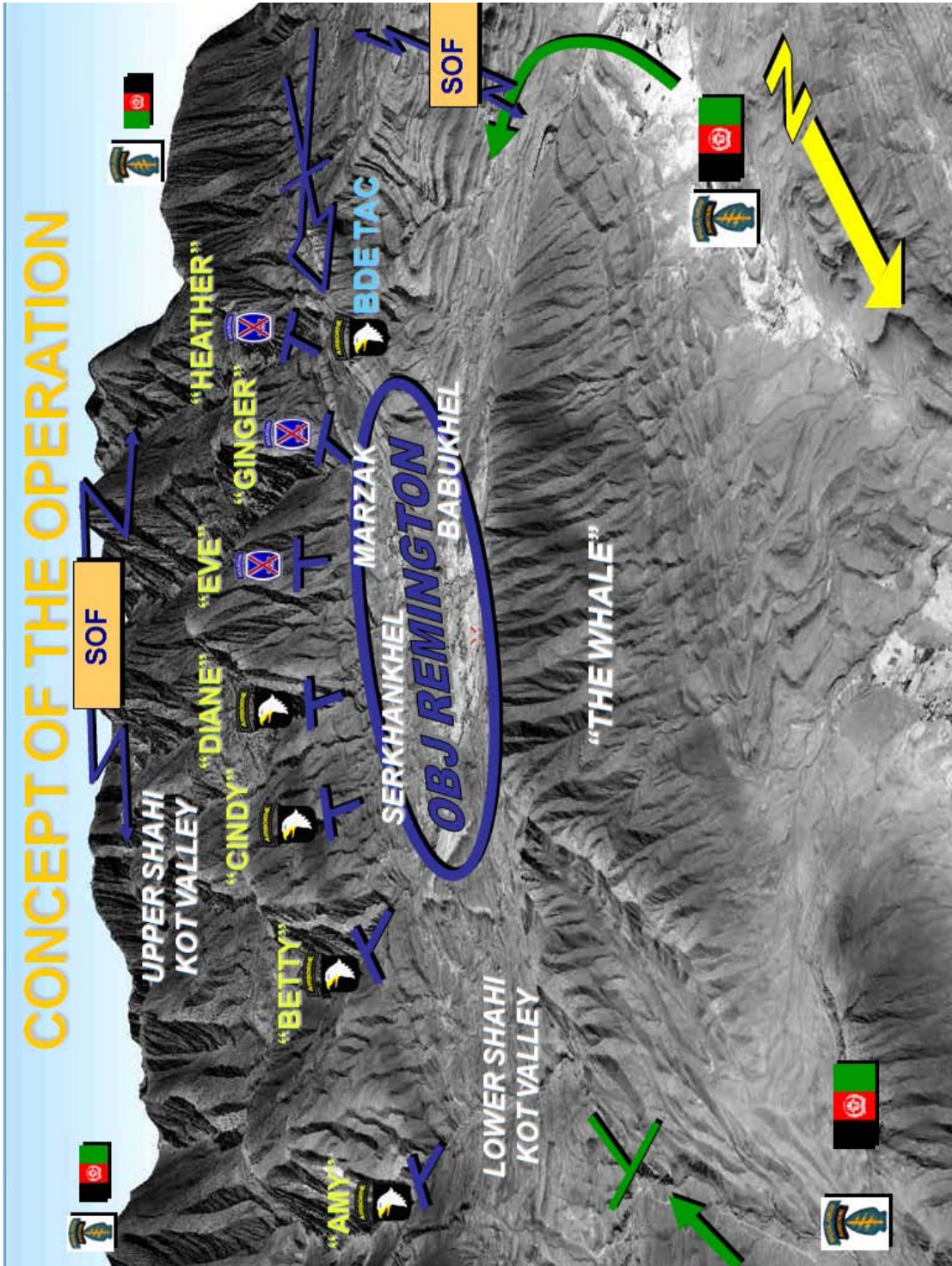
¹⁰⁷Chenault.

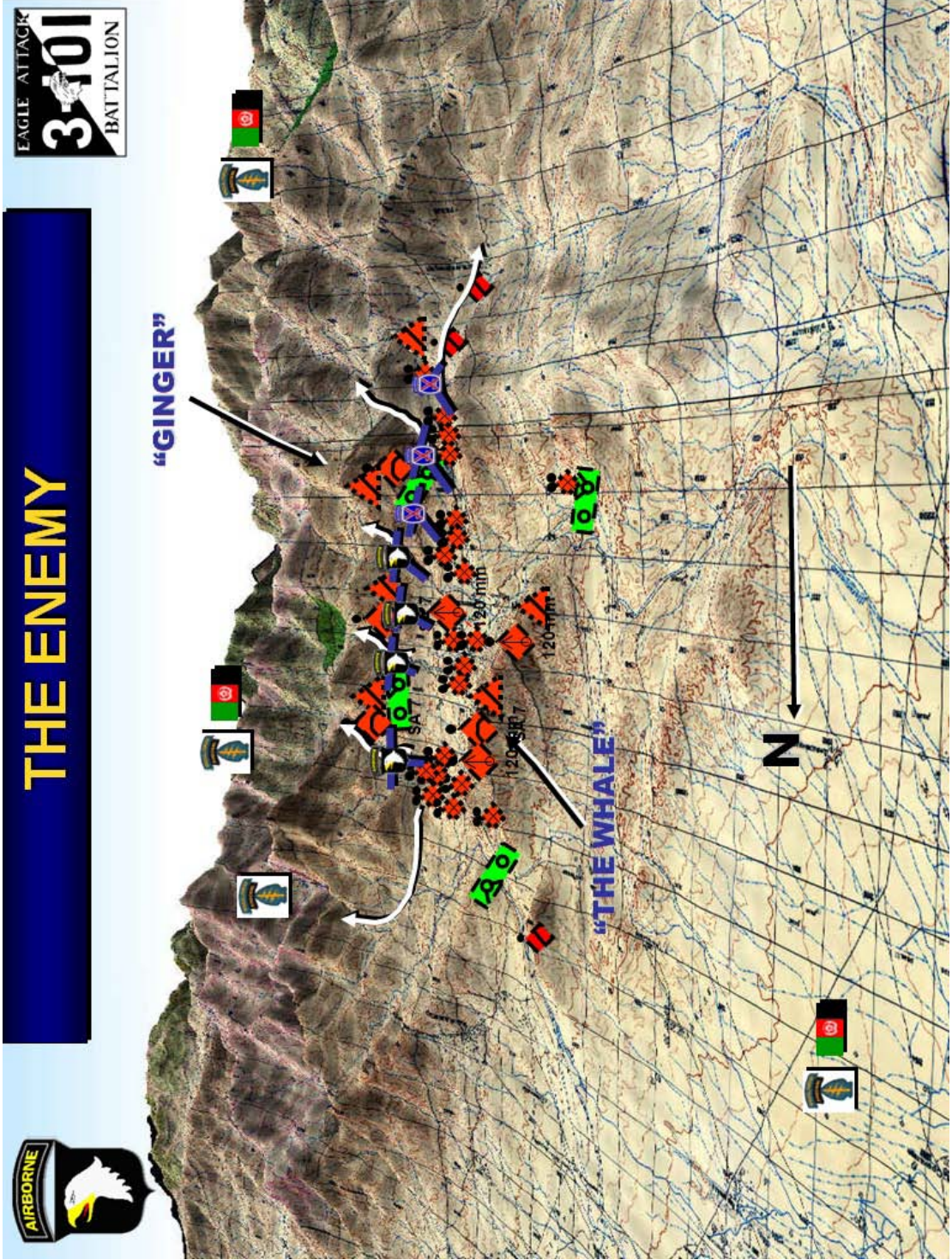
¹⁰⁸Naylor, 3.

¹⁰⁹Conversations with Colonel Wiercinski.



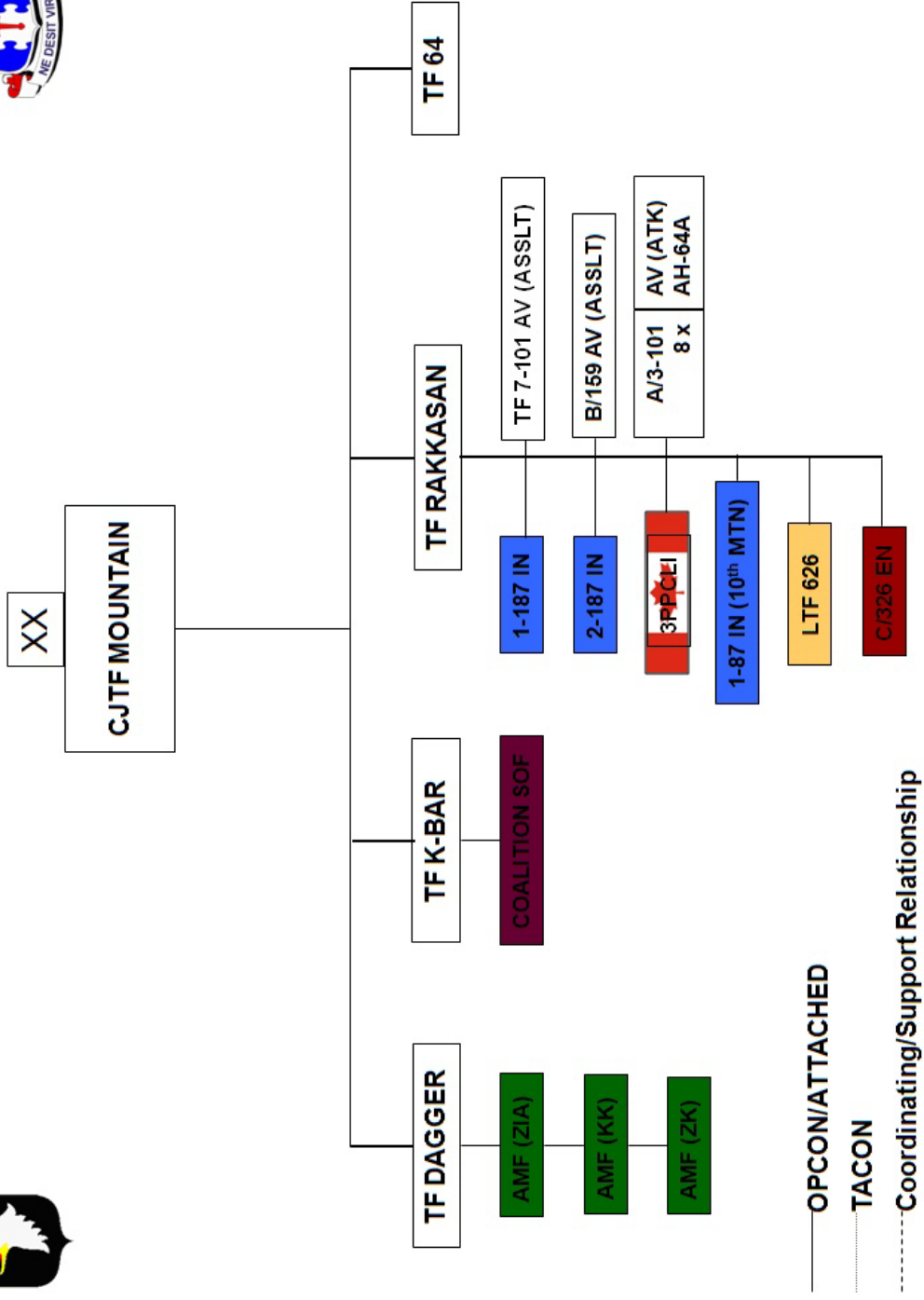








TASK ORGANIZATION



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CHAPTER 6.

ANACONDA, 2 MARCH 2002

Fight the enemy, don't fight the plan. The second the first shot goes down range, things are going to change with the plan.

— Colonel Francis Wiercinski, Commander Task Force Rakkasans

When you get fired on, don't worry about it. You're going to do just fine. Don't get rattled on the radio. That just means that no one can hear anything. You're going to get real thirsty. You'll be surprised at how much you will drink.

— MG Richard A. Cody
Commanding General of the 101st Air Assault Division
During a visit before Anaconda

I was the first one off the helicopter and I didn't really know what to expect. We didn't know if we were going to take fire or not. When we ran off the helicopter, we were supposed to turn left and all we saw was straight-up mountain that we had climb.

— Private First Class Joe Gallagher, 3/C/2-187

These guys were not amateurs. I've fought amateurs before. That was in the Gulf. These guys were not amateurs. They knew what they were doing.

— SFC Michael A. Peterson
Heavy Mortar Platoon Leader, 1-87

D-Day, H-0.30 Fratricide

Grim 31 again checked with ground control to make sure there were no friendlies at those coordinates and then opened fire. The Spectre is a highly-accurate gunship and it did not miss. 105mm rounds and 40mm rounds chewed into the convoy. Vehicles and bodies went flying through the air. CW2 Stanley L. Harriman was in one of those vehicles. "His truck got hit in the front left side and he was the passenger in the front seat. The next hit came directly below my husband in his truck, and the shrapnel came up through the vehicle, so it went through his legs, his chest,

his arms, severed a couple of his fingers, through his face, ripped most of his ear off, and up through the back of his head.” Chief Harriman was 34-years old and had 16 years of service. He left behind a wife, a daughter and a son.¹ Two other members of his team were wounded. Two Afghans were killed immediately and thirteen more were seriously wounded.² At first, the survivors thought that they were receiving heavy mortar fire, but the rounds were too accurate, too direct. They were under friendly air attack.

“Cease fire, cease fire, cease fire” one of the ODA372 survivors yelled into the radio. The call was relayed and finally reached Grim 31. Fratricide is a bone-chilling event, and the firing immediately ceased. It would be the last close air support that the main attack would receive. Unfortunately, they were the recipients.

LTC Chris Haas and 1SG Danny Van Allen were on Route Brass, but monitoring the progress on Route Copper. Chris was still trying to get close air support for the main attack and to bring up the last group of combatants who were stuck in the sand when he got the emergency call from Route Copper. They were “taking heavy mortar fire and had wounded all over the place.” At this point, the survivors were not sure if they were under an air or mortar attack. After determining what the ground situation was and that the force needed medical evacuation support, Chris sent Major Mark Schwarz and 1SG Van Allen to the column to help reorganize and take care of the wounded. Two Special Forces medics jumped in their up-armored Mercedes vehicle to accompany them. Thirty Afghans accompanied them as they headed toward the hamlet of Charwazi. They got about halfway, calling for

helicopter medical evacuation [medevac] the whole way. Suddenly enemy small-arms fire broke out. The small convoy halted, but the firing ceased, probably after realizing that the group they were firing at was good-sized. The convoy continued on to the impact area.³

“There was carnage everywhere. Vehicles were burning. Wounded Afghans were lying around. The team medic was desperately giving CPR to Chief Harriman. Chief was gone but the guy just couldn’t let up. At that point, we just tried to assess the situation to see what we could do, who we could treat and who is beyond treatment and vector the birds in. We determined who could be ground medevaced and who had to be medevaced by air.”⁴

Chinooks that had just dropped off US troops on the landing zones in the valley now flew to pick up the critically wounded. The Special Forces helped vector them in and get the wounded on board. Not all the Afghan wounded would fit, but there was room for the seriously wounded. The Afghans were concerned about getting their guys back for medical care and, through miscommunication, many more of them left than was necessary. There was now a small group on hand. The remaining Afghans scurried up Little Tir Ghol Ghar and established an observation post on the northwest slope. It was not the blocking position that was originally planned, but they could see into the northern approach of the valley. The Special Forces pulled an element back to the east side of Little Tir Ghol Ghar where communications with the main body was easier and where they could detect an enemy attempt to flank the OP. They held this position while the Afghans completed

their ground evacuation of the less-critically wounded. It was about 0730 in the morning.⁵

D-Day, H-Hour (The North)

At 0630 local (30 minutes earlier), the Chinooks set down on the landing zones, kicking up clouds of grit and snow. The valley temperature was somewhere around 20 degrees Fahrenheit. The troops ran off the Chinooks, cleared the landing zone and established a quick perimeter using the prone firing position. Then they took a knee. Hollywood air assaults show a lot of bravado and dash and there is certainly a lot of both involved in an actual air assault landing. Troops' adrenaline is pumping but their bladders are also full. "Take a knee and take a pee" is a common command that Hollywood films do not show.⁶ On-board waiting time plus an hour and 11 minute flight in a freezing cold helicopter imposes urgent demands.

As the Chinooks departed the landing zones, the surprised, sleepy enemy reacted. As the birds left the shadow of the eastern wall, the landing zones came under small arms fire. CW2 Stephen Brisset was lifting off and observed a man sitting on a roof top some 300 meters from the landing zone. The man watched them take off. Stephen had received a call from the Special Forces on Route Copper asking for an emergency medical evacuation. He had promised to respond as soon as he had delivered his passengers. Now Stephen banked left and headed for little Tir Ghol Ghar. As soon as they landed, the Afghan and Special Forces personnel started piling the wounded on board.⁷

Back at the landing zones, small arms and machine gun began cracking overhead. For most of the troops, this was their first or second time under fire, the first being probes against the Kandahar airfield where the rounds were hitting the berm. The rounds here had a different sound, a whistle as they whooshed overhead. They kicked up dirt when they impacted.⁸

LTC Chip Preysler's battalion, the 2nd-187th, landed in the north. Actually, it was only part of his headquarters and part of his C Company. Three Chinooks, each carrying 40-45 passengers, could only lift in three platoons. A Company was supposed to come in on the second lift some 11 hours later. The battalion was going into helicopter landing zones (HLZs) one, three, and four to take up blocking positions Betty, Cindy, and Diane. [See Map 6-1, Task force Rakkasan Planning Graphics and Map 6-2, Helicopter Landing Zones.] They were not carrying any mortars since the 1st-87th was bringing a single 120mm mortar that could range the valley. The plan was to occupy blocking position Amy when the second lift came in. The headquarters would go between Amy and Betty. Chip was in CW3 Brett Blair's Chinook that set down on HLZ One. Chip had earlier split his headquarters into two groups and put them in the first two Chinooks. Major Rick Busko, his S3, led the headquarters group that landed at HLZ Three.⁹

Shortly after the Chinooks left, the man sitting on the roof of the building (who could not be touched due to the ROE) turned hostile and began firing. Thirteen-fifteen enemy poured out of the small building like clowns out of a clown car. Some immediately fired on the Rakkasans, while others sprinted up the mountain and then

began firing down on the troops from prepared positions. As the Rakassans moved on the compound, small-arms fire broke out behind them. The sleeping enemy was now fully awake. The altitude was brutal. Every fifth step, one had to stop and take a breath. The Rakassans had already established a support-by-fire line, so the assault went smoothly, although, due to the altitude, it took about 15 minutes. They cleared the compound, although the enemy continued to fire down on them from Cindy. Inside the compound building, tea was brewing on a propane heater. This was no civilian compound. There were AK-47s and RPG-7s (some of them almost brand new) lying around as well as three AN/PVS-7 night vision goggles, two 82mm mortar tubes, and a mounted 57mm recoilless rifle. There was a manual, written in Arabic, on how to employ the RPG-7 in the indirect fire mode. There were Motorola hand-held radios as well as ICON squad radios like those used by the Rakkasans. Due to the terrain, the helicopters set the battalion down about two kilometers from its blocking positions. Chip directed Apache fire onto the enemy on blocking position Cindy as the 2nd platoon struggled uphill to take it. Chip was anxious to get his force up into the mountains on high ground. The lead element started to move north when suddenly the ridge line in front of them erupted. Five or six JDAMs slammed into the ground only 400 meters away from the lead troops! This was well within danger close for sheltered friendly troops and the Rakkasans were in the open. Chip grabbed Air Force Sergeant Schlecler, his ETAC and demanded "Who's calling in that fire?"

"Don't know. I didn't call it in."

“Okay, then it’s time to leave. If the Air Force is going to bomb the ridge and the enemy is on the high ground, we are not going to screw around here. We’ll get to our own piece of high ground and make the enemy come to us.”¹⁰

The troops’ first priority was to occupy their assigned blocking positions. Colonel Wiercinski’s orders were “don’t get drawn into a firefight and get bogged down or get sucked into a fight that you don’t need to get sucked into, either in the town or en route to your blocking position. Get up in the blocking position, get the high ground, get set. Zia is going to come sweeping into the valley and we need to be the anvil. Otherwise, we are going to have two moving forces and that’s not pretty.” Chip pushed his forces out and up the mountains.¹¹

The platoons occupied their blocking positions, although it took awhile to chase the enemy off of blocking position Cindy. There was snow on Diane plus a determined enemy outpost and two enemy cave positions that required a stiff fight. RPG and small arms fire from the caves threatened the left flank of the platoon. The enemy was in well-prepared defensive positions with integrated fields of fire. Snipers, M240 machine guns and M203 grenade fire cleared the way. The second priority was to take on any enemy that were not in the immediate way of getting onto the blocking positions. Enemy troops continually popped over the ridge top to get into the fight. Others came from the flanks. The fire fight would go on for twenty minutes, stop and then start up twenty minutes later. The thin mountain air was hard on the un-acclimated soldiers. There is 29 percent less oxygen available at 8,000 feet elevation.¹² The soldiers were exhausted and moving on discipline and heart. “I

watched guys who were stallions just begging and begging for air to get into their lungs and it took everything they possibly had just to get up to where we had to go.”¹³

The scouts pushed forward to catch anyone trying to get out through Amy pass.¹⁴

[See Map 6-3, D-Day, H-Hour, Task Force Rakkasans lands.]

D-Day, H-Hour (The South)

LTC Paul La Camera graduated from West Point in 1985. He met his wife, another West Point graduate, at airborne school. He had spent his entire career with troops either in command or staff positions. He took command of the 1st-87th Infantry in May 2001. His command had now been deployed approaching six months and some of his platoons had been involved in earlier fighting. Now he had most of his battalion assembled and he was taking his command into harms way. But instead of the entire command, he was deploying with only a portion of it since there was not enough helicopter lift available. In fact, Paul had assigned his B Company to Ron Corkran’s 1st-187th Battalion as part of the brigade reserve.¹⁵

Whereas the HLZs up north could not be engaged directly from the main defensive positions on the mountain tops, HLZ 13 and 13A could. The 1st-87th, landed on HLZ 12, 13, and 13A. Actually, what landed was part of the battalion headquarters, part of A Company and part of C Company.¹⁶ There were only three Chinooks available to carry this battalion, and each Chinook carried 40-45 men. These Chinooks were from B Company, 2nd-159th Aviation from Savannah, Georgia.¹⁷ There were fewer “trigger pullers” in this lift than up north since there

were two company command groups present, but this lift was carrying one 120mm mortar and its crew--the heaviest and most potent ground weapon in the task force.

Captain Nelson Kraft, the Charlie Company Commander, had been in command since November of 2000. However, the Bowling Green ROTC graduate had not had his company together in one place since they deployed. One platoon had been pulled to Mazar-i Sharif for QRF, another platoon remained in Uzbekistan for QRF, and a third platoon was at Sherbegan, Afghanistan between Christmas Eve and mid-February assisting processing 3,000 prisoners. Some of his company was still in Kosovo. In fact, at one point, his company was spread over seven locations. Just before the operation, Nelson finally got most of his company together in Bagram and began two days of rehearsal for the upcoming operation. Nelson had two of the Chinooks. He put part of his command post, part of the battalion TAC and his 1st Platoon in the lead Chinook. The second Chinook had the rest of the command post, the rest of the battalion TAC, part of the battalion mortar platoon, and his second platoon. Nelson and LTC Paul Le Camera, the battalion commander, flew in the first Chinook to HLZ 13A. The 3rd Platoon was supposed to come in on the second lift along with more battalion elements.¹⁸

The flight was cold and long. Paul La Camera was on the radio and learned that the main attack was stalled and under mortar fire. Charlie Company was the battalion main effort, but the enemy was expected to try to leave the valley to the northeast in the 2nd-187th sector. Any enemy attempting to escape in Charlie Company's sector would come via route "Chrysler" and "Jeep." Charlie Company

was supposed to establish blocking positions at Heather and Ginger to interdict these routes. The birds set down on HLZ 13 and 13A, 2nd Platoon on 13 and 1st Platoon on 13A. As soon as they lifted off, the enemy opened up on them with small arms fire. There was about 100 meters between HLZ 13A and blocking position Heather. The 1st Platoon was moving to Heather when the enemy began firing RPGs, mortars, and automatic weapons. As is common with light infantry, most of the troops dropped their rucksacks so that they could move into position faster.¹⁹ The troops were carrying about 100 pounds each, so they had to get lighter quick.²⁰ The 2nd Platoon, which had landed at HLZ 13 had much further to go, but blocking Route “Chrysler” had priority, so the platoon had further to travel to Ginger. Just as Heather was established by the 1st platoon, enemy 82mm mortar rounds slammed into the position, wounding the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, Fire Support Officer and the RTO and several other soldiers. Enemy could be seen moving on the flanking ridge lines (RAK 6 Ridge [Khosa Chinah], Heather and Ginger [Takur Ghar]). The platoon began suppressing the enemy forces on the near ridge lines. The mortar fire was evidently coming from Ginger. The fire was accurate and it was evident that the enemy had trained forward observers on Rak 6 ridge and Heather ridge, and were in direct radio contact with the mortar crews on Ginger.²¹ The enemy knew what it was doing. They had their air defense assets located on the military crest, not on the mountain tops where the USAF would normally do their SEAD missions. Their dug-in fighting positions, however, were not all on the military crest. Many were on the mountain tops where they could fight in multiple directions. They were well-

camouflaged and the individual combatants were masters at blending with the terrain using a grey or brown shawl. The RPG gunners were so professional that they wet down their backblast areas so they would not disclose their firing positions.²²

The 1st Platoon found a bowl by Blocking Position Heather in which to consolidate. It did not offer much shelter, but it was better than open ground. The troops called it “Hell’s Half Pipe.”²³ The company command post and the battalion TAC moved into it as well.

The 2nd Platoon was also drawing heavy fire. Getting the 2nd Platoon to Blocking Position Ginger was increasingly problematic. HLZ 13 was about 250 meters from “Hell’s Half Pipe.” Captain Kraft drew two squads from the 2nd Platoon into “Hell’s Half Pipe” and left one squad at HLZ 13 where they had better observation toward the East. The mortar crew was setting up their 120mm mortar at HLZ 13 to engage the enemy mortars.²⁴

The presence of the five AH-64A Apache helicopters was critical, because they came to the immediate assistance of the 1st-87th with the only heavy ordnance available besides HHC’s single 120mm mortar. Groups of six-eight RPG rockets rose into the air seeking to knock out the Apaches. They were not trying to hit the helicopter directly--a very difficult shot. Rather, they were trying to use the lethal four-meter bursting radius of the RPG round. The maximum range for RPG-7 antitank rounds is 920 meters, at which point the round self-destructs after its 4.5 second flight. The RPG-7 antipersonnel grenades does the same at 1,100 meters. When fighting the Soviets, the Mujahideen discovered that a frontal RPG shot at a

range of 100 meters was optimum against an approaching helicopter. Multiple RPGs firing simultaneously provided a better chance of a hit and escape from an avenging wing man. Should the helicopters be flying further away, it was better to wait until the helicopter was 700 to 800 meters away and then fire, trying to catch the helicopter with the air-burst explosion of the round's self-destruction at 920 or 1,100 meters distance. Chances of hitting a helicopter at this range using the blast effect and fragmentation from the RPG round's self-destruct mechanism were limited, but the valley was narrow and the flight paths into and inside the valley were obvious and few. This helped the RPG-7 gunners. Most of the rounds burst above the Apaches, throwing fragments down into the rotor blades.²⁵ The Apaches flew under the blasts, providing close combat attack support to the soldiers as they moved to Hell's Half Pipe. Every time the Apaches came overhead, the enemy volume of fire would increase to a steady roar.²⁶

Task Force Summit established its TAC and a casualty collection point (CCP) in the strong point. The battalion surgeon, Major Byrne, was all over the place, pulling in the wounded and treating them. Captain Kraft finally convinced him to stay at the CCP and the company would bring the wounded to him. There would be 23 casualties in the first 30 minutes, 17 in the company and the rest in the battalion headquarters. Major Jay Hall, the battalion S3; CSM Frank Grippe, the Battalion Sergeant Major and SFC Robert Healy, the Battalion Operations NCO were among the wounded.²⁷ Sergeant Black, the S3 RTO, was badly wounded and almost lost a leg.²⁸ Body armor limited most of the wounds to the extremities except for one

unfortunate soldier who took a round between the plates, collapsing a lung. The 1st-87th would end up with 28 wounded out of their 82 men on the ground. Further, Charlie Company now estimated it was facing about 150 enemy.²⁹

There were several cave complexes in the region and the enemy poured out of them “like ants.” The soldiers killed several enemy who were trying to run the 75 meters from one complex to another at some 400 meters distance from Heather. A group appeared on the top of RAK 6 Ridge (Khosha Chinah). Task Force 64 was supposed to be in the area but the agreement was that they would be readily identifiable through orange VS-17 panels and BDU trousers. This group was displaying neither. The soldiers fired on this group and it promptly disappeared over the ridge. They sheepishly reemerged waving the VS-17 panels.³⁰ They were not the Australians. They were Mako 31, a Navy SEAL team that had earlier eliminated a DShK on that very ridge.³¹ There would be no more firing on RAK 6 ridge from blocking position Heather.³²

SFC Michael Petersen has been a mortar man all his career. He was going to use them yet again in combat. Kenny Loggins “Danger zone” rattled around his mind. The platoon had listened to it over and over the night before. The scarcity of helicopters meant that only one squad of his platoon, one 120mm mortar, and 48 rounds of mortar ammunition were on board the Chinook that landed at HLZ 13. The rest of the platoon and weapons was scheduled to fly in on the second lift two hours later. The 48 rounds included 38 rounds of HE (high-explosive), five rounds of WP (white phosphorus), and five rounds of illumination. The Chinook set down and the

troops exited the bird. The mortar men strained as they pulled out the mortar and ammunition loaded on Skedco® sleds while looking for a place to set up. Enemy small arms fire started to zip across the valley. Four soldiers from Charlie Company scrambled up a ridge for better observation while other soldiers returned fire. An Apache helicopter swept in the valley to deal with the enemy and cut loose with some rockets. One detonated five meters away from one of the Charlie Company soldiers on the ridge. It did not hurt him. The soldiers quickly moved off the ridge. The mortar squad was now set up and started firing mortar rounds against activity they could see on Ginger. The result of their firing was to draw enemy attention to their mortar position. Now the enemy began to fire at the mortar position. The mortar men, along with Charlie Company, had dropped their rucksacks, and now the enemy was systematically targeting the rucksacks with RPGs. One of them contained a claymore mine. The result was spectacular. The eight mortar men took cover and engaged in the small arms fight. Sergeant Thomas Finch's fire team and Sergeant Amicks' fire team from Charlie Company joined the mortar men and covered them as they recovered the mortar. They also helped move mortar ammunition. An enemy round had destroyed the mortar sight. They fired a few more rounds before they were driven off. They repeated this again and again. When they had fired all the ammunition except the illumination rounds, they drug the mortar to Hell's Half Pipe and joined the perimeter. The mortar men were drawing intense small arms fire on their part of the Charlie Company perimeter. Every 20 minutes or so, a barrage of

massed RPG fire would slam into the position.³³ [See Map 6-4. D-Day, Battle for Hell's Half Pipe and RAK 6 Ridge.]

The third Chinook was carrying the first platoon from A Company, the Battalion Scout platoon and the A Company Command Post. Captain Roger Crombie was the Alfa Company Commander. As the Chinook approached the HLZ, the pilot saw footsteps on the ground. The news got the troop's adrenaline pumping harder. Everyone heard a radio report reporting "220 enemy troops on the ground." Now, the adrenaline was really flowing. The Chinook landed at HLZ 12 and as soon as the Chinook lifted off, the enemy small arms fire began. The first platoon and the Scout platoon started up the mountain to Blocking Position Eve. The first squad of the first platoon immediately saw one man with an RPG and opened up on him. SPC Jose Vera engaged him with his SAW thankful for the extra range and power of the 7.62mm round. 40mm rounds finished him off. More enemy came into the fight, but the return fire was not as intense as that hitting their brothers in Charlie Company.³⁴ Both platoons scrambled up the mountain, gasping for oxygen in the thin air. First platoon continued to fight as it climbed. Both platoons got into position and tried to dig fighting positions in the frozen, stony ground. The first platoon was on the east and the scouts were on the west. The enemy kept trying to flank the Scouts and soon the scouts were also in a stiff fight.³⁵ AK-47 Kalashnikov rounds began bouncing off the rocks inside the A Company perimeter. A Company was fully engaged.

Once the Chinooks returned to Bagram, they refueled and began loading on more soldiers from Alfa and Charlie Company. They flew back to the battlefield, but

never entered the valley. The fighting was too intense. The helicopters finally returned to Bagram and the troops got off. They were not going to be able to join the fight this day.³⁶

D-Day, H-Hour (Command Group)

Colonel Frank Wiercinski's plan was to fly in with the initial air assault, spend a few hours getting a feel for the area and then return to Bagram to fly back with the second lift. After that, he would return to Bagram where he could more readily control the fight. He took along LTC Ron Corkran, the Commander of the 1st of the 187th (his reserve), Major Mike Gibler (his S3), USAF CPT "Dino" Murray (his Air Liaison Officer), CSM Iuniasolua T. Savusa (the brigade CSM), and some RTOs. They flew on two UH-60H Black Hawk helicopters toward RAK 6 ridge (Khosa Chinah) at the south of the valley, a position that provided an excellent view of the valley. Colonel Wiercinski was in the command and control helicopter that could communicate with ground forces, army aviation forces and the USAF.³⁷

As they Blackhawks flew toward the valley, "Dino" Murray tried to stay in contact with the AWACS control aircraft. Communications were sporadic due to the mountainous nature of the terrain and the nap-of-the earth. "Dino" had the antenna of his UHF hand-held radio outside the aircraft, pointing in the direction of where he thought the AWACS was. It was clear that the air strikes were well behind schedule and that the landing would have to be postponed if the bombers were going to have time to get bombs on the targets. "Dino" turned to Colonel Wiercinski and said "Sir, not all the targets have been struck. We are fifteen minutes from touchdown and it's

obviously your call. The bombers cannot turn around and strike the targets in time so that there won't be a problem with bombs exploding near helicopters.”³⁸

Colonel Wiercinski had two choices; he could either call off the air strike and go in as is or he could try and turn around this entire train of helicopters that were on their way into the valley to give time for the air strikes to go in. Wiercinski said “Dino, shut off the air strikes. We're going in. I want to get the guys on the ground, and then we can worry about bombing targets.”³⁹

Dino called in what the Air Force calls a *knock it off*. “This is a *global knock it off*! The helicopters are five minutes out, and there will be no more air strikes until we get everybody on the ground.”⁴⁰

As the Black Hawk approached the ridge, the enemy opened up on it with AK-47 and RPG fire and ominous bullet holes began to appear in the helicopter fuselage. Originally, Colonel Wiercinski had hoped to fly about the valley observing the air assault, however, the helicopter was now in danger, so Colonel Wiercinski directed the pilot to land immediately and let the command group off and then return to Bagram. “Quite honestly, it was a flying fuel blivet at that point in time.”⁴¹ Reportedly an RPG-7 round flew through one of the helicopters as it was preparing to take off. The round entered the passenger compartment through the open door and flew harmlessly out through the opposite open door.⁴² The plan was for the aircraft to return in a few hours and pull the small group out. That was not going to happen.⁴³ The command group security element established a quick perimeter while Colonel Wiercinski studied the battlefield. The enemy was firing RPGs in clusters up at the

Apache helicopters in an attempt to knock them down. The soldiers of HHC and Charlie Company, 1-87 were closest to the command group. They were also the soldiers who were most heavily engaged by the enemy. Captain Dino Murray climbed to the highest ground and began to call for close air support. He noticed that large insects apparently were zipping by him. "Get your head down Dino," Major Mike Gibler (the S3) yelled. "You're drawing fire." Sheepishly, Dino realized that the insects were 7.62mm in size and propelled from the barrels of AK-47 assault rifles.⁴⁴

LTC Corkran and CSM Savusa moved forward off the ridge line to see if anything was coming up the hill. They saw 10 to 12 armed enemy, dressed in the regional *salwar kameez*, with its knee-length shirt and baggy trousers, coming up the mountain. They knew that the Americans were up there. They just were not sure where they were located. The group stopped about 400 meters away from the TAC. They occupied a prepared position that was furnished with nets and rugs to hide them from observation. CSM Savusa and LTC Corkran moved back to the TAC. Soon mortar rounds began marching up the mountain toward the TAC. The TAC prepared to move, but the last mortar rounds fell 50 meters short of the TAC and then ceased.⁴⁵

These were not the only visitors. Major Gibler announced that they were going to link up with another team. This was news to everyone. Major Gibler staked out a VS-17 panel and soon another panel appeared along the mountain top. A small group walked down to the TAC. It was Mako 31, the one SEAL team reconnaissance unit in the valley at the time. They were now on their third day in the valley and had

taken out a DShK machine gun on that ridge just five minutes before the TAC landed. Without their action, the Brigade TAC would have flown into direct heavy machine gun fire as it tried to land. The SEALs had some sniper rifles with them and were only too glad to go forward and reduce the size of the enemy squad dug in some 400 meters distant. Afterwards, the SEALs left on other business.⁴⁶

Right now, the available air support was all Apaches and they were heavily engaged. They were also taking a lot of fire. Colonel Wiercinski got on the radio and ordered the one uncommitted functioning Apache at Kandahar to fly to the FARP and prepare to join the fight.⁴⁷ The enemy did more than fire at the command group. Groups of enemy began to move toward the command group. Soon the command group was locked in a fire fight.

Communications are essential to any coordinated fight. Communications within the valley were fine, as long as the radio stations could see each other. The ground FM radios worked well and communications between the ground forces and the Apaches flying overhead worked well. The problem was, the fight was in a bowl and the only way to communicate outside the bowl was over satellite communications. Unfortunately, the brigade lacked sufficient SATCOM radios and, more critically, sufficient band width to communicate. Whereas the special operations community and air force had band width to spare, the army was constrained to one narrow-band net over which they had to speak very, very slowly. A brigade in combat normally has, as minimum, a command net, a fire direction net, an operations net, an intelligence net, and an administration and logistics net over

which they can communicate with higher headquarters. All communications with higher headquarters had to go over the one net. One expedient fix was to use non-secure Iridium telephones to talk to higher headquarters. A further problem was that the army could not communicate directly with the air force and had to rely on air liaison officers (ALOs) and enlisted tactical air controllers (ETACs). There were not enough ALOs and ETACs to go around and Iridium telephones could do little to help that out.⁴⁸ Although band width was not a problem for the special operations community and air force, there was only one SATCOM frequency available for both air force combat controllers and ETACs, and that frequency belonged to the special operations force. Soon communications snarled on that frequency as a lot of people were trying to use it at the same time.⁴⁹

There was another problem. “Dino” started the mission with only two Mark 7 laser range finders to split among his 24 ETACs. These were crucial to directing precision bombing strikes. One of the Mark 7s was hit by enemy fire early in the fight and was out of commission. There was only one precision range finder in the valley to handle all the precision fire missions.⁵⁰ Fate intervened. The Navy SEAL team that had earlier destroyed a DShK and then drew friendly fire from “Hell’s Half Pipe” had a USAF combat controller who had a Mark 2 laser ranger finder. When Mako 31 came to the TAC for a visit, Dino was in his element. He had the best seat in the valley to observe the battle and now he had the means to identify targets precisely to circling aircraft. He and the combat controller went to work.⁵¹ The small

command group began to develop its battle rhythm. The command group would be on the ground for 18-hours straight.⁵²

D-Day, H-Hour (The Sky Above the Valley)

The Apaches were the turning point for us. They saved more people than they can count because they laid suppressive fire continuously until Paul [La Camera] could get his folks organized in a hasty defense. [The helicopters] flew through gauntlets of Al-Qaeda fire. Each and every one of those helicopters sustained multiple, multiple hits. Captain Bill Ryan was wounded in the face and continued to fly. Our aircraft flew that gauntlet until they were either bingo fuel or Winchester or the aircraft were going to fall from the sky.⁵³

— Colonel Francis Wiercinski.

The two leading AH-64A Apache helicopters flew into a calm valley and orbited in the north. Five minutes behind trailed the Chinooks which then landed and disgorged their passengers. Trailing five minutes behind them were the three-bird group of Apaches which orbited in the south of the valley. As the Chinooks lifted, the valley began to echo with enemy fire. The Apaches monitored calls for assistance and swung into action. Groups of five to eight (and sometimes 20) RPG-7 rockets rose into the air to intercept them, trailing greasy white smoke trails. DShK machine gun and small arms fired arced toward the aircraft. The first call for assistance was from a Special Forces reconnaissance team in the north. The Apaches locked onto and destroyed an Al Qaeda mortar pit, their first kill of the battle. They began to take out other targets identified by Special Forces. Two DShK positions exploded. Radio intercept disclosed concern and fear among the enemy. “Kill the Cobras, kill the Cobras” an Arab-speaking radio operator was shouting. “They are killing us.” The

radioman was familiar with the USMC Cobra gunship, but did not yet know about the Apache.⁵⁴

The Apache pilots had more than enough targets and the pilots were quickly “going Winchester” (running out of ammunition). Enemy air defense fire was heavy—RPGs, DShKs, and several shoulder-fired surface-to-air guided missiles were in the valley.⁵⁵ The lack of an earlier SEAD (Suppression of Enemy Air Defense) mission, due to ROE considerations, assured that these weapons were all available to the enemy. The Apaches were flying close and personal and began taking hits.⁵⁶

First Lieutenant Gabe Marriott was the 1st Platoon Leader of the Apaches. Gabe is an outgoing West Point graduate and was then an Apache pilot with 300-400 hours of flying time under his belt. A skilled raconteur, Gabe tells how he met his wife, Rebecca, on a “booze cruise” to Cancun during his junior year at West Point. He was immediately drawn to her long curly hair and lithe figure accented by leather pants. Life was a bit more sedate now. The attractive Rebecca was a popular kindergarten teacher at Fort Campbell and the couple had bought their first home. During deployment, the last movie Gabe and his guys had watched in the states was “Black Hawk Down” in the Holiday Inn near Travis Air Force Base. It had focused their attention then. Gabe’s attention was really focused now. Gabe was the gunner in the front seat. CW2 John Hamilton was pilot-in-command in the back seat. Gabe was part of the three-bird group of Apaches that followed the Chinooks in and were orbiting in the south. Captain Bill (Darrell) Ryan and CW3 Jody Killburn led the three-bird team. CW4 Jim Hardy and CW2 Stanley Pedsworth were in the remaining

bird. The calls for assistance from the 1st-87th began. The first problem was finding the friendly forces. Their camouflage uniforms worked and it was hard to pick them out among the rocks of the valley floor. The Apaches were flying low at 80-100 mph looking for targets and friendly troops. The 1st-87th calls for close combat attack were different than those practiced in the 101st Air Assault Division which also complicated matters. It took four-five runs up and down the valley to figure out where the friendly forces were. Jim Hardy's bird was engulfed by black smoke as it was rocked by an RPG hit that took out all his weapons systems. AK-47 small arms fire began peppering all the aircraft. Jim Hardy continued to fly, drawing fire away from the troops and other aircraft. Gabe was not doing the traditional front-seater job of gunner. Instead, he was looking intently and calling targets for his back-seater to engage. The helicopters were each carrying four Hellfire missiles, two pods of rockets, and 90 rounds of 30mm chain-gun ammunition. Hellfire missiles are designed to kill tanks. There were no tanks. Not all the rockets could be used either. The Apaches were carrying some MPSM (Multipurpose Submunition) rockets. These have a high rate of dud production, so they could not be used around friendly troops or where friendly troops would go.⁵⁷

In the South, the Apaches were now running race track patterns with Gabe's bird in the lead. They would mark and engage a target and then pass it off to Jody Killburn and Bill Ryan's bird. Jim Hardy's aircraft would trail them and spot targets since he now had no working weapons systems.⁵⁸

Up north, the Apaches were also fighting. Keith Hurley and Stu Contant's Apache was hit by an RPG and then a bullet entered the cockpit and skinned over Keith's knee before smashing into the control console. The aircraft was spewing oil and clearly needed to withdraw to the FARP. They called Captain Ryan and told them that they were withdrawing. Jim Hardy, the unit Maintenance Test Pilot was monitoring the radio traffic. He got on the radio and instructed Hurley and Contant to set down immediately. They landed in the northern part of the valley and Jim Hardy flew to their position. Jim jumped out and looked at the wounded Apache. The RPG had destroyed three missiles on the left wing stores. Far worse, it had hit the transmission and most of the transmission fluid was gone. Jim was an experienced pilot who had started out flying the Cobra. His long experience taught him to have all the helicopters carry cans of transmission fluid. He grabbed the cans of fluid from his aircraft and began pouring it into the wounded Apache. He added those of the wounded bird. He told Keith Hurley to jump into his aircraft and escort his wounded bird. Stu Contant and Jim Hardy flew the wounded bird the 25 minutes back to the FARP, although the danger of transmission seizure was high. Jim was not about to let the enemy or friendly forces see an Apache shot down. When he got the aircraft back to the FARP, he again added transmission fluid and flew it all the way back to Bagram for maintenance. Jim Hardy would later receive the Distinguished Flying Cross for his death-defying act.⁵⁹

There were now only three Apaches in the fight. MAKO 55 and SHARK 65, Special Forces reconnaissance teams, began calling for fires. The troops in contact

kept calling for fires. Gabe's bird was hit but kept flying.⁶⁰ Bill Ryan's bird was hit by machine gun fire and the cockpit canopy was penetrated.⁶¹ The round bounced off Bill's chest plate and entered his face. Bill was shot in the face and neither Bill nor Jody Killburn could assess how bad the wound was, but like all head wounds, it was bleeding liberally. The bird was down to 15 minutes of on-site fuel, so Bill transferred team command to Gabe and flew to the FARP to assess his wounds. There were only two Apaches in the fight fighting as a single team. Gabe joined Captain Joe Hermann (the Company Executive Officer) and CW3 Rich Chenault, the company SIP (Standardization Instructor Pilot). They were out of rockets and 30mm ammunition. Joe Herman was the gunner/front-seater in the lead bird. All he had left was some Hellfire missiles. These expensive tank killers were also proving valuable as bunker busters. Now Joe was trying to engage a determined enemy machine gunner. He locked his FLIR on the man and found his range to him was 490 meters. The minimum engagement distance for the Hellfire is 500 meters. "Back it up Rich," Joe said to CW3 Chenault and the Apache crept back. The machine gunner was masked by a rock outcropping and the walls of the machine gun pit, but Joe could still detect the heat rising through his *Pakhol* pancake hat. Joe laid the laser sight on the hat and launched the missile. The gunner and gun vaporized. After 15 more minutes, the last two birds left the valley and flew to the FARP to refuel and rearm.

CW2 John Hamilton felt personally vindicated. His father had fought with the 10th Mountain Division in World War II. John was a late addition to his dad's life. John carried his father's Combat Infantryman's Badge (CIB) and 10th Mountain

Division shoulder patch with him on the mission. John belonged to the 101st Air Assault Division, but today he had honored his father's memory by joining soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division in their fight. The 10th Mountain Division had kept his father alive and he had returned the favor.⁶²

At the FARP, soldiers scrambled to get the Apaches ready for further combat. One of the birds caught on fire after refueling--a bullet had ruptured the carburetor. It was down to one engine. It and another Apache had to be evacuated to Bagram for repair. Captain Joe Herman and CW3 Rich Chenault had the only fully capable bird of the original five. However, the Apache that had been "barfing hydraulic fluid" that morning had been fixed by some talented crew chiefs and CW4 Bob Carr and CW2 Emmanuel (E-man) Pierre had flown it from Bagram to the FARP. The two helicopter crews prepared to fly back into the valley.⁶³ A third bird, flown by CW2 Sam Bennett (SP) and CW2 Randy Huff was enroute from Kandahar.⁶⁴

Major "Dino" Murray and his USAF ETACs had also been busy trying to get more air support into the battle. There were no ETACs or Combat Controllers with the main Afghan attack and so only American forces would get their support. The B-52s that dropped the seven JDAMs on the "whale" (Tir Ghol Gar) had long since departed the area, but a B-1 bomber was available and a special operations team had a target. Some ETACs tried to raise the Air Support Operations Center (ASOC) back at Bagram, but were having communications difficulties. They started talking directly to the AWACS--an excellent system for controlling an air operation, but not designed for controlling close air support to a ground operation. The crew on board

struggled with the problem and directed the B-1 strike. The B-1 bomber released its JDAMs on the ridge 400 meters directly in front of LTC Chip Preysler's advancing 2nd-187th Rakkasans.⁶⁵ This was well-within the 500-meter "danger close" area for dug in troops and Chip's soldiers were up and exposed. The USAF ETACs, who worked with the conventional ground forces, were not linked to the USAF Combat Controllers, who were working with the special forces although they were using the same frequency. A combat controller with the special forces had called in an air strike dangerously close to the conventional force. Only the fact that the JDAMS were fused for point [impact] detonation prevented fratricide. The Shar-i Kot Valley terrain is irregular and cutup and readily absorbs kinetic energy. Using point detonation in such terrain is ineffective and severely limits the effectiveness of ordnance, however, this time the unsuitable fusing prevented another incident of fratricide. Not knowing that this would be the last bomb strikes on this position, Chip's troops wisely and quickly withdrew and moved to their objective by another route. Lack of ETAC and Combat Controller coordination with each other and with the ASOC meant that there were no USAF personnel initially deconflicting SOF and conventional force locations, hazarding ETACs and ground forces alike. The B-1 dropped additional bombs for another controller away from friendly troops and left the area.

There was not much fixed wing aircraft available initially. The general officers at CENTCOM Forward, CFACC and Task Force Summit had agreed that there was not a lot of need for aviation in support of this mission. They had agreed

that “two CAPS, twenty-four/seven would be adequate to support Anaconda.” That meant that there would be two Combat Air Patrols, each consisting of a pair of F-16s, F-15Es, or F-18s airborne twenty-four hours a day to support the force.⁶⁶

The supporting attack was on the ground and in a tough fight. There would be no second lift of troops into the valley this day. The US ground force, numbering less than 300, was outnumbered, outgunned, and outranged. The enemy held the high ground. The main attack needed to arrive soon.

D-Day, H+2–H+9.5 (The Main Attack)

About 0830 in the morning, the main attack began slowly moving again. There was no prospect of air support. US troops were under fire, and so there would be no close air support provided to the main attack. Commander Zia sent an advance party of about a squad to the town of Surki to secure it and to get a view of the pass to see what was waiting. The squad cleared the town without incident. Zia moved a company down toward the town. Suddenly, just north of Surki, the company came under heavy fire from mortars, RPGs and recoilless rifles set up on the eastern slope of Tir Ghol Ghar. The company was caught out in the open without air support. Fortunately, Commander Zia had put his 82mm mortars in position at the town of Gwad Kala to support the advance. The main attack pulled back to Gwad Kala, while the 82mm mortars returned fire. Again Chris Haas called for Close Air Support while the mortar duel went on. Crossing a large open area under constant fire is tough for seasoned regular troops. Commander Zia’s force more or less guerrilla force was

reluctant to move without air support. They had been promised 55 minutes of aerial preparation, and they wanted it before they moved. It was now about 1100.⁶⁷

There was heavy fighting going on around the 1st-87th landing zones. Apache helicopters and jet aircraft were flying in support. The only possible way to get close air support appeared to be to get into position where a combat controller could get a laser designator on the target to provide terminal guidance. There was some higher ground to the northwest of Surki. After much discussion, the Afghan force began moving to occupy this high ground. It took a lot of time to get the Afghan force organized and pointed in a direction. It was now 1400. As they moved, enemy fire shifted and now began landing behind the force. It was not just mortars. It was also artillery! Enemy artillery rounds began tearing up the ground around the Afghans. It was coming from inside the valley, fired on direct lay. The enemy had laid out the battle field professionally and their gunners knew their business. After the fighting, the Afghans recovered enemy artillery field maps that had all the towns and prominent positions identified with Target Reference Points listing range, azimuth and grid.⁶⁸

Finally, some Apaches from the 101st flew close combat attack in support of the main attack. They came in, took out some mortar positions and then flew back into the valley to support the fight there. They were not there for a long period of time, but their presence was a real morale lifter. When the helicopters left, the artillery fire started again. They began expertly bracketing the Afghan positions. The forward Afghan elements were now in small-arms contact with enemy flanking units

coming off of Tir Ghol Ghar. The artillery fire now started landing in the middle of the Afghan positions wounding combatants. The Afghan force backed up into the bowl around Gwad Kala giving up high ground, but gaining some protection. In the middle of all this, the truck drivers decided that they had enough and drove away, heading back north through the pass! The Afghan combatants saw the trucks leaving, trucks that contained their chow and their equipment. They also began moving north, following the trucks out. Commander Zia and LTC Haas decided to move out of the bowl and out through the pass. The majority of combatants were walking and the mortar and artillery fire continued to work them over. Almost no one had a helmet or body armor.⁶⁹ [See Map 6-5, The Main Attack, D-Day, H to H+9.]

One of the Special Forces team trucks was hit and destroyed by artillery fire. Others were hit, but were still mobile. The surviving trucks began shuttling the Afghan forces back to the pass, but the majority of the force ended up walking out. The force took another 20 or so casualties while moving out of the bowl and through the pass. Zia had lost six killed and 13 critically wounded (plus another two dozen lightly wounded) up north and now had 20 additional wounded on hand. About 14 percent of his force were casualties. He had been severely handled. He offered to lead a forlorn hope, a desperate charge into the valley that would satisfy the demands of personal honor but would accomplish nothing militarily and lose much of the remainder of the force. LTC Haas managed to dissuade him from that intent. It was time to disengage, gather the force, take care of the wounded, bury the dead and reorganize.⁷⁰

But Commander Zia was still out for blood. He has lost a large part of his command and part of the blame lay in the urban center of Zurmat. Zurmat had clearly tipped off the defenders to his passing and had been supplying the enemy for months. Commander Zia wanted to drive into Zurmat and punish it. LTC Haas again had to use all his diplomatic and professional skills to dissuade Zia from following the Pashtun inclinations and creating a major incident and blood bath.⁷¹

It took a long time to reassemble the force. They had to fetch the element that had stayed in contact with the enemy and then fell back as a screen line to prevent the main body from being flanked. The main attack force got permission to withdraw to Gardez to refit and to bury their dead. Commander Zia was adamant that the time would also be used to arrange for close air support that would actually be there. The battered force left a small contingent on site to observe enemy activity as it withdrew from the battle. Part of the force would be back in the battle the next day, but for now, the battle had been handed off to Task Force Rakkasans.⁷² The main attack had been defeated by fratricide, enemy artillery, enemy mortars and lack of close air support. It was now about 1600.

D-Day, H+2–H+8 (The North)

LTC Chip Preysler's battalion, the 2nd-187th, had established their perimeters and were digging in and improving their fighting positions. The sun was out and the troops began to shed some of their cold weather gear. The fighting had clearly shifted to the south, although the enemy kept firing 82mm mortars in their direction. Chip had learned that constant close air support is not constant. It cannot be. Chip had

originally relied on Paul Le Camera's one 120mm mortar for indirect fire support. However, the 10th Mountain Division's mortar was in constant use fighting in support of its own battalion until it ran out of ammunition. Chip's 81mm mortars were supposed to come in on the second lift, but that clearly was not going to happen anytime soon.⁷³

As the day wore on, it became increasingly obvious that the main attack force was bogged down and would not get into the valley. Task Force Rakassans now had the main fight but their positions were now all wrong. The Task Force was strung-out piecemeal in platoon-sized positions along the eastern wall and down in the valley. There was not much ability to maneuver and the enemy held the high ground to the east and to the west. Task Force Rakassans needed to regain the initiative and fight the fight on their terms and their schedule. Chip conferred with Colonel Wiercinski and LTC Paul Le Camera on the radio. The second lift was supposed to come at sunset. It was beginning to make a lot more sense to reverse the process and use those helicopters to withdraw the entire force and then return later to conduct a logical maneuver, with mutually supporting attacks, to clear the valley.⁷⁴

D-Day, H+2–H+8 (The South)

The bullets continued to whip into and over the 1st-87th positions. RPG rounds still slammed into the ground or skipped along the stony surface. To add to the misery, the enemy began to fire two 122mm howitzers at them. The howitzers were dug into a cave in the side of a mountain. Fortunately, the gunners could not depress the howitzers low enough to hit "Hell's Half Pipe," and the sharp crack of

artillery rounds screaming overhead added to the din. The enemy had determined the range and coordinates of “Hell’s Half Pipe” and were dropping mortar rounds right onto the position. The soldiers dug small caves and scrapes into the flinty ground of the half pipe and sheltered themselves and the wounded in them. They used their ammunition sparingly. It was going to be a long fight. PFC Jason Ashline, of the battalion mortar platoon took two AK-47 rounds in the chest, but they were stopped by his body armor. Jason got right back into the fight.⁷⁵ Despite the enemy’s advantage in position, there had been some victories. The enemy on RAK 6 ridge had been driven off by a combination of their fire, special forces support and Apache gunships. The enemy had quit sallying out of Marzak since earlier attempts had only stacked up the bodies of their dead. West and South of Charlie Company was clear. Two enemy platoons dominated the high ground on Heather and Ginger and continued to make life uncomfortable for Charlie Company. The battalion surgeon, Major Thomas Byrne, was scrambling from casualty to casualty, making sure that they were going to live and trying to make them comfortable.⁷⁶ Specialist Eddie Rivera, who previously struggled just carrying his overstuffed medic’s bag, was now doling out the contents and the care along with the doctor.⁷⁷ The packs that the troops had dropped earlier at the HLZs, in order to get into position faster, were still out there, tantalizingly out of reach. The spare ammunition and batteries, food and snivel gear were in the packs but still targeted by RPGs.⁷⁸ [See Map 6- 4, Battles for Hell’s Half Pipe and RAK 6 Ridge.] In the afternoon, jet aircraft were showing up in increasing numbers to provide close air support.

The enemy was learning to adjust to close air support. Once the aircraft showed up, the enemy would cease firing and run into their caves and bunkers. After the aircraft left, they would come out again to fire mortars and RPGs at Hell's Half Pipe. The enemy had expert mortar men and they were adept at walking rounds right into Hell's Half Pipe. But the ETACs now knew where the enemy mortar firing positions were and they finally brought down massive amounts of ordnance on them. The mortars quit firing and did not bother Charlie Company again.⁷⁹

The fight was less intense at Eve. The two squads from the first platoon of Alfa Company had gotten into position along with half a squad from the scouts. Captain Crombie had his force doing things according to the plan. Unfortunately, the plan was overtaken by events and they were a small group of many small groups strung out on the eastern mountain wall. The troops returned sporadic fire and watched their comrades in Charlie Company absorb the brunt of the enemy fire. The fight went on all day.⁸⁰ There was a group of a dozen enemy that was out of small-arms range and the Alfa Company 60mm mortars were scheduled for the next flight in--whenever that would occur. Senior Airman Sean Lloyd was Alfa Company's assigned ETAC, but he could never get a bomb dropped on them. Someone else always had priority.⁸¹

LTC La Camera was not one to back away from a fight, but he wanted to get his wounded taken care of. Air cover had shown up, but air cover was not constant. At times, there were aircraft stacked up for hours waiting to deliver their ordnance. Some never got to deliver their ordnance but had to fly off to refuel. At other times,

there were no aircraft available for hours at a time. Air traffic controllers were having difficulty staging in aircraft to provide comprehensive cover. At those times when the air cover was gone, the enemy shelled his unit ferociously. It was a long-range fire fight and since his one 120mm mortar had long ago exhausted its ammunition, Paul had to suffer the enemy shelling without response. After coordinating with Colonel Wiercinski, he contacted Bagram and ordered that the rest of the battalion mortar platoon and mortars, all the company 60mm mortar sections, C Company's 3rd Platoon and large amounts of mortar ammunition be loaded onto the B/159 Chinooks for delivery when the sun went down. He could evacuate his wounded on board the same birds. Paul was there for a fight, and if it was going to be a long-range mortar duel, he was getting the gear to do such.⁸²

D-Day, H+2–H+10 (The Sky Above the Valley)

Two Apaches rose from the FARP to return to the fight. Captain Joe Herman and CW3 Rich Chenault flew the only Apache that was still intact from the first flight into the valley. CW4 Bob Carr and CW2 Emmanuel Pierre crewed the second Apache. They saw the shot-up Apaches and their wounded commander and wondered what they were up against.⁸³ The crippled birds flew back to Bagram since they could not be repaired at the FARP. The remaining birds flew back into the hornet's nest. RPGs began to rise and burst, a few at first, and then in increasing amounts. Black flak floated by the Apaches as they returned to exact vengeance on the enemy. There was no lack of targets in the South.⁸⁴ The air force was not on station and they were the only aircraft available. They flew into the south end of the

valley where the Rakkasans Command Post was under attack. Rich Chenault could hear machine gun fire in the background as they talked over the radio. They flew over RAK 6 ridge (Khosah Chinah) looking for the command post. They finally saw some VS-17 panels laid out on the ground marking the location. The Apaches then spotted the enemy that had pinned the RAK6 down. The two Apaches made seven passes from two different directions on the target. The command post took no more fire.⁸⁵

The 10th Mountain Division soldiers in “Hell’s Half Pipe” were taking fire and calling for help. The Apaches rolled in on the enemy, making five running gun passes and drawing lots of RPG fire. Five RPGs exploded close to Rich Chenault and Joe Herman’s bird on a single pass. The right side of their airframe was heavily damaged by heavy RPG and small arms fire. It lost both night systems and Joe Herman, the front-seat gunner, lost his targeting systems. Joe talked to Colonel Wiercinski and let him know that there was yet another damaged aircraft. Colonel Wiercinski ordered both birds in the team to depart station and return to the FARP.⁸⁶

Another B-1 bomber flew into the area and stayed for some two hours, dropping 19 JDAMS on 10 different targets at the direction of several ETACs, combat controllers and the ALO.⁸⁷

The two Apaches returned to the FARP and the crews inspected their damaged aircraft. CW3 Rich Chenault and Captain Joe Herman’s bird was still flyable and could still fire ordnance. True, it had lost its Target Acquisition Designation Sight (TADS) and Pilot Night Vision System (PNVIS) for flying and

fighting at night and it could only fire ordnance from the backseat controls. CW4 Bob Carr and CW2 Emmanuel Pierre's bird was also fairly chewed up, but it could still fly and fight. They were waiting for the B-1 bomber to clear the area so that they could go back in. CW2 Sam Bennett and CW2 Randy Huff landed at the FARP. They had been on station in Kandahar when Colonel Wiercinski ordered them forward. After a quick situational awareness briefing, the three Apaches prepared to enter the valley for the third time that day. This was Rich and Joe's third combat mission that day and they were experienced and ready to deal with this enemy. However, the enemy also had a learning curve. Each time the Apaches entered the valley, enemy air defenses improved. This time they were very lethal. It was late in the day and the sun was beginning to set. The three Apaches came into the south end of the valley to help the embattled troops of the 10th Mountain Division. To help them, they had to fly due west, right into the setting sun. They could not see much, but the enemy could see them and RPG and small arms fire snaked up at them. They pulled out and tried to hit the enemy from the south. On this pass they crested a ridge on Takur Ghar. Joe and Rich were following Bob and E-man. Sam Bennet and Randy Huff were trailing them.⁸⁸

The radio crackled. Randy yelled, "Rich, you just had an RPG blow up in your tail rotor."

The bird still flew, so obviously the RPG had not actually exploded in the tail rotor, but now, anti-aircraft artillery fire from heavy machine guns rattled right by Rich's left side. He could see the large bullets zip by. They did not hit the airframe.

The enemy gunners were not using tracers, so it was hard to pick out the enemy firing positions. It was a very scary moment.⁸⁹

The three birds exited the valley through the south entrance and flew north to reenter the valley. They flew the length of the valley, tried to get into Ginger pass again, but the fire was too heavy and so they exited through the south entrance again. They did this two more times. The last time, Bob and E-man were in the lead. As they again tried to enter Ginger pass, the enemy fire snaked up at them and then a SA-7 shoulder-fired air defense missile also rose in the air, trying to take down Bob and E-man's bird. The SA-7 missed, but Rich saw the gunner, laid his 30mm automatic chain gun sights on him and had the satisfaction of watching the enemy disintegrate. Still, the Apaches were not going to be able to get into Ginger pass. The fire was just too heavy.⁹⁰

It was getting close to 1600. Three CH-47 Chinooks from B/159 (Call sign Hooker 6) were now flying a pattern outside the valley. They were waiting for sunset, so they could fly to Hell's Half Pipe and deliver mortars and ammunition to the 10th Mountain Division troops. The three Apaches were supposed to escort and protect them. The small Apaches had already absorbed a great deal of ground fire and abuse. The large, lumbering Chinooks would present an easier target to the enemy--particularly when they were sitting on the ground. The Chinook was not designed to take the abuse that the Apaches received. Colonel Wiercinski conferred with the Apache pilots and then cancelled the Chinook mission. It was dark and two B-1 bombers were coming into the area. The Apaches had to clear out of the

airspace, so they flew back to the FARP, refueled, and then flew on to Bagram where their wounded birds could be repaired. Rich and Joe had no night vision systems intact, so they had to follow the navigation lights of their wingmen. Flying over the mountains at night without night vision systems is hairy, particularly when you have to crest a 10,500 foot mountain en route.⁹¹

D-Day, H+2–H+5 (Rakkasans Staff, Bagram)

The staff back at Bagram was in contact with Colonel Wiercinski and the brigade TAC. CPT Butch Whiting learned of the damage that the Apaches were taking and got an initial report sent to General Hagenbeck's 10th Division TAC "on the chat." The computer age has eased and complicated staff communications and coordination. The brigade was hooked up to division with a secure computer chat room. Fifteen-twenty minutes later, when CPT Bill Ryan flew into the FARP, he updated Butch on the status of his helicopters by Iridium phone. Butch updated his earlier report to MG Hagenbeck "on the chat" and learned that MG Hagenbeck was exploring the possibility of requesting reinforcement by the AH-64D Longbow Apache battalion that was stationed in Kuwait. There was a problem with that. The AH-64D is 3,000 pounds heavier than the AH-64A, although the engines are the same. The extra 3,000 pounds are state-of-the-art electronic systems, but they make the AH-64D a more cumbersome bird than the AH-64A particularly at altitude. The AH-64D would never be able to get over the "whale," let alone maneuver effectively in the tight confines of the valley. Butch logged into another classified chat room, this one with Fort Campbell, Kentucky and the 101st Air Assault Division. He sent

an e-mail to MG Cody, the division commander, explaining the situation. Soon Butch was called to the telephone. It was MG Cody. He instructed Butch to tell MG Hagenbeck that he could have a company of AH-64A Apaches en route to his location in 12 hours. Soon MG Hagenbeck and MG Cody were on the telephone. When MG Hagenbeck hung up, he told CPT Whiting, “your boss is sending me more Apaches.” This began the movement of the rest of the 3-101 Aviation battalion to the fight.⁹²

LTC Richardson, the Apache battalion commander, had visited his troops in Afghanistan earlier and knew about the forthcoming fight. He was now following the action “on the chat.” He called in his planners and key personnel and briefed them. The battalion was preparing for possible deployment before MG Cody called LTC Richardson and told him to prepare to deploy. The battalion broke down the aircraft, loaded equipment onto pallets and then began to loading aircraft and pallets on arriving USAF transport aircraft. Sixty-eight hours after notification, the first reinforcing Apaches would arrive at Kandahar. Four hours later, they were assembled and test flown and ready to fight. But that would be on D+4.⁹³

A more pressing problem was the immediate fight. The main attack had failed, the enemy was much stronger than planned for and determined to defend his ground, there were wounded to extract and the plan was out the window. Should they withdraw, refit and return, or should they hold on and fight the enemy now that they had him pinned to one spot? The decision on this would rest with MG Hagenbeck, but the Rakkasans’ staff started planning for both options. LTC Jim Larsen and

Major Dennis Yates spearheaded the effort since the S3, Major Gibler, was pinned down on RAK 6 ridge with Colonel Wiercinski and the rest of the TAC.

D-Day, H+2 (The Media in Bagram)

The headquarters at Bagram had their hands full. Dodge Billingsley, the journalist, and Captain Pool, the PAO, were trying to get into the valley, but so was everyone else and the HLZs were hot. Public Affairs wanted to get the story of the operation out to the public, and was anxious to facilitate that. The trouble was that there was no way to go into the valley and then transmit the story out of the valley. Staying in Bagram would not allow Dodge to get the story. Captain Pool also wanted OSD to retain release authority. It was clear that this was a significant media event, but how to cover it, follow the rules, and make everyone happy, was uncertain.

Desperate to get into the valley, Dodge came up with an idea. He had a contact at the CBS World Bureau in London whom he trusted completely. He proposed writing an e-mail with everything he knew about the operation so far. Of course, it was still close hold or classified at that point. Dodge would have Bagram fact check his report to make sure he got it right. He then would send the story to his contact at CBS, with instructions that CBS would hold the story until the Pentagon announced the operation.

The PAO chain accepted his plan and Dodge called London to get the ball rolling. Within an hour, the e-mail summary of the operation was complete, revised, and sent to London. He continued to update the material as new facts became

available. There was now word that a member of the special forces was KIA and that Task Force Summit was engaged in something significant in the south.⁹⁴

D Day, H+5–H+9 (Command Group, RAK 6 Ridge)

Fixed-wing aviation was now playing a significant role in the fight. Anything and everything available was showing up. USAF B-1 and B-52 bombers, F-15E Strike Eagle long-range interdiction aircraft, F-16 Fighting Falcon Multi-role aircraft, USN F/A-18 Hornet Strike Attack Aircraft, F-14 Tomcats, USMC AV-8 Harriers, USAF A-10 Close Air Support aircraft, French Mirage 2000Ds, and Super-Entards strike/attack fighters would all eventually provide fire support during the 13-day fight.⁹⁵ “Dino” Murray was calling in strikes as well as his ETACS. At first Colonel Wiercinski insisted that all support go to his embattled forces, but a few hours later, the enemy was moving up the south end of RAK 6 ridge and the firing on that side increased. Colonel Wiercinski then said “Dino, we are going to need close air support as soon as you can get it here.”

“Okay sir, thanks for the heads up.”

“Dino” got on the radio and broadcast *Immediate. Troops in contact*. Two F-16s checked in. “Dino” is an F-16 pilot and knew exactly what switches the pilots needed to use to put the bomb exactly where he wanted. They were flying the block 40 version which is “Dino’s” favorite version--an aircraft designed to deliver laser-guided bombs. “Dino” started to try to fly the aircraft from the ground. “Okay, hit this switch and tell me what you see.” “Hold up, there are some guys in that area. Go to a white hot field of view.” “Squirt your laser.”

The pilot recognized “Dino’s” voice and responded “Dino, is that you down there? I know how to fly this airplane! Tell me where you want the bombs and let me worry about putting them there.” It was Bodey, a Lieutenant who flew with Dino in Korea a short six months prior. Thus two friends met in the Shar-i Kot Valley. Bodey put the bombs where they needed to go and the enemy threat against the command post from that side disappeared.⁹⁶

Later, a B-52 was 40,000 feet overhead. It had expended all its JDAMS and only had 24 Mark-82 conventional bombs left. LTC La Camera wanted air strikes on a ridge line of Takur Ghar Mountain, but it was only 500 meters away from friendly positions. This was “danger close” to dug-in troops. The ETAC was in a wadi and every time he stuck his head up, someone shot at him. “Dino” could readily see the position from his viewpoint on Rak 6 ridge, but he did not have a laser range finder or target indicator. Dino took control of the airstrike and worked directly with the B-52. He decided to drop one Mark-82 as a spotter round and furnished the coordinates to the B-52 crew. The B-52 bomb hit exactly where “Dino” (and LTC La Camera) wanted. On the next pass, twenty-three Mark-82 rounds splattered exactly on the ridge and the enemy activity ceased. It gave the 10th Mountain troops a break from all the enemy firing.⁹⁷

Throughout the day, Colonel Wiercinski was on the FM radio talking to Chip Preysler and Paul Le Camera. It was clear that the main attack had failed and that Zia’s force would not be able to make another attempt for several days. It was Task Force Rakkasans’ effort now, but their positioning was all wrong. The force was

outnumbered, outgunned and the enemy had the advantage in terrain. The force was strung out piecemeal in platoon positions in the valley and along the Eastern wall. None of the positions could support the next. There was little opportunity for maneuver. It was an invitation for defeat in detail. C Company, 1st-87th was fairly well used up and the wounded had to be evacuated. The two battalion commanders and the brigade commander agreed that the thing to do was to evacuate the battlefield that night. The Chinooks were already set to return at sunset with the second lift for the north. Instead, the smart thing seemed to reverse the process and to conduct a night extraction of the entire force. Then, the force could return at a future time and systematically clear the valley and mountains through coordinated attacks and maneuver. Colonel Wiercinski radioed his recommendation to MG Hagenbeck.

D-Day, H+6–H+12 (10th Division Staff, Bagram)

The crippled Apaches were back in Bagram, CW4 Jim Hardy was supervising their repair. The mechanics and crew chiefs performed maintenance miracles-- patching holes, replacing parts and fabricating pieces. Captain Bill Ryan, after receiving medical care for his facial wound, went to see MG Hagenbeck. He brought 1LT Gabe Marriott. Bill and Gabe provided the general with personal observations about the nature of the enemy defenses, their determination to defend the valley and the amount of heavy weapons that the enemy controlled.⁹⁸ MG Hagenbeck had been in frequent radio contact with Colonel Wiercinski and now he had some eye witnesses just back from the fight. Their input was invaluable. The General had a decision to make--to stay in the fight or withdraw--and he needed all the reliable input

that he could get. Colonel Wiercinski, the ground commander in the valley had recommended a withdrawal of the entire force that night. The sun would go down in two hours.

Bill and Gabe then went through some debriefings with the staff. In the early evening, they left the headquarters and started toward their tent for a meal and rest. Gabe's best friend from elementary and high school was Shane Bledsoe. Shane was now in the USAF and attached to the Special Forces headquarters in Bagram. Before Gabe went to his tent, he had one more stop. He looked up his friend and scrounged a phone call on Shane's satellite mobile phone. Gabe called his wife. "Hey baby, you're going to hear some real scary stuff on the news tonight, but know that I am okay. I'm fine. I can't tell you what is really going on, but, if anyone calls you to find out what's going on, tell them that everyone is okay." It was good to have an Air Force buddy with all the expensive, technical gear. Over the next days, Gabe's buddy let the other army aviators and mechanics in the Apache company call home. The ability to communicate home was great for morale in the field and home, but only the headquarters staff had access to e-mail and satellite telephones. E-mail and morale telephones for the force would come later.⁹⁹

D-Day, H+8–H+14 (The North)

The 2nd-187th prepared to leave the valley. After the sun set, the troops gingerly picked their way down the gravelly mountain slopes toward the pick-up sites. Tired troops lost their footing and fell down frequently. In a test of personal leadership, the NCOs kept the troops together and moving. They were closing into

the HLZs when LTC Chip Preysler received a call on the radio. The brigade command post, the battalion headquarters of the 1st-87th and Charlie Company, 1st-87th would extract that night. His battalion would stay. He would pick up the 1st platoon from A Company, 1st-87th, the company headquarters and the 1st-87th Scout platoon since they could not rejoin their battalion due to the fighting in the Ginger Valley. Chip's Alfa Company, which had been standing by in Bagram, would land at HLZ 15 under Spectre cover and establish a perimeter. Chip would move his deployed unit north to HLZ 15, expand the perimeter and wait for the morning. Chip's force would establish the base from which Task Force Rakassans would launch to recapture the valley. The plan now was that two companies from 2nd-187th and two companies from 1st-187th would maneuver from the HLZ 15 perimeter to seize the valley. Chip got on the radio and began moving his units into perimeters and coordinating link-up with the two platoons from 1st-87th.¹⁰⁰

Linking up two units from different divisions at night when there are enemy close at hand is not easy. Coordinating it over the radio with no face-to-face discussions and rehearsal makes it even more difficult. Chip wanted to consolidate his force and move it past the high ground that bisected the valley before dawn. Getting to HLZ 15 would take longer. Chip set up his headquarters inside the perimeter defense established by Cpt Frank Baltazar, the C Company Commander. The perimeter lay around the trail on the valley floor below Blocking Position Betty. Chip's Scout platoon established a smaller perimeter below Blocking Position Diane. The Scout platoon would link up with the 10th Mountain Division soldiers. Chip

wanted to get to HLZ 15, but he needed to keep C Company at Betty in case his Scouts got into trouble and needed help. Both positions waited for the units to link up. It was bitterly cold--in the teens Fahrenheit. There was a cold weather casualty in the main group at Betty. The soldier's heart stopped. Other soldiers quickly erected a warming tent while the battalion surgeon went to work on the soldier. He got his heart started again, got the soldier warmed up and saved his life.¹⁰¹

Spectre moved over the valley. Spectre's thermal imagers could pick up the people below. Who were the enemy? Who were the friendly? The friendly forces all had glint tape incorporated in their gear. The glint tape showed up on Spectre's imagers. The glint tape had not saved the main attack from fratricide that morning, but it was helping now. The friendlies were mostly stationary in the valley, the enemy was moving. The friendlies had USAF ETACs along insuring that they were not attacked from above. Spectre passed over HLZ 15, engaged a few targets and declared the area clear. From out of the dark came the sound of rotor blades. The CH-47 Chinooks had returned to the valley eleven hours after the first insertion. HLZ 15 was really a series of one-ship landing sites, some 500 meters apart! The soldiers of A Company, 2nd-187th stormed out of the Chinooks into the night. No one knew if there were enemy on the landing zone or not. There were none. There was enough moonlight to move around, but some soldiers still turned on their night vision goggles to see the world more clearly, albeit in a slimy-green light. Platoons established strong points. Once everyone had communications, Captain Kevin Butler and 1SG Jon Blossom deliberately and methodically positioned their forces to make sure that

the company perimeter was complete and tied in. It took two hours to put in the defense. There were four hours to sunrise. Major Powers, the Battalion Executive Officer, was in charge of the alternate battalion TOC now located at HLZ 15.¹⁰² The company had communications with battalion and LTC Preysler and Captain Butler discussed the link-up with Charlie Company and the small force from 10th Mountain Division.

The high-probability of fratricide during a night link-up still bothered LTC Preysler. Too many things could go wrong. Daytime linkup was not optimum either, but the chances of fratricide were less. Chip decided to hold in position, let the 10th Mountain soldiers get close and then go into a defensive perimeter. They would attempt the link-up shortly before dawn. The soldiers went on 50 percent alert so that the tired soldiers could have a short, uneasy sleep in the bitter cold. Spectre prowled the skies and fired at those enemy who were foolish enough to move.

Meanwhile, Captain Roger Crombie, his truncated 1st Platoon from A Company, 1st-87th and part of the battalion Scout Platoon were moving to linkup. They were only a small group of two-and-a-half squads. Earlier, they had planned to extract with the rest of the 10th Mountain Division forces. In preparation, some troops dug into their hoarded MREs and drank freely of their water. They would not have to stretch their rations if they were returning to Bagram that night. Some unwisely pitched their spare batteries. Now they were a small group moving in the dark night trying to find troops from another division. The enemy was out there. Spectre was firing at them. Fortunately, the radios were working. Unfortunately it

was a long haul carrying too much gear at too high an altitude. Each soldier felt as if he had been brutally kicked in the chest. The unit moved on high ground across undulating ground that was cut by dry stream beds.

“It was ungodly. Regardless of the slope of the terrain, there was not a flat place to put your foot--and trying to move on that at night while wearing night vision goggles was slow. We were supposed to move seven kilometers beginning at end of evening nautical twilight (EENT) but we only made like 500 meters in six hours. Part of it was the slope and the other part was that there was just nowhere to step. It was just a boulder and rock strewn landscape.”¹⁰³

The link-up unit was astride the valley trail, but the enemy was probably waiting there in ambush. So, they stayed well off the trail and moved on the high ground. Movement was slow, very slow, but they could see the IR strobe in the middle of their link-up position through their night-vision goggles.

It was a huge gut check when we were told to move up seven kilometers north in that terrain. I thought that we had a good physical training program, so it wasn't the physical aspect of it; but a 12-mile foot march just doesn't give you the gut check that moving seven kilometers in extremely rough terrain does, and I don't know how you replicate that. I almost wish we had gone through some kind of crucible event before that. I realized it was the importance of leaders being physically fit. Your tongue is swollen but you also have to give commands. The physical stress of it all and how you deal with it as a leader was a huge takeaway.¹⁰⁴

About 300 meters from the link-up, the force was played out. Roger formed a small perimeter and put his force on 50 percent alert. Link-up would wait.¹⁰⁵

D-Day, H+8–H+17.5 (The South)

DShK and RPG fire continued to plague Hell's Half Pipe, but at least the enemy mortars were knocked out. There were wounded that needed to be evacuated and LTC La Camera knew that his forces in the Halfpipe would be evacuated by air that night. However, there was still a long time until the evacuations. The shadows began to stretch and the sun was going down behind the Whale. The enemy began to stir again. As it got darker, the enemy crept out of his caves and bunkers and started moving stealthily toward the 10th Division soldiers. They low-crawled into small-arms range and opened fire. They were still firing at long range. Soldiers would get shot in the foot, and half the bullet would still be visible sticking out of the boot. Enemy RPG gunners still concentrated on the packs that were left near the HLZs. US M-4s and M-16s were still out of range for return fire, but the SAWs and M240 machine guns conducted effective fire. These automatic guns were running hot and their gunners carried tubes of powdered graphite that they dumped on the firing mechanisms to keep them firing. The graphite was issued in lieu of oil for winter lubrication. Oil freezes and can gum up the works. But the graphite was now clumping up and disrupting fire.¹⁰⁶

The enemy continued probing fire to draw return fire and pinpoint the US automatic weapons--an old technique called reconnaissance by fire. The troops withheld their fire. There was a DShK dug in on a ridge to the south that now fired on the position. ETAC and mortar men's lasers pinpointed its position and a B-52

splattered it. It was now dark enough for Spectre to fly. The enemy activity slowed down.¹⁰⁷

It was time to get the wounded out. SSG Robert Brault, a mortar sergeant was also a trained US Army pathfinder. He left the perimeter and began setting up infrared strobes and IR chemical lights to mark the landing zone. The enemy could not detect them, but the aircraft could. The soldiers ensured that their glint tape was visible to Spectre. At 2000 hours, a TF Rakkasans Medevac Blackhawk helicopter flew into HLZ 13A. The soldiers began loading wounded soldiers on board when it came under fire. Red DShK tracers and three air-burst RPGs streaked toward the helicopter. Soldiers were loading casualties and other soldiers were returning fire. The helicopter left with the wounded. A second Blackhawk from the 101st came in and also received fire. It set down and picked up more casualties. Spectre took out the enemy firing positions. The Blackhawks evacuated 17 of the more critically wounded.¹⁰⁸ All of the wounded members of the battalion TAC, except for the critically wounded Sergeant Black, stayed behind.

It was time to get ready to evacuate the rest of the unit. The pickup would be at midnight. Unfortunately, the moon rose fully and bathed the valley in light. It was time to gather up the equipment and make sure that all the men were accounted for. The rucksacks still sat out in the open--dark against the reflection from patches of snow and the moonlight. Spectre should have flown home due to the moonlight, but Spectre had stayed on station protecting the soldiers. Now Spectre was low on fuel

and ammunition and had to leave the valley. The enemy knew that Spectre was gone and resumed their firing. The packs remained out of reach.¹⁰⁹

Another Spectre arrived on station at 2230 hours and began engaging the enemy. At 2245 hours, Captain Kraft sent a detail of soldiers out to retrieve the packs. The troops were exhausted from the altitude and a day of fighting and dragging the packs in was difficult. Since most of the battalion TAC were wounded, it fell on Captain Kraft to organize the pickup zones. He established two separate pickup zones to the west of Hell's Half Pipe and began to move men and equipment to them. There was more equipment to evacuate. The packs and some of the weapons of the wounded that were already evacuated had to be brought to the pickup zones and the walking wounded had to drag their own gear. They had about 45 minutes to drag in a company's worth of gear. In the middle of this, the battalion lost communications with Brigade. One minute Major Gibler was on the airwaves, and next minute he was not. The battalion now had no way of communicating with incoming aircraft.¹¹⁰ [See Map 6-6, D-Day, H+17.5, Withdrawal and Consolidation.]

Spectre flew over the valley as two CH-47s came in and sat for seven minutes while they counted the men on board and loaded the rucksacks and equipment. Major Jay Hall, four soldiers and twenty rucksacks were now alone. The third CH-47 came in and sat down--in the wrong place. The five soldiers begin hauling the rucksacks to the bird. It took two soldiers to carry one rucksack. Jay was wounded, but ran back and forth getting gear and making sure that no soldiers were left behind. Finally, after about 20 minutes, the last bird rose into the air--with five exhausted soldiers and

twenty packs on board. In the other aircraft, the doctor and the medic continued to patch up the wounded during the flight. Some soldiers slept but most were too keyed up from the day's fight.¹¹¹ The Chinooks flew toward Bagram. It was past midnight. For these warriors, D-Day was over.

D-Day, H+10–H+17.5 (The Sky Above the Valley)

The great thing about the U.S. Military is that once a big fight starts, everybody wants to bring their toys. Within hours of this becoming a much bigger fight than we thought it was going to be, everything started showing up, air power wise. There's a U-2 overhead, trying to help with communications and information. Predators start showing up. JStars. AWACs. All these airplanes show up in this small confined air space--an area seven or eight miles long by two or three miles wide. And they're all trying to fly around this area and help.¹¹²

— Captain Dino Murray

The sun was almost gone. At 1600, a B-1 bomber overflew the valley and dropped a string of JDAMS in a box pattern. They were fused for point detonation. The B-1 then turned to other targets including a ZSU-23-1 anti-aircraft machine gun whose gunner kept retreating into a cave. As the B-1 left the area, another B-1 overflew the area and made six target runs against six targets. It dropped 15 JDAMS. Spectre returned to the valley. Air traffic control was getting difficult. At 1828 hours, a B-52 bomber overflew the valley and dropped a string of point-detonating JDAMS on Marzak. It turned while it prepared to drop a string of conventional MK-82 bombs, also fused for point detonation. Thirty seconds prior to release, the ground controller asked the bomber if it “could see the AC-130 below them.” The B-52 could not see Spectre and aborted the mission ten seconds before release. The B-52 left the area to refuel.¹¹³ Spectre stayed to hunt. Spectre acquired a group of enemy

that it engaged with 105mm fire. Later its thermal imaging helped Spectre gunners count 60 dead enemy. Spectre then killed 28 more.¹¹⁴ The AC-130 would stay on station long past its window of survivability. Americans were in trouble in the valley and Spectre would protect them. After the withdrawal from the south, Spectre would again overfly Hell's Half Pipe and blast it to make sure that nothing was inadvertently left that would aid the enemy.¹¹⁵

D-Day, H+8-H+17.5 (Command Group)

Once the seriously wounded were evacuated from the 1st-87th, the command group concentrated on the rest of the evacuation. Three CH-47 helicopters would take out the 1st-87th and a fourth would take out the command group. While the three Chinooks were loading the 1st-87th, the command group moved down the ridge. There was no HLZ. Major Gibler started swinging a green chem-light around his head to attract the fourth Chinook. After several attempts, the Chinook found them and they loaded onto the helicopter. The skilled pilots backed the helicopter up to the side of the mountain and the command group scrambled on board at an angle. The command group bird followed the other three Chinooks toward Bagram.¹¹⁶

D-Day, H+10-H+17.5 (The Enemy)

The Americans were leaving! They had pulled their force out of the south. The radio traffic indicated that the overall commander was no longer in the valley. The American forces in the north were fleeing further north, trying to leave the valley. The vaunted American helicopters did not get them all out! After the months

of continuous retreat, it was now the infidel who was retreating. Surely this was a sign. Osama had stated that killing a small group of Americans was enough to drive them all out of Afghanistan. Now was the time to kill all of these remaining Americans!

Some of the enemy began to come down from the mountains to pursue the Americans in the North. Some paralleled the withdrawing troops by moving north through the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley. Others moved up the main valley itself. Some, but not all, of the enemy came down from the Eastern Wall and the Whale. They were joined by Afghans. There were now Afghans back in the valley! If you want to draw a crowd in Afghanistan, shoot a gun. Afghans from the surrounding area picked up their Kalashnikovs and walked to the valley through the snow in their plastic sandals, drawn by the prospect of adventure and loot. Many Afghans entered the valley from the East through Ginger Pass. There were now many more enemy in the valley than when the fight started, but there were fewer Americans. [See Map 6-7, D-Day, H+15 - H+17.5, Withdrawal and Consolidation.]

The enemy was moving to trap the remaining soldiers and fight them when the sun rose. They were not night fighters. The US soldiers had individual night vision gear and were trained to fight at night. The enemy had US-manufactured night vision gear (some US Army, more purchased from sporting goods outlets), but the enemy did not have enough of it and had not trained in its use in night combat. Proficiency in night vision equipment involves fire and maneuver by trained units.

The enemy was only proficient in individual night vision skills. The enemy was content to infiltrate, reinforce, and follow the Americans and wait for daylight.

“[The enemy] were brave to a fault. A lot of it’s cultural and some of it is obviously training. We respected them but it was also apparent that they were not very accurate with their weapons and that there wasn’t a lot of collective training. They did some things well, though, like field craft, camouflage and some more command-type skills like understanding terrain and positioning weapons systems in terrain that protects the weapon and also allows it to fire undetected and have a huge field of fire. They were very good at that, especially with their DShK machine guns.”¹¹⁷

Spectre could operate safely in complete darkness starting at 2030 local, but they had already been there for two hours. That first night, Spectre could only hunt for five hours before moon rise put the aircraft at hazard, but they pushed the window on both sides. [See Chart 6-1, Light Data for Afghanistan, March 2002.]

Spectre saw the enemy moving and began hunting. 105mm howitzer rounds slammed into the larger groups while 40mm and 20mm automatic cannons searched out the smaller groups. The rip of the 20mm six-barreled guns alternated with the thud-thud of the slower Bofors and provided a spectacular fireworks display. It was more pleasant to observe than to receive. Enemy casualty rates are difficult to assess but perhaps some 150-200 enemy died under Spectre fire that night.¹¹⁸

D-Day, H-H+17.5 (Task Force 64)

SMSGt James Hotaling had watched the sunrise that morning. He and the small Australian team were stuck on a mountain top five kilometers south of where they were supposed to be. They could readily observe movement in the north-south valley below, but nothing was moving there. They had excellent communications and had requested that the helicopter come back and move them to where they were supposed to be. They were told to sit tight and do their job from their present position. Shortly after dawn, the radio had crackled to life. It was soon obvious that the battle was not developing as planned and that there were a lot more enemy at the objective than previously thought. The Task Force 64 liaison officer with the 1st-87th was calling for help from Hell's Half Pipe, but, since James' team was so far from the battle, they could do nothing but listen. The insertion site where they were supposed to be overlooked HLZ 13 and 13A, and Hell's Half Pipe. As the battle progressed, it was clear that they were needed at the planned location. The team leader requested movement. Finally, their request was approved. The sun was now down but it would be the early morning hours before a helicopter would move them.¹¹⁹ Other Special Operations deep reconnaissance teams that had been landed at their correct locations, continued to call down fire from the heavens.¹²⁰

D-Day, H+14–H+17.5 (The North)

The Command Group and most of the 1st-87th had left the valley. LTC Chip Preysler and his soldiers from Charlie Company, 2nd-187th listened to the Chinooks lifting off to the south. They were alone in the valley--alone except for lots of enemy

and Spectre. About midnight, the tired battalion rose to its feet and started to move to HLZ 15. D-Day ended with the lone demi-battalion moving north through the moonlit valley.

¹Sheila Harriman quoted in a CBS Report on 12 March 2003, cited on Arlington Cemetery website, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/slharriman.htm> (accessed 29 November 2007).

²Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder and Kalev I. Sepp, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 286.

³Interview with LTC Christopher K. Haas, Cdr, 1st Battalion 5th SF Group, and 1SG Danny Lynn Van Allen, 1SG, 1st Bn 5th SF Group at Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

⁴Van Allen.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Interview with SGM Mark Nielsen, CSM 2-187, Bagram, 19 May 2002.

⁷Interview with CW2 Stephen Brisset, Chinook pilot, A/7-101 Aviation Regiment, Kandahar, March 2002.

⁸Interview with Private Richard Sprague, 3/C/2-187, Shar-i Kot Valley, March 2002.

⁹Interview with LTC Chip Preysler, CO 2-187 Bn, Bagram, 18 May 2002; and Colonel Chip Preysler (now J-2 CJTF-76), Bagram, 14 November 2005.

¹⁰Preysler and Nielsen. Interviews with Cpt Frank Baltazar, CO, C/2-187; SSG Christian Sheffield, 1/C/2-187; 1Lt Samuel Johnson, FDO with C/1-187; SFC Kelly Luman, Platoon Leader 3/C/2-187, Bagram, 18 May 2002. Sergeant Shlecler was very well respected by the members of 2-187, but he was now the representative of the service that was threatening to kill them.

¹¹Preysler.

¹²Allan J. Hamilton, "Biomedical Aspects of Military Operations at High Altitude" (US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, 1988), 5. Between sea level and 18,000 feet, atmospheric oxygen decreases 52 percent.

¹³Sheffield and Luman.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Interview with LTC Paul La Camera, CO 1-87, Fort Drum, 11 June 2002.

¹⁶The battalion TAC consisted of LTC Paul La Camera, the battalion commander; CSM Frank Grippe, the Battalion Sergeant Major; Major Jay Hall, the S3 operations officer; Cpt Adam McLaughlin, the S2 intelligence officer; Cpt Timothy Gittins, the S3 Air; SFC Robert Healy, the Operations NCO; Cpt Scott Taylor, the Fire Support Officer; three RTOs; two Australian Special Forces liaison personnel from Task Force 64; and a USAF ETAC, TSGT Victor McCabe. Interview with Cpt Timothy Gittins, S3 Air, 1-87, Fort Drum, 11 June 2002.

¹⁷La Camera.

¹⁸Interview with Cpt Nelson Kraft, CO, C/1-87, Fort Drum, 11 June 2002. HLZ 13A was not part of the original HLZ selection. Pilots from B-159 picked the new LZ the night before in an effort to save the unit walking a long distance to the blocking positions. Interview with Major Jay Hall, S3 1-87, Fort Drum, 30 July 2002.

¹⁹La Camera.

²⁰Interviews with SSG Darren M. Amick, 2/C/1-87; SGT David M. Wurtz, 2/C/1-87; SGT Daniel Navarro, 3/C/1-87; PFC Terry Moore, Mortars C/1-87; SPC John Sarbaugh, Mortars C/1-87; and SPC Michael Hoke, 1/C/1-87, Fort Drum, 12 June 2002.

²¹Kraft.

²²La Camera.

²³Kraft.

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- ²⁴Ibid.
- ²⁵For a discussion of the RPG-7, see Lester W. Grau, "The RPG-7 On the Battlefields of Today and Tomorrow," *Infantry* (May-August 1998): 6-8.
- ²⁶Interviews with SFC Michael A. Peterson, Heavy Mortar Plt Ldr; SP K. C. Thomas, Squad Leader, Heavy Mortar Plt; SP Guy Adametz, Heavy Mortar Plt, 1-87; PFC John Anthony Irizary, Heavy Mortar Plt, 1-87, Fort Drum, 11 June 2002.
- ²⁷Kraft. An enemy 82mm mortar round landed directly on the position wounding many of the battalion staff. Hall.
- ²⁸La Camera.
- ²⁹Interviews with Cpt Adam McClaughlin, S2 1-87; SFC Robert Healy, Operations NCO, 1-87; Cpt Timothy Gittins, S3 Air, 1-87; Cpt Scott Taylor, FSO, 1-87; Cpt Francisco Ranero, SIGO 1-87, Fort Drum, 11 June 2002.
- ³⁰Hall.
- ³¹Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005), 244.
- ³²Hall.
- ³³Peterson, Thomas, Adametz, and Irizary.
- ³⁴Interviews with PFC Chris Couchot, A/1-87; PFC Christopher Reeves, 1/1/A/1-87; PFC Garret Fortin, A/1-87; SGT Trevor L. Boyd, A/1-87; SPC Jose L. Vera, SAW gunner, 1/A/1-87; SSG Jeffrey S. McDonald, Scout Squad Leader, 1-87; Sgt Jorge Alcaraz, Scout sniper/spotter, 1-87; SPC Larry Ryland, Scout, RTO/Point Man, 1-87; SSG Mark Condren, Scout Platoon Sergeant, 1-87, Fort Drum, 11 June 2002.
- ³⁵La Camera.
- ³⁶Amick, Wurtz, Navarro, Moore, Sarbaugh, and Hoke.
- ³⁷BG Francis J. Wiercinski, CO, TF Rakkasans, Schofield Barracks, 13 January 2006. The TAC was light. Usually the fire support officer, intelligence officer and army attack aviation liaison officer also accompany the brigade TAC, however, due to the limited lift, limited number of troops on the ground and projected short visit, many of the key staff remained in Bagram.
- ³⁸Major Paul "Dino" Murray, Air Liaison Officer, 19th Air Support Operations Squadron, Boston, 24 March 2007.
- ³⁹Murray.
- ⁴⁰Ibid.
- ⁴¹Wiercinski.
- ⁴²Interview with CSM Iuniasolua T. Savusa, CSM 3/101 Brigade, Bagram, 14 November 2005.
- ⁴³Wiercinski
- ⁴⁴Interview with Major Mike Gibler, S3 3/101 Brigade, Kandahar, 17 May 2002.
- ⁴⁵Savusa.
- ⁴⁶Ibid.
- ⁴⁷Interview with CPT Butch Whiting, Aviation LNO from the 3rd Battalion 101st Aviation Regiment to Task Force Rakkasans, Fort Campbell, 16 August 2002.
- ⁴⁸Interview with CPT James Riley, 3/101 Brigade Signals Officer (SIGO), Kandahar, 13 May 2002. For an in-depth discussion of communications in mountains, see Lester W. Grau, and Jason Falivene, "Mountain Combat: Hard to Move, Hard to Shoot, Even Harder to Communicate," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (September 2006): 619-625.
- ⁴⁹Murray.
- ⁵⁰Ibid.
- ⁵¹Naylor, 244.
- ⁵²Savusa.
- ⁵³Wiercinski.
- ⁵⁴Whiting.

⁵⁵They might have been US-manufactured “Stinger” missiles, but were more likely Chinese or Soviet-manufactured SA-2 “Strella” missiles.

⁵⁶“What do you do when you run out of ammunition, yet you have promised to provide two hours coverage to the ground force? You can provide reconnaissance. The Apaches did so. Later in the fight, when the USAF and Navy were engaged, the helicopters could have provided target designation for laser-guided bombs. This concept is part of doctrine under the JAAT concept (Joint Air Attack Team) where army attack aviation and jet aircraft share the same air space and jointly destroy the enemy. The doctrine was there, but the Air Force and Navy were unaware of the Apache’s capability and had never practiced using an Army target designator. Their reluctance, and lack of earlier joint training prevented their using this ready asset. It was a lost opportunity.” Whiting.

⁵⁷Interview with CPT Gabe Marriott, 1st Platoon Ldr, A/3-101 Aviation Regiment, Fort Leavenworth, 11 June 2004. In army aviation, the pilot-in-command is an experienced pilot who has passed a series of qualifying flights and examinations. For even the most-talented, it is a years-long process to make pilot-in-command. Warrant officers spend much more time flying than commissioned officers and it is common for a warrant officer to be pilot-in-command of an aircraft (the back-seater in an Apache). The air force no longer has warrant officers, so the pilot in command is the senior officer.

⁵⁸Marriott.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Interview with Cpt Bill Ryan, “Killer Spades” Apache Company Commander, A/3-101, Kandahar, 16 May 2002. Bill was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions. Bill is a modest, unassuming man who insists the medal belongs to all his men.

⁶²Marriott.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ryan.

⁶⁵United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 7 February 2005), 64.

⁶⁶Interview with “El Cid,” Colonel David M. Neuenswander, Deputy Commander, 332nd Air Expeditionary Group (A-10 and F-16 pilot), Fort Leavenworth, 22 February 2006.

⁶⁷Haas and Van Allen.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Haas.

⁷⁰Ibid

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Preysler.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Peterson.

⁷⁶Kraft.

⁷⁷John Sack, “Anaconda,” *Esquire*, August 2002, 119-123.

⁷⁸Kraft.

⁷⁹Amick, Wurtz, Navarro, Moore, Sarbaugh, and Hoke.

⁸⁰Fortin and Vera.

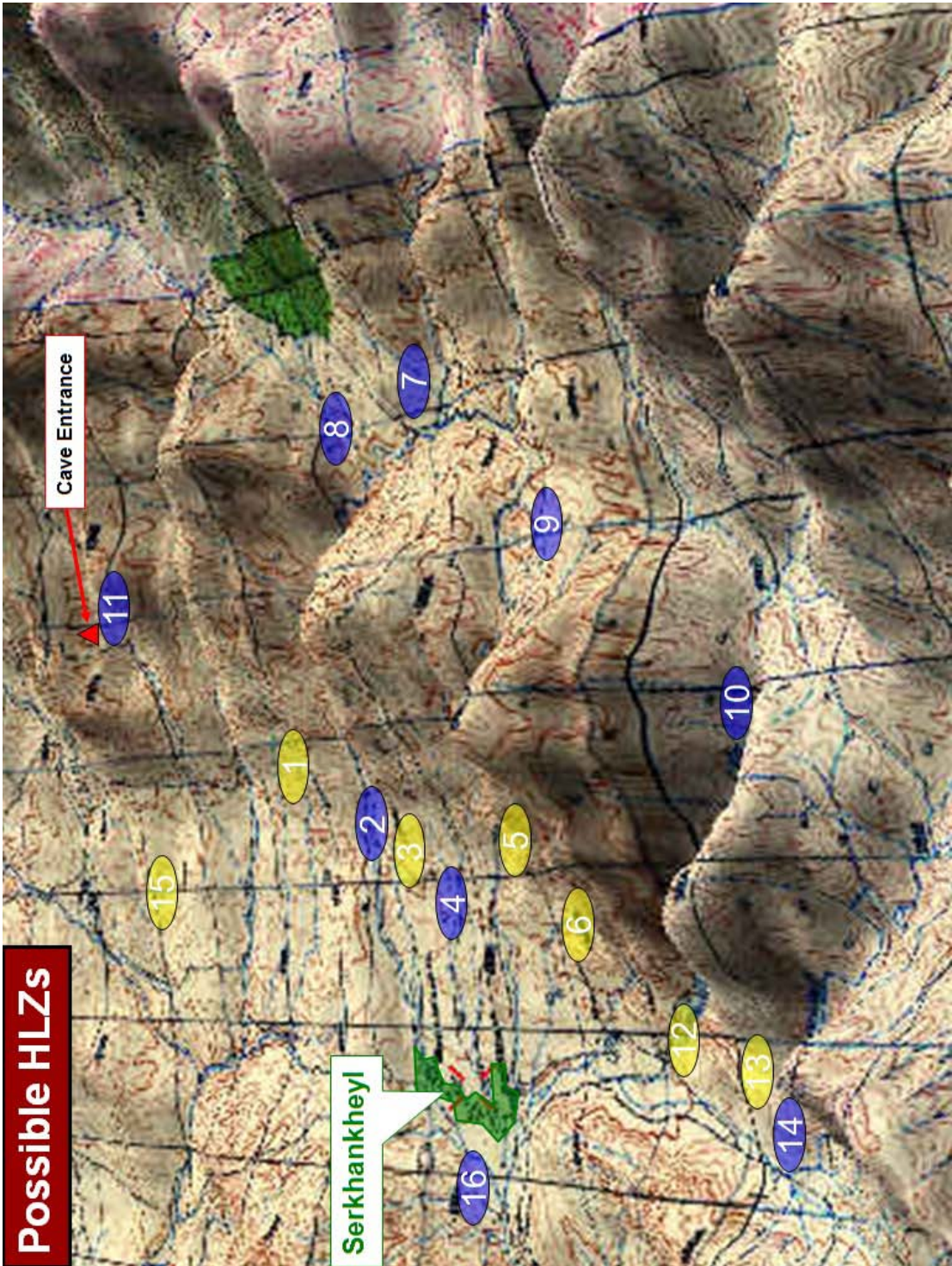
⁸¹John McCool, “Interview with MAJ Roger Crombie,” Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 15 April 2006, 9-10. Hereafter, Crombie.

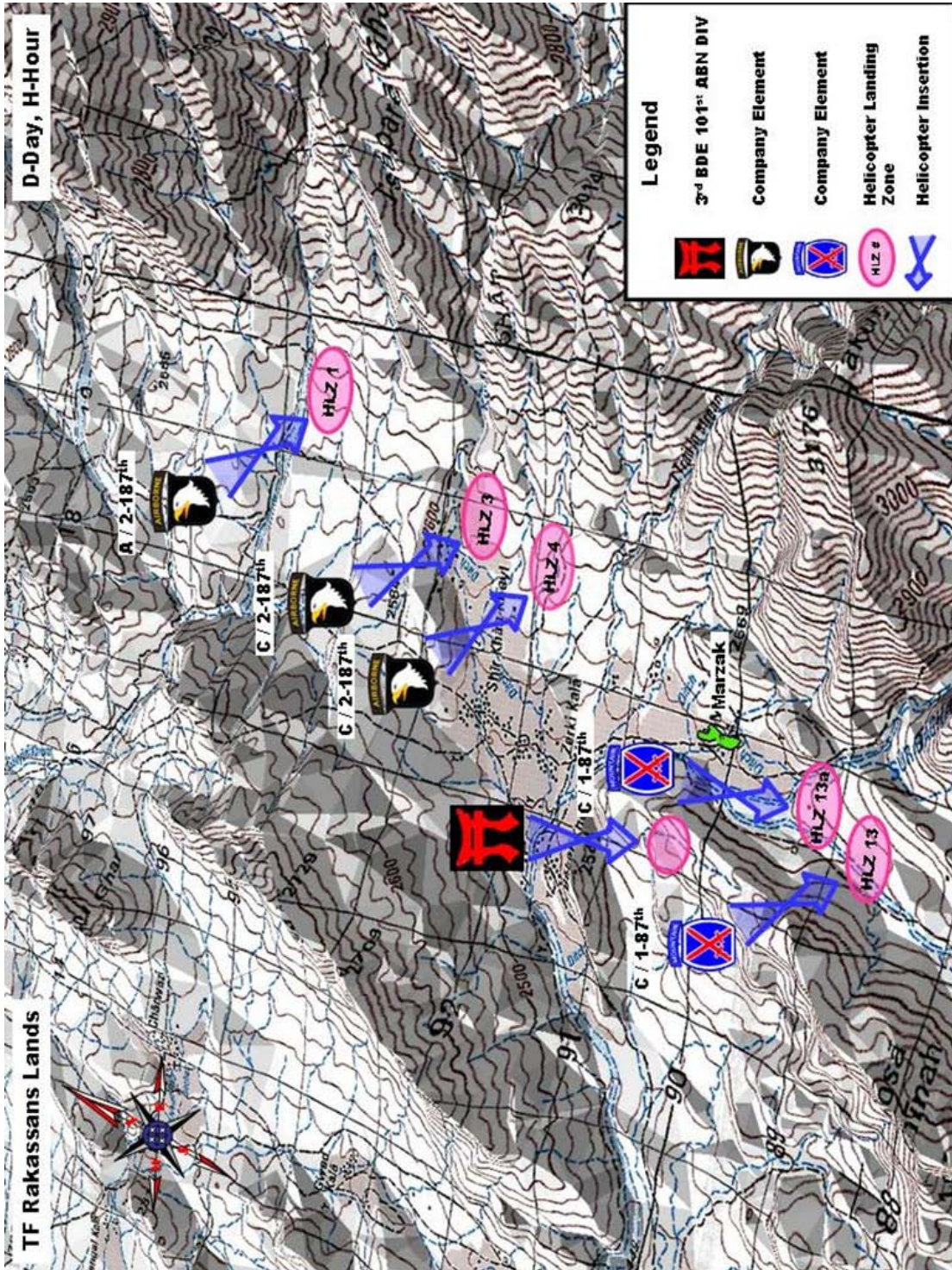
⁸²CW3 Richard K. Chenault, A Company, 3rd Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, 101st Air Assault Division, Kandahar, March 2002. Hall and La Camera.

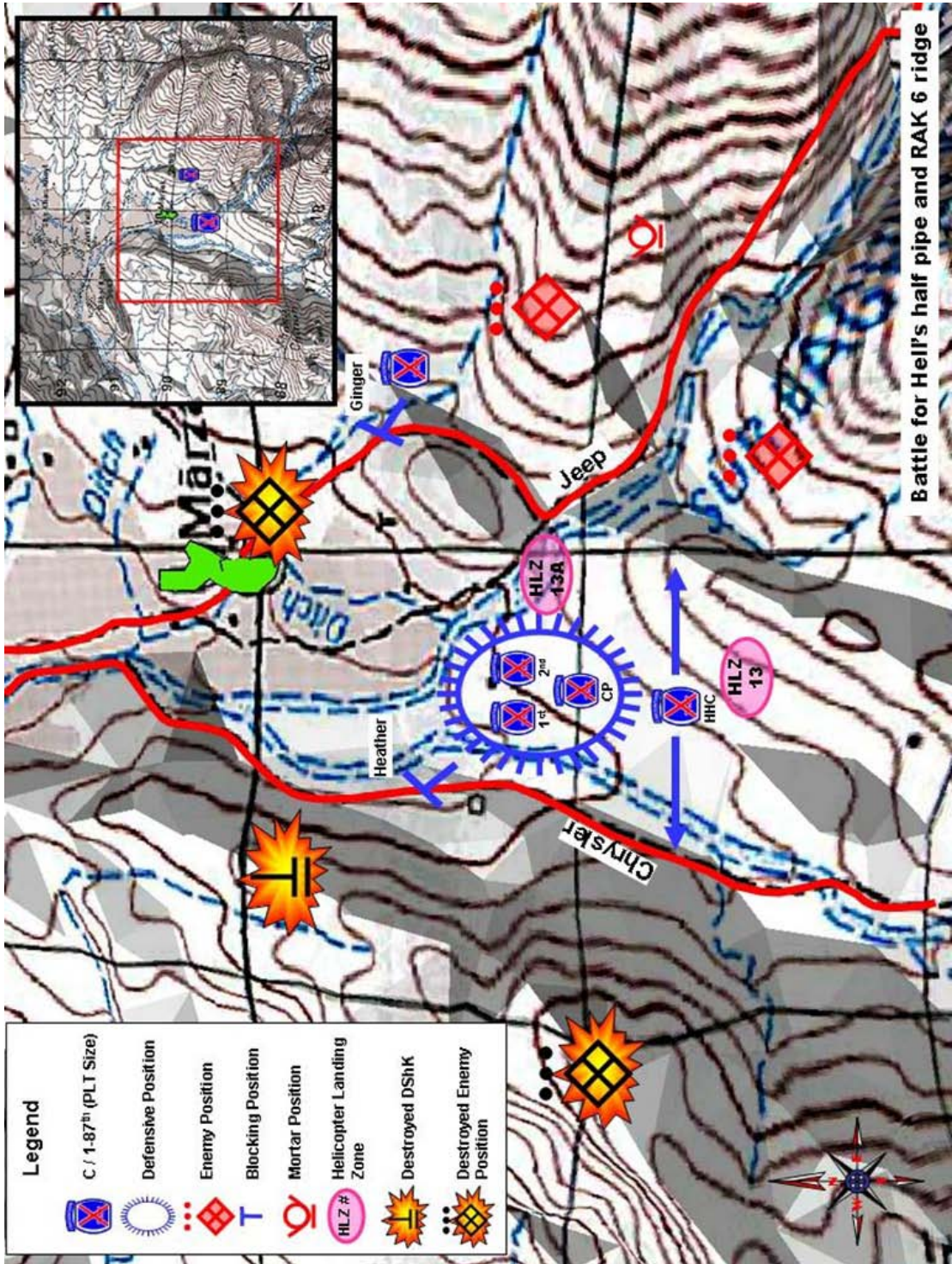
⁸³Interview with CW4 Bob Carr, CW4 Bob Carr, Apache pilot, A/3-101 Aviation Regiment, Kandahar, March 2002.

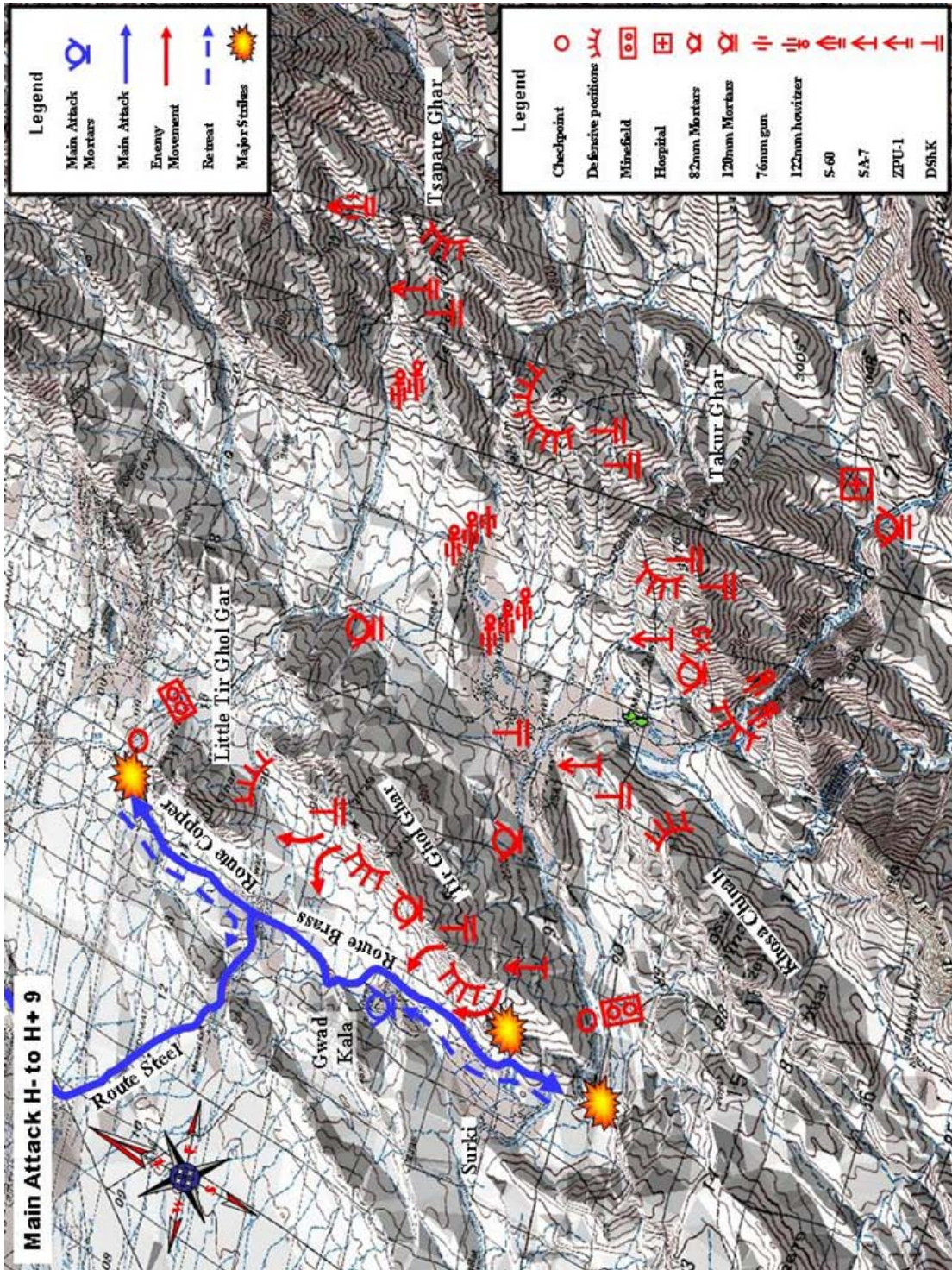
⁸⁴“E-man” Pierre had only recently recovered from having two legs broken when he was broadsided by a Ford 1-50 while he was driving his brand-new motorcycle near Fort Campbell. “E-man” would be badly beat up again in Afghanistan, but not during Anaconda. Marriott.

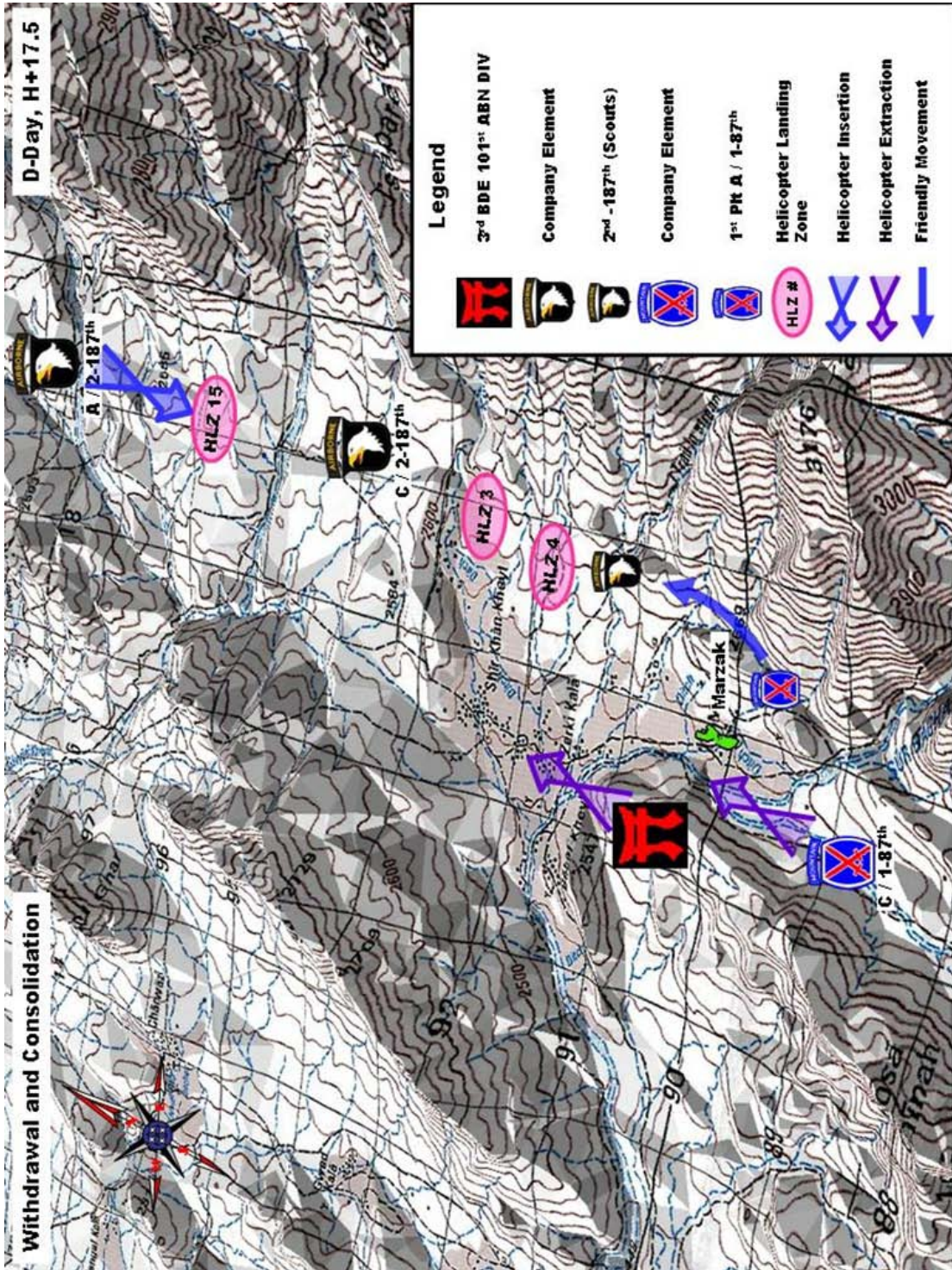
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- ⁸⁵Chenault.
- ⁸⁶Ibid.
- ⁸⁷United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective*, 64.
- ⁸⁸Chenault.
- ⁸⁹Ibid.
- ⁹⁰Ibid.
- ⁹¹Ibid.
- ⁹²Whiting.
- ⁹³Ibid.
- ⁹⁴Billingsley.
- ⁹⁵United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective*, 100.
- ⁹⁶Murray.
- ⁹⁷Ibid.
- ⁹⁸Marriott.
- ⁹⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰Preysler.
- ¹⁰¹Ibid.
- ¹⁰²Preysler, Butler.
- ¹⁰³Crombie, 6-7.
- ¹⁰⁴Ibid., 13.
- ¹⁰⁵Couchot, Reeves, Fortin, Boyd, Vera, McDonald, Alcaraz, Ryland, and Condren.
- ¹⁰⁶Amick, Wurtz, Navarro, Moore, Sarbaugh, and Hoke.
- ¹⁰⁷Amick, Wurtz, Navarro, Moore, Sarbaugh, and Hoke.
- ¹⁰⁸Amick, Wurtz, Navarro, Moore, Sarbaugh, and Hoke.
- ¹⁰⁹Amick, Wurtz, Navarro, Moore, Sarbaugh, Hoke, and Hall.
- ¹¹⁰Hall and Kraft.
- ¹¹¹Amick, Wurtz, Navarro, Moore, Sarbaugh, Hoke, and Hall.
- ¹¹²Murray.
- ¹¹³United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective*, 64-65.
- ¹¹⁴Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Airpower Against Terrorism: America's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2005), 185.
- ¹¹⁵Hall.
- ¹¹⁶Wiercinski.
- ¹¹⁷Crombie, 9.
- ¹¹⁸Lambeth, 185.
- ¹¹⁹SMSGT James Hotaling, CCT 125th STS, Oregon Air National Guard, Hurlburt Field, 26 June 2007.
- ¹²⁰Sean Naylor had excellent access to the Black SOF community and has written extensively about their actions during Operation Anaconda. Since the author lacked his access, the reader is directed to Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005).



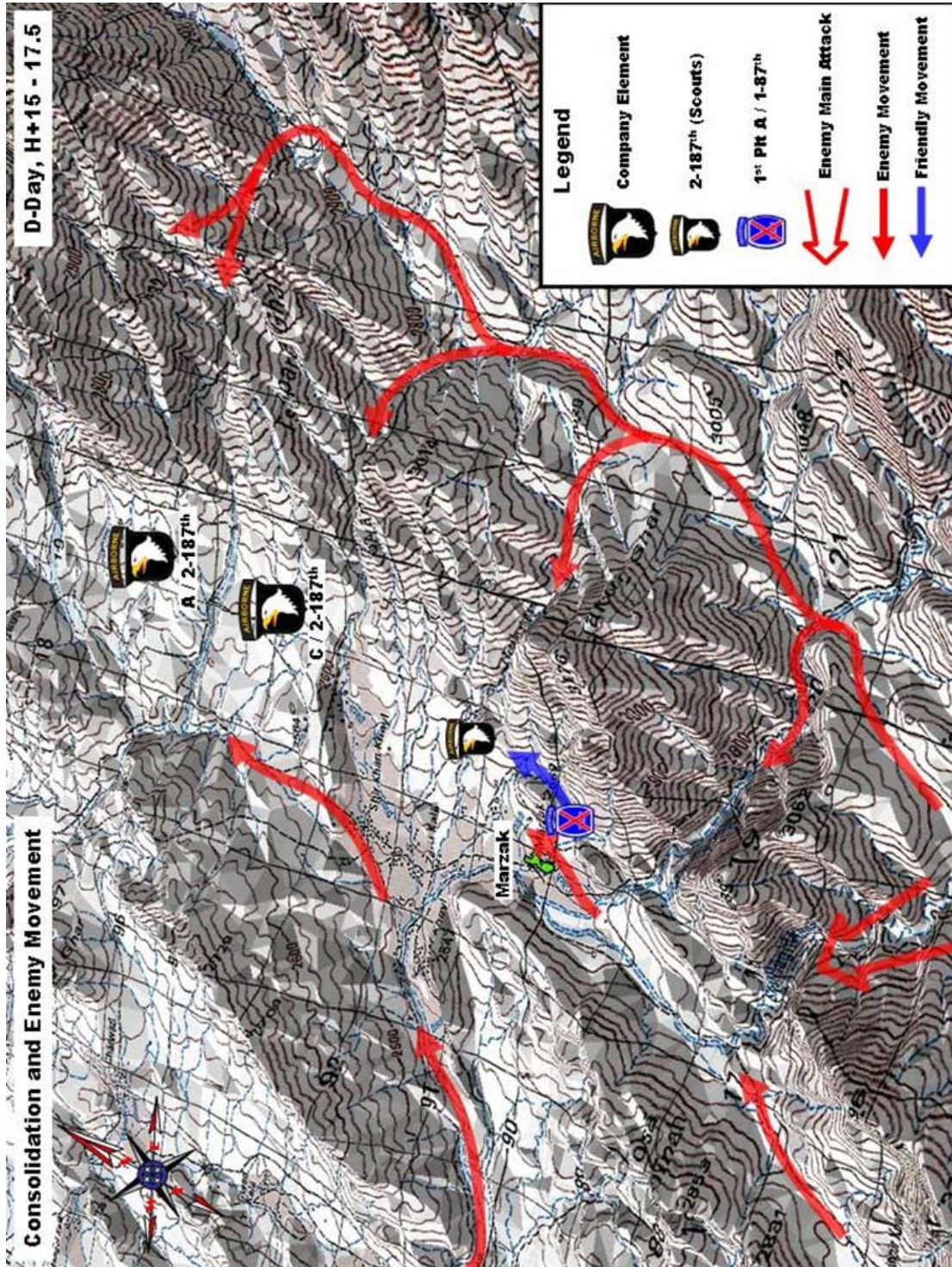








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|--------|--------------------|--|-----|--------------------|--------|
| 28 FEB | SS:1325 ET:1350 | 2hrs MR:1559 | 96% | SR:0155 BT:0131 | 01 MAR |
| 01 MAR | SS:1326 ET:1350 | 3hrs10min MR:1700 | 90% | SR:0154 BT:0129 | 02 MAR |
| 02 MAR | SS:1326 ET:1351 | 4hrs57min MR:1808 | 82% | SR:0153 BT:0128 | 03 MAR |
| 03 MAR | SS:1327 ET:1352 | 5hrs06min MR:1914 | 72% | SR:0152 BT:0127 | 04 MAR |
| 04 MAR | SS:1328 ET:1353 | 6hrs12min MR:2019 | 61% | SR:0151 BT:0126 | 05 MAR |
| 05 MAR | SS:1329 ET:1353 | 7hrs13min MR:2120 | 51% | SR:0149 BT:0125 | 06 MAR |
| 06 MAR | SS:1330 ET:1354 | 8hrs10min MR:2216 | 40% | SR:0148 BT:0123 | 07 MAR |
| 07 MAR | SS:1331 ET:1354 | 9hrs02min MR:2307 | 31% | SR:0147 BT:0122 | 08 MAR |
| 08 MAR | SS:1331 ET:1356 | 9hrs47min MR:2351 | 22% | SR:0145 BT:0121 | 09 MAR |
| 09 MAR | SS:1332 ET:1356 | 10hrs24min MR:0030 | 15% | SR:0144 BT:0120 | 10 MAR |
| 10 MAR | SS:1333 ET:1357 | 11hrs02min MR:0105 | 9% | SR:0143 BT:0118 | 11 MAR |
| 11 MAR | SS:1333 ET:1358 | Total Hrs of Darkness 11hrs34min MR:0136 | 4% | SR:0142 BT:0117 | 12 MAR |
| 12 MAR | SS:1334 ET:1359 | MARCH 2002 LIGHT DATA FOR AFGHANISTAN | | SR:0140 BT:0116 | 13 MAR |
| 13 MAR | SS:1335 ET:1359 | Total Hrs of Darkness | | SR:0139 BT:0114 | 14 MAR |
| 14 MAR | SS:1336 ET:1400 | 3% MS:1540 10hrs12min | | SR:0138 BT:0113 | 15 MAR |
| 15 MAR | SS:1337 ET:1401 | 8% MS:1635 9hrs15min | | SR:0136 BT:0112 | 16 MAR |
| 16 MAR | SS:1338 ET:1402 | 13% MS:1731 8hrs18min | | SR:0135 BT:0110 | 17 MAR |
| 17 MAR | SS:1339 ET:1403 | 21% MS:1830 7hrs18min | | SR:0134 BT:0109 | 18 MAR |
| 18 MAR | SS:1339 ET:1404 | 29% MS:1929 6hrs17min | | SR:0132 BT:0108 | 19 MAR |
| 19 MAR | SS:1340 ET:1405 | 39% MS:2029 5hrs16min | | SR:0131 BT:0106 | 20 MAR |
| 20 MAR | SS:1341 ET:1405 | 49% MS:2128 4hrs16min | | SR:0130 BT:0105 | 21 MAR |
| 21 MAR | SS:1341 ET:1406 | 60% MS:2223 3hrs18min | | SR:0128 BT:0104 | 22 MAR |
| 22 MAR | SS:1342 ET:1407 | 70% MS:2314 2hrs27min | | SR:0127 BT:0102 | 23 MAR |
| 23 MAR | SS:1343 ET:1408 | 80% MS:2359 1hrs41min | | SR:0126 BT:0101 | 24 MAR |
| 24 MAR | SS:1344 ET:1408 | 89% MS:0040 1hrs01min | | SR:0125 BT:0100 | 25 MAR |
| 25 MAR | SS:1344 ET:1409 | 95% MS:0118 | | SR:0123 BT:0058 | 26 MAR |
| 26 MAR | SS:1345 ET:1410 | 99% MS:0154 | | SR:0122 BT:0057 | 27 MAR |
| 27 MAR | SS:1346 ET:1411 | 100% MS:0230 | | SR:0121 BT:0056 | 28 MAR |
| 28 MAR | SS:1346 ET:1411 | MR:1546 | | SR:0119 BT:0054 | 29 MAR |
| 29 MAR | SS:1346 ET:1411 | 98% | | SR:0118 BT:0053 | 30 MAR |



CHAPTER 7.

ANACONDA, DAY 2 AND DAY 3

There comes a moment in every battle against a stubborn enemy when the result hangs in the balance. Then the general, however skillful and far-sighted he may have been, must hand over to his soldiers, to the men in the ranks and to their regimental officers, and leave them to complete what he has begun. The issue then rests with them, on their courage, their hardihood, their refusal to be beaten either by the cruel hazards of nature or by the fierce strength of their enemy.¹

— Field Marshal Viscount William Slim

Sunday, 3 March 2002, D+1, Midnight to 0400 **(The Command Group, TF Rakkasans)**

Colonel Frank Wiercinski, LTC Ron Corkran (the commander of the 1st Battalion-187th Air Assault Regiment) and Major Mike Gibler (the brigade S3) huddled in the back of the CH-47 as it flew back toward Bagram. They had to shout to be heard over the noise of the rotor blades. They were planning their return to the valley to continue the fight. The three refined the basic plan of maneuver during the hour-long flight. When the aircraft landed, Colonel Wiercinski went to see MG Hagenbeck while LTC Corkran went to his battalion to start battalion-level planning and Major Gibler went to brigade headquarters to check in with brigade planning.

MG Hagenbeck was anxious and happy to see Frank. Frank brought along LTC Paul La Camera, the Battalion Commander of the 1st of the 87th. Brigadier General Harrell, the commander of Task Force Bowie and the LNO from TF 11 were already there. Despite being totally off plan, the day had gone fairly well, all things considered. None of the Task Force Summit soldiers were dead although a Task Force Dagger soldier had paid the ultimate price. Most of the wounded should be

able to return to duty. Al Qaeda had been hurt. The Apaches, the ground forces, and the air forces had all pounded on the enemy. The remaining US ground force was moving to a position from which it could consolidate and prepare to retake the valley.

“Frank, we are going back in there.”

“Sir, we are all ready to go. Ron’s been in there with me and knows the terrain. We can do this. Chip’s got a good consolidated position up here in the north. The Special Forces are reorganizing the Afghans to come back in the fight.”

“Frank, you have the main effort now.”²

This was no surprise to Colonel Wiercinski. He had been the main effort since the enemy artillery broke Commander Zia’s advance. He would retake the valley and the mountains. He did not have forces in the south now, but the air force could pound Ginger Pass, Heather Pass and Takur Ghar. The enemy was reinforcing this area--Predator television cameras showed them coming into the valley. “We continue to pound that area heavily until we can get our troops back down there. Here’s how we retake the valley. We use Chip’s position at HLZ 15 as our base. We bring in Ron’s battalion and then he and Chip’s battalion leap frog from one pass to the next. It’s almost like World War II island hopping in the South Pacific--only we are moving from gap to gap. After Paul has a chance to reorganize his battalion, we’ll bring it into HLZ 15 and have three battalions leap frogging each other to seize the valley. We’ll build up our mortars and maneuver their fires from one kill box to the next. The Afghan and coalition forces can maintain a block in the south so that nothing can get through there.”³

D+1, 0330-0830 (Task Force 64)

SMSGT James Hotaling had been on the radio trying to raise the Mi-8 helicopter that was finally going to deliver them to their original insertion point overlooking Hell's Half Pipe. Eventually he raised the helicopter crew and got the infrared beacons and chemlights out to mark the pick-up position. There was no landing zone on their mountain and when the helicopter had originally dropped them off, it had to back up to the slope. Now they had to reverse the process and trundle a lot of heavy gear onto a Russian-made helicopter that was hovering within feet of blade strike against the mountain. The six-man team had gone in with a lot of gear. The plan had been to go in above the snow line and not move. In addition to the radios and weapons, the team had tents, cold weather gear, sleeping bags and over a week's water and rations. They struggled to throw this gear up onto the oscillating helicopter. Finally all the gear and the team were on board and the helicopter lifted into the cold night air.⁴

The helicopter flew a short distance and let the team and all its gear off. Then it flew away. SMSGT Hotaling started reassembling his communications gear while an Australian set up the GPS (Global Positioning System). The Australian let out a yelp. Once again, the helicopter had put them down in the wrong position! They were now five kilometers west of where they needed to be. James finished assembling his radio and tried to raise the helicopter, but it did not respond. James finally raised his headquarters, but they were unable to get the helicopter back--and dawn was only two hours away. The Mi-8 was not going to fly during the day. The

team was on top of a very steep mountain with a lot of gear. Obviously, if the team was going to get into position to help, they were going to have to get themselves there. The time to move was now, since darkness would conceal their movement. But there were steep drop offs everywhere and they had far too much gear. It was too dangerous to move at night. So they hunkered down and waited for the dawn. Even with their warm clothing, it was bitterly cold. Several of the Australians were from Queensland and had never seen snow before. The novelty had long since worn off.⁵

Dawn finally broke and the team dug a pit and began burying food, water, and cold weather gear. The rucksacks went from 140 to 120 pounds lighter, but still far too heavy. James was on the radio talking to the circling AWACS aircraft. Since they were going to be moving through enemy territory during the day, James requested coverage by a Predator unmanned reconnaissance aircraft. They got it! A national reconnaissance asset was going to watch over a six-man team. James was so involved with communications that he neglected to peel off his cold weather gear before the team started down the mountain. 120 pounds of rucksack dramatically shifts one's center of gravity when making a descent. It was a nasty descent and the team searched for goat trails all the way down. When they finally got to the bottom of the mountain, James was able to strip off his sweat-soaked cold weather gear. The team started moving along a creek bed with the low-flying, slow-flying Predator flying point! Predator was checking out what was around the bend, under the rock cropping, staying just far enough ahead of the slow-moving team to provide warning.

The altitude and weight were killing. The team would walk for 15 minutes, rest for five and then rise to walk again.⁶

D+1, 0001-0630 (Al Jabar, Kuwait)

Colonel Matt Neuenswander had been sitting in on the debriefings of his F-16 pilots after their return from the Shar-i Kot Valley. It was a three-and-a-half hour flight from Kuwait (skirting Iran), followed by their mission over the valley and an equally long flight back. There were several in-flight refueling stops both ways. His pilots were tired and frustrated. The Shar-i Kot Valley was a very small place and no one was effectively controlling the air missions into it. Clearly, it was not an AWACS mission although AWACS was trying to do so. AWACS could not talk to the ground forces and did not have a clear picture of the ground situation. The AOC at Bagram could not talk with the ETACs and Combat Controllers in the valley and were not de-conflicting targets with the special operations personnel and conventional forces. The special operations reconnaissance teams had drawn large no-fire circles around the areas their three-five man teams were in. Some of these circles occupied six square kilometers of area and restricted the area that maneuver forces and aviation could fire in.

Who was in charge of directing the fires of all the incoming aircraft? With the retirement of the EC-130E Airborne Command and Control Center (ABCCC) aircraft, the USAF no longer had this capability. Who was scheduling in the aircraft? There were times when aircraft were stacked up for hours waiting to deliver their ordnance. Many of them never got to drop, because they were low on fuel by the

time their turn in the queue came about. Other times, there were no aircraft available for any missions for hours. The USAF base at Al-Udeid, Qatar was providing tanker aircraft which were doing a great job in keeping the aircraft aloft, but these aircraft could not circle forever.

Who had priority of fires? Everyone in the valley seemed to be requesting fires. The special operations reconnaissance teams had the advantage of viewing the valley from a height, but quite often their calls for fire were ignored. Troops under fire were supposed to have priority. Lots of troops were under fire. Who should get priority? The battle in the south had ended up getting the bulk of the fire support, but many of the ETACs in the south continually requested fire missions on identified enemy, but their requests were never serviced. Many enemy lived simply because the ETAC or Combat Controller could see them but could not get the aircraft to attack them.

Clearly, there was a problem. Spectre had the situation in hand until the sun rose, but then it could be a repeat of yesterday's air control snarl. They needed a solution. One solution was to get something in the area that could communicate with the air, the ground, and the AOC in Bagram. That something was JSTARS. The EC-8 JSTARS is a Boeing 707 with an amazing load of sensors that are great in a maneuver war but had little applicability for the present fight. What the JSTARS also has is communications capability. It can talk to other aircraft, ground forces, and headquarters. The JSTARS was fueled, the crew was briefed, and their passengers came on board: USAF fighter pilots, special forces soldiers, and conventional

soldiers. Finally, they had a platform that could help sort out the airspace control tangle over the valley--and the personnel with the right backgrounds to make it happen. It was not an EC-130E, but it was a lot better than trying to do it with AWACS.⁷

D+1, 0545-0930 (The North)

It was bone-aching cold but it was time to go. The sun would be up soon and LTC Chip Preysler needed to consolidate his battalion at HLZ 15. Radio checks confirmed that everyone was ready to move. Chip had not gotten any sleep and the inside of his eyelids felt scratchy and gritty. Chip decided not to wait to consolidate all the elements of Charlie Company and the small group from the 10th Mountain Division before moving to HLZ 15. They would consolidate inside A Company's perimeter as they arrived at HLZ 15. His troops were moving well before the horizon began to lighten.⁸ At HLZ 15, A Company did a stand-to before dawn, fully expecting a dawn attack. It did not come. There was no sign of the enemy, as Chip and his headquarters plus part of C Company moved into the A Company perimeter. SFC Kelly Jack Luman's Third Platoon from Charlie Company acted as the rear guard and was still outside the perimeter. The small group from the 10th Mountain Division trailed SFC Luman's platoon by some 400 meters. Chip met with Captain Kevin Butler, his A Company Commander, and told him that the 1st-187th would be landing at HLZ 15, so mark touch-down points for the helicopters and expand the defensive perimeter so that the battalion could land inside the perimeter and get sorted out before it launched south into the valley.⁹

1LT Jamie Gadoury, the A Company executive officer, moved out with Sergeant Delazarro's heavy fire team (two SAW gunners and two M203 gunners) to mark four touch-down points. They staked out a VS-17 panel at each one. They needed to leave about 100 meters between birds. They heard some shouting, but could not determine the origin.¹⁰

The sun had been up for over two hours. It was now 0850. LTC Preysler had moved his TAC to some high ground, sat down in the sun and pulled out an MRE Jambalaya entree. He had the plastic envelope precariously balanced on his knee as he prepared to dig into his first meal in how long?

An RPG round landed near 1LT Gadoury. Then another. Small arms fire and DShK fire began to stitch across the open ground. The lieutenant, his RTO, and the fire team began to bound back over the 400 meters to the perimeter. The ground was open and exposed and so it was not the regulation five-meter bounds. They were long bounds moving as quickly as possible in the lung-searing altitude. The group slowed down to a walk, despite the bullets clipping at their feet. They could see some of the enemy in a saddle some two kilometers off. The enemy fire was long-range, but there was a lot of it. The enemy was well out of the range of the soldiers armed with the M4 carbine, M16 rifle, and M203 grenade launcher. The enemy seemed to be holding at the limits of the range of the M240 machine guns and SAWs. The only thing available to answer the enemy fire was the 60mm mortar section that belonged to A Company.¹¹

The M224 60mm mortar has a minimum range of 70 meters and a maximum range of 3,500 meters. Its HE round has a bursting radius of 15 meters. SSG Meyer was shifting his base mortar when a mortar or recoilless rifle round hit near them. They picked up their mortar and moved it back toward the other mortar. When they finally got back, the other mortar had been in action for 10-15 minutes. It turned into a heavy day for the mortars. They were fighting in 360 degrees. The mortar section was going through ammunition, but there was no way of getting supplied. The HLZs were the contested areas. The mortars took out an enemy mortar position and suppressed the enemy that was firing at 1Lt Gadoury's group. Finally, as they were running low on mortar ammunition, friendly close air support aircraft flew over the valley.¹²

The enemy mortar men were not staying in fixed positions. They had a lot of 82mm mortars and their mortar crews were quite proficient carrying a mortar to a new position, setting it up, and then firing the mortar on target without having to establish a bracket. When the mortar round was fired, the Rakkasans would yell "shot out" and everyone would hit the dirt. A lot of the mortar rounds were duds. Two mortar rounds landed right next to Charlie Company soldiers, but fortunately did not explode.¹³

The initial sudden burst of enemy fire caught SFC Luman's 3rd Platoon from Charlie Company in the open. They were moving toward the A Company perimeter and crossing a creek bed when mortars started firing on them from the Whale and south of HLZ 15. The enemy mortars had the area registered and mortar rounds were

walking up and down the creek bed. Captain Roger Crombie's truncated force from the 10th Mountain Division (part of 1st Platoon from A Company, 1st-87th and part of the battalion Scout Platoon--in all two-and-a-half squads) were trailing SFC Luman's platoon when the rounds began to hit them. Soon enemy RPG fire and DShK fire began crisscrossing both their positions. The mortars chased SFC Luman's men from the creek bed to a wadi some 200 meters away. The Rakkasans dropped their packs, moved to the wadi, and established a firing line. The trailing 10th Mountain soldiers also dropped their packs and tried to hurry toward the perimeter, but enemy fire was dancing around them. An RPG round skipped down the creek bed near SFC Luman's platoon. The RPG round glanced off a rock and hit Sergeant Earl Beaudry Jr. in the back. The blast tore the back plate out of his armored vest and peppered his extremities and backside with fragments. Eight men from the First Platoon moved forward to carry him out. It would take nearly ten hours before they could get him evacuated due to enemy fire. SFC Luman's Third Platoon was pinned down by fire and would remain outside the perimeter until nightfall. Captain Crombie's force was also pinned down and would also spend the day outside the perimeter.¹⁴

LTC Chip Preysler's jambalaya MRE remained uneaten. He was on the radio trying to get fire on the enemy and help from above. He reflected "I am the first American battalion commander since Vietnam to be fighting an enemy whose has me outgunned and outnumbered." It was a historically interesting thought, but Chip had immediate problems to deal with.¹⁵

D+1, (Bagram)

LTC Pete Blaber headed a special operations organization at Bagram called the Advanced Force Operations (AFO). AFO was drawn from the US Army Delta Force and had the mission of tracking down Al Qaeda leadership. Pete was responsible for the study, planning, and orders that eventually infiltrated three reconnaissance teams onto the mountains surrounding the Shar-i Kot Valley. They arrived on 27 February in advance of the attack. Up to this point in the fight, the two US Army Special Forces deep reconnaissance teams and one US Navy SEAL team had been doing a great job in locating the enemy positions and calling air strikes in on top of them. The SEAL team had even destroyed the DShK position on RAK 6 Ridge just prior to the arrival of the command group. But Americans have been raised with the idea of fairness--everyone should get a turn. BG Gregory Trebon, a USAF special operations officer, was the deputy commander of Task Force 11. He wanted to pull out the teams which had been there and let someone else have a turn. In this case, it was the turn of Navy SEAL teams located on Misrah Island in the Persian Gulf. There is an argument to be made that it is a good idea to get combat experience to as many troops as possible, but the reconnaissance teams were in place, doing a vital job for which they were well-trained, and it was a critical point in the fight. It was the wrong time to pull them out. LTC Blaber told BG Trebon that he recommended that the SEAL teams be given time to study the terrain and do the same preparation that the teams on site had done before insertion. BG Trebon wanted the teams in fast and ordered that they go in that night. The SEAL teams had flown in

from Misrah Island to Bagram. Unknown to LTC Blaber, the SEAL commander established a separate communications link with Task Force 11, effectively setting up an independent command called Task Force Blue and cutting AFO out of the picture. This act prevented the effective coordination of the special operations effort in the valley. Two of the three experienced teams would be replaced by two SEAL teams that were trained for assault, not reconnaissance and the AFO would be unable to communicate with the new teams.¹⁶

D+1, 0930-1230 (Gardez and South)

LTC Chris Haas had spent the night helping Commander Zia reconstitute his shattered force. There were dead to bury, wounded to visit at the hospital, equipment to repair and account for, and a battle to fight. Chris had lost a great deal of face by the “no-show” of the promised air support the day before. But Chris was not about to give up on the fight. They were going back in that night. Zia split his force. Some stayed behind to train with the ODA while the remainder, including the mortars, would again board trucks and head back to the valley. ODA 594 and 372 would accompany Zia’s forces. Chris had determined that the best way to work with Commander Zia was to encourage him to fight “Afghan-style” and not as a conventional force. Zia’s force would establish a loose screen of check points and mortar firing positions on Little Tir Gol Ghar, sealing the northwestern entrance into the valley. Commander Zia’s force would also establish some checkpoints on the route to Zurmat that would reduce the flow of combatants into the valley from the

Zurmat region. These checkpoints captured most of the prisoners that would be taken during the fight.¹⁷

Gardez had a welcome visitor that morning. Colonel Mulholland, the Task Force Dagger (JSOTF North) Commander, flew out to Gardez to grieve with his fellow soldiers over the loss of CW2 Stanley Harriman. He also brought the news that the wounded members of ODA 372 were going to be alright. Colonel Mulholland was accompanied by BG Mike Jones, the military liaison to the CIA who was also MG Hagenbeck's deputy and the CIA Station Chief from Kabul. They flew back to Bagram together.¹⁸

D+1, 0630-1630 (The Skies Above)

JSTARS was able to get a better grip on the air control problem. The fighter pilots, special forces officers, and ground force officers on board were able to communicate with their own and start de-conflicting the calls for fire. They were also able to talk to the AOC in Bagram and get it on line and in the fight. Their job was easier now that there were fewer troops in contact and that they were mostly in the same area. More planes were being brought into the area than on D-Day, and in a more coherent fashion. All of the F-16s from al-Jabar that normally flew in support of Operation Southern Watch over Iraq were diverted to Afghanistan. One of the problems was that the surge of activity was disrupting the crew-rest schedule. On D-Day, the F-16s expected to flatten the Whale in support of Commander Zia's attack and were in the air when the heavy strike was cancelled out of concern for rules of engagement. The crews returned from a twelve hour mission only to find that they

were supposed to have been sleeping for the last six hours so that they could go out again. D+1 was an all-out effort for the aviation support but they were now being scheduled in over time to provide better coverage.¹⁹

D+1, 0930-1530 (The North)

There was an enemy 82mm mortar crew on the Whale. The ETAC directed an air-strike on it. It seemed to disappear in a cloud of smoke. While the soldiers were cheering the results, the three enemy mortar men emerged from the smoke and began gesturing at and taunting the soldiers. They had a cave or bunker to jump into whenever aircraft threatened. Thus began a six-hour mortar duel. The enemy became more abusive in his taunting and one of them had his own end-zone dance. Whenever the enemy heard a 60mm mortar round fire out of the tube, they would run for shelter. Finally, the ETAC called a fire mission on the position and as the aircraft hit the target, the 60mm mortar fired. The air strike masked the sound of the mortar. As usual, the enemy gunners danced back into view through the smoke--only to be splattered by the 60mm mortar round.²⁰

The enemy spent much of the day firing mortars at the under-gunned 2nd-187th. The soldiers were constantly moving to escape the mortar rounds, and frequent movement at this altitude was exhausting. Fortunately, there were no friendly casualties despite all this mortar firing. The enemy had stored the mortar ammunition improperly and the mortar ammunition was old. The mortar fire was accurate, but the mortar round detonations were of a lower order of magnitude and

effectiveness than would be expected from decent ammunition.²¹ Furthermore, a large number of the mortar rounds were duds.²²

D+1, 1300-1530 (Bagram and the North)

LTC Ron Corkran watched his force loading onto the waiting Chinooks at Bagram airbase. They troops were carrying light rucksacks--45 to 50 pounds, two or three meals, and six-eight quarts of water. This should last for a 48-72-hour mission. There were two serials in this first lift--each serial had three Chinooks. Charlie Company, 1st-187th, 101st Air Assault Division was the first serial. The 2nd Squad, of the 1st Platoon of Charlie Company, 326th Engineers was also with them. Bravo Company, 1st-87th, 10th Mountain Division was the second serial. The rest of Ron's battalion was still in Pakistan and Bravo Company had been attached to his battalion before the start of the operation. At 1339, the helicopters rose into the air en route to HLZ 15. The noise of the blades drowned out most attempts at conversation and the troops turned to their private thoughts or feigned sleep. At 1415, the forces at HLZ 15 reported that they were under mortar and small arms fire. MG Hagenbeck ordered the Chinooks to continue toward the landing zone but to stop short and fly a ten-minute "doughnut" nearby to see if there was any change in the situation. At 1420, he ordered the lift to land at FARP Texaco and wait for a call to conduct the insertion. LTC Corkran requested that his force be allowed to land at HLZ 3 and HLZ 5 instead. Meanwhile, the Chinooks continued toward the HLZs. At 1425, MG Hagenbeck denied the request for a change in HLZs and aborted the mission. Communications were problematic and everything was relayed through Task Force Talon. Serial Two

received the order. Serial One did not.²³ As the Chinooks of Serial One were flying over HLZ 15, the door gunner turned to CSM Jimmy Taylor and said: “The HLZ is under fire. What do you want us to do?”

“We’ve got to land somewhere. Put us down here.”²⁴

The serial landed and 124 soldiers moved off the aircraft. The battalion command group was distributed among all the aircraft so that a downed aircraft would not knock out all the leadership. Major Paul Sarat, the battalion S3, and CSM Taylor were now the battalion command group. Colonel John Mulholland, the Special Forces Task Force Dagger Commander was also a passenger on Serial 1. The aircraft had set down facing differently than planned, so after a quick on-ground orientation, CSM Taylor and Major Sarat moved the troops off the HLZ and into more sheltered positions. Charlie Company formed a perimeter while CSM Taylor and Major Sarat went to find LTC Chip Preysler and CSM Mark Nelson. After coordination, they returned to Charlie Company to wait the arrival of the rest of the battalion.²⁵

At 1515, Serial Two landed back at Bagram. LTC Cochran and his force disembarked. The troops were keyed-up and ready. When would they get into the valley?²⁶

D+1, 1500 (Task Force 64)

It took the six-man team all day to travel the five kilometers. Fortunately, Predator continued to fly point. Finally they had to leave the stream bed, turn north and head straight up a mountain so they would have a good view into the Shar-i Kot

Valley. There was snow on the mountain--at some places it was waist deep. SMSGT James Hotaling was still wearing too much warm weather gear and was suffering from heat exhaustion. Two hundred yards from the peak, his body quit. He signaled his team leader. In broad daylight, in the middle of enemy territory, he stopped, stripped down to his long johns and stuffed the rest of his clothing into his pack. They climbed the last 200 meters. The Shar-i Kot Valley spread below them. This was a great place for reconnaissance. It was almost exactly where they were originally supposed to be inserted and was where Task Force Rakkasans had established its TAC on D-Day. There were no air strikes to call in, so the team set up camp, posted two men on security, and went to sleep. They had not slept in two days and were exhausted.²⁷

D+1, 1830 (The North)

It was dark and SFC Luman's platoon rejoined Charlie Company. Captain Crombie's force from the 10th Mountain Division also pulled closer to the perimeter. The troops could now rest when the force went to 50 percent alert. The troops had gone through their rations and water. The troops did not have any water purification tablets, but they started drinking the water in the creeks anyway. It was snow melt and no one seemed to suffer. They found a small crab and small fishes in the water pools--in the middle of the desert. When Spectre came back on station, the troops could really rest. The enemy did not want to fight at night and Spectre confirmed this tendency.²⁸

D+1, 1830-2400 (Al Jabar, Kuwait)

It was about 2100 hours Kuwait time and Colonel Matt “El Cid” Neuenswander had put in a long day. He headed for his hooch to get some sleep. He would be back on duty in five or six hours. The telephone rang. “Get back to the operations center. You are taking the A-10s down range.”²⁹

The three favorite attack aircraft of the American infantryman are the US Army Apache helicopter gunship, the USAF night-flying Spectre gunship and the USAF close air support A-10 Warthog. The A-10 is as ugly as its name, but it is armored, can fly low and slow, and stay on station for long periods of time. Further, it can fly off of dirt strips and carry an incredible amount of ordnance, which it can deliver accurately. In short, the A-10 is everything that an F-16 is not. Unfortunately, the A-10 does not fly for long distances and has problems with high altitudes. The A-10 pilots at Al Jabar had been sitting this fight out while the F-16 pilots were putting in overtime.

“El Cid” was qualified to fly both the F-16 and the A-10, but he was currently rated for the A-10 and it was his favorite. As Deputy Commander of the 332nd Expeditionary Group, the 12 A-10s in the group were his. He walked back into the operations center. “Where are we going?”

“We don’t know yet. Here are the requirements. We want your A-10s, supported by tanker planes, to give us five to six hours over the battle area. We want the A-10 to serve as a FAC-A [airborne forward air controller] to bridge the command and control problem that we are struggling with.”³⁰

That was it? De-conflict the airspace and assist controlling air strikes when the A-10 was the premier (and only) close air support aircraft in the USAF! Still, it got them into the fight. Matt put all the A-10 crews on crew rest except for four A-10 pilots who would help him with the planning. It was going to be an all-nighter. How many A-10s would they be able to launch the next day? It really was a question of how many tanker aircraft were in support. Where would they land? There were five possible airfields. Bagram and Kandahar were tempting, but their runways were still shorter than 9,000 serviceable feet. With a full combat load and a full tank of fuel, the A-10 needed a longer runway to launch at that altitude. In the end, there was only one viable candidate, Jacobabad, Pakistan. That would require a major diplomatic effort to get permission and clearance. When the first two A-10 pilots (Captain Scott “Soup” Campbell and LTC Dahl “K-9” Kostelnik) took off at 0900 Kuwait time on D+2, they knew they were going to fly to the Shar-i Kot Valley. They just were not sure of where they were going to land--Seib, Oman, Al-Udied, Qatar or Jacobabad, Pakistan.³¹ Since Iran would not permit overflying their airspace, aircraft had to fly around Iran. This meant that the aircraft flew from Kuwait, down the length of the Persian Gulf, went east over Arabian Sea and then went north over Pakistan and then into Afghanistan to the valley. It was a three-hour flight one way for an F-16. It was a five-hour flight one-way for a lower, slower A-10. It was also three refueling stops with an aerial tanker enroute.³²

Before Captain Campbell went on crew rest, he requested a change on the weapons load that the A-10s were carrying. The normal load for flying Operation

Southern Watch was CBU-87 cluster bombs, AGM-65 air-to-ground Maverick missiles, AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, an electronic countermeasure (ECM) pod, a chaff pod and the depleted uranium armor-piercing rounds for the A-10's 30mm Gatling gun. This load was clearly designed for an enemy with armored vehicles, aircraft and infantry. Unfortunately, the CBU has a high dud rate and should not be used around friendly forces. Captain Campbell changed the standard load to 30mm high-explosive incendiary (HEI) rounds, white phosphorus rockets, LUU-19 infrared flares, Maverick missiles, and Mark-82 500-pound bombs fused for air burst.³³

D+1, 2200-2300 (Bagram and the North)

Two Chinooks warmed up on the Bagram airfield as soldiers of the 2nd-187th Rakkasans and engineers from C Company, 326th Engineer Battalion boarded. The TF Rakkasans tactical command post was mixed in with the other soldiers. Colonel Frank Wiercinski, the Commander; CSM Iuniasolua Savusa, the Brigade Sergeant Major; Major Mike Gibler, the Operations Officer; Major Dennis Yates, the Fire Coordination Officer; USAF Captain Paul "Dino" Murray, the Senior Forward Air Controller and Air Liaison Officer; and Captain Eric Haupt, the Intelligence Officer were in this group. They also brought along some Australian communications personnel with some special radios that would be able to talk to Task Force 64 that was located to the south of the valley. It was an uneventful flight that lasted for an hour. When they landed, the troops were met by guides from their units. The Rakkasans forward headquarters walked to Chip Pressler's command post. The

Rakkasans and the 2nd-187th command posts set up side-by-side while Chip briefed the current situation.³⁴

D+1, 1400--D+2 0200 (Gardez)

Mako 30 consisted of six navy SEALs and one air force combat controller. They were now in Chris Haas' compound in Gardez. They had traveled from Misrah Island to Bagram and arrived unannounced with Mako 21--a similar team. BG Trebon wanted them in the fight and LTC Pete Blaber's AFO teams out of the fight. The men of Mako 21 and 30 had precious little time to learn about the target area that they were going into. Chris had helped them out as much as he was able, but he was fully engaged in keeping a most-upset Commander Zia in the fight. LTC Pete Blaber, the AFO commander was there and worked with them on known enemy locations.³⁵ Mako 30 was going to the top of Takur Ghar, 3,176 meters (10,420 feet) above sea level. This was the area that had housed the mortar crews that had played havoc with Charlie Company, 1st of the 87th as it sought shelter in Hell's Half Pipe. The SEALs listened, but then stayed out of Chris Haas's and LTC Blaber's way. They erected their own tent and established radio communications within TF Blue--but not with the special operations forces already working in the area. Mako 30's plan was to fly in at night, land low, and spend four hours climbing 2,000 feet further up the mountain to get into position before daybreak.

Razor 03 and Razor 04, two MH-47E Chinook helicopters from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment ("Night Stalkers") arrived after dark. Their mission was to infiltrate the two SEAL teams into two different locations--one to the

north of the valley near HLZ 15 and the other to the south on the lower reaches of Takur Ghar. The 160th flew in pairs so that one aircraft could quickly assist the other in case there were problems. The plan was for Razor 03 and Mako 30 to accompany Razor 04 to the northern drop-off area and then proceed south to Takur Ghar. Razor 04 would deliver Mako 20 to the north and then slowly fly north linking up with Razor 03 over Gardez. Then both birds would return to Bagram.³⁶ They made their first attempt to insert at 2300. Six minutes from touchdown, their missions were aborted due to an incoming B-52 strike. Both Chinooks returned to Gardez. It was a 15-minute flight. They sat on the ground idling. When the B-52 bomber cleared the area, the Chinooks again climbed into the night sky. They gained some 1,000 feet and were heading toward the valley when the flight was again aborted. Three Chinooks from Task Force Summit were conducting the night insertion of the 1st-187th near HLZ 15. The Night Stalker Chinooks landed and idled for another ninety minutes. When they finally got the go-ahead, Razor 03 cranked up its engines and promptly shut down. The number two engine was racing out of control. Mako 30 needed another helicopter.³⁷

Monday, 4 March 2002, D+2, 0001-0540 (Bagram and the North)

Three Chinooks lifted off the dark Bagram airfield at 0036. On board was Serial Two. The 10th Mountain Division was coming back into the fight, only now it was Bravo Company of the 1st-87th and they were now under the command of LTC Corkran, the battalion commander of the 1st-187th, 101st Air Assault Division. At 0130, the Chinooks overflew the wadi which they could identify from the soldiers'

cigarettes and landed south of HLZ 15. The troops got off and moved north to link up with the rest of the battalion. They brought significant long-range firepower--two 120mm mortars and two 81mm mortars from the 1st of the 87th. They brought two Gator all-terrain vehicles to help haul supplies. They also brought three reporters and a cameraman. Martin Savage from CNN and Dodge Billingsley from Combat Films and Research were in this group.³⁸

Dodge had been trying to get into the valley since the first Chinooks left in the early morning hours of March 2nd. LTC LeCamera, whose 10th Mountain troops were in the first helicopters on D-Day had a strong aversion to media and wanted none of them along. His focus was on “shooters only.” It was probably a good decision considering the fire fight that he and the rest of Task Force Summit got into. For Dodge, it was one frustrating false start after the other trying to join the troops in the valley. Twice Dodge was in the jump seat, soldiers loaded, rotors spooling, but both times the flight was ordered to stand down. Now, marching north in the frigid darkness with elements of 1st-187th, Dodge wondered if the fight was already over. At that moment a soldier noticed Dodge’s civilian clothing and asked, “who the ‘eff’ are you?” He was surprised to have a reporter along.³⁹

Within minutes of exiting the helicopter Dodge had lost track of the soldiers that he had flown in with. It was night and he had no night vision goggles. Eventually the march paused and Dodge moved up to the front of the column and settled down next to two soldiers. They were a bit surprised at his being there, but made him welcome. One of the soldiers, clearly suffering from altitude sickness,

began to throw up, and stayed at it for some time. Dodge lay there, staring up at the bright clear night. It was oddly beautiful and Dodge felt secure knowing that above him and the rest of the soldiers in the Shar-i Kot Valley were layers of air assets, stacked in support of the US forces in the valley. A moment later an MH-47 flew directly overhead. Dodge could tell it was from the 160 SOAR, he recognized the long refueling probe on the nose of the aircraft. It was gone as quickly as it had come. Minutes later he heard the sound of another Chinook, or was it the same one? He wondered. As he watched the MH-47 set down and then take off again, probably a couple hundred meters away this time, the rotor static clearly visible, he wondered what it was doing this far north. The fog of war is ever present on the battlefield and while soldiers train constantly to overcome or mitigate the unknown, Dodge had none of that benefit. He asked the two soldiers still laying next to him about it, but they also had no idea.

LTC Corkran (code named Leader 6) and LTC Preysler (code named Raider 6) conferred. LTC Corkran's first mission was to attack a cave complex located up a ravine to the east. Fortunately, the remaining special forces reconnaissance team from LTC Blaber's AFO had it under observation. The battalion commanders contacted the reconnaissance team (call sign Juliet) by radio. The team had not observed any enemy activity at the cave site recently. The special forces team was short on supplies. Could the Rakkasans help? One of the Gators had its first mission-hauling food, water, and batteries to the special forces element.⁴⁰

By 0223, the elements of LTC Corkran's command were moving into the creek bed to consolidate. At 0449, the battalion started to move East up the pass, the soldiers' night-vision goggles helped them pick their way among the rocks and rough terrain. Charlie Company, 1st-187th was leading and Bravo Company, 1st-87th followed. At 0540, the column stopped for a break.⁴¹

D+2, 0100-0300 (Gardez and The South)

Mako 30 was waiting for another CH-47 from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. Fortunately, there were two sitting at nearby FARP Texaco. But, the earliest they could now insert into the valley was 0315.⁴² That meant that the team would lose three and a half hours of darkness. This was not optimum for either SEAL team, but particularly bad for the team in the South. Once they got there, it was a four-hour climb to their position and it was sunrise at 0621. The Mako 30 commander felt that it was best to postpone the insertion by 24 hours. He radioed back to Bagram. BG Trebon was forward at Bagram from Misrah Island, and he talked directly to the Mako 30 commander. BG Trebon did not give a direct order, but he told the Mako 30 commander that he wanted the team inserted today--not tomorrow. He expected the team to go in now. There was only one way to get in position in time before the sun was up--they had to land on the mountain top at their intended observation position. This was not how the special operators normally did business. They landed away from their position and then moved to it, hiding their intended location from the enemy.⁴³

The replacement CH-47 arrived. The original crew of the damaged helicopter, who were already briefed for the mission, and Mako 30 boarded and began pre-flight procedures. The new helicopter was now Razor 03, the radio call sign of the helicopter crew. The Mako 30 commander approached CW3 Al Mack, the pilot-in-command and explained his predicament. “Can you take me to the top?”

“I can do it, but I can’t guarantee that I can land up there. I have not seen the imagery. If I take you up there and hover around without landing and don’t let you out, I’ll have compromised your position. The enemy will know that we are interested in that terrain. Is that okay with you?”

“I’ve seen the imagery. There’s room up there for you to land.”⁴⁴

CW3 Mack got on the radio. A relief Spectre gunship had just come on duty. CW3 Mack passed the coordinates of Takur Ghar to the gunship and requested that they do a sensor sweep of the mountain top. Spectre carries an impressive array of sensors, including heat sensors. Unfortunately, heat signatures can be masked by overhang cover and blankets. At this hour, most of the stationary enemy was in caves or tents, sleeping under blankets. Spectre radioed back. “Nobody is there. You are cleared in.”⁴⁵

Razor 04 followed Razor 03 into the valley flying in from the north. Razor 04 set down at HLZ 15 while Razor 03 continued on to Takur Ghar. The men of Mako 20 exited the helicopter rapidly. Their mission was to link up with and reinforce the Juliet team that was overlooking Amy Pass. After dropping the team, Razor 04 flew slowly back toward Gardez to link up with Razor 03.⁴⁶

As Razor 03 approached the mountain top, Spectre turned to deal with some enemy up north that were not under blankets. Razor 03, was landing without gunship cover.⁴⁷ It was 0248 and the helicopter noise boomed through the quiet night air.

As the helicopter flared for landing, powdered snow blew up obscuring vision. Yet there was enough moonlight for night vision goggles to work well. There were footprints in the snow, there were fighting positions, and there was an unmanned DShK heavy machine gun. There was a donkey tied to a tree. Goat carcasses swung from a tree. Someone stood up behind a low berm. He had an RPG and he fired it at the Chinook from 25 yards away. It hit the front part of the aircraft and exploded throwing flames everywhere. Another RPG round from another gunner slammed into the right radar pod. A third RPG round blew up in the snow in front of the bird. Yet a fourth RPG hit the right-side turbine. The electrical power was gone, the guns were down, the transmission was coming apart, hydraulic fluid was squirting all over the rear compartment, and the plane was on fire. Enemy machine guns now opened up on the crippled bird and opened holes in its skin. CW3 Mack struggled with the controls to keep the bird in the air.⁴⁸ The helicopter was dancing awkwardly directly in front of an enemy main defensive position.

The SEALs were ready to exit the aircraft. Petty Officer 1st Class Neil C. Roberts was not tied in. With his 80-pound rucksack and M249 SAW, he weighed close to 300 pounds. He slid down the hydraulic-oil-slicked ramp toward the yawning exit. SGT Dan Madden, the rear ramp gunner and SGT Alexander Pedrossa, the left door gunner, made a grab for Roberts. They all went sliding toward the rear.

The helicopter jerked and Roberts and Pedrossa went sailing out the back. Pedrossa dangled from his tether, clutching Neil Roberts. The helicopter still danced, trying to stay airborne. Roberts slipped from Pedrossa's grip and fell 10 feet into the snow. "Man on the ground, man on the ground" SGT Madden yelled into his mike as he hauled Pedrossa back on board.⁴⁹

CW3 Al Mack hauled on the controls. If he had a man on the ground, he was going back for him. But the controls did not respond. There were no hydraulics. SGT Madden pumped some hydraulic fluid into the system, but Al still did not have full control. He made two circles trying to get back to Roberts, but the bird was not responding. He had to set the bird down immediately--preferably in a safe place--or they were going to crash. Green enemy tracer bullets cut the darkness searching for the wounded Chinook. Some hit the rear of the aircraft. CW3 Mack could see Roberts below him--his red tracer bullets firing back at the circling enemy, but this bird could no longer help Roberts. This bird was going to crash. The pilots struggled to bring it down near HLZ 15. The Chinook began to disintegrate while they rode it the length of the valley, static electricity arcing off its rotor blades. Finally it slid onto the ground.⁵⁰ [See Map 7-1, D+2, 0530.]

D+2, 0220-0320 (Gardez and Little Tir Gol Ghar)

Commander Zia's truncated force was on the move back to the valley again. The CIA had acquired a dozen different vehicles. LTC Chris Haas and some of the ODA personnel accompanied him. LTC Pete Blaber and some of the AFO personnel also accompanied the force. Their vehicle sported an X-wing satellite antenna that

gave them access to Bagram and beyond. When they arrived at Tir Gol Ghar, Commander Zia's force spread out and they set up their mortars. After the AFO personnel got the radio set up, they checked in with their team Juliet, the circling Spectre gunship and Bagram headquarters. Communications were great and LTC Blaber was in an excellent position to assist in any effort coordinating Bagram, special operations forces and the air force.⁵¹

D+2, 0330-0430 (The North, short of HLZ 15)

Razor 03 pitched up but it did not roll over and it did not burn. CW3 Al Mack followed emergency shut down procedures. He and his pilot exited the front of the aircraft and moved to the back of the crippled bird to check on his crew and passengers. SGT Madden was badly banged up with what proved to be compression fractures of four vertebrae and two broken ribs. His flight helmet was cracked by the impact, but he was still full of fight. The rest of the crew and passengers were beat up but fully functioning. The USAF combat controller, TSGT John A. Chapman was setting up communications. He broadcast for any listening ground or airborne station. GRIM-32, a Spectre Gunship had just come on duty over the valley and answered the call. John relayed what had happened, their status and their coordinates. He then asked the gunship to sweep the area around them for signs of the enemy and then to sweep the top of Takur Ghar to determine if Neil Roberts was still alive.⁵² TSGT Chapman also spoke to LTC Pete Blaber, who was on the nearby little Tir Gol Ghar.⁵³

Razor 04, whose pilot-in-command was CW3 Jason Friel, had landed at Gardez and waited well past the agreed-on 15 minutes for Razor 03 to show up. Razor 03 was not there and not answering the radio. Grim-32 did answer the radio, told Razor 04 that Razor 03 was shot down, that the crew and passengers were okay and gave their coordinates for pickup. Razor 04 took off to rescue the passengers and crew. Mako 30 wanted to fly back immediately to Takur Ghar to retrieve Neil Roberts, but Razor 04 would not be able to handle the weight of another Chinook crew plus the SEAL team at that altitude. Overhead, a Navy radar and reconnaissance plane, a P-3 Orion detected 40 enemy moving toward the crash site.⁵⁴ It was actually a platoon from A Company, 2nd-187th. Fortunately, in the confusion, the aircraft did not vector attack aircraft against them. Razor 04 flew in at about 0330, picked up all the personnel and flew them back to Gardez. Before they left, Razor 04 crewmen helped strip classified gear, weapons and ammunition from the downed helicopter. By 0340, they were flying toward Bagram.

D+2, 0345 (Takur Ghar)

Grim-32 circled the Takur Ghar mountain top. Earlier, the crew had spotted an infrared strobe light pulsating from a position on the mountain top. Invisible to the naked eye, the strobe showed up clearly on the infrared scope. The pilot, Major Daniel "D. J." Turner, saw a man leaning up against a tree with the strobe in his hand. It must be the missing SEAL! However, closer examination showed that there was a group of ten men passing the strobe around. Were they friendly, were they enemy? No one seemed to know. Everyone seemed to be crowding the airwaves with

conflicting reports and ideas. Complicating the matter was a Predator UAV that was now circling the area, broadcasting very fuzzy images back to waiting headquarters. The field of view of the Predator feed was limited and the picture quality was terrible.

D+2, 0345 (Task Force 64, The South)

SMSGT James Hotaling was sleeping the sleep of the totally exhausted, but he still had two headsets on over his watch cap. A flurry of conversation woke him up. It was a gunship saying that it could see some sort of strobe. After a while, it was obvious that something had gone wrong with a special operations insertion and that someone had fallen out of the back of an aircraft. James struggled out of the warmth of his sleeping bag and, avoiding stepping on a snoring Australian, went to the team leader and briefed him on what he knew. Takur Ghar was only three-four kilometers away, but they could not see the strobe light.⁵⁵

D+2, 0345-0420 (Bagram)

Captain Nate Self was catching up on paper work in the joint operations center. Nate commanded the 1st Platoon of A Company, 75th Rangers. Half of his platoon was in Kandahar, training at the Tarnak Farms. The other half was here in Bagram serving as the special operations quick reaction force. Earlier his force has been on alert for a mission in Khost, but that was cancelled. They were now all asleep except for Nate. Nate finished his paperwork while he listened to radio traffic. There was a problem--an aircraft was down and details were sketchy. Still, it was a good bet that his quick reaction force might be required to secure the downed aircraft.

Nate collected some aerial imagery of the area and woke up his squad leaders to begin planning.⁵⁶ Soon word came down that TF 11 was putting the quick reaction force on alert to secure the downed aircraft.⁵⁷

Shortly after Nate left the operations center, the ad hoc command and control system began to unravel. There were two separate headquarters in Bagram: Task Force Summit controlled the conventional fight through TF Rakkasans and TF Talon; JSOTF North (Task force Dagger) controlled the white SOF working with Afghan commanders and the Delta Force (AFO) operations running the special operations reconnaissance effort in the valley. Neither of these headquarters were in charge of the entire effort in Afghanistan. There was no overall local commander of the effort that could direct what each headquarters could do and who had priority for air support, logistics support, intelligence support and the like. Up to this point, the command and control structure had been shaky and only partly coordinated, but it had worked. The glue that held it together was the personalities and relationships of the two commanders. MG Hagenbeck had served in the 101st Air Assault Division, had served in the special operations community and was friends with Colonel Mulholland. Together, they managed to coordinate actions and synchronize actions between their respective forces. There was another special forces headquarters to control southern Afghanistan, but it was not in Afghanistan! JSOTF South (TF K-Bar) was the joint special operations headquarters on Misrah Island in the Persian Gulf. There was no overall control of American forces in Afghanistan outside of Afghanistan either. The fixed wing aviation effort was controlled by LTG Moseley, Commander of

CENTCOM Air Forces out of Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina. He had a Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Saudi Arabia. CFLCC headquarters in Kuwait controlled the conventional forces and logistics of TF Summit, but not the Special Forces. The Special Forces were controlled by Joint Special Operations Command (JSOCOM) in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The only one who had the authority to pull it together was the CENTCOM Commander, General Tommy Franks--and there were clear restrictions on what he could request from aviation and special operations.

BG Gregory Trebon was the USAF Deputy Commander of JSOCOM. JTF 11 was the putative headquarters for JSOTF North and JSOTF South--but its headquarters personnel were mostly with JSOTF South in the middle of the Persian Gulf. Trebon had arrived at Bagram and established a small forward command post in a tent separate from TF Summit and JSOTF North. Up to this point, JSOTF North had pretty much been involved in all the special operations in Afghanistan. BG Trebon intended to change that. He ordered the deployment of the SEAL TF Blue to Gardez without informing the special operations personnel that were already there. He authorized the separate communications link between TF Blue and Task Force 11. This cut off TF Blue from JSOTF North and, particularly, AFO. He gave the order that launched Razor 03 into the teeth of the enemy main defense and marooned Petty Officer Roberts on Takur Ghar. He gave the order alerting the quick reaction force--to guard a downed aircraft. Now he had a rescue mission on his hands. It was about to become a ground fight. Ground combat is always tough and complex. Plans are

made with the understanding that they will rapidly change with circumstance. Ground combat is not so much about predictable weapons and systems as it is about people--whose parameters, capabilities, and limitations change constantly.

The AFO element of TF Dagger had its commander, LTC Blaber, on the ground overlooking the valley in communication with all the necessary elements. One of Blabers's officers was in Bagram at the joint TF Summit/Dagger headquarters coordinating the rescue attempt. Suddenly, BG Trebon's voice cut into the frequency and announced that he was taking over the rescue. AFO was no longer part of it. This order was clearly within BG Trebon's authority, but it cut off the experienced on-site ground force special operators from the fight--and transferred it to TF Blue and JSOTF South--one at Gardez and the other a thousand miles away.⁵⁸ The TF 11 headquarters was in Bagram, but deliberately separated from the joint headquarters. The navy was about to take on a ground fight led by an air force general without a marine in sight. And they were going to do it on a radio frequency that the other American commands were not monitoring.

D+2, 0355-0505 (Gardez and Takur Ghar)

Razor 04 was low on fuel and there was none at Gardez. Mako 30 had to get back to Takur Ghar quickly if Neil Roberts was to have a chance. "Leave no man behind" was a honored tradition in the special operations community. A refueling trip to FARP Texaco would take too long and Razor 04 did not have the FARP's coordinates. The crew of Razor 03 got off of the helicopter. CW3 Jason Friel and the commander of Mako 30 tried to make some sense of the confusing radio traffic.

Finally Grim-32 announced that they had identified Roberts. At 0420, Razor 04, with MAKO 30 on board, flew off to Takur Ghar, requesting that Grim-32 conduct preparation fires on the HLZ five minutes before Razor 04 landed. Grim-32 replied that the request was denied because they could not positively identify Roberts. Major Turner had been piloting Grim-31 on D-Day when it had mistakenly attacked Zia's column, killing CW2 Harriman and several Afghans. Fratricide gives one pause. Still, Razor 04 was heading toward the same HLZ where Razor 03 was shot up and the enemy was clearly up and alert.⁵⁹ Grim-32 saw that it was "crawling with people."⁶⁰

At 0455, CW3 Friel brought Razor 04 in horizontally to the HLZ, trying to mask the helicopter's approach, but it is a big bird and makes a lot of noise. DShK fire opened up across the nose of the Chinook. The bird settled in close to where Razor 03 had been shot up. The enemy gunners were still there. Bullets zipped into the left side of the Chinook. The Chinook kicked up a blinding mist as it landed in the thigh-deep snow and the five SEALs and the USAF Combat Controller bounded out of the aircraft. Terrain had helped protect the Chinook as it was on the ground, but bullets again hit the Chinook as it lifted off. The left door gunner returned fire, but his M-134 mini-gun jammed. The right gunner managed to engage the DShK with a venerable M-60 machine gun. The Chinook then orbited and tried to contact Mako 30, but was unable to raise the SEALs on the radio to see if they needed an emergency extraction. By 0500 the Chinook was "Bingo fuel" and had to return to Gardez. It landed on fumes. Its left fuel tank was holed and a wire harness

controlling the left engine was shot up. The bird could still fly, but there was no fuel at Gardez and the Chinook needed repair before it could go back on mission.⁶¹

The six rescuing members of Mako 30 charged through the deep snow, the altitude further slowing their pace. The enemy quit firing at the helicopter and now fired on the team from three different directions. TSGT John Chapman, the combat controller, fired his M4 carbine at close range into a bunker. He killed at least one enemy. He did not realize it, but he was very close to Neil Robert's corpse. The SEAL had probably been dead for at least a half hour. A 7.62mm machine gun opened up on Chapman from another bunker. Chapman and the SEALs returned fire. Firing whipped back and forth until Chapman pitched face forward. He had been hit while pulling the trigger; and his trigger finger jammed the carbine's aiming laser on. Its red beam pointed into the snow.⁶²

The Spectre gunship flew overhead, wanting to help, but he could not communicate with Mako 30. Green and red tracers intersected and laser pointers crossed the dark, but shooting at the green Soviet-manufactured tracers might not be the answer. Spectre radioed back to JSOTF South to get their frequency, but the headquarters on Misrah Island never provided it. Spectre tried broadcasting on three frequencies that Mako 30 might use. There was no answer.⁶³

Two more SEALs were wounded. The Mako 30 leader decided that he had to evacuate the area immediately. Throwing grenades to break contact, the team abandoned Chapman's body and ran, jumped and slid 800 meters down the snowy slopes of the northwest side of Takur Ghar. The SEALs were carrying the short-

range MBITR radio. The main radio, able to communicate long-ranges with circling aircraft, was in John Chapman's pack on his still body on the mountain top. John's trigger finger was still activating the aiming laser. The IR strobe still shone on the mountain top, visible only to those with infrared goggles.⁶⁴

Finally Spectre picked up a call from Mako 30. Its commander was on his short-range MBITR. He reported his location and called for fire on the top of Takur Ghar. He turned on his own infrared strobe to show his position. He requested that the QRF come to their rescue.⁶⁵ At 0523, Major Turner, the Spectre pilot, relayed the request to Bagram. Mako 30 needed the QRF.⁶⁶ [See Map 2, D+2, 0455-0610, Mako 30 on Takur Ghar.]

D+2, 0445-0502 (Bagram en route to Gardez)

Captain Nate Self and his Rangers headed toward the airstrip. On his last trip into the operations center, he heard radio traffic about someone falling out of a helicopter. He thought it was a separate incident from the downed Razor 03. The assumption was some Rakkasasan had fallen out of a Blackhawk and they might also have to help find him. No one seemed to know where the soldier had fallen out of a helicopter and where the downed helicopter was but the assumption was that both were somewhere down in the valley. Nate's orders were to get his command on board helicopters and fly to Gardez to wait clarification of the situation and further orders. Two MH-47E Chinook helicopters of the 160th SOAR were there but the blades were not turning.⁶⁷ The pilots were just arriving and starting pre-flight procedures. The first problem was that there might only be one helicopter available.

Someone wanted a large supplemental fuel tank mounted inside one of the Chinooks so that it could conduct forward fueling of other Chinooks-converting it into a “fat cow.” A “fat cow” would not be able to carry any rangers, but it could park at Gardez and provide a fueling capability closer to the valley than FARP Texaco. Further, there was a four-man USAF Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) team waiting to fly along with the rangers. At the altitude that they were going to be flying, Nate could have a total of nine rangers, himself and the four-man USAF team. Nate wanted his whole team available and contacted Major Jim Mingus, the battalion operations officer, requesting that he be authorized two full ranger teams in his force.⁶⁸

There was another problem. Nate and his platoon were used to dealing with a different CSAR team. They had rehearsed and trained together and knew each other well. They understood the drills and had developed a relationship and a pattern in working together. But his normal CSAR team was gone on another mission. These were four new guys. And why did he need the CSAR team? Their job was to rescue downed personnel. The passengers and crew of Razor 03 were already rescued. Why should he take along PJs and a combat controller when his mission was to guard an empty wrecked helicopter and prevent the enemy from stripping it? There was a USAF ETAC already assigned to the Rangers. Staff Sergeant Kevin Vance could talk to aircraft and there was no one to rescue. While things were being sorted out, Nate began briefing the CSAR team. Then two other Chinooks landed and the CSAR team that the Rangers were used to working with got off. Nate wanted to swap teams. He ended up swapping helicopters. His team was directed to board one of the helicopters

that had just arrived. The new CSAR team quickly got their gear loaded and strapped down. The CSAR team leader that Nate usually worked with decided that the new team should go since it was already loaded and it was time to leave. Nate and his six-man squad, a two-man machine gun team and his ETAC, as well as three CSAR loaded onto Razor 01. There were eight in the aircrew--an air mission commander, two pilots, four crew chiefs/gunners, and a flight medic. As they were beginning to take off, word came down to load the second team on Razor 02. The thirteen men of Team 2 (a six-man squad, two-man machine-gun team and a Ranger medic plus the squad leader) scrambled on board Razor 02. SSG Arin Canon, the Ranger Squad Leader, was the Chalk Leader for Team 2. At 0502, the Chinooks lifted off and began the 50-minute flight to Gardez.⁶⁹

D+2, 0500 (The Skies Above the Valley)

Major Turner and Grim 32 were approaching a decision. Mako 30 was still drawing fire from the mountain top and Grim 32 kept them alive by pummeling the enemy with 105mm rounds. But Grim 32 was running low on fuel and it was an hour's flight back to K2, Uzbekistan. USAF rules dictated that the Spectre aircraft be out of the combat zone by dawn and the sun rose at 0621. Grim 32 was trying to get some jet aircraft overhead before he left. TF Dagger, TF Summit, and TF K-Bar agreed on one thing--Spectre needed to stay on station longer. All these headquarters' calls to Air Force officials to extend the gunship's time were denied. Even BG Trebon's status as an Air Force General Officer did not cut it.⁷⁰

D+2, 0502-0540 (Enroute to Gardez)

Captain Nate Self was plugged into the radio nets of the Chinook and trying to determine what was going on. There was a lot of chatter and conjecture on the radio nets, but very little fact. Nate could only hope that someone would have a better picture once they landed at Gardez. It was going to be light soon and Nate preferred to land at night to secure the downed aircraft-particularly with only one team. During the flight, he learned that his second team was following him on Razor 02. This was good news, but they were going to have to do some quick planning at Gardez to coordinate the two teams' actions. The mission was still unclear. Was he securing an aircraft or searching for a missing soldier? During the flight, he could hear the radio traffic between Spectre and the leader of Mako 30. Mako 30 was under fire and calling for the deployment of the QRF immediately. The location of Mako 30 was still a mystery and Nate thought that they were in the valley. They were nearing Gardez, but it was getting increasingly problematic that they would have a chance to land and sort things out.⁷¹

D+2, 0500-0605 (The Skies Above the Valley)

Major Turner and the crew of Grim 32 continued to slam round after round into the enemy, buying the SEALs time and an opportunity to move further downhill. Major Turner had overextended his time over the valley--almost an hour after he had been ordered out. Daylight was lighting the mountain tops and sky above. Major Turner already had his sunglasses on--although the command center on Misrah Island was still passing orders to do night-specific tasks. He had been ordered home but had

stayed to provide Spectre gunship support and communications relay for the SEALs. He was low on fuel. Major Turner had already drawn and avoided two enemy shoulder-fired air defense missile launches. At 0601, a third missile (possibly an RPG) launched at Spectre. At 0605, a two-ship flight of USAF F-15E Strike Eagles arrived over the valley. The F-15Es were less accurate than Spectre and lacked the ability to provide constant cover, but they were not the large, slow-moving target that Spectre is in the daylight. It was long past time for Grim 32 to leave. He passed the Strike Eagle call signs to Mako 30 and checked out of the net.⁷² One of his last calls from the valley was to Misrah Island. “Whatever you do, don’t send them [the QRF] back to this same LZ. It is absolutely hot.”⁷³ Grim 32 had the best situational awareness of what was going on atop of Takur Ghar and unfortunately he was leaving at a very critical time.⁷⁴

D+2, 0540-0610 (Pivot Turn at Gardez)

The SEALs continued to call for help. They identified their position as close to the missing person but did not state that he was one of theirs or that there were now two missing persons. Further, they were no longer close to the missing persons. They stated that they were in close contact with the enemy at the HLZ and needed the QRF immediately. Actually, they were now almost a kilometer away from the enemy, but Nate had no way of determining this and Spectre was no longer in the area to help sort things out. Ranger command came on the radio. Nate’s teams were to fly immediately to Takur Ghar, land low on an offset HLZ, and work their way up the mountain top to help the SEALs who were still presumed to be fighting on top of

the mountain. There was no opportunity to land at Gardez, no time for mission planning, no time for coordination between the teams. They were going in. At least they would have some time on the offset HLZ to get organized.⁷⁵

There was a Navy P-3 Orion flying overhead. The P-3 is an infrared/radar reconnaissance aircraft, not a command and control aircraft. But, it had communications with Misrah Island, Bagram and other headquarters. Razor 01's SATCOM radio quit working. Now the communications between the 160th SOAR TOC and the Chinooks was spotty, so the command asked the P-3 to vector the Chinooks into the offset HLZ. Something happened, because the P-3 did not vector the Chinooks into the coordinates for the offset HLZ. The P-3 used the same coordinates for the HLZ where Razor 03 and Razor 04 had been so badly shot up. Yet at 0540, the P-3 had reported movement at those very same coordinates. It was now 0600. The skies were lit and the helicopters were looking for the HLZ. They flew around it twice before they were able to pinpoint it. Razor 02s radios now began to act up and Razor 01 could no longer talk to them. The 160th SOAR command post was frantically radioing the Chinooks to abort the landing because they were going into the wrong LZ. The Chinooks never got the call. The noisy helicopters clearly roused the soundest enemy sleepers. Then Razor 01 began the assault approach onto the HLZ while Razor 02 flew a holding pattern. Razor 02 was then abruptly ordered to land at Gardez, ten minutes away. There was a small HLZ and there was danger of a midair collision if the HLZ was hot. It was 0610.⁷⁶

D+2, 0540-0805 (The North)

LTC Ron Corkran's men slowly moved up Amy pass. It was slow going over the rocky ground and the altitude was a killer. Ron stopped the column again at 0628 to catch their breath and radioed Special Forces Reconnaissance team Juliet. Juliet could not detect any enemy activity at the objective. The column inched on. At 0630, Ron requested air coverage, but was told that there was a Special Operations Chinook down on Takur Ghar and no close air support was available since everything was diverted to combat search and rescue (CSAR).⁷⁷ Ten minutes later, Master Corporal Tim McMeekin and Corporal Robert Furlong, snipers from the Canadian 3PPCLI, were in overwatch positions covering the objective with a McMillan Brothers 50 caliber and a C3A1 (Parker Hale M82) 7.62mm sniper rifle. They could see some buildings outside the cave complex--and a 122mm howitzer covering the northern approach into the valley. At 0718, Charlie Company swept the objective. They searched the caves, buildings and surrounding area.⁷⁸ They found another 122mm howitzer as well as a Soviet-manufactured S-60 57mm automatic antiaircraft gun. The sappers blew up the breeches of these weapons to make them inoperable.⁷⁹ There were caves full of RPG rounds, artillery rounds and other ordnance.⁸⁰

D+2, 0600-1830 (The Indian Ocean off Pasni, Pakistan)

The *USS Bonhomme Richard* was sitting off the coast of Pakistan. Starting Sunday, it had sailed from Kenya to get there. Five AH-1W Super Sea Cobra helicopter gunships and three CH-53 super Stallion transport helicopters from the 13th MEU rose into the air. The helicopters were part of the USMC HMM-165

Helicopter Squadron and these Marines were coming to help. LTC Greg A. Sturdevant was the mission commander. It was going to be a long flight. The helicopters flew to a refueling point in Pakistan, refueled and flew on to Kandahar. At Kandahar, they refueled and scrounged some maps before flying into FARP Texaco. They then flew on to Bagram. The trip was 850 miles and took seven hours of flight time. With refueling stops, the trip took almost 12 hours.⁸¹

The Cobras were ready for action. Each carried four TOW and four Hellfire antitank missiles, 28 rockets and 750 rounds of 20mm Gatling Gun Ammunition. The Army had plenty of Hellfire missiles and 2.75 inch folding-fin rockets on hand, but they did not have any TOW missiles or 20mm ammunition. The beauty of the USMC integral transport aviation capability proved itself again. A Marine C-130 flew ammunition, maintenance personnel, additional pilots and supplies into Bagram. The helicopters landed in pitch-dark and parked. The personnel picked up their personal gear and started walking in the direction of some small fires where the tents should be. They walked through a minefield. It was marked off with orange paint, but in the pitch dark, no one saw the paint. Fortunately, no one stepped on a mine.⁸²

D+2, 0610-0630 (On Top of Takur Ghar)

CW3 Greg Calvert and CW2 Chuck Gant were flying Razor 01 on the assault approach. CW3 Don Tabron was sitting behind them as the Aircraft Commander.⁸³ The coordinates for the HLZ had changed several times in the flight from the Gardez pivot turn to Takur Ghar. The P-3 Orion crew had relayed messages back and forth between the Chinook and Misrah Island. The P-3 had confirmed that the HLZ was on

the mountain top. During the circling of the mountain top, Don had confirmed the grid location and looked for signs of the SEAL team. There were none, but there were footprints in the snow, impact areas where Spectre had blasted the mountain top and muzzle flashes apparently directed at them. Don reported this enemy activity and again questioned whether this was the correct HLZ. The P-3 Orion stated that it was. Don and Greg now started in--a very large helicopter flying right into the same HLZ where two other equally-large Chinooks had been shot up earlier that morning. The experienced pilots came in low and fast, using the terrain for cover instead of the normal high approach to a small HLZ.⁸⁴ The Rangers in the back moved from sitting to kneeling, like pumped-up sprinters at the starting block. They expected to get off the Chinook quickly and to link up with the beleaguered SEALs. But as Captain Nate Self viewed the terrain, he did not see the SEALs. Were they headed toward the wrong LZ? He heard Chief Calvert on the intercom querying "Where's this LZ?" Nate had a very disturbing thought. "We are going to land on the same LZ where Razor 03 and 04 were shot up."⁸⁵

Forty feet off the ground, bullets sliced through the front cockpit shattering side windows and chin bubble of the cockpit. Eight bullets slammed into Greg Calvert's chest. Fortunately, they bounced off or lodged in his body armor. Another bullet slammed into his flight helmet, smacking his head back and turning his helmet about. Yet another bullet hit him in the left leg. Chuck Gant was shot in the right thigh. There was no question of aborting the mission. They had to land. Sergeant Phil Svitak, the right door gunner/flight engineer got off a burst with his M134

7.62mm minigun. Staff Sergeant Dave Dube, the right rear door gunner, opened up with his M-60 machine gun. The helicopter was now 20 feet off the ground. An RPG round slammed into the helicopter's right engine. Sergeant Phil Svitak fell back, mortally wounded. SSG Dube was hit in the left leg by a round that shattered his scabbarded knife, driving its fragments into him⁸⁶ The pilots wrestled with the controls, but at 15 feet above the ground, the wounded Chinook dropped like a rock going 500 feet per minute onto a 20 degree mountain slope--a controlled but very hard landing. Everyone was thrown around the aircraft.⁸⁷

Enemy fire continued as bullets ripped through the fuselage. It sounded like someone was slamming it with a ballpeen hammer. An RPG round entered the rear cabin. The warhead did not detonate, but it hit an oxygen bottle that exploded and the resulting sparks set the cabin wall soundproofing on fire. The Rangers started down the rear ramp into the knee-deep snow. Sergeant Bradley S. Crose, and PFC Matthew A. Commons were killed exiting the aircraft. Specialist Marc A. Anderson was killed before he could exit the aircraft.⁸⁸ In the cockpit, CW3 Greg Calvert held the controls while CW2 Chuck Gant had pulled the engine stops. The helicopter did not roll over and finally settled with its nose elevated in the air. Chuck had a shattered femur, so he opened his door, rolled out, and dropped into the snow. Greg shoved his M4 carbine out his shattered window and fired at the enemy while he opened his door. The intense return fire hit him in the left leg and three bullets ripped into his hand, nearly severing it. It was dangling from his arm by one bone and a tendon. One of the bullets lodged in his hand was a burning tracer. His hand was on fire. The cabin

was on fire. He was spurting arterial blood two feet into the air as he pushed out of his seat and back into the burning main cabin.⁸⁹

SFC Cory Lameraux, the medic from the 160th SOAR, grabbed a fire extinguisher and put out the cabin fire. Then he grabbed CW3 Greg Calvert and helped him into the main cabin. A RPG round slammed into the cockpit and put more shrapnel in Greg's legs. Cory went to work stopping Greg's bleeding. USAF PJ, Senior Airman Jason Cunningham, was working on the dying Specialist Anderson. SSG Dube clearly needed medical attention as well. CW3 Don Tabron had the tip of his index finger shot off. While SFC Lameraux was saving Greg Calvert's life, Greg was repeatedly broadcasting on all the survival radios he could muster. "Razor 01 is down! Razor 01 is down." He gave the grid coordinates and added "numerous casualties and taking fire."⁹⁰

The rest of the rangers were outside of the aircraft and returning fire. Enemy fire was pouring in from three directions. They had three RPGs, a DShK heavy machine gun, a RPK light machine gun, and lots of AK-47 Kalashnikov rifles. Fortunately, the enemy were abysmal marksmen. Unfortunately, they were close, the downed helicopter was an easy target and the rangers were in the open. The enemy were in bunkers and prepared fighting positions, although the Rangers did not realize it. There were 23 Americans on top of the mountain--nine army rangers, two army Chinook pilots, one army Chinook air mission commander (also a pilot), four Chinook crew chiefs/gunners, one flight medic, two air force PJs, two air force combat controllers, one air force ETAC, and one Navy SEAL. Three of the rangers,

one combat controller, one Chinook crew member and the SEAL were dead. The two Chinook pilots and one of the crew members were severely wounded. The SEAL team that had called them to this place was no where in sight. The “Battle of Robert’s Ridge” had been going on for less than a minute.

Captain Self got his small force of surviving rangers organized and oriented. They lay down a base of fire and provided some cover so that the medics (SFC Cory Lameraux, TSGT Kerry Miller, and Senior Airman Jason Cunningham could work on the patients). Kerry low-crawled around to the front of the aircraft to tend to CW2 Chuck Gant’s wounds. He was hemorrhaging badly but firing his M4 carbine at the enemy. Kerry put a tourniquet on his leg and crawled back. Later he and one of the aircrew would drag Chuck back to the ramp and inside the aircraft.⁹¹

USAF Staff Sergeant Gabe Brown came out of the back of the helicopter and looked for a place to set up his radio. He noticed quite a few dead enemy laying around with clean head shots. The rangers were good at their calling. But there were a lot of enemy and they were firing mortars, small arms and RPGs. As the combat controller, Gabe needed to start communicating with aircraft to get some close air support pronto--ideally he would be able to get the Spectre gunship back. He looked for a place to set up. There was a rock--not enough of a rock to afford any protection, but the top of the rock was dry. It offered a place to sit and not get one’s seat soaked while getting shot at. Gabe set up and began broadcasting. First, he tried to reach the AWACS aircraft, but got no response. He then tried to contact the departed Spectre gunship. He got the gunship liaison cell instead. It was daylight and they were not

going to turn Spectre around. Gabe could see the puffs of enemy antiaircraft fire in the distance. The two F-15s, Twister 51 and Twister 52, were in the area and Gabe called them next requesting help. They did not respond since they were doing a fire mission for Texas 14, the combat controller with the special forces and Commander Zia's forces located on Little Tir Ghol Ghar. Then one of the F-15s contacted Mako 30 at the bottom of the mountain.⁹²

“Where's my close air support, Jeremy?” Captain Nate Self kept yelling back at Gabe. This team had been put together in such a hurry that Nate thought Gabe was Jeremy Mercier, another combat controller from another team. With everyone wearing Kevlar helmets, it was hard to tell. Gabe introduced himself after the fight, but for the whole time on the mountain, he was Jeremy.⁹³

Nate Self had his own problems. His M4 Carbine had immediately jammed and shortly after he exited the helicopter, a RPG round landed nearby wounding one of his rangers, Specialist Aaron Totten-Lancaster, in the leg. Aaron could still shoot, but he could no longer move. The RPG also wounded his USAF ETAC, SSG Kevin Vance in the arm. Kevin was his RTO. The RPG also wounded Nate Self in the thigh. The RPG gunner crouched behind a rock while he reloaded. He did not crouch low enough. SSG Ray DePouli put a round from his M4 carbine into the gunner's forehead. There were six guys who could move and shoot out of 21 on the mountain top. The enemy began pitching hand grenades downhill, but the deep snow absorbed most of the impact.⁹⁴

Gabe Brown finally got the attention of an aircraft that gave him the call sign for the Predator that was still circling the mountain. The predator operator provided an update and how to contact Twister 51 and 52. Gabe's GPS was not working. The lithium batteries were too cold, so he had to pull them out and warm them up next to his skin. When he finally got these warm and the GPS working, he contacted the F-15Es. Some twenty minutes had passed.⁹⁵ [See Map 7-3, D+2, 0610-0630, Razor 01 and Rangers on Takur Ghar.]

D+2, 0600-0730 (The Skies Above)

Twister 51 and 52 were short of gas when they approached Takur Ghar. Mako 30 talked to them and directed them against a distant enemy mortar position. They nailed it with the second 500-pound bomb.⁹⁶ Then they circled Takur Ghar and saw a helicopter where there had not been one minutes before. "Mako 30, this is Twister. Is that helicopter on the hilltop friendly or unfriendly?"

"Twister, this is Mako. Unfriendly."

Fortunately, Twister 51 and 52 did not react immediately to this report, but broke off to go refuel off an orbiting tanker aircraft. When they returned, they again queried Mako and got the same unsettling reply. However, the F-15 pilots figured out that it was the QRF aircraft and did not attack it.⁹⁷ Clearly the Mako team was rattled.

Twister 51 was flown by Major Christopher M. "Junior" Short and his back-seater (weapons systems officer-WSO) was LTC Jim "Meat" Fairchild. Twister 52 was flown by Captain Kirk "Panzer" Rieckhoff and his back-seater was Captain Chris

Russell. They were armed with GBU-12 500-pound bombs and 20mm automatic air-to-air cannon. They were the wrong aircraft with the wrong ordnance for what needed to be done, but they were on station and the situation was dire. Gabe Brown finally contacted them, oriented them on the situation and then radioed Captain Nate Self.

“Hey, I’ve got two F-15s, bombs and guns. What do you want?”

“Let’s go with guns.”⁹⁸

The F-15E is designed for long-range interdiction of enemy targets in air-to-air combat. It is not designed for close air support and the distance between the enemy positions and the friendly troops was less than 75 meters. The AC-130 Spectre gunship or the A-10 Warthog close air support aircraft would have made short work of the enemy position, but these aircraft were not there. It was too close for bombs. The guns were risky enough. The gun angle on an F-15 is raised 15 degrees higher from the horizontal plane in order to aid the aircraft in aerial combat. The aircraft would have to dive well below the normal dive approach in order to fire the guns at the 11,000 foot summit. The aircraft came in from the east. Gabe aborted the first gun run, then the next. Finally, the aircraft got the right heading and Gabe directed “cleared hot, cleared hot.” At 0720, the first F-15E rolled in spraying fire and making the snow kick up in front of the Rangers. It was hard to see if it had hit the enemy so Gabe moved forward. The plane had strafed the ridge line. The aircraft lined up and came in again.⁹⁹

D+2, 0640-0645 (TF 64, The South)

Fifteen minutes earlier, Gabe Brown had been trying to get anyone to talk to him. Now everyone was trying to talk to him and he was in the middle of directing close air support with aircraft that were not designed for the task. The radio rubber-neckers were getting in the way of some very tricky business. From his vantage point, SMSGT James Hotaling could see the aircraft and he could see the enemy running about. He could not see the helicopter due to its location. He listened to the radio. He recognized Gabe Brown's voice. James and Gabe had known each other for all of Gabe's career. James was one of his instructors and they had continually bumped into each other over the years. Gabe was doing a terrific job, but he needed some help. James got on the radio and contacted the air task force commander.

"I have complete situational awareness on this as well. Why don't you let me handle anything that is away from the crash site, let me work those fire missions and let Gabe handle the extreme close air support."¹⁰⁰

The air commander agreed. Gabe and James talked over their MBITR radios. Gabe would handle anything close and James would handle anything at 1,000 meters or more from the crash site.¹⁰¹ James dogged determination to get to the right place on the battle field had paid off. He and the Australians were finally at the right place at the right time.

D+2, 0640-0800 (Takur Ghar)

The aircraft made several strafing runs, expending 80 to 180 rounds of 20mm ammunition per run. The F-15E carries 500 rounds of 20mm. After several turns, the

guns went silent. They were out of ammunition. The pilots wanted to drop their 500 pound bombs next, but the Rangers would be only 60 meters from a bomb run, and Nate Self had never worked with Gabe Brown before. He would trust his ETAC, SSG Kevin Vance, but Kevin did not have a SATCOM radio. [See Map 7-4, D+2, 0640-0800, F15E strafing runs, Takur Ghar.]

The enemy had learned to go to cover when the aircraft began their gun runs. After the aircraft passed, they would pop out and resume shooting at the Rangers. The bunker and trench line were still intact and the Rangers did not know it was there. The enemy was still a serious threat. There was someone else's US gear on the mountain top--an MBITR radio, night-observation goggles, a pack. One of the dead enemy was wearing part of a US uniform.¹⁰²

D+2, 0805-0900 (The North)

The 1st-187th had swept the objective in Amy Pass and was searching the caves and bunkers. At 0805, LTC Corkran received a radio call from Colonel Wiercinski. There were American troops in trouble in the south. The 1st-187th needed to attack south, down the valley immediately to relieve pressure on these units. Who these units were or where they were at was still vague, but the 1st-187th needed to go to their aid. Colonel Wiercinski directed Ron to leave a small force to complete the search of the objective (sensitive site exploitation or SSE). Ron's command was strung out for a kilometer and a half in the pass. He needed to turn his command around. B Company, 1st-87th was the trail unit, so it would now lead the attack. Charlie Company would finish the search and then follow.¹⁰³

In the valley proper, more Chinook helicopters were coming into HLZ 15 carrying troops and supplies. They were getting shot at. Air power could not help out since everything available was directed at Takur Ghar. Near HLZ 15, Major Dennis Yates, the brigade fire support officer set out suppress the enemy fire. He worked with the battalion fire support officers to coordinate available mortars. More mortar tubes and mortar ammunition were coming in and Dennis incorporated all mortar assets into a make-shift mortar battery. Forward observers would locate enemy firing positions and the mortars would suppress them just in advance of the arriving helicopters. USAF Captain Paul “Dino” Murray joined the effort by keeping the close air support aircraft above the apogee of the mortar fire [Maximum Ordinate or Max Ord]. Dino would also keep the various flights of jets from flying close to each other and hand them off to various ETACs for control.¹⁰⁴

D+2, 0625- 0815 (Razor 02, Gardez-Takur Ghar)

Razor 02 had landed at Gardez at 0625. Ranger SSG Aaron Canon, the weapons squad leader, was in charge of the remainder of the QRF. The pilots told Aaron that Razor 01 had been shot down. All the rangers were anxious to join their comrades, but they had to sit and wait. Finally, Lieutenant Commander Vic Hyder, the senior naval officer present from TF Blue got on the helicopter. “I’m going with you. My guys are trapped on the side of the mountain.”¹⁰⁵

At 0700, the helicopter lifted off en route to an offset HLZ on Takur Ghar designated by Ranger command. Halfway there, they were diverted to a nearby valley when the stranded Mako 30 team informed them that there was a bombing run

going on and the HLZ was hot. After the F-15Es finished their strafing runs, Razor 02 flew to another HLZ designated by Mako 30. They stormed off the helicopter and encountered no enemy. The QRF was only 300 meters away from Mako 30, but they were far away from the beleaguered Rangers. It was a 2,000 foot climb and an 800 meter traverse over a 70 degree slope that was either waist deep in snow or covered with loose rock and scree! Mako 30 had vectored them away from their higher insertion landing zone that was much closer to their hard-pressed comrades. But before this realization set in with SSG Canon, Lieutenant Commander Hyder attempted to hijack his force. “Come on, let’s go, let’s go. We need to go now.” “Go” meant to Mako 30’s position, not the mountain top where the Rangers were fighting for their lives.¹⁰⁶

“Look, you outrank me sir, but these are my guys up there and until we figure out where the hell we are, we are not going anywhere.”¹⁰⁷

SSG Canon called Captain Nate Self on the radio. “Hey, we’re on the ground, but I don’t see you. I can hear you making contact.”

After some conversation and a GPS check, they figured out where each other was. Nate had been told they would be landing on the southwest slope, but Mako 30 had vectored them onto the northeast slope to a lower altitude.

Lieutenant Commander Hyder interrupted. “Let’s get my guys first, my wounded. We’ll bring them down to the LZ on the valley floor and then we’ll go up to the top for your guys.”

SSG Canon turned to his radio and talked to Captain Self. “I’ve got Vic Hyder with me. He wants us to go exfil his guys.” The ad hoc command and control arrangement continued to unravel.

“No way. Let him do whatever he needs to do. Or he can come up here. But you are here for us. The SEALs are fine. They are not getting shot at.” Nate was right. The SEALs were in relatively good shape. They had wounded, but they had managed to descend 2,000 feet in a hurry and they were evidently all still walking.

SSG Canon told Lieutenant Commander Hyder “We’re going to the top, and we’ll come back down and get your guys later. That’s how it’s going to be.” The Rangers began the long hike up the mountain to join their Ranger brothers in battle and, though they did not know it yet, to retrieve the dead of Mako 30. The Navy officer was the ranking officer on site and would be expected to conduct the battle. Instead, he decided to stay with his SEALs and his SEALs were not going up the mountain again. They were a spent force. It was just as well. Captain Self was the officer on site who understood ground combat and how the rangers fought. The middle of a fight is no time to teach a naval officer about ground combat-beyond direct action. SSG Canon estimated that he would join Nate in 45 minutes. It was a lousy estimate.¹⁰⁸

Nate tried to contact the rest of his platoon in Kandahar, but the radio operators did not recognize his call sign and asked him to leave the net. He tried calling the TF Dagger TOC in Bagram, but no one answered his calls. BG Trebon’s private communications network had backfired at a critical point. Nate had to route

all communications through Gabe Brown. After awhile, with no direct contact, the TF Dagger TOC assumed that Nate was dead.¹⁰⁹

D+2, 0800-0935 (Takur Ghar)

LTC Burt “Divot” Bartley was flying a single-seat F-16CG Viper. His call sign was Clash 71. His wingman, Captain Andrew “Rip” Lipina was Clash 72. They were each carrying four bombs and 500 rounds of 20mm ammunition. When they came over the valley, Gabe Brown called them and told them what he needed. He needed a strafing run. Since the run would be well within danger-close range, the Colonel asked for Gabe’s ground commander’s initials-giving the ground commander’s initials is an acknowledgment that the fire support is dangerous and theoretically absolves the pilot from any responsibility for fratricide. Gabe had been giving out Nate’s initials since the F-15Es arrived. LTC Bartley made a dry run and then came around again. This time he came in firing. The rounds splattered ineffectually to the east of the ridge. He came around again and made another gun run. This time the fire splattered the ridge and kicked snow all over the forward Rangers. LTC Bartley was out of bullets.¹¹⁰

Unfortunately, the enemy was still there and they had plenty of bullets. From across the valley, SMSGT James Hotaling and his Australian comrades could see enemy behind a tree on the bunker line. The Predator UAV could also see them.¹¹¹ The enemy was in strength in the bunkers and now an enemy 82mm mortar on an adjacent hillside began methodically firing at Nate Self’s command. One round was short, the next round was long. The enemy mortar men were not amateurs. They

were deliberately establishing a bracket and moving the strike of the successive rounds closer to the downed helicopter. Fortunately, the enemy mortar men had set the rounds for point detonating and the rounds were landing in deep snow that absorbed much of the blast and fragmentation. Still, the enemy might catch on and their rounds were getting closer. Nate called SSG Canon. “How much longer until you are here?”

“Another 45 minutes.” It was an overly-optimistic assessment.

“You are moving too slow. Do you still have your back plates in?”

“Roger.”

“You might lose those.”

Body armor will stop an enemy 7.62mm bullet, but it is heavy. Some Rangers pulled out their back plates, while others just tried to scale the steep sides a bit faster.¹¹²

The other Rangers were not going to be there anytime soon and the mortar fire was close and uncomfortable. Something had to be done now. “Jeremy, do the F-16s have anything else to offer.”

“Bombs,” Gabe replied.

“Well, let’s try bombs and then we’ll try an assault.”¹¹³

The mortar rounds were landing around the helicopter and so SFC Cory Lameraux, TSGT Kerry Miller, and Senior Airman Jason Cunningham began to move the patients away from the helicopter into the open area behind Gabe Brown. They used several litters and their two Skedco sleds to move the wounded. It was

hard going in the knee-deep, crusted snow. Unfortunately, the Skedco containing SSG Dube got away from Airman Cunningham and started down the slope toward an 800-foot drop. Luckily, it ran into some litters and stopped.¹¹⁴

D+2, 0645-0935 (TF 64, The South)

SMSGT James Hotaling and the five Australians had a great view but not a lot of time to enjoy it. James was not quite as busy as Gabe Brown was on Takur Ghar, but busy enough. He was keeping the radio rubber-neckers at bay. Many of Gabe's radio transmissions were garbled, so James would relay those as well. The entire team was spotting and recording targets. The enemy was trying to reinforce the peak of Takur Ghar and James could see them coming up through the snow and through the tree line like ants toward an anthill. There were some groups with radios that looked as if they were directing things. Weapons fire disclosed fixed firing positions. Whenever there was an aircraft available that Gabe could not use, James would direct it against the most threatening target--command and control first, reinforcements next, weapons positions next.¹¹⁵

D+2, 0935-1015 (Takur Ghar)

Gabe again called Clash 71. The idea was for LTC Bartley to bomb the far side of the ridge and then move the bombs closer up onto the bunker line, hopefully not killing or wounding any of the Americans. After getting Nate's initials, the F-16 dropped its first bomb. It was about 400 meters from the top of the hill. The 500-pound blast threw debris everywhere. The second bomb was 200 meters off the top

of the hill and closer to the bunker line. The enemy fire ceased momentarily. Then the firing started all over again. The bunker line had a connecting trench line and the enemy was able to move back and forth under cover. The bombs were not doing the job. The third bomb came across to the near side of the ridge line, exploding 90 meters from the crouching Americans. Danger-close on a 500-pound bomb was 425 meters.¹¹⁶

Gabe Brown was on the radio. “Whoa, you almost got us with that one. Can you move it a little closer to the tree?”

“Negative.”

Nate yelled at Gabe. “OK, stop him. They’re getting a little too close.”¹¹⁷

Nate had noticed something else during the bombing runs. The F-16 was drawing heavy antiaircraft fire to the east. Puffs of flak blossomed across the sky. Across the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley was another string of mountains and another set of enemy positions. The enemy had moved heavy anti-aircraft guns and machine guns onto that mountain ridge--and the one behind that. The mortar fire that targeted them was coming from that mountain as well. The F-15s and a B-52 had been trying to bomb these positions, but with limited success. Nate was clearly stuck in the middle of a well-organized, well-equipped defense in depth. How had they managed to move heavy antiaircraft guns up that high? How deep did this defense go? Was this just the tip of the iceberg? What the heck was here that was so darned important?¹¹⁸

The enemy kept firing at them from the ridge immediately to his front. They were not that accurate, but Nate had to clear them from that ridge so that he could create an HLZ and bring in a medical evacuation helicopter for the wounded. CW3 Greg Calvert was in particularly bad shape and might not make it much longer. But no helicopters were coming in until he had the area secured. He had to take that ridge and there was no way to flank it. It was too steep in the south and the enemy dominated the north. Nate prepared for a frontal assault.

PFC David Gilliam would provide a support-by-fire position with his M240 machine gun. A Sergeant from the flight crew of Razor 01 would assist him with reloading the machine gun and directing fire. The assault element would be Captain Nate Self, SSG Ray DePouli, USAF SSG Kevin Vance, and Sergeant Joshua J. Walker. The top of Sergeant Walker's helmet had been plowed by two enemy bullets, which made him easy to identify. PFC Gilliam's machine gun chattered as his bullets raked the top of the ridge. The four-man assault group rose and advanced using assault fire. An enemy appeared, fired at them and then scooted back under cover. Instinctively, Nate recognized, from the way the man moved, that there were well-constructed, well-camouflaged, connected bunkers along the ridge line and momentarily his assault group could be decimated from enfilade fire from a flanking machine gun. "Bunker, bunker, bunker! Get back, get back, get back!" The assault group had made it half-way there, but they fell back.¹¹⁹

The mortar rounds were falling close again. It was such a beautiful day for the grim business at hand. Nate saw a Predator UAV fly across the clear blue sky. Nate yelled at SSG Gabe Brown, "Find out if the Predator is armed."

Gabe was puzzled. The Predator was strictly a reconnaissance drone. At that time, the fact that some Predator UAV carried Hellfire guided missiles was highly classified information and Gabe knew nothing about it. "What are you talking about? It's just a Predator."

"Some of them are armed. Ask them."¹²⁰

Gabe got on the radio. "They have two Hellfires."

The UAV flies low and slow so it can deliver accurate fire. The 14-pound warhead of the Hellfire is a lot less dangerous to nearby friendly troops than a 500-pound bomb. "Have him put it on the bunker by the tree."

The UAV lined up for its first shot. It exploded impotently on the far side of the ridge. Nate got a call from SSG Canon who was climbing to his rescue.

"Whatever you're doing, you need to stop. It came pretty close to us."

"It's not as close to you as it is to us. Just keep moving."¹²¹

The close air support aircraft were gone, the enemy mortar fire continued, the enemy fire from the ridge line continued and there was one Hellfire missile left. SSG Brown talked to the operator, guiding him onto the target. Finally Gabe said, "Cleared hot. Kill the effing tree."

The operator launched the missile. It hit directly into the bunker. Logs, pieces of machine gun, and debris went flying. Enemy fire from the ridge line

ceased. But then, it started again, from the trench.¹²² [See Map 7-5, D+2, 0640-0800, F16CG Strafing and bombing runs and Predator strike.]

D+2, 0800-1015 (Bagram to Gardez)

The Special Operations community in Bagram reacted to the situation at Takur Ghar. The situation had clearly developed past the capability of the remote headquarters on Misrah Island to influence or redeem. The Bagram SOF constituted another QRF with 35 Rangers that were still in Bagram. Two Chinooks from the 160th SOAR lifted off from Bagram, carrying the QRF to Gardez. Two Apaches from Alfa Company, 3-101 “Killer Spades” and two Black Hawk Medical Evacuation helicopters from the 7-101 joined the effort. Another Chinook from the 160th later joined the group at FARP Texaco where they fueled. At Gardez, the Air Mission Commander and the QRF Commander began planning for the rescue mission.¹²³ They were getting ready and waiting for the go signal.

D+2, 0900-1130 (The North)

TF 1-187 advanced out of Amy Pass and into the Shar-i Kot Valley. Company B, 1-87th was in the lead. They moved south through the valley by bounds, one group covering the other’s advance and then moving forward through that group to the next position so that they would not be surprised. Ahead of them, they could see aircraft attacking targets far up on Takur Ghar. It was 1025 and the lead elements were about even with Blocking Position Betty. At 1110, the company stopped short of a large walled edifice that became known as “the compound.” The soldiers could

see a mortar inside the walled courtyard. One platoon moved south of the compound and set up security while the rest of B Company secured the compound and began to search it. There were two prepared fighting positions by the compound but no enemy. They seized the mortar, RPGs, rockets, many small arms and ammunition as well as PVS-7B night vision goggles, radios and manuals on such subjects as bomb-making and narcotics and what looked like a financial ledger. There was also a lot of cut hair. The occupants had apparently left in a hurry.

At 1122, the enemy began firing about a kilometer and a half to the south of the compound. The company pushed forward. At 1130, Colonel Wiercinski issued an order to TF 1-87 to occupy blocking positions Cindy and Diane and set up strong point defenses to control the passes in both directions. LTC Ron Corkran told Bravo Company to clear the compound and then occupy blocking position Cindy while Charlie Company, 1-187 would move through Bravo Company to occupy blocking position Diane.¹²⁴

Colonel Wiercinski was frustrated. He was trying to coordinate a battle and help out with whatever was going on atop Takur Ghar. The only way he could communicate outside the valley was on his one narrow band TACSAT net. Everyone wanted to talk to him and he needed to coordinate matters, but the communications were just too tough. He wanted to be on the battlefield, but he could not accomplish what he needed to there. He managed to communicate with MG Hagenbeck that, if the extraction from Takur Ghar failed, he would move LTC Paul La Camera's 1st-

87th back into the battlefield that night and begin a night attack up the mountain. If not, he would bring the 1st-87th in the following day.¹²⁵

Task Force Rakkasans stayed in the northern valley with the 2nd-187th. Major Dennis Yates, the Brigade Fire Support Officer, and Captain Paul Murray, the USAF Air Liaison Officer, relocated to the compound along with the mortars. On their way to the compound, Dennis and “Dino” ran into LTC Chip Preysler, the 2nd-187th Commander and his Chaplain, Mike Shellman. They were scruffy. They had not shaved in days and were grimy and tired. It was a good reunion. While they were talking, Dennis noticed a young lieutenant in the small battalion command post. He was intently reading a bible. Dennis asked: “Hey, who’s that?”

Mike replied, “Oh, the Lieutenant? He’s our resident atheist in the battalion.”

“What’s he doing?”

“He’s reading the Psalms. He converted to Christianity yesterday when an RPG skimmed past his head.”¹²⁶

Dennis and “Dino” hiked on to the compound. SFC Michael A. Peterson, the mortar platoon leader from the 1-87, and part of his platoon had returned to the valley at HLZ 15 that morning. They had moved two 120mm mortars and two 81mm mortars and some ammunition on one of the Gators to the compound. SFC Peterson, “the mortar man’s mortar man” set up and tied in with an assortment of 60mm and 81mm mortars from the Rakkasans. Dennis now had a mortar battery that would eventually number 12 mortars and there was no one better qualified to run it than SFC Peterson.¹²⁷

D+2, 0900-1500 (FARP Texaco)

The pumps were running dry at the FARP. The overworked Chinooks from TF Talon began ferrying more fuel into the FARP to meet the demand. That was not the only problem. The FARP was drawing a lot of attention and Afghans crowded round the area. Some of them did not appear to be friendly. The engineer platoon was providing security and was a bit stretched. Fortunately, they had linked up with an Afghan force led by Gul Haidar that was keeping the crowds at bay. Still, it would probably be a good idea to move the FARP. But they were short on time and resources and could not afford to shut the FARP down long enough to move it.

D+2, 1015-1315 (Takur Ghar)

The enemy mortar fire had shifted from the group on top of the hill to SSG Aaron Canon's group scaling the mountain. At places, the snow was waist deep and it was slow going. The thin air further slowed the Rangers who were not acclimated to high altitude. Captain Nate Self kept radioing SSG Canon. "How much longer?"

Forty-five minutes was the standard answer, but they were now working on the fourth consecutive set of forty-five minutes and the enemy in the trenches were still shooting. Their marksmanship was not improving but the mathematical probability of getting hit was. Finally SSG Canon's group got to a point where they could see Specialist Anthony Miceli who was providing rear and flank security. SSG Canon brought a great deal of combat power to the force--a M240 machine gun, two SAWs, an M203 grenade launcher, and six M4 carbines. He also brought another medic. Nate and Aaron had discussed the assault plan as Aaron climbed. Around

1050, the squad linked up with Nate's force, went immediately on line and as two machine guns laid down suppressive fire, the Rangers assaulted the ridge line and cleared the top. There were some more bunkers on the reverse slope. The Rangers cleared these as well, dispatching more enemy. They discovered that the enemy had a recoilless anti-tank gun mounted and ready to fire. Fortunately, they had not used it. The enemy defenses were well laid out and camouflaged and the enemy had range cards drawn and displayed for the various weapons at the firing positions.¹²⁸ [See Map 7-6, D+2, 0730-1050, Rangers on Takur Ghar.]

During the assault, one of the Rangers was shot in the ankle. TSGT Keary Miller and the Ranger medic, SGT Matt LaFrenz, went forward to fix him up. They took the wounded Ranger to the bunker for treatment. They patched him up and found two dead Americans. One of them was John Chapman. The other was Neil Roberts. Keary Miller knew John Chapman but had no idea what he was doing here.¹²⁹ Nate was puzzled and worried. They had a dead US airman and a dead US sailor. What were they doing here? Had they killed them during the assault? Were they a small reconnaissance team that they had killed with close air support? Was one of them the guy who had fallen off the helicopter in the valley and the enemy had brought him up here on donkey back? What was going on?¹³⁰

SSG Gabe Brown got on the radio. Finally Mako 30 checked in. Mako 30 had offered no information earlier, but now they acknowledged that the two dead belonged to them and that Neil Roberts had fallen out of the helicopter on top of Takur Ghar. The mystery began to clear, but it had taken almost six hours to get this

rudimentary information to the Rangers. Mako 30 offered no explanation why they had asked for the QRF to come to their rescue at the top of the mountain when they actually were far down the mountain, practically at its base.¹³¹

Nate moved his command post up on the high ground and looked for an HLZ to evacuate his wounded. TSGT Keary Miller found a new area to move the wounded to. It was hard to treat them on a 20 degree slope in the cold and high altitude. They had exhausted the oxygen bottles within the first hour and a half. Many of the patients were on IVs, but you cannot give a patient a cold IV without the danger of putting him into shock and killing him. The medics were wearing IVs next to their skin before administering them. Keeping them warm while they dripped was practically impossible unless you stooped over the patient with the IV inside your jacket.¹³²

It was approximately 1115. Four enemy armed with an RPG and automatic weapons had evaded the interdiction efforts of SMGT Hotaling and the Australians and had climbed up on the south side of Takur Ghar. The new enemy fired the RPG. Gabe could see it coming at him. It looked as if he could have caught it if he had been wearing a baseball glove. The RPG flew overhead and then passed just over Nate Self's head. The new enemy group then opened up with small arms, concentrating on the wounded that were lying in the open between them and the Rangers on the mountain top. Two of the Rangers were moving SSG Dube to the new casualty collection point when the enemy opened up. SSG Dube was still strapped to his Skedco. They dropped him and returned fire. SSG Dube grabbed a

bush and held on so that he would not take another ride. The Rangers then returned for SSG Dube and again dragged him to safety.¹³³

The Rangers discovered what their comrades on the valley floor had already discovered. The M4 Carbine is not the optimum weapon for a mountain fight. The M4 is a short-barreled version of the M16 rifle. The M16 rifle round is a high-velocity, small-caliber, short-range cartridge that gets its lethality from hitting bone and causing the high-velocity round to tumble. The 5.56mm M16 bullet weighs a mere 55 grams. When the M16 bullet is fired in the shorter-barrel M4 Carbine, it goes subsonic at 50 meters. It is like trying to engage the enemy with a .22 caliber magnum round. Engaging the enemy at any significant range (which most mountain combat entails) with an M4 is frustrating. It is very hard to hit anything at 300 meters and if you do, you may annoy the enemy, but you probably would not kill him. The quick fix is to equip soldiers armed with the M4 with ammunition with a 70 gram bullet which will keep it supersonic longer. The long-term fix is to equip soldiers in the mountains with a weapon with a larger, longer-range, heavier weight bullet such as the 7.62mm. The 7.62 mm rounds of the M240 machine guns could, and did, reach the enemy driving him into bunkers.

The four enemy continued to fire from the bunkers at the original casualty collection site. Enemy 7.62mm small arms fire rattled among the wounded, wounding some again. SFC Cory Lameraux, the Razor 01 medic; Senior Airman Jason Cunningham, one of the PJ medics; and CW3 Don Tabron, the Air Mission Commander fired back to protect the patients. The enemy shifted his fire from the

patients to the combatants. A burst of fire caught Cory Lameraux and Jason Cunningham low, below the body armor. Cory had two rounds in his gut and Jason was shot through the pelvis.¹³⁴

SSG Gabe Brown was busy on the radio while bullets snapped by. He and the patients were between the Rangers and the four enemy and the enemy was trying to kill the wounded. Gabe was trying to get an air strike in to kill the enemy. Unfortunately, there was a shortage of laser designators and Gabe did not have one. He did not even have a pair of the range-finding binoculars. Gabe tried to talk a B-1 bomber onto target. The bomber dropped his JDAMs into an abyss. The four enemy were not the only problem. Hots (SMSGT Hotaling) and the Australians have been watching the enemy crawl up the side of the mountain. They had picked off a lot of enemy with airstrikes, but more keep coming. Gabe's SATCOM radio hummed. It was Hots. "Gabe, two hundred personnel coming to kill you!"¹³⁵

Maybe Hots was wrong. Maybe it was only 100, maybe only 50. However many there were, it was a lot of enemy coming out of Marzak and coming up the mountain. Hotaling and Brown stayed busy. Hotaling took charge of the JDAM assets and started hunting pockets of enemy between Marzak and the mountain summit. Gabe took charge of the laser-guided, precision munitions and the close-in fight utilizing the Predator UAV to spot the enemy. Gabe got some F-18 Navy fighters overhead and tried to talk them onto the target. The first approach came in from the wrong direction. Gabe talked them into the right approach and onto target. The 500-pound bombs much dropped closer than expected. It blew off helmets and

sent very-large chunks of metal cartwheeling overhead. It sent three enemy bodies and pieces of a fourth skyward. It was 1215.¹³⁶ [See Map 7-7, D+2, 1115-1215, F16 and French Mirage Strikes.]

The immediate enemy threat was over. In the middle of the fighting, the enemy mortar had been put out of action by two French Mirage Fighters. Gabe had problems understanding their accented English, but the Predator operator could. He took over the fire mission and directed them onto the mortar position. Six-eight enemy were manning the position. The French put a 500-pound bomb right into the position. The surviving enemy ran into a bunker. The next French Mirage put his bomb right into the bunker.¹³⁷

Nate Self and his exhausted command continued to move the wounded to the new pick-up zone. He need to get his wounded evacuated now. CW3 Greg Calvert was in very bad shape and now two of his medics were “urgent surgical.” SFC Cory Lameraux, the Razor 01 medic was gut shot through the bladder. Senior Airman Jason Cunningham, one of the PJs, was shot in the groin and bleeding out. The HLZ was cold. At 1300, USAF ETAC SSG Kevin Vance radioed Bagram and requested an immediate casualty evacuation. He had a good reverse-slope pick-up zone (PZ) that was protected from enemy fire. He was told to “Stand By.” The headquarters then requested the status of the PZ. Just as Kevin answered “Cold,” an enemy mortar round exploded nearby.¹³⁸

D+2, 1130-1340 (The North)

B Company, 1st-87th was moving south and watching the aircraft working over portions of Takur Ghar. At 1153, they spotted some possible mortar positions on the northwest slopes of Takur Ghar. At 1315, the trailing C Company, 1st-187th spotted a Red SUV with tinted windows and an antenna rig on the outskirts of Sherkankehl. It might be an enemy spotter vehicle. At 1340, a Canadian sniper immobilized the vehicle with a .50 caliber round through the engine block. Several minutes later, PFC McBride, one of the Arab linguists, heard a female voice on the enemy radio net reporting on the sniper shot. Evidently not all the Al Qaeda women had left the valley and one of them was performing a combat support role. At the same time, B Company spotted four enemy on Takur Ghar. They appeared to have a TACSAT radio and a RPK machine gun. One was wearing a white turban. Bravo Company wanted to engaged them with close air support but since special operations forces were in the area and since they were known to carry enemy weapons and dress locally, B Company was not positive that they were enemy. Not having a unified command made it difficult to check and the group of four left long before anyone could determine whether or not they were friendly.¹³⁹

D+2, 1015-1330 (FARP Texaco)

At FARP Texaco, the QRF commanders, helicopter flight leads and air mission commander worked on a deliberate evacuation plan. By 1330, the plan was ready and the force stood by their three Chinooks. The QRF had grown to 70 personnel. Captain Nate Self argued against that many people. The top of Takur

Ghar was small and could not accommodate all those people. The QRF was cut back to 35 Rangers.¹⁴⁰ They were ready to launch, but now BG Trebon made it clear that he did not want the force from Task Force Dagger to make the rescue. Task Force Dagger would perform the rescue. He did not want the 35 Rangers. The rescue Chinooks sat and waited for the arrival of an all-SEAL QRF.

D+2, 1315-1530 (Bagram)

Captain Nate Self continued to request immediate evacuation of his six critically wounded. The able-bodied and walking wounded could hold out until dark. But every time they requested evacuation and stated that the PZ was cold, firing would erupt. BG Trebon had already lost three special operations Chinook helicopters. He was not going to risk another. At 1430, BG Trebon ordered the three Chinooks at FARP Texaco to switch off. He moved to extraction time to 2015 that night. He did not tell this to Captain Self and his command on Takur Ghar. At 1520, Sergeant Matt LaFrenz, the Ranger medic, called BG Trebon's TF K-Bar headquarters to explain that "medical conditions were getting worse." The patients needed immediate evacuation.¹⁴¹

"Roger, we understand" was the terse reply. Ten minutes later, TF K-Bar called back and told Captain Self that the extraction would not be until 2015--four and a half hours later.¹⁴² The Rangers kept asking that the extraction of the wounded be moved up, but after awhile Misrah Island would not even answer their calls.

Radio intercept was picking up lots of interesting information. The enemy was telling his personnel to split up into three-five man groups to avoid close air

support as they climbed to the summit. The enemy was trying to get a video camera crew up to the summit to film their anticipated victory over the Americans.¹⁴³ The locals knew that carpenters in Zurmat were working overtime building “boxes for bodies” and Toyota Hilux pick-up trucks were transporting the boxes toward the battlefield to carry out the dead and the wounded.¹⁴⁴ There was one rush order for 150 boxes. Since most Islamic burials do not use coffins, but only a shroud, these boxes were most likely used primarily for transporting the wounded in the back of vehicles.¹⁴⁵

D+2, 1340-2000 (The North)

By 1500, the infantry units were in position at Amy, Betty, Cindy, and Diane.¹⁴⁶ The Sappers had gotten to blow up the Red SUV before they moved on.¹⁴⁷ At 1645, TF Rakkasans issued an update. The extraction of the personnel on Takur Ghar would take place at 2115. TF Rakkasans would support by pushing up the ridge lines and establishing a mortar park at the compound at 0230 hours the next morning. The 1st-87th would come back into the valley that night and B Company would rejoin its battalion if the extraction failed.¹⁴⁸

With nothing to do but wait, Dodge Billingsley and the other media, along with Captain Pool, the PAO, who were now in LTC Corkran’s battalion’s furthest southern position, decided to walk back north to the compound. The battalion had passed it earlier the day before setting up night positions. There was ample evidence of an armed presence within the small walled compound, lots of mortar rounds, assault rifles, and even RPGs. Suddenly there was a detonation and then another,

followed by a sustained burst from the .50 caliber. Looking back to the south, Dodge could see the position they had just left taking and returning fire.¹⁴⁹ It was 1732. It was a probing attack--a reconnaissance by fire.¹⁵⁰ Almost all the .50 caliber machine guns returned fire. Mortar and automatic fire whipped back and forth. No one was hurt and company mortars and close air support silenced the enemy mortars. TF Rakkasans announced that the extraction from Takur Ghar was now delayed until 2200.¹⁵¹ The fire fight led to an order that the soldiers and media now at the compound would stay put for the night and return to their former position in the morning. There was a problem. It was warm during the day, but the nights were bitter cold. Dodge and everyone else who had walked back to the compound had left their snivel gear in the southernmost position.¹⁵²

Enemy activity dropped off and the ground forces quit moving. Soldiers cleaned their weapons and grabbed a bit to eat--if they still had any food or water left. No one shifted their machine gun positions after the firing. Everyone was waiting for the night extraction off of Takur Ghar. Soldiers prepared fighting positions and improved fields of fire. There were indications that the enemy would attack in strength in the morning. [See Map7- 8, D+2. 1340-1732.]

It was a miserable night, Dodge and Captain Pool wore a path into the hillside by the compound trying to stay active and warm. At one point in the night a Navy SEAL medic gave the freezing media one foil "space blanket." After snuggling with the others for a while without getting any warmer, Dodge headed back up the path to continue walking and waiting for daybreak. The SEAL medic mentioned that a MH-

47 had hard landed in the north the previous night, and another had been sent in to extract the downed crew. The helicopter or helicopters that Dodge had seen were likely one or both of those. He still had no inkling that the helicopters were linked to what was happening on Takur Ghar.

D+2, 1530-1800 (Takur Ghar)

Bombs were erupting on the slopes as SMSGT Hotaling and the Australians brought in close air support on the climbing enemy. Some enemy made it to the top only to be taken out by the Rangers. After moving all the wounded, the Rangers stripped the helicopter of anything of value to the enemy. They also stripped out helicopter insulation to warm the wounded. The sun had melted some of the snow and everyone was wet. It was getting colder, the water was re-freezing inside the clothing and everyone had borderline hypothermia. They retrieved Chapman's and Robert's bodies, after first attaching a rope to pull them in case the enemy had booby-trapped the bodies.

The temperature continued to drop and the wind was picking up. The medics were frantically working to keep the wounded alive and warm. The IVs had to be kept warm. Senior Airman Jason Cunningham was getting worse. By 1800, Jason was dead. He had bled out from internal injuries. There were now seven US dead on top of Takur Ghar, two more casualties were very critical and the helicopters were not scheduled for at least another two and a half hours.¹⁵³

D+2, 1800-1900 (The Skies Above)

Two A-10 Warthogs flew into the valley. It had taken longer than planned since their KC-135 refueling aircraft took off late and they had to slow way down so they could link-up. They refueled over the area where the Persian Gulf meets the Arabian Sea and then the tanker and A-10s turned east over the Arabian Sea. Eventually, they turned north into Pakistan and refueled about midway up the country. Finally they turned west and fueled again before they flew into Afghanistan. LTC Dahl “K-9” Kostelnik and Captain Scott “Soup” Campbell entered the valley about dusk--the worst time for flying. It was too dark to see the ground, but there was enough light from “sky glow” to use the night-vision goggles. The two single-seater aircraft were now part of a traffic snarl. AWACS [call sign Bossman] was not flying, but a British air control aircraft [call sign Spartan] was. The A-10s got a call for close air support--enemy mortar fire and enemy troops in the open near HLZ 15--LTC Chip Preysler’s 2nd-187th area. White Lightning Bravo was the ETAC’s call sign. It was the ETAC working with Captain Roger Crombie and his truncated 1st Platoon from A Company, 1st-87th. The A-10s flew over the area and saw the infrared strobe of the requesting unit. The enemy was supposedly one kilometer south of that strobe. “Soup” fired two white phosphorus rockets into the target area and then flew an east-west run dropping two Mark-82 500-pound bombs. They were off, but White Lightning Bravo adjusted the point of impact and “K-9” put two Mark-82s right on target. The mortar firing ceased.¹⁵⁴

Too many elements were trying to control the air fight, but no one really was. The Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia was directing bombing strikes on “time-sensitive targets” (TST). The CAOC had no sense of the ground situation of friendly troops and was demanding 12-hour notification by ground unit calls for close air support. CAOC did not understand the immediate nature of close air support but it was trying to assign priority missions for close air support (the prerogative of the ground commander) without an understanding of the ground situation. AWACS was trying to direct aircraft into and out of the valley, but the bulk of the aircraft were involved in close air support—something AWACS is not equipped to handle. JSTARS was trying to sort out the close air support coming into the valley. JSTARS and AWACS were quarreling over who had tasking authority. Captain Paul “Dino” Murray was trying to handle close air support when it arrived, but SOF elements from TF K-Bar and TF-Dagger were also calling in strikes which were not always coordinated with those of TF Rakkasans. There were additional problems. Close Air Support (CAS) is run on one radio frequency, Time-sensitive Targeting (TST) is run on another. The pilots on different missions did not talk to each other. Communications between air and ground were problematic. Most of the ground units were not carrying secure voice gear and were broadcasting in the clear. Most of the aircraft were in secure voice and had no idea when the ground was trying to talk to them unless an air controller could tell them to switch over. In the immediacy of the tactical fight, there was no need for

secure voice, but pilots were doing what they were trained to do. Pilots in secure voice could not hear pilots broadcasting in the open and vice versa.¹⁵⁵

Suddenly an AC-130 Spectre called with the news that a B-52 was ten minutes out on a bombing run and to clear the area. “Soup” checked the coordinates of the strike and realized that the B-52 was going to lay a string of bombs right at the edge of the LTC Chip Preysler’s 2nd-187th! “Soup” talked to the B-52. They had no idea there were any friendly forces in the area. Air control became even more problematic. A Navy F-18 split the A-10 formation. A Predator UAV almost collided with Captain Campbell’s A-10. Captain Campbell almost collided with the Spectre gunship. The air players were more of a threat to themselves than the enemy on the ground. The A-10s took over as FAC-As. They directed everyone to turn their navigation lights on and redirected the axis of the B-52 strike away from the Rakkasans. Finally, the two A-10s flew back to Pakistan for aerial refueling.¹⁵⁶

D+2, 1945-2045 (FARP Texaco-Takur Ghar)

The extraction mission was ready to launch. The death of Jason Cunningham had accelerated the process. Still, TF K-Bar was taking no chances on losing a fourth Chinook. The rescue mission was supported by two AC-130 Spectre gunships and two Apache helicopters. The two A-10 Warthog close air support aircraft were also supposed to be part of this, but the time juggling meant that they were refueling during the event. Spectre and the Apaches were all equipped with night vision capability and any enemy who showed himself would be vaporized. There were six Chinooks ready--four Chinooks from the 3rd Battalion of the 160th SOAR had just

arrived in country and were pressed into the mission. They had arrived at the FARP just an hour before launch.

At 1945, four Chinooks lifted into the night sky and headed toward of Takur Ghar. Razor 02 lead the flight and would land first to offload the SEAL QRF force and pick up the critically wounded on top of Takur Ghar. Razor 05 would pick up Mako 30. Agile 03 would land on Takur Ghar after Razor 02 left and would pick up the dead and the remaining Rangers. The fourth Chinook would then land on Takur Ghar and pick up the SEAL QRF force which had been trimmed back from 35 due to the altitude.¹⁵⁷

It was 2005.¹⁵⁸ The rangers had their strobe light on. Razor 02 came in on the wrong heading! The helicopter landed with its nose toward the casualties and its tail over a slope. The SEALs bounded out of the back of the helicopter and many slid for a distance in the deep snow before they could stop. Nate Self tried to get the helicopter to reposition, but the pilot felt that he would cause more damage by taking off and landing again. The SEALs and the CSAR personnel formed a perimeter and knelt. The wounded had to be move 40 meters through knee-deep snow and rotor wash. The embattled rangers, Razor 01 crew and airmen had been fighting and soldiering for over 12 hours at altitude. They were exhausted and many were wounded themselves. Captain Self asked the SEALs and CSAR for some help moving the wounded. They refused. They were there to guard the aircraft. The survivors move the wounded. It took four-six men to move one wounded and they had to put him down every few minutes. When the first litter rounded the rear of the

aircraft, there were further difficulties besides the steep slope. All the CASR gear was strapped to the right rear of the Chinook ramp, so they had to work their way around that and then lift the litter on board. Moving the patients on Skedcos was easier, but still tricky. CW3 Greg Calvert was accidentally dumped from his Skedco during the trip to the back ramp. It took 22 long minutes to load the 11 critically wounded on board. The four-man CSAR team then jumped back on board. Neither they, nor the SEAL team, had raised a finger to help during the entire time. The aircrew of Razor 02 had.¹⁵⁹

Agile 03 then landed--on the right heading. But, its ramp was tilted up into the air, so everything had to be loaded at shoulder height. Again Captain Self asked the kneeling SEALs for help loading the dead, the weapons, the radios, and the sensitive gear. Again the SEALs refused. They would not even help carry their own two dead that Nate Self's command had recovered at great cost. The rangers, Razor 01 crew and airmen carried and lifted the six dead and the gear on board. Then Agile 03 lifted off. The living and dead and tools of war were packed on top of each other in a strange communion.¹⁶⁰

Razor 05 had the quickest--and trickiest evacuation. During the entire day, the SEALs had only managed to progress about 1,500 meters further downhill toward a landing spot. Their two wounded were worse than originally thought. One of them would lose his leg. The aircraft had no communication with Mako 30 but saw their strobe and laser designator. They were in a tough spot for a pickup. They were at the bottom of a gorge with granite walls on three sides of them. There was no place to

land a helicopter. Razor 05 hovered 80 feet above them and then slowly dropped down to a two-wheel landing. Mako 30 and the Naval Lieutenant Commander crawled on board. The helicopter rose straight up until it could fly back to Gardez.¹⁶¹

The last Chinook landed, picked up the SEAL QRF and departed without incident. The “Battle of Roberts Ridge” would captivate the American public’s attention and, for most Americans, would be the sum total of Operation Anaconda. It is a stirring account of the heroism and tenacity of American fighting men and the tragic tale of seven brave men who did not return to their families. But it was a sidelight to the main event. Operation Anaconda was just warming up and the main event was yet to come.¹⁶²

D+2, 2000-2400 (The North)

The Americans in the valley heard the armada of aircraft heading toward Takur Ghar. The enemy held his fire. Hopefully, it would be a quiet night and the enemy would show his usual disinclination to fight at night.

D+2, 2050-2400 (The Skies Above)

The two A-10s found the orbiting tanker and fueled. While they were refueling, they heard the good news. They were cleared to land in Jacobabad, Pakistan after their next two missions into the valley. They flew back to the valley, but the extraction was over. Suddenly some bombs whistled pass the lead A-10. Some Navy F-18s were bombing and did not know where Spectre or the A-10s were. It was still the problem that Close Air Support (CAS) is run of one frequency, Time-

sensitive Targeting (TST) is run on another. The A-10s left the valley to check out another site but never got permission to engage it. They again flew to Pakistan to refuel and returned to the valley for the third time. The third time in the valley was quiet. They identified a seven-truck convoy but were not allowed to engage it. Finally, it was time to head to Jacobabad, Pakistan. About 100 miles out, they checked in with the tower and were denied permission to land. The diplomats had done their job, but no one had told the air controllers. Colonel Neuenswander and a support aircraft were supposed to be in Jacobabad to meet them, but they were not there yet so he could not help. The A-10s were almost out of fuel and the tanker had left the area. They had to land now. The A-10s declared a fuel emergency and landed on a pitch-black runway using their night-vision goggles. The American airfield personnel scrambled looking for someone who could pin the armaments on the A-10 so that the aircraft would be safe while they tried to fit the aircraft into a too-small revetment to hide them from prying eyes. “Soup” and “K-9” staggered off the aircraft for some welcome MREs and some more-welcome cots. They had been flying for 11.5 hours and up about 24.¹⁶³

D+2, 2000-2400 (The Enemy)

The enemy ascent up Takur Ghar did not cease with the night extraction. There was undoubtedly loot to be had on the mountain top. More enemy came into the valley, primarily through the southern passes. Most were local Afghans and some determined Pakistanis from the Miram Shah area. These reinforcements headed into the villages. Marzak was well rubbled--SMSGT Hotaling had seen to that.

Babulkhel and Sherkhankhel were still intact. Although it was clear to the troops on the ground that there were no civilians in the valley, higher headquarters had not yet declared these two villages hostile. The enemy disappeared into the villages. Some continued up onto the Whale. The enemy had been hurt that day, but so had the Americans. The main event was yet to come. [See Map 7-9, D+2, 2000-2400, Enemy Movement.]

The Australian SAS of TF64 had set up a series of road blocks. They observed and stopped a large number of male non-combatants moving through their area in the south. Most of them were in vehicles, but they were not armed and were not carrying ammunition or anything to indicate that they were combatants. So, the Australians had been letting them go on through. They later discovered that the vehicles were dropping off the men, who scooted into the nearby *karez* irrigation tunnel systems or into caves, only to emerge armed to the teeth and ready for a fight.¹⁶⁴

D+2, 2000-2400 (TF 64, The South)

It had been a long day for SMSGT James Hotaling and his Australian teammates. They had been calling death and destruction on the enemy all day. They still had nine-and-a-half hours of aerial butchery ahead. The valley was full of enemy. The Australian team leader was putting together the clues to figure out enemy dispositions and supply routes. James fired mission after mission all through the night. “It was an incredible night because of the intensity of working those gunships, and those A-10 drivers coming in there. And there were so many targets in

that valley that night. That's when we began to really, really push it into the enemy. And this was mostly all on Robert's Ridge and into the town of Marzak."¹⁶⁵

It had now become very personal for "Hots." Someone had broadcast the names of the dead and "Hots" knew the USAF dead. This was now more than payback for 9/11. "Hots" was also in a battle rhythm. Four Spectre gunships were working the valley at night. Each had two or two-and-a-half hours on station. All night, "Hots" would work with the gunships and A-10s. He and the Australians would write down those enemy locations that they did not hit with these aircraft. Once all the targets were mapped out, they would pass a long list of GPS coordinates of troops, ammunition dumps, trucks and bunkers to the command post for the bombers to hit during the day. When day broke and the bombing missions started, "Hots" and the Australians could sleep.¹⁶⁶

"Hots" friend and fellow Combat controller, TSgt John Wylie, was several kilometers to the south of his position and the valley. He was also with the Australian SAS in TF64. While "Hots" had inserted into the battlefield twice by helicopter and then finally ended up hoofing it into position, John moved on a six-wheel all terrain vehicle with three Australians. The vehicle carried a Mark-19 40mm automatic grenade launcher, LAW antitank rocket launchers, and personal arms. The vehicle was part of a six-vehicle group that had driven down all the way from Bagram, skirting Gardez and Zurmat as they went. The other vehicles were carrying .50 caliber machine guns and Javelin anti-tank guided missiles. John was the youngest combat controller out there-21 years old.¹⁶⁷

John and his team from TF 64 were south of the valley looking for “squirters”--enemy who were trying to leave. The enemy were not leaving. Meanwhile, they could hear the fighting going on in the valley. Finally, TF 64 kicked out a six-man dismounted patrol to go into the valley and help out with the fight. John was part of the patrol. He was carrying a 104-pound rucksack. He weighed 125 pounds. They walked for two days and finally took up a position two kilometers south of “Hots.”¹⁶⁸

¹Field Marshal Viscount William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1941-1945* [1956; repr., New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000], 551.

²Interview with BG Francis J. Wiercinski, CO, TF Rakkasans, Schofield Barracks, 13 January 2006. Interview with LTC Dennis Yates, Fire Support Officer TF Rakkasans, at the United States Military Academy at West Point, 8 November 2006.

³Wiercinski.

⁴Interview with SMSGT James Hotaling, CCT 125th STS, Oregon Air National Guard, Hurlburt Field, 6 June 2007.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Interview with “El Cid,” Colonel David M. Neuenswander, Deputy Commander, 332nd Air Expeditionary Group (A-10 and F-16 pilot), Fort Leavenworth, 22 February 2006.

⁸Interview with Colonel Chip Preysler, CO 2-187 Bn, (now J-2 CJTF-76), Bagram, 14 November 2005.

⁹Interview with Captain Kevin Butler, CO A/2-187, Bagram, 19 May 2002.

¹⁰Interview with 1Lt Jamie Gadoury, XO, A/2-187, Bagram, 19 May 2002.

¹¹Interview with CPT Kevin Butler, CO A/2-187; 1SG Jon Blossom, A/2-187; 2Lt Joseph Bell, 3/A/2-187; SSG Jonathan Meyer, Mortar Section Leader, A/2-187; 1Lt Shane T. Owens, 2/A/2-187; 1Lt Adrian B. Hall, 1/A/2-187; 1Lt Stephan Leonhardt, FDO with A/2-187; 1Lt Jamie Gadoury, XO, A/2-187, Bagram, 19 May 2002.

¹²Meyer.

¹³Interview with Cpt Frank Baltazar, CO, C/2-187; SSG Christian Sheffield, 1/C/2-187; 1Lt Samuel Johnson, FDO with C/2-187; SFC Kelly Jack Luman, Platoon Leader, 3/C/2-187 at Bagram, 18 May 2002.

¹⁴Baltazar, Sheffield, Johnson, and Luman.

¹⁵Preysler.

¹⁶Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005), 297-307.

¹⁷Interview with LTC Christopher K. Haas, Cdr, 1st Battalion 5th SF Group and 1SG Danny Lynn Van Allen, 1SG, 1st Bn 5th SF Group at Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

¹⁸Naylor, 304.

¹⁹Neuenswander.

²⁰Meyer and Leonhardt.

²¹Yates.

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- ²²Interview with Captain Frank Baltazar, CO, C/2-187; SSG Christian Sheffield, 1/C/2-187; 1Lt Samuel Johnson, FDO with C/2-187; and SFC Kelly Jack Luman, Platoon Leader, 3/C/2-187 at Bagram, 18 May 2002.
- ²³Complete TF 1-187 Operations Log for Operation Anaconda including Operations Orders, FRAGOS and log furnished by Major Paul Sarat, S3.
- ²⁴Interview with CSM Jimmy Taylor, CSM 1-187, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.
- ²⁵Taylor.
- ²⁶TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ²⁷Hotaling.
- ²⁸Baltazar and Luman.
- ²⁹Neuenswander.
- ³⁰Ibid.
- ³¹Ibid.
- ³²Interview with Major Scott “Soup” Campbell, A-10 pilot and Weapons and Tactics Officer, 74th Fighter Squadron, attached to 332nd Air Expeditionary Group, Fort Leavenworth, 29 August 2008.
- ³³Ibid.
- ³⁴Yates.
- ³⁵Naylor, 305.
- ³⁶Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder and Kalev I. Sepp, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth; Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 296-297; Naylor, 311.
- ³⁷Malcolm MacPherson, *Roberts Ridge: A Story of Courage and Sacrifice on Takur Ghar Mountain, Afghanistan* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2005), 8-11.
- ³⁸Billingsley.
- ³⁹Ibid.
- ⁴⁰TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ⁴¹Ibid.
- ⁴²This book uses local time. Conventional forces and conventional aviation used ZULU time in their reporting whereas the Special Operations community used CHARLIE time--the time zone in Kuwait and Misrah Island where CFLCC and TF 11 were headquartered respectively.
- ⁴³MacPherson, 11-14.
- ⁴⁴MacPherson, 15-16; Briscoe et al, 297.
- ⁴⁵MacPherson, 16. Naylor’s sources state that the TF Blue Operations Officer gave the fatal order to go in shortly before dawn, but later tried to pin it on an enlisted radio operator during an inquiry. 309
- ⁴⁶Briscoe, et al. 297.
- ⁴⁷MacPherson, 20; Briscoe et al. 297; Naylor 310.
- ⁴⁸MacPherson, 22-24; Briscoe et al. 297-298; Naylor, 311-312.
- ⁴⁹MacPherson, 29-31.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., 32-47.
- ⁵¹Naylor, 311, 318
- ⁵²MacPherson, 45, 49.
- ⁵³Naylor, 318.
- ⁵⁴MacPherson, 53-55, Briscoe et al. 299-301.
- ⁵⁵Hotaling.
- ⁵⁶Interview with Captain Nate Self, Commander, 1/A/175th Rangers, Fort Leavenworth, 24 March 2003.
- ⁵⁷Naylor, 328.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., 319-320.
- ⁵⁹Briscoe et al. 302.
- ⁶⁰Naylor, 324.

⁶¹Briscoe et al. 302; Naylor, 324-325; MacPherson.

⁶²MacPherson's and Naylor's sources disagree whether Chapman was alive or not when the SEALs retreated. MacPherson states that the laser light was moving in time with Chapman's labored breathing, but then stopped-102. Naylor states that the laser light was rock steady and that Chapman was already dead-326. In any event, there was little time to move him and no one checked him for a pulse or other vital signs or attempted to give him first aid. TSGT Chapman was posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross, the USAF's second highest decoration for valor. There is some video evidence from the Predator UAV that Chapman was still alive and managed to move and conduct a firefight with the enemy nearly an hour after the SEAL's retreat. See Naylor, 338-340. Chapman's body was not found where the SEALs left him, but at the position where Predator filmed the firefight that ended with an RPG explosion.

⁶³Naylor, 326.

⁶⁴Briscoe et al. 302; MacPherson, 102-108; Naylor, 326-327.

⁶⁵MacPherson, 109-110.

⁶⁶Naylor, 328.

⁶⁷Self.

⁶⁸Self, Briscoe et al. 303.

⁶⁹Interview with Major Joe Ryan, Commander, A/175th Ranger, Fort Leavenworth, 29 January 2003. Also, Self; Briscoe et al. 303; MacPherson, 129-133; Naylor, 329-331.

⁷⁰Briscoe et al. 303-304, Naylor, 335-336. Spectre is a slow, lumbering target in daylight. On 31 January 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, the USAF lost an AC-130H gunship and all 14 crew members. Spirit 03 was covering USMC ground elements past daybreak when it was shot down by an Iraqi surface-to-air-missile. Since then, it is USAF policy to have Spectre well out of harm's way before daybreak.

⁷¹Self.

⁷²Self; Naylor, 336; Briscoe et al. 303-304; United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 7 February 2005), 74. The times in the last source do not always tally with other sources.

⁷³Naylor, 338.

⁷⁴Later that morning at Bagram, Major Gibler and Captain "Dino" Murray woke up and saw Grim 32 flying north to Uzbekistan. This was the first and most likely the last time that either of them would see an AC-130 flying in the daytime in a combat zone. Billingsley.

⁷⁵Self.

⁷⁶Self; Briscoe et al. 304; Stone Phillips, "Rescue on Roberts Ridge," *Dateline NBC*, Sunday, 11 June 2006.

⁷⁷TF 1-187 Operations Log. The misidentification of where Razor 03 went down continued for much of the day and created confusion. It also prevented 2-187 from forming a rescue party to go to Razor 03's immediate assistance although they had a platoon working in the area.

⁷⁸TF 1-187 Operations Log.

⁷⁹Taylor. Interview with 1LT Matt Lowen, Platoon Leader, 3rd Platoon, C Company, 326th Engineer Battalion, Fort Campbell, 16 August 2002.

⁸⁰Baltazar, Sheffield, Johnson, and Luman.

⁸¹Interview with Cpt Philip E. Eilertson, Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters" 13th MEU; Cpt Brian Ashford, Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters" 13th MEU, Yuma; and Cpt (now civilian) Howard Brunson, Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters" 13th MEU at Yuma on 21 November 2006. Interview with Major Richard F. Sims Jr., Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters," 13th MEU; Major Bruce Laughlin, Cobra pilot HMLA-367 attached to HMLA-369 "Gunfighters" 13th MEU; and Major Will Sieve, Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters" 13th MEU at Camp Pendleton, 22 November 2006.

⁸²Ashford and Laughlin.

⁸³Phillips.

⁸⁴Briscoe et al. 304-305; MacPherson, 134-135.

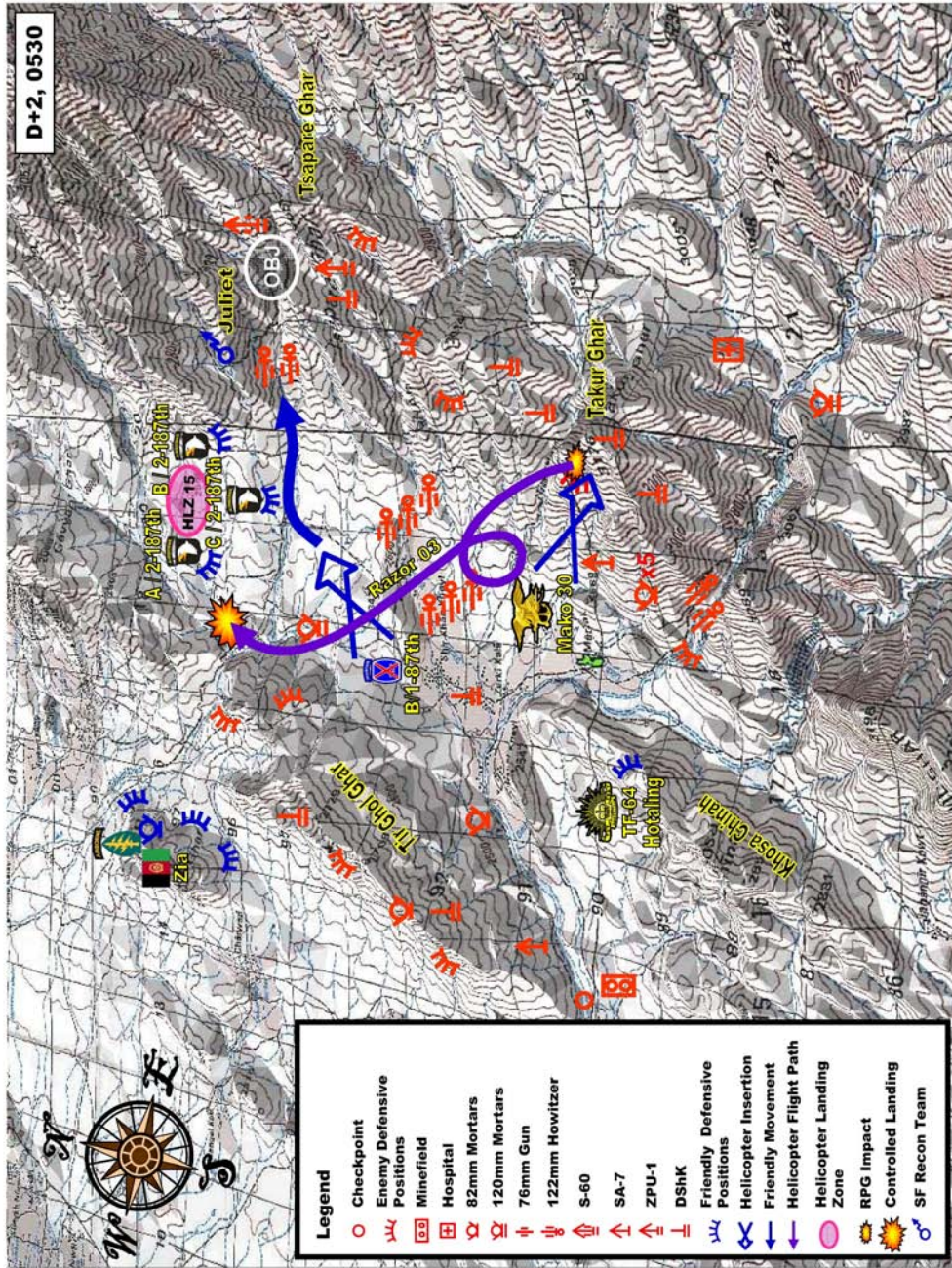
⁸⁵Self; MacPherson, 136.

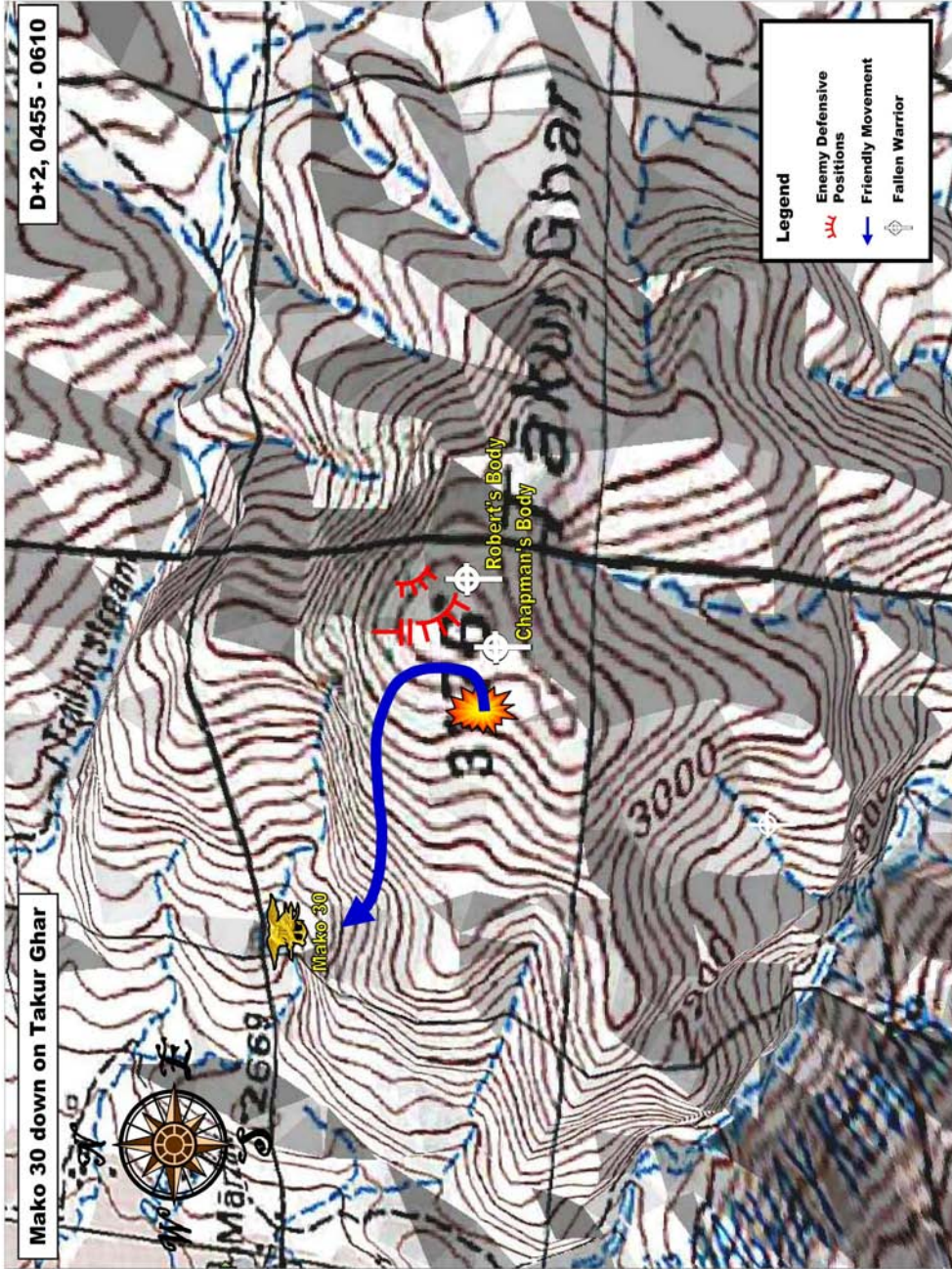
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- ⁸⁶Briscoe et al. 305; MacPherson, 144-145.
- ⁸⁷Self; MacPherson, 145.
- ⁸⁸Self; Ryan; Briscoe et al. 306.
- ⁸⁹Briscoe et al. 305-306; MacPherson, 144-146.
- ⁹⁰Briscoe et al. 305-306; MacPherson, 147-151
- ⁹¹Interview with TSgt Keary Miller, PJ, 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, Kentucky Air National Guard, Hurlburt Field, 25 June 2007.
- ⁹²Interview with 2Lt Gabriel P. Brown, 27 LRS/LGRT, Cannon Air Base, Hurlburt Field, 25 June 2007.
- ⁹³Brown.
- ⁹⁴Self; Ryan.
- ⁹⁵Brown.
- ⁹⁶United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective*, 75.
- ⁹⁷Brown.
- ⁹⁸Ibid.
- ⁹⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰Hotaling.
- ¹⁰¹Ibid.
- ¹⁰²Self.
- ¹⁰³TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ¹⁰⁴Yates.
- ¹⁰⁵Briscoe et al. 309.
- ¹⁰⁶Self; Ryan; Briscoe et al. 309-310; MacPherson, 205-207; Naylor, 353.
- ¹⁰⁷MacPherson, 205; United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective*, 75-76.
- ¹⁰⁸Self; Briscoe, et al. 309-310; MacPherson, 206-207; Naylor, 353-354.
- ¹⁰⁹Self; Briscoe, et al. 310.
- ¹¹⁰MacPherson, 180-184; United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective*, 76; Brown. These three accounts differ on Clash 72's participation in a strafing run. The author goes with SSG Brown's account. Clash 72, for whatever reason, did not make a gun run.
- ¹¹¹Brown; Hotaling; MacPherson, 185.
- ¹¹²Self; Briscoe et al. 311.
- ¹¹³Self; MacPherson, 189.
- ¹¹⁴Miller.
- ¹¹⁵Hotaling.
- ¹¹⁶Self; Brown, Briscoe et al. 312; MacPherson 189-190. Danger-close estimates come from the J-FIRE joint publication. After SSG Gabe Brown's skillful handling of the bomb runs on Takur Ghar, the danger-close distances for air ordnance was reduced. In the 1997 J-FIRE, the minimum distance for dropping a GBU-12 500-pound bomb near exposed troops was 425 meters. In the 2004 J-FIRE, it was reduced to 300 meters. 80-90 meters was still way too close for comfort. Fortunately for the beleaguered Americans (and the enemy), the bombs were set for point detonation, so most of the blast and shrapnel was absorbed by the cut-up terrain.
- ¹¹⁷MacPherson, 190-191.
- ¹¹⁸Self; Ryan.
- ¹¹⁹Self; Briscoe et al. 310.
- ¹²⁰Self; Brown; MacPherson, 192.
- ¹²¹Self to Phillips.
- ¹²²Self; Brown.
- ¹²³Ryan; Briscoe et al. 312.
- ¹²⁴TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ¹²⁵Yates.
- ¹²⁶Ibid.

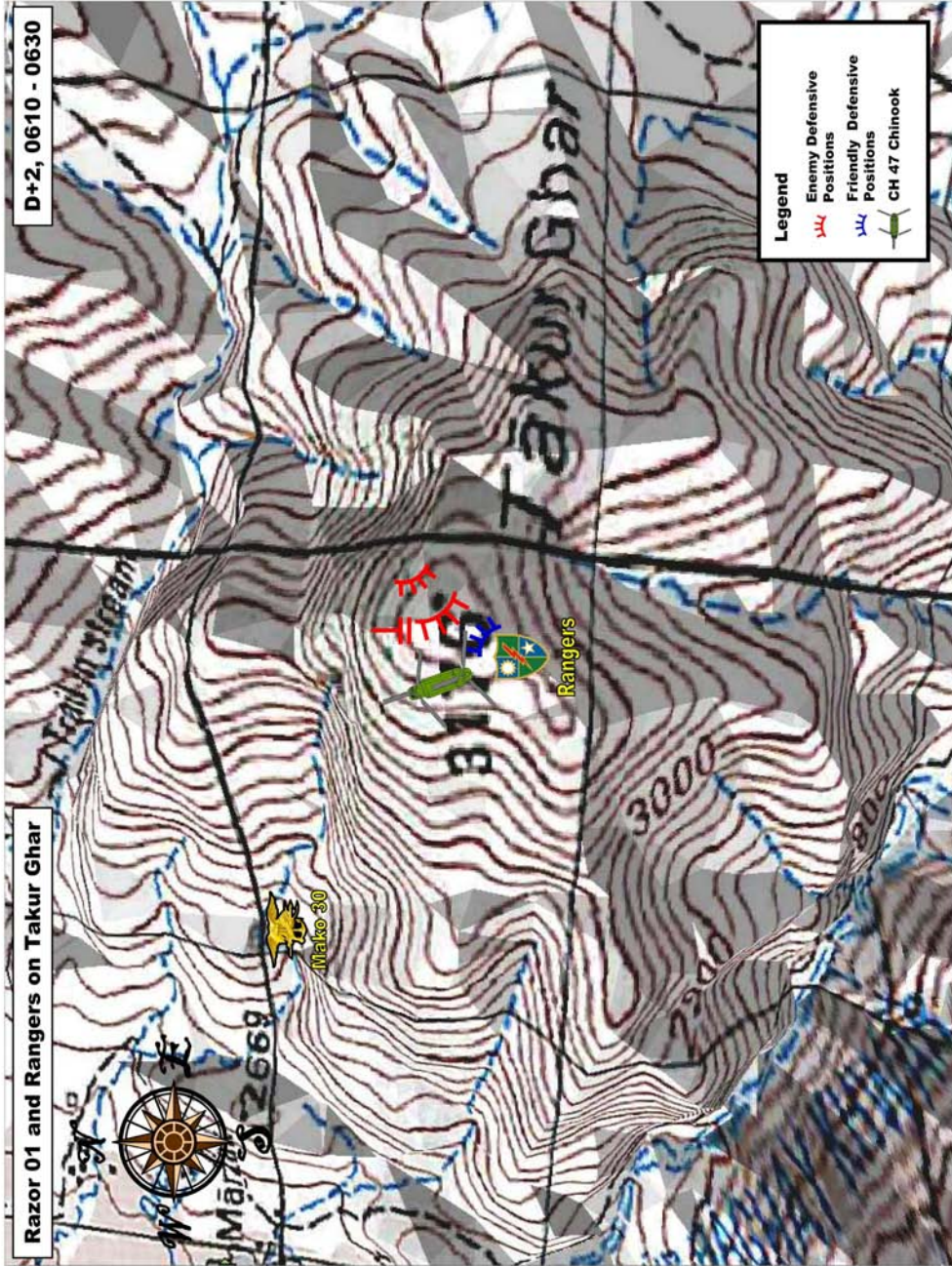
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- ¹²⁷Ibid.
- ¹²⁸Self; Ryan.
- ¹²⁹Miller.
- ¹³⁰Self.
- ¹³¹Briscoe et al. 313.
- ¹³²Miller.
- ¹³³Self; Miller; Brown; Briscoe et al. 314.
- ¹³⁴Briscoe et al. 315.
- ¹³⁵Brown.
- ¹³⁶Brown; Self; Briscoe et al. 315.
- ¹³⁷Brown.
- ¹³⁸Self; Briscoe et al. 315
- ¹³⁹TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ¹⁴⁰Ryan; Briscoe et al. 315.
- ¹⁴¹Self; Miller; Ryan; Briscoe et al. 316.
- ¹⁴²Self, Briscoe et al. 316.
- ¹⁴³Self.
- ¹⁴⁴Interviews with Sakhi Jan, Nisar Jan, Shamo Jan, Delawer Khan, Mhamd Asif, and Mhamd Sharif—all members of Zia Lodin’s force. Interviews conducted in Gardez on 24 November 2005.
- ¹⁴⁵Haas and Van Allen.
- ¹⁴⁶TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ¹⁴⁷Lowen.
- ¹⁴⁸TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ¹⁴⁹Billingsley.
- ¹⁵⁰Billingsley. A reconnaissance by fire is an attacker’s option to determine where his opponent’s major weapons systems such as mortars and machine guns are located. Many armies have “duty weapons”—machine guns and mortars that are located in alternate positions. Only they return enemy probing fire and then they shift back to their primary defensive position. “Duty weapons” are not a practice in the US Armed Forces.
- ¹⁵¹TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ¹⁵²Billingsley.
- ¹⁵³Briscoe et al. 317.
- ¹⁵⁴“Soup” Campbell.
- ¹⁵⁵“Soup” Campbell, Steve Call, *Danger Close: Tactical Air Controllers in Afghanistan and Iraq* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 32-36.
- ¹⁵⁶“Soup” Campbell.
- ¹⁵⁷Self; Briscoe et al. 318; Naylor, 367.
- ¹⁵⁸TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ¹⁵⁹Self; Briscoe, et al. 318.
- ¹⁶⁰Ibid.
- ¹⁶¹Ibid., 317-318.
- ¹⁶²The Battle for Roberts Ridge is the most researched and published aspect of Operation Anaconda. This book does not attempt to match other sources in detail on this particular aspect of the operation. Readers who wish to examine this small-unit fight in detail should read Malcolm MacPherson’s *Robert’s Ridge* which is an entire 338 page book devoted to the fight and Sean Naylor’s *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* that devotes 68 pages to the fight.
- ¹⁶³“Soup” Campbell.
- ¹⁶⁴Interview with LTC Rowan Tink, Commander Australian SAS in Afghanistan, by Ross Coulthart, “Operation Anaconda,” *Nine Network Australia* “Sunday” program, 2004.
- ¹⁶⁵Hotaling.
- ¹⁶⁶Ibid.

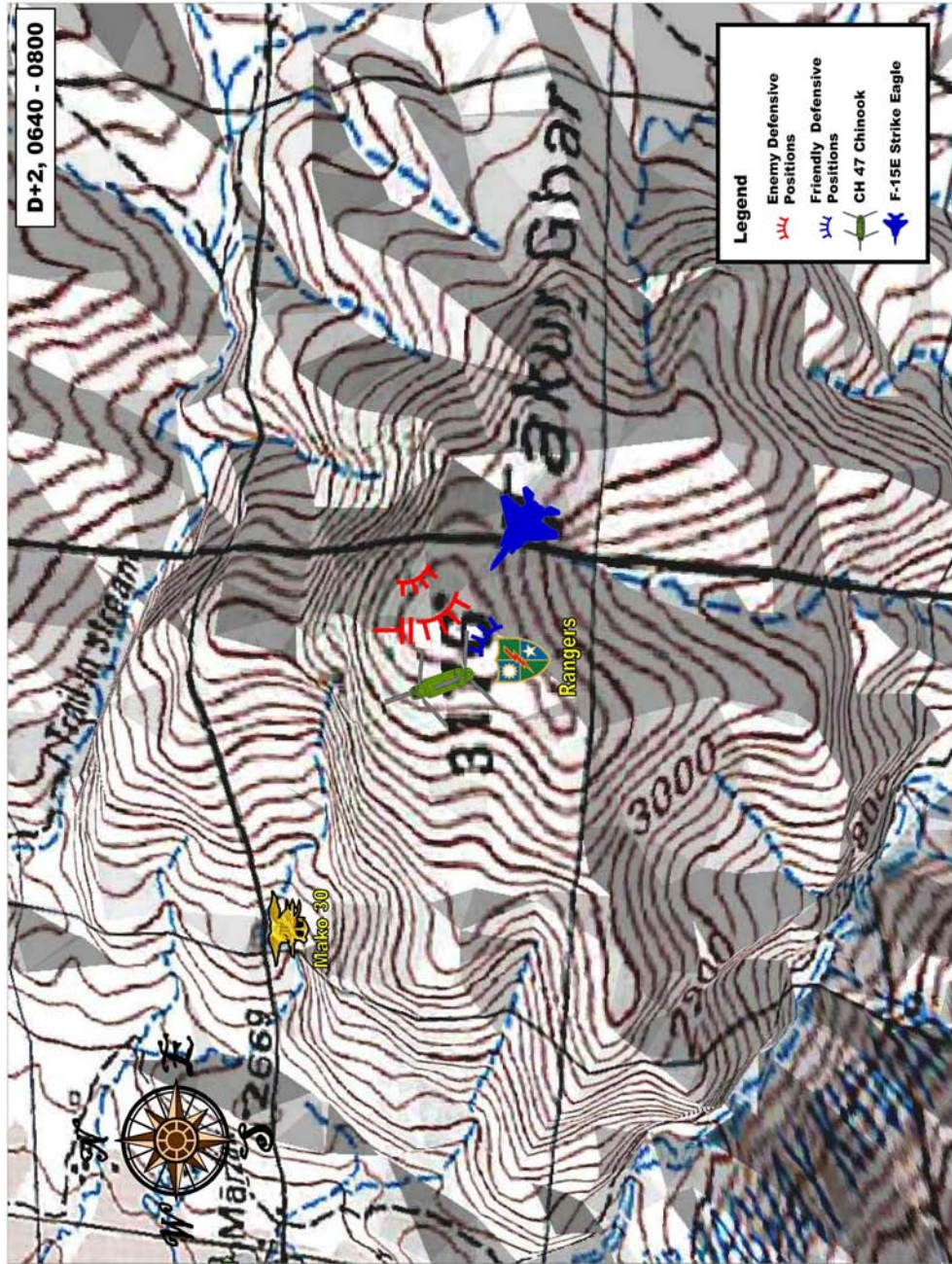
¹⁶⁷Interview with TSgt John J. Wylie, CCT 334 TRS/ULA, Keesler Air Base, Hurlburt Field,
26 June 2007.

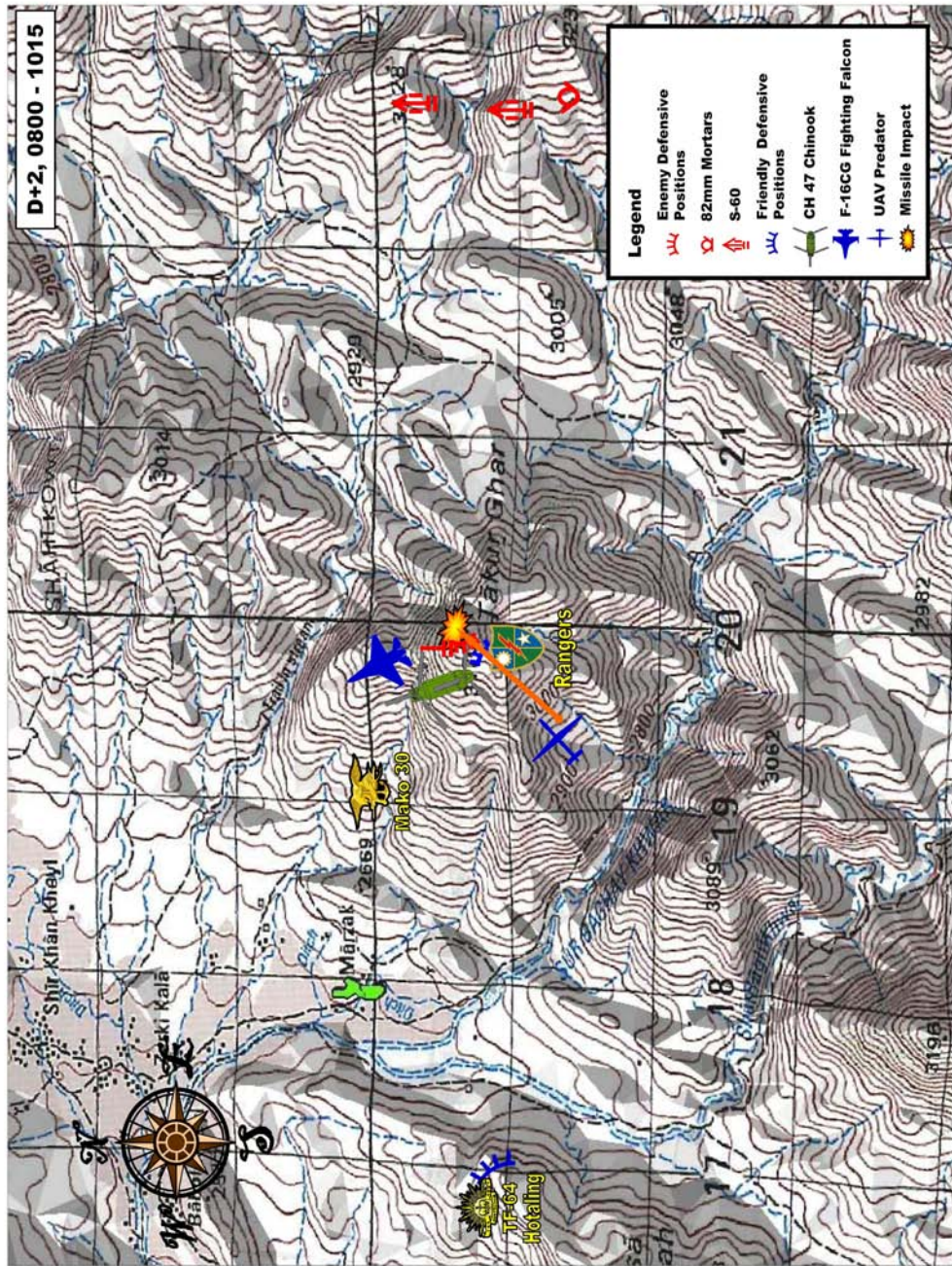
¹⁶⁸Wylie.

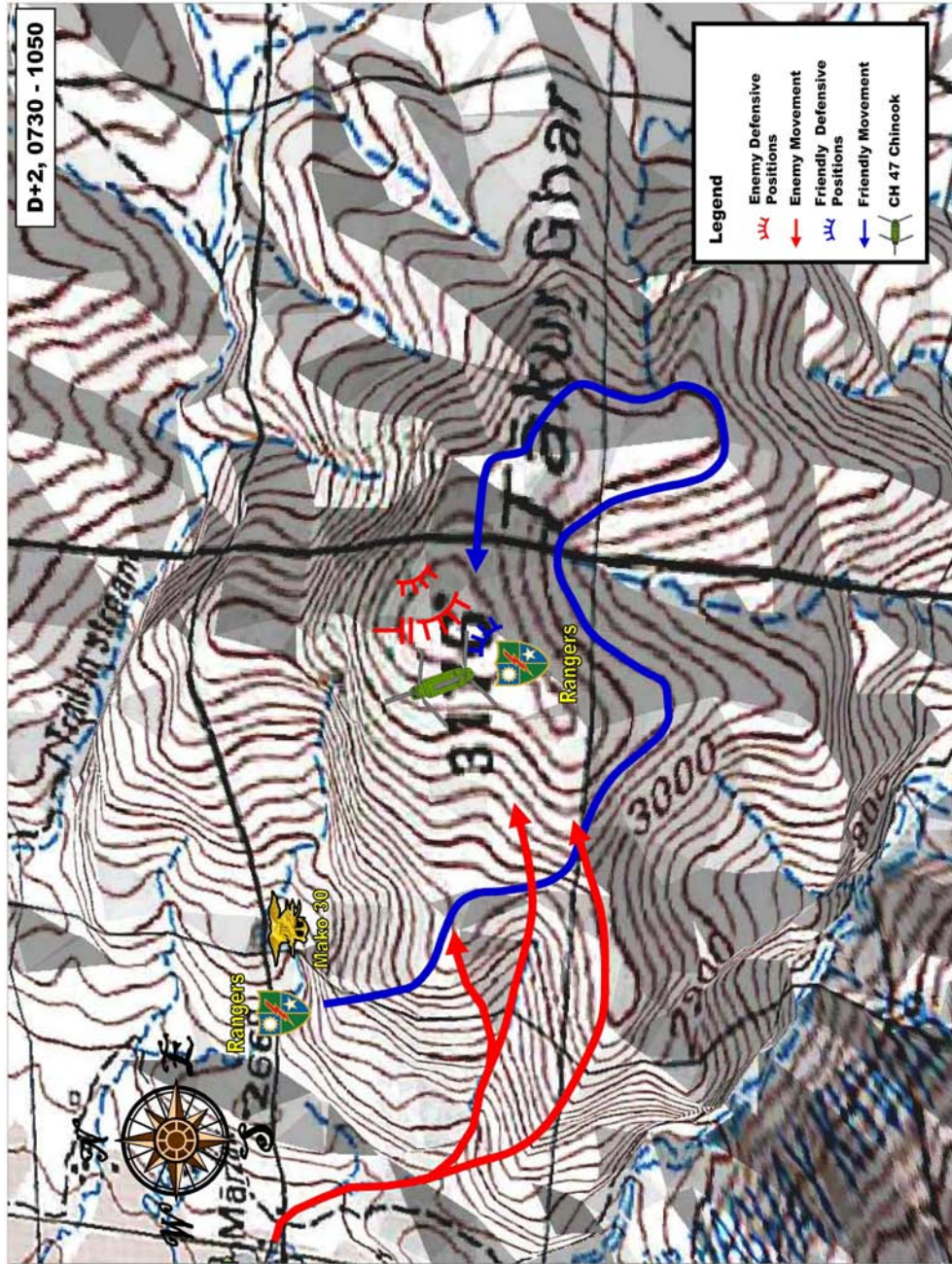


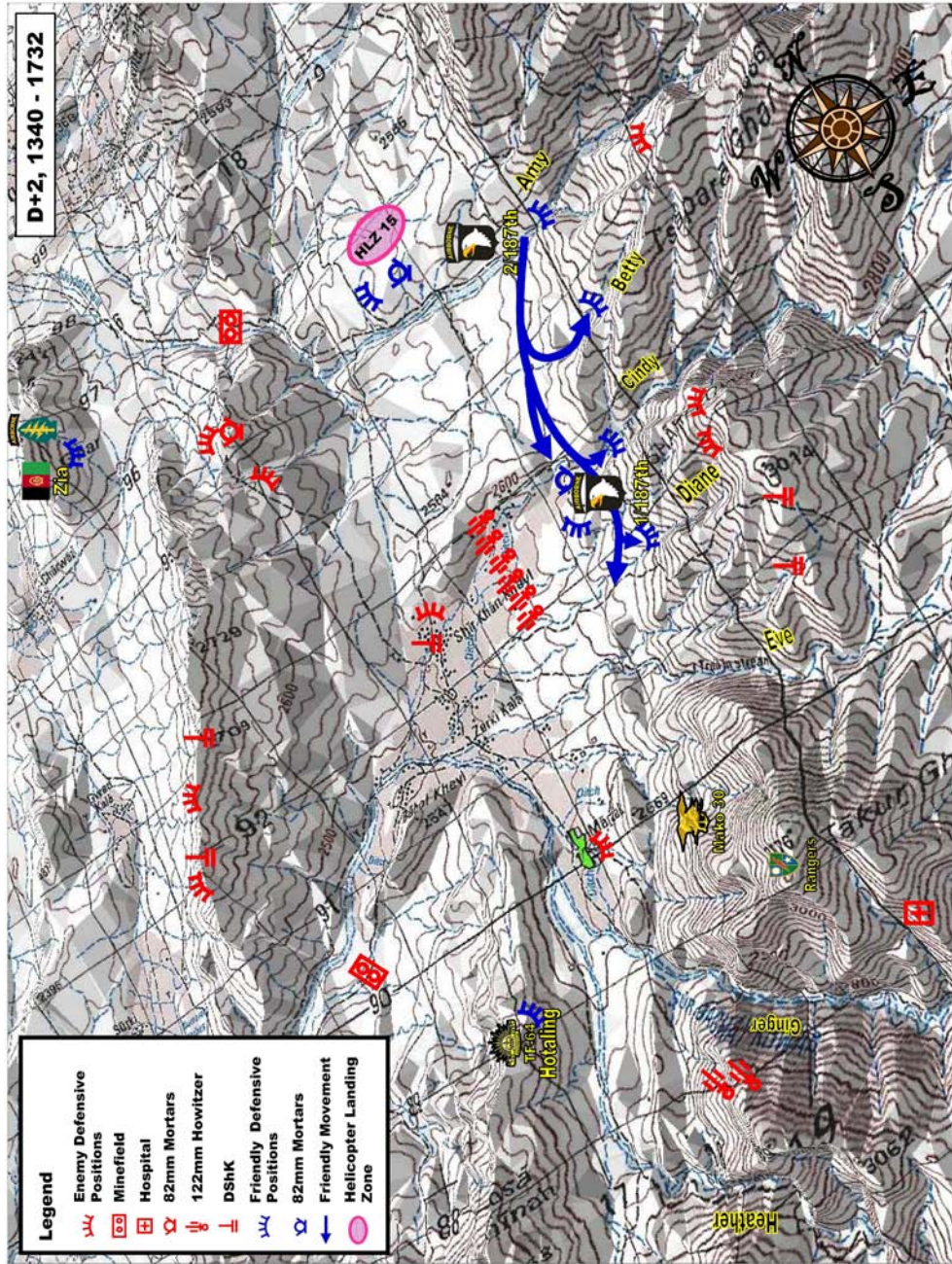


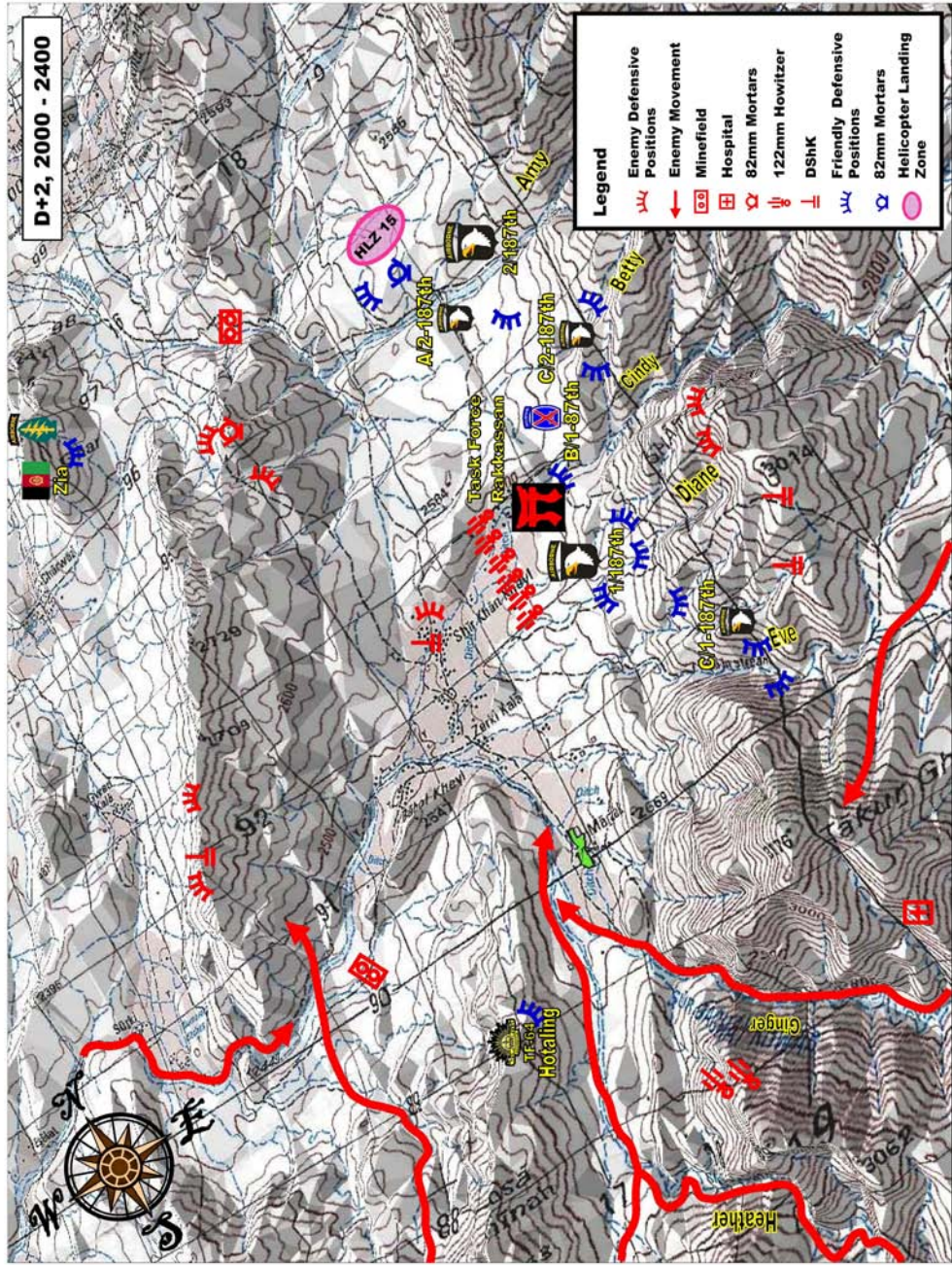












CHAPTER 8.

ANACONDA AND HARPOON, DAY 4 THROUGH DAY 14

Although I love the cavalry madly, although I am a horse soldier from my cradle, every time I watch the infantry advancing at a sure, firm pace, with fixed bayonets and menacing drum-toll, I feel an emotion which has something of both reverence and dread, I don't know how to express it. All that comes to mind at the sight of a formation of hussars or uhlans flying past is the thought of what gallant lads they are, how well they ride, how dashing they cross sabers! Woe to the enemy, and this woe usually consists of more or less dangerous wounds or captivity, and nothing more. But when columns of infantry rush toward the enemy with their rapid, smooth, disciplined motion, there are no more gallant lads, that's all over: these are heroes who bear inevitable death or go to inevitable death themselves--there is no middle ground. The cavalryman gallops up, gallops away, wounds, rushes past, turns back again, and sometimes kills, but his every motion is eloquent of mercy for the enemy: all this is merely the harbinger of death. But the infantry formation is death itself, dreadful, inevitable death.¹

— Stabs-Rotmistr [Captain] Nadezhda Durova,
Veteran of the Battle of Borodino, 1812.

Tuesday, 5 March 2002, D+3

The American Infantry was on the ground but was hardly ready to advance “at a sure, firm pace.” The enemy forces were still two-three times larger than the Americans. There were two American demi-battalions on hand, but they each had only two companies and the companies were not complete-averaging two platoons each. The Americans now had their mortars, heavy machine guns and Canadian (the other Americans) sniper rifles, so they were finally able to engage the enemy in the long-range fight. The enemy had all the artillery, but the Americans had all the air. The enemy had more ground mobility with his fleet of pickup trucks and SUVs. The American ground mobility was combat boots and a few Gators. American air

mobility was constrained by altitude and the small number of available Chinooks. The enemy had ample supplies of food, water, and ammunition. The American on-hand supplies were less than Spartan. The 2nd-187th was out of food and water. They were drinking out of creeks and snow melt. The Americans were uniformly trained and equipped whereas the standard of training and armaments within the enemy force varied. The enemy's widely distributed logistic stockpiles and lack of body armor made them more agile and mobile. Both sides had excellent in-valley communications, constrained external communications and convoluted command and control systems. The enemy had the high-ground, the villages and the prepared defensive positions. They knew the terrain intimately. The Americans held some of the valley floor and the lower slopes of the eastern wall and they controlled some of the passes. The Americans had bypassed the forward security element on the way in, so they had not been bloodied to the extent that the enemy had intended. Military practice says that one should have at least a three to-one-advantage in an attack across open ground. Mountains up the estimates to a six-to-one advantage, but the Americans were far from even having parity. Both sides had a firm lodgement. It would be difficult to move either from their positions, since it was difficult for either side to close with the other for a decisive engagement.

D+3, 0100-0400 (Jacobabad, Pakistan)

AC-130 touched down on the airstrip. Colonel Matt "El Cid" Neuenswander and the rest of his advance team from Al Jabar stepped off into the dark. The diplomatic efforts had worked and the A-10s piloted by LTC Kostelnik and Captain

Campbell had already landed after their night mission over the Shar-i Kot Valley. Three more A-10s and many plane loads of ordnance and maintenance equipment would follow. The A-10s were in the fight. Captain Scott “Soup” Campbell and LTC Dahl “K-9” Kostelnik were finally sleeping. “El Cid’s” staff hooked up communications and began mission planning. More C-130s full of maintenance personnel, munitions, and equipment would follow during the day. The other A-10s would arrive that night. Their presence in Pakistan was a secret and accordingly they were to use the distinctive A-10s only after dark as airborne FACs.²

D+3, 0645-0800 (The North)

The sun was out and the troops began spotting enemy bunkers, SUVs, trucks and personnel in and around Marzak and Sherkhankhel. Since it was a long-range fight, it was impossible to take them out with issue infantry small-arms. Clearing the villages was still reserved for Commander Zia’s force, so there was no move to get closer to the villages. After last-nights fire fight, there was a reluctance to use the .50 caliber machine guns and disclose their positions. The troops began calling for fires from the brigade fire direction center. Major Yates would either get the mortar battery working on the targets or Captain Murray would call for close air support. The Canadian snipers were also put to work. The team of Yates and Murray had their work cut out for them.³ Tir Ghol Ghar (the Whale) had been designated as the ordnance disposal site (dump target) for the fight and aircraft with unexpended bombs would drop them on the Whale before they flew back to their bases. A lot of bombs would fall on the Whale.⁴

The mortar battery, operating from the compound, was turning things around. SFC Michael Peterson integrated the mortar platoon from the 1st-187th with his own and distributed targets between the 120mm and 81 mm mortars. The mortar battery eventually had two 120mm mortars and ten 81mm mortars. The 60mm mortars stayed forward with the companies. There were a lot of targets. The battery began to contest the enemy firepower advantage on the battlefield. The enemy artillery had been quiet for awhile and their guns were still not responding. The enemy mortars responded, only to get struck by the mortar battery or CAS. CAS cannot be constant, but mortar support can. Soon, CAS was getting in the way of mortar duels as the mortar battery dominated the valley--but not Ginger Pass. SFC Peterson came into the fight this time with 86 rounds of 120mm HE and 300 rounds of 81mm HE. They were soon rationing ammunition again. An enemy target had to have six personnel or a vehicle before they would engage the target with 120mm fire. The ammunition for the M252 81mm mortar was performing extremely well. Later in the fight, they would receive some of the old ammunition for the M29. It was not nearly as good, long-ranging or accurate. SFG Petersen would not fire this older ammunition over the heads of friendly troops.⁵

A helicopter came in with some supplies and took most of the Brigade TAC with them back to Bagram. Colonel Wiercinski, the Brigade Chaplain and Captain Haupt, the S2, flew back to Bagram where they could communicate and coordinate. Major Yates was the senior brigade officer left on the field, but the brigade remained in charge of the fight from the rear TAC in Bagram. CSM Savusa stayed in the

valley. It was a tough call for Colonel Wiercinski, but the limited band width available for communication dictated where he needed to be--not where he wanted to be.⁶

D+3, 1000-1400 (Bagram)

Colonel Wiercinski and Major Gibler sat down with LTC Paul La Camera, the 1st-87th battalion commander, and Major Jay Hall, the battalion S3. The 1st-87th was going back into the fight. Alfa Company had never really left and its small contingent had been fighting with LTC Chip Preysler's battalion (the 2nd-187th) since D+1. The rest of A Company was now at the compound providing security for the mortars. Bravo Company was now part of LTC Ron Corkran's battalion (the 1st-187th). The Summit battalion was down to its Alfa Company and its battered Charlie Company. The 1st-87th was going back in with its battered Charlie Company plus another Charlie Company. C Company, 4th-31st, 10th Mountain Division had been pulling security at K2 in Uzbekistan and had just been brought down for the fight.⁷ There were far more Chinooks available this time for the battalion--all six instead of the three they got on D-Day. The battalion could land 258 personnel. The battalion began preparing for the insertion. Soldiers were shifted into new positions since the wounded from D-Day could not go along--there was going to be a lot of walking.⁸

Colonel Wiercinski began conferring by radio with LTC Pat Stogran, the Canadian Commander of the 3PPCLI. The enemy was reinforcing the fight from the Obaste Valley 14 kilometers across the Eastern Wall. Their main entry was through Ginger Pass. The enemy had another concentration in the Naka Valley 16 kilometers

south-southeast of the Shar-i Kot Valley. If LTC La Camera's battalion could seal Ginger Pass, perhaps the Canadians could air assault into the Naka Valley and smash the enemy there. The Canadians began preparing for this contingency.⁹ Information from TF 64 indicated that some of the key enemy personnel (high value targets) may have slipped out of the Shar-i Kot after D-Day when Ginger Pass could not be plugged and might be hiding in the Naka Valley.¹⁰ The Naka Valley could be very challenging. It was a bowl five-six kilometers across. It was forested and the HLZs were on the valley floor. One lesson of D-Day was to land high when possible. There was not much information on the valley or who or what was in there. It could be a death trap.¹¹ [See Chapter 8, Map 8-1, D+3, Enemy Concentrations and Supply Routes.]

Captain Nate Self was up and looking into the status of his wounded when he was summoned to the Special Operations TAC. His decimated Ranger platoon was still the QRF and they had another mission. The rest of his platoon was still down in Kandahar, so the survivors of Robert's Ridge cleaned their weapons, checked their gear, drew ammunition, and moved to the Chinook. The bird lifted into the sky. It would be three days before Nate was able to get a call home to his wife and let her know that he was alright. The Army had already released the names of the dead and Nate's wife learned of Nate's wounds from another wife--but she did not know how badly wounded he was or where he was.¹²

D+3, 1230-1500 (Jacobabad, Pakistan-Shar-i Kot)

Captain Scott “Soup” Campbell and LTC Dahl “K-9” Kostelnik were up and went to link up with Colonel Matt “El Cid” Neuenswander. They were expecting another night flight to the Shar-i Kot. They got an immediate daytime mission. They jumped into their two A-10s and blasted off. Waiting for them at the “Bigfoot” tanker track area by the Afghanistan border was a KC-135 Stratotanker flown by the New Jersey National Guard. This tanker crew was pumped up. They all had buddies who were policemen or firemen involved with the World Trade Center rescue. Most tankers send you off with a “happy hunting” or “go get some.” The Jersey boys send off was “go kill a ton of those mother-effers for us.” “K-9” and “Soup” flew toward the Shar-i Kot. There was nothing going on and some French Mirage aircraft were dropping their ordnance on the Whale. Finally, they got a call for fire from White Lightning, but by then they were low on fuel. They flew back to refuel with the Jersey boys. They were a bit disgruntled about returning with full bomb racks.¹³

D+3, 1230-1400 (FARP Texaco)

Setting up and running a FARP is not something they teach in Engineer Officer Advanced Course, but Captain Mark Quander, the company commander of Charlie Company, 326th Engineer Battalion, had been doing just that. His company was scattered to the winds. One platoon was deployed in Jacobabad, Pakistan. One squad was with Zia Lodin’s force. One squad was in Khowst with Special Forces. Two squads were with the 2nd-187th and two squads were with the 1st-187th. Fortunately, the 1st-87th had two squads of their own engineers. This left him one

platoon, the third platoon, to run and secure the FARP. He also had control of a light equipment platoon from Fort Campbell, but it had a full-time job keeping the Kandahar airfield in service.¹⁴

Mark was not an aviator but he was a commander. He had an ad hoc command of some air traffic controllers from the 7-101st Aviation Regiment, some USAF parajumpers (PJs) for medical evacuation, a three-person psychological operations (PSYOP) team, one interpreter on loan from the CIA, a platoon of aircraft mechanics, rearmers and refuelers from 3/5 Platoon, 7th-101st and his own 3rd Platoon of Engineers. The FARP had actually landed on the ground a few hours before dawn on D-Day. There was always a HH-60 Blackhawk medical evacuation helicopter and a CH-47 Chinook “Fat Cow” helicopter at the FARP, plus stacks of ammunition.¹⁵

Keeping the local Afghans back was a constant challenge. Finally, Gul Haidar had shown up and provided some 60 men to help out on crowd control. The FARP was a very tempting target. Now that Mark had security somewhat under control, another crisis erupted. The 7th-101st had just pulled out all the air controllers for an “urgent mission” in Kandahar. Things were pretty urgent here. Yesterday, he had about 30 aircraft sitting at the FARP--all involved in the rescue at Robert’s Ridge. What would today bring?¹⁶

D+3, 1300-1600 (The Compound)

Major Dennis Yates and SFC Petersen kept the mortar battery busy. The targets were scattered--an SUV here, a bunker there, a dump truck beyond that.

Captain “Dino” Murray continued to sort out the air traffic tangle and put close air support on target. At 1327, Sherkhankhel was finally declared hostile allowing troops to engage targets in the village.¹⁷ Up to this time, only Marzak could be hit due to the large numbers of enemy that had emerged from it. American troops were not allowed to take the villages, although this was in their capability. This honor would go to Afghan Forces as a mark of legitimacy and national pride.

An enemy DShK on top of Takur Ghar fired intermittently at the compound. Fortunately, the gunner did not understand the concept of plunging fire, but it was enough to cause the mortars to disperse to defilade positions. CAS went after this machine gun position several times, but the gun crew would shelter in a cave until the CAS effort was over. The determined DShK crew continued to make life a bit edgy for the soldiers at the compound.

D+3, 1500-1630 (The Skies Above)

After refueling, the A-10s headed back to the valley. It was now about 1600. On the way back, they got a call from Dragon 11 (an ETAC with TF Rakassans) that there were some 200-300 enemy marshaling in Ginger Pass! A Predator UAV followed some enemy vehicles into the valley and had seen the convoy pull over beyond the mouth of the pass. Predator then saw enemy troops coming down out of the hillsides and assembling in the valley pass. SMSGT Hotaling and TF64 could not see them--only Predator had eyes on the target.¹⁸ The enemy were apparently waiting for dusk when close air support is at its most ineffective and Spectre is still not on station. Then the enemy apparently planned to launch an attack against the American

forces at Diane and the compound and regain control of their six howitzers that were still positioned facing the southern pass. The Americans had not found all of them yet.

“Soup” and “K-9” flew into the valley. There were some AH-64A Apaches working over Marzak. They had just destroyed a dump truck. Unfortunately, the A-10s and Apaches cannot talk to each other. “Soup” lined up on the valley and started a rocket run and then pulled up. He was about to fly into Eve Pass, not Ginger Pass. He lined up again. He could not see the targets in Ginger Pass due to the deep shadows in the valley. He fired two smoke marking rockets for SMSGT Hotaling to observe, but the valley was too deep for “Hots” to see them. “K-9” put a smoke rocket further out toward the mouth of the pass. “Hots” could see that. “Soup” then made a bomb run and put four bombs in a line down the pass mouth. “K-9” followed with four more bombs deeper into the pass. The airburst-fused bombs lit up the dark valley momentarily. There was a secondary explosion and a fireball. They had hit the vehicles. “Soup” rolled back in and dropped the rest of his bombs further into the valley. “K-9” expended his last two even deeper.

There were two Navy F-18s (call signs Popeye 13 and 14) entering the valley. They were each carrying two Mark 82 500 pound bombs fused for air-burst and two GBU-12 500-pound laser-guided “smart bombs.” The F-18s flew into the valley to drop their four bombs further east. They only saw one explode. The F-18s left and the A-10s returned, this time on a strafing run. “Soup” and “K-9” expended about 250-300 rounds of 30mm HEI during each of two passes, focusing on where they had

seen the secondary explosions. Then it was time to refuel. The A-10s flew to the tanker, but the Jersey boys had left. They refueled off of another tanker and then headed back to Jacobabad. They were out of ammo and might have done some very good work, but there was no way of knowing for sure without eyes on the target.¹⁹

Two hours later, two more A-10s flew in from Jacobabad and released more airburst 50-pound bombs in Ginger. An hour after that, two more A-10s arrived from Jacobabad and did a strafing run down the dark valley.²⁰

The following day, Predator did a run of the valley before the shadows obscured it. Predator reported a bomb damage assessment (BDA) of some 200-plus enemy and four vehicles killed. In the words of the controller, Predator was following “a trail of cold, dead bodies up the valley.”²¹ SMSGT Hotaling and some of the Australian SAS of TF 64 went down to the mouth of the valley for a peek. “Hots” described it as “pink mist” or “pink fog.” There were a lot of bodies and parts of bodies, but when the American forces entered the valley three days later, there were no bodies.²² After Anaconda, the total number killed became a point of contention between the Army and Air Force and with the public. BDA is not an exact science and Predator has a limited scope of vision. Still, the aviation effort seems to have made a significant contribution in Ginger Pass and an opportunity for a battalion-level infantry-on-infantry clash had passed.

D+3, 1630-2400 (The Compound)

Shortly after the A-10s and F-18s had worked over Ginger Pass, the 1st-87th Battalion landed at HLZs 1, 2, and 3 and outside the compound. It was 1630--a

daylight landing! The landing time was a major departure from the previous day and a testament to how much better cover the mortar battery and close air support were providing.

The landing was not without some drama. One platoon came off of its Chinook totally disoriented. East was west and north was south. They resolutely set off into the valley headed for an enemy impact zone. Frantic radio calls and hand signals got the platoon turned around after they had gone several hundred yards.²³

Bravo Company was holding the perimeter of the compound and provided protection for the compound HLZ as well. The battalion moved past the compound to form a defensive perimeter around an assembly area. While moving, the flanking elements reported finding enemy artillery pieces. They eventually stumbled on all six enemy artillery pieces in direct fire lay on the southern approach to the valley.

American action had driven the gunners away from the pieces, but the weapons were still ready for use. Ammunition was stacked by the guns, sights were mounted, and the firing maps and tables were ready at the guns. The maps were professionally and accurately done, with target reference points, distances, and settings.²⁴ The engineers would later blow up the weapons' breeches to disable them. The American had now captured eight of the ten enemy artillery pieces and opened up the southern approach into the valley. This severely truncated a major enemy advantage.

Dodge Billingsley and Captain Pool were sitting at the compound watching the helicopter landings. That morning, they had made the trip south to retrieve their

“snivel gear.” Now, as the TF Summit soldiers came by, the journalist and PAO grabbed their gear and joined the column.²⁵

Once in the assembly area, the two TF Summit C Company commanders assembled for battalion orders. The battalion’s mission was to destroy the enemy on Takur Ghar. LTC La Camera and Major Hall briefed them on how it would go down. The troops did not have mountain gear, but at least they had better climbing boots than the 101st. They were going to ascend a snow-covered, steep mountain, with sheer rock facings in the dark. They did not have crampons, pitons, and sufficient rope. But 258 soldiers were going up Takur Ghar. They moved out in the night.

It was a slow, brutal march to the mountain. Night vision goggles are wonderful inventions, but it is hard to gauge distances while wearing them. The troops were stumbling over rocky ground, slipping and cursing quietly. The column slowly began to ascend Eve pass. Suddenly, five soldiers in the lead platoon began vomiting loudly. They could be easily heard a kilometer away. It was the onset of mountain sickness. The platoon was no longer in the lead, since these soldiers had to be walked down to lower ground for treatment and eventual evacuation. It took two soldiers to walk down each afflicted soldier.²⁶ The Americans were not acclimated to the altitude and were paying the price.

Charlie Company, 4th-31st moved up the creek bed and trail that was Eve Pass. Charlie Company, 1st-87th began moving up the northwest slope of Takur Ghar. It was six or seven hours of agony. The battalion finally stopped at about 0300 the next morning.

D+3, 1800 (The North)

The 2nd-187th had prepared to leave the valley that night and go back to Bagram to reconstitute and refit. This was cancelled. Instead, the overworked Chinooks would ferry in supplies. There were shortages of food, water, and particularly mortar ammunition. The commanders wanted one blanket or bedroll for every two men, but they were far short of that goal. Some small tents would also be great. The weather was going to change and the logisticians were trying to get everything forward before they were unable to fly.

LTC Chip Preysler, the 2nd-187th Commander, relinquished control of A Company, 1st-87th. Captain Roger Crombie started his small force south on a night march to link up with its parent battalion. Specialist James Brossie and Specialist Mark Henry both picked up their M240 machine guns. They had been the company studs the past four days. On the second day's movement north, they had foiled an enemy long-range ambush by lying down in the kill zone and giving covering fire while the rest of the company bounded out of harm's way. Their machine guns had reached out where the M16s and M4s could not. Senior Airman Sean Lloyd, the company ETAC should have been a stud, but every time he had a good target, he could not get an aircraft to respond. Enemy lived because the aircraft ignored Sean's calls and serviced other targets. Sean had been living a life of not-so-quiet frustration. Then yesterday, he had gotten an aircraft to respond and took out a mortar that had bedeviled them. Five days later, he would rip the ligaments in his knee, but would refuse evacuation. He would stay for the whole fight. Specialist

Reginald Huber was another great performer--a fire team leader who was rock steady and calm under fire. He had enough courage for three men. Hudson, a platoon forward observer was now Roger's RTO. He was a physical wonder. He carried an amazing amount of equipment and joked about it. Roger watched them and the rest of his small group marching to the guns once again. They were dirty, short of rations, and drank water from small streams, but they soldiered on, griping all the while as infantrymen are entitled to do. He was proud of them.²⁷ [Map 8-2, D+3, 1600-1800.]

D+3, 1800-2400 (The Valley)

The Chinooks returned to the valley, this time carrying Bravo Company, 1st-187th. They had flown in from Jacobabad the day before. They came in two separate lifts. Each man was carrying loads of up 140 pounds. They did not join their parent battalion, but were the brigade reserve. They were not acclimated for the elevation. Jacobabad has an elevation of 180 feet. They were now at nearly 9,000 feet. It hurt to draw a breath and carrying all that weight made it worse.²⁸

D+3, 1800-2400 (The Enemy)

The enemy again moved into Ginger Pass. Some moved into the valley and onto the Whale or ascended into the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley or to the top of Takur Ghar. Some headed into Eve Pass--from the top. Some stayed to remove the Afghan dead--they were local and deserved a decent burial. They were not as particular about burying or evacuating the foreigners. The enemy was getting better at hiding individual heat signatures when they heard the Spectre gunship. They would quickly

cover themselves with shawls or space blankets and remain motionless. Enemy Toyotas were running back and forth, carrying rations in and bodies out. The body-box makers in Zurmat were still working overtime.

Wednesday, 6 March 2002, D+4

It was a much more even fight now. The enemy still had the advantage of terrain and defensive positions, but the Americans had captured most of their artillery. The American mortar battery dominated the valley. There were three American demi-battalions on the ground and the air-ground coordination was much improved. However, every American soldier on the ground exacted a price in logistics support. The troops had not been getting enough food, water, ammunition--particularly mortar ammunition--and cold weather gear. Now, the few Chinooks had to haul even more supplies to keep this larger force in the fight. This negated the commander's ability to maneuver using these same helicopters. The enemy still had the mobility advantage with his fleet of Toyota Hilux pickup trucks, dump trucks, and SUVs. Ginger Pass remained an open enemy line of communication (LOC) that Colonel Wiercinski had tried to plug with aerial bombs. Bombs alone could not seal Ginger Pass. The weather was closing in. Soon it would snow and aircraft would not fly. The soldiers were trying to claw their way up the mountains, but they lacked the equipment and the training for mountain combat.

D+4, 0400-0515 (Diane)

Larry, the USAF Senior Master Sergeant who was the ETAC with LTC Ron Corkran's 1st-187th, had an idea. Most of the fire directed at them came from the Whale or from the top of Takur Ghar. Takur Ghar was particularly vexing. Every time an aircraft would take out a position or kill some enemy personnel, the enemy would replace the weapon and the people. They refused to leave despite the pounding. They were obviously protecting someone or something up there. Larry talked with Ron. He wanted to get some aerial reconnaissance to look carefully at the top of Takur Ghar. With Ron's concurrence, Larry requested two fighters with sensor pods from the ASOC. He got the expected answer. "ETACs do not request specific aircraft and ordnance."

Larry explained his request and what he hoped to accomplish. Finally, he was told "Okay, if you can wait for an hour, we can get that to you."

"That's fine."

In an hour, two F-16s came on station. They were carrying laser-guided bombs and the LANTIRN (low altitude navigation and targeting infrared for night) targeting and guidance system. Larry explained to the pilots what he was looking for on top of Takur Ghar--something that the enemy was determined to protect. The F-16s made four passes, hitting various things to no real effect. Then the Number Two aircraft stated "I think I see a bunker down there."

He rolled in on the target and released a 500-pound laser-guided bomb.²⁹ It was the culminating point in the battle.

D+4 0515-1000 (Takur Ghar)

This was it--the big secret, the jewel in the crown, the pearl of great price, the thing most worth fighting for. It was the reason that Al Qaeda had come to this valley to make their last stand. It was not a person or a holy relic. It was an ammunition dump. It was not just any ammunition dump, there were plenty of those scattered about the valley and elsewhere across the country. It was the largest ammunition dump remaining under Al Qaeda control in Afghanistan. It had first come into being during the Soviet-Afghan War when Mansoor the Elder staged out of the valley. It had been a key dump supplying the Siege of Khost. It had provided for the forces fighting the Soviets during Operation Magistral when the Soviets finally forced the Satakandow Pass and briefly opened the road to Khost.³⁰ The Soviets never found the dump and Mansoor continued to expand it. Al Qaeda took up the maintenance and supply of the dump during the Taliban years. The dump was built for effectiveness--not efficiency. An efficient ammunition dump would be built on ground level next to a road where trucks could drive up and offload and load ammunition pallets with forklifts. An effective ammunition dump would be hidden on a high, out-of-the-way mountain top where it was difficult to reach and almost impossible to find. No one knows how many man-years, mule-years, and donkey-years had been expended in making and expanding this ammunition dump, but it surely is an impressive figure.

The laser-guided bomb went straight into the bunker. The mountain top erupted. Secondary and tertiary explosions echoed across the night sky. Black clouds boiled from the mountain top. The dump would burn for hours, maybe days.³¹

The bomb also stirred up the ant-hill. At dawn, the enemy came out of his caves and bunkers to exact revenge. They fired at the Americans with mortars and heavy machine guns. The Americans responded with mortars and close air support. It was a “target-rich-environment” for the Apaches and they were quickly going “Winchester” and made repeated runs to the FARP to rearm and refuel. The enemy was not running back into his caves and bunkers. He was standing and fighting and dying.³²

D+4, 0630-0930 (Bagram to the Valley and Back)

An Apache and two Cobras rose into the air at Bagram and flew to FARP Texaco. The Marines had spent the previous day getting settled, listening to briefings, and pulling maintenance. The “Killer Spades” Apache was now going to give them a familiarization tour of the valley. They flew down to FARP Texaco to refuel and then flew on to the Shar-i Kot. They entered from the north with the Apache in the lead and the two Cobras in trail. The Cobras could not go to high altitude and the aircraft were harder to control and maneuver even at this altitude. The pilot had to anticipate everything--almost like driving on ice. The Apache crew were good guides, pointing out significant terrain features, HLZs, mortar pits, fighting positions, and the sites of previous fights. They flew the length of the valley and button-hooked over the southern pass and flew the length of the valley again.

They did not see any enemy, but Captain Bruce Laughlin noticed some dummy enemy--poles with *pakhol* pancake hats on top of them and wrapped in blankets in some of the fighting positions. Suddenly, Captain Brunson Howard saw what looked like an enemy and called it forward to the Apache. "Sorry," was the amused response, "that's a stone marker for an Afghan grave. What these guys do, when they hear us coming, is to roll themselves up in a blanket and cover themselves with whatever they can for camouflage."³³

Captain Howard had just seen what looked like bodies wrapped up in blankets in a fighting position. He radioed that back to Major Shane "Squirt" Stover in the trail Cobra. Shane peeled off and returned to the area where he fired a rocket. Immediately, the blankets peeled back and seven or eight enemy jumped up from under blankets or out of caves and bunkers and began firing AK-47s into the air at them. One was carrying a SA-7 antiaircraft missile or an RPG. Shane hit him with a Hellfire missile. The Cobra was designed for running gun fire and so the Marines needed not introduction to the concept. They tore into the area with 20mm fire. By the time the Apache had made the turn, the damage was done. The helicopters flew back to the FARP to refuel and rearm. They then flew back and shot up the area again. The Marines had their baptism by fire and were ready to fly on their own.³⁴

D+4, 0630-1000 (The Valley)

After a couple hours of fitful sleep, Captain Jeff Pool went to find LTC Paul La Camera, the 1st-87th Commander. The colonel was unhappy to discover that the media were in his march column and ordered Captain Pool to leave on the next

supply helicopter. Captain Pool and Dodge Billingsley began hiking west towards a flatter part of the valley and the supposed HLZ. The Chinook did not land there, instead touching down hundreds of yards further. They ran as fast as they could through a creek bed but the helicopter was gone by the time they arrived. They were not welcome at the battalion, so they started the long walk north to the compound. As they walked, Captain Pool could see soldiers in the mountains to the east. He said “do you realize we are the FLOT.”

“What’s the FLOT?” Dodge asked.

“Forward Line of Troops.” How safe was this open road? They turned a bend and saw two individuals walking towards them. It was two Australian SAS that were on the plane with Dodge when he flew in from Kuwait. They nodded at each other. The daytime walk back to the compound only took an hour.³⁵

CH-47s landed at HLZ 15 and 3, bringing supplies to 2nd-187th and the 1st-87th. The 1st-87th was now the largest battalion on the battlefield. Captain Roger Crombie’s A Company had walked south during the night to link up with the fresher/cleaner part of his company waiting near the compound. It was a good reunion as the recent arrivals dug through their packs for MREs and water for the veteran force. The veterans had been on short rations for days. The 1st-87th was now three companies strong--A and C Company from the battalion and C Company from the 4th-31st. B Company was still attached to the 1st-187th.

The enemy was active and not going to ground immediately after firing. All three infantry battalions began pushing patrols out. The patrols slowly climbed up the

Eastern Wall to get at the enemy while the mortars, snipers, heavy machine guns, and aircraft supported with occasional fire. It was very slow going and, where the enemy could fire directly at the climbing infantry, the climbing stopped. The troops were not trained for mountain combat, were not acclimated to the altitude, and were not equipped for mountain climbing. It is hard enough climbing snow-covered rock, but it really gets difficult under fire.³⁶ [Map 8-3, D+4, 0630-1000.]

The climbing troops discovered several areas on the mountain sides that the enemy had painstakingly cleared and leveled. On these sites, the enemy had poured large concrete pads--suitable for positioning artillery pieces and other crew-served weapons. This was clearly a well-prepared defense that had taken years to construct.³⁷

Back at the compound, Dodge saw LTC Jim Larsen, the Brigade Executive Officer. Jim was going back to Bagram and offered Dodge a lift on a Gator going north to HLZ 15. By now all of Dodge's camera batteries were expended. If he were going to shoot anything else during the operation he had to get back in and get recharged and file a story. He would have to take a chance of catching another helicopter ride back into the valley. It had been a productive few days. He had been all over the valley and now it was time to get back and try to tell a cohesive story.³⁸

Dodge Billingsley and LTC Jim Larson jumped on board a departing Chinook at HLZ 15. CW2 Stephen Brisset was lifting off as machine gun bullets began tearing lines in the dirt in front of the aircraft. Stephen took off, did a 180 degree pedal turn north and put power to the rotors. Fifteen seconds after takeoff, the Chinook took

more fire a few hundred meters north from where they had landed. Sergeant Edwin D. Wahl, the flight engineer and door gunner, saw the enemy gunner and returned fire. He hit the enemy gunner.³⁹ Dodge used his dwindling battery power to record the firing.

It began to snow heavy, wet flakes and the temperature dropped. Progress up the Eastern mountain wall ceased. It was hard enough climbing without proper equipment and training, but now it became impossible. The snow changed to hail and then back to snow again. There was not enough cold weather gear and “travel light, freeze at night” was now a daytime event. The mountain assault stalled. Soldiers hunkered down and tried to stay warm in the damp cold. The wind picked up. Close air support ceased, although the Apaches could still poke their way into the valley to help out. It was total soup. Bombing from above the clouds continued although no one could spot its effects. Because of the clouds, laser-guided bombs were not going to work and JDAM delivery was problematic. Most of the bombs were 500-pound iron bombs with point-detonating fuses. These were not going to accomplish much. The bulk of fire support now came from the mortar battery and Apaches. Enemy fire also diminished dramatically. They could not see what they were shooting at.

Major Mike Gibler, the Brigade S3 had flown in with the supplies. He was now at the compound and he had brought two small crew tents with him. They got them set up just before the foul weather set in. Mike and Major Dennis Yates piled into one and Captain Paul “Dino” Murray and one of his RTOs piled into the other one. The S3 and Fire Support Officer in the one tent would yell over to the ALO and

his RTO in the other tent to coordinate fires. They were up all night in the dark, yelling back and forth, while snow piled on the tents, trying to coordinate fire. It was miserable. But, at least they were in tents. Most soldiers had no tents, no bedrolls and their clothes were wet. Few slept. The NCOs were busy making sure that their soldiers were all right and not succumbing to frostbite, chilblains, immersion foot, and other cold weather crippers. Thanks to their efforts, there were no cold weather injuries. The West Texan, CSM Jerry Taylor of the 1st-187th has a repertoire of jokes that professional comedians would envy. He kept the battalion headquarters in good spirits with non-stop entertainment throughout the nasty weather.⁴⁰

D+4, 1600-2200 (The Media at Bagram and Kabul)

Back at Bagram Dodge was stunned to see dozens of media milling about. CFLCC public affairs had predicted the media impact of the operation, and media were arriving from everywhere. The e-mail Dodge had sent CBS days earlier was a mild sensation and Dan Rather opened with the story reading the e-mail, immediately after the Pentagon announced the operation. It was a media success story for the OSD. The story was theirs, but verified via independent media almost immediately.

The CBS crew from Kabul had been waiting at Bagram to get an update on the story and quickly picked up Dodge and drove to their production house in Kabul. That evening Dodge recorded some stand up reports for CBS and they cut in additional images from his valley footage. There were a couple of hitches. First, the CBS producer directing Dodge's report kept telling Dodge that he sounded too

excited and had to tone it down. Dodge was dead tired and very excited about what he had experienced. It was not possible to be somber, not now.

The second hitch occurred the next day at Bagram. Overall Public Affairs were handled by General Hagenback's staff. The staff PAO decided that all media would pool their footage to share among all the media. Dodge was there trying to get the footage and story to produce a documentary for the Discovery Channel. Pooling footage is a good idea to provide blanket coverage, but it is death to documentary producers and anyone else hoping to build a unique story from the events. If Dodge pooled his footage, he would give up the exclusivity he came for. Discovery Channel would be within its rights to discontinue sponsoring Dodge and produce its own program on the operation, using the pooled footage. Dodge met with LTC Hilferty, the senior PAO and part of General Hagenback's staff. They agreed to pool portions of his footage through CBS, but the majority of his footage would remain exclusive. The shot of SGT Wahl returning fire as he exited the valley was shown worldwide shortly after CBS posted it.⁴¹

It was an interesting clash of two cultures with two distinct missions, but it worked in the end thanks to personal engagement. There were almost 80 media personnel at Bagram now, all intent on getting in on the unfolding story. It was a little bit of chaos. The PAO had his hands full.

D+4, 1000-2400 (The Enemy)

There was no reason to stay. It was time to yield control of the valley to the infidels. The trick was to leave in good order without being further decimated. The

snow and heavy cloud cover were perfect for a withdrawal. Some claimed that it was sent by Allah to protect his faithful. They packed what weapons could be moved and waited for nightfall. They would leave in good order. Not everyone would move at once and the Al Qaeda units would use rear guards and covering detachments to prevent detection and pursuit. The mountain top units could stay in position longest. The toughest part was extracting the forces from the villages and Tir Ghol Ghar (the Whale). The locals and Pakistanis could handle their own evacuation, although some of the locals were retained in Al Qaeda units to serve as guides to the Pakistan border, particularly to Miram Shah.

When night came, the units began leaving the valley. It was snowy and cold and Spectre did not interfere with their departure. They moved in small groups of two and three to assembly areas and then moved out again--in small groups of nine or ten. Pickup trucks moved the dead and wounded and heavy weapons but they left one of their last two 122mm howitzers. The locals moved their own dead and wounded. It got down to 12 degrees Fahrenheit. Those who were not moving huddled in their bunkers and caves trying to stay warm until morning. [Map 8- 4, D+4, 1800-2400]

Thursday, 7 March 2002, D+5

About six inches of snow had fallen. It stopped at about 0300, but the cloud cover was still heavy. There would be very little uphill movement or aviation support this day. The Americans did not realize that the enemy withdrawal had begun but they had detected that the nightly mass infiltration into the valley had finally stopped. Was it the snow or something else? Colonel Wiercinski was trying to seal the valley

so that he could close with the enemy and have it out in a toe-to-toe infantry fight. However, all the advantages of mobility and logistics remained with the enemy. Even the Chinooks were of little mobility advantage at present since the increased number of Americans in the valley meant that the Chinooks' primary task was logistics. The Naka Valley enemy gathering looked like a great opportunity, but he needed some more Chinooks. As always, tactics define the realm of the probable while logistics define the realm of the possible.

D+5, 0001-0545 (Gardez)

The trucks slowly jolted down the snow-covered dirt road. Their headlights shone through the flying snow. After refitting, the rest of Commander Zia's force was returning to the battle. The Commander had been promised air support. But he had been promised air support on the first day of the battle. They were heading for Little Tir Ghol Ghar (the Guppy). Commander Zia and the mortars had held the site for several days, but had then pulled off to get the rest of his force. He still had a small force holding the pass northwest of Gwad Kala.⁴² Earlier that day, Commander Zia's outpost at the pass intersected a young Afghan, walking through the snow in plastic sandals. He was carrying a Kalashnikov and was hurrying to the fight. "Come along. There will be loot" he explained, not sensing that Zia's force was not part of the enemy force.⁴³

D+5, 0545 (The Valley)

At 0545, the Chinooks returned bringing in more supplies. The only aviation that flew into the valley this day were Chinooks, Apaches, and A-10s. The other aviation was flying above the clouds and dropping ordnance through those clouds. There were now a lot more Apaches available. All 24 Apaches of the 3rd-101st Aviation Battalion were in the fight. In a truly impressive effort, the remaining 16 helicopters, equipment, and personnel of the battalion had been flown over from Fort Campbell to Kandahar on USAF transport aircraft. They assembled and test-flew their helicopters within a four-hour span at Kandahar and then joined the fight, giving the “Killer Spades” of A Company a little breathing room. Of course, more helicopters meant more logistics and maintenance requirements and the workhorse Chinooks ferried even more fuel and ammunition to the FARP.⁴⁴

D+5, 0615-0715 (Rak 6 Ridge–Task Force 64)

Night vision goggles are great, but you cannot use them to see long distances. TSgt John Wylie was waiting for the dawn. He reached for his canteen. It was frozen solid. When he could finally see, he checked out the house some 700-850 meters across from him on the southern entry into the valley. The inhabitants clearly knew that he and the Australians were up here. They just were not sure where. Yesterday, before the weather had turned nasty, the husband paraded his wife and kids on top of the roof of his house for hours. They were wearing their brightest clothing so that John could see them. He wanted to make sure that John did not flatten his house and family. The women and her children were the only non-

combatants that John had seen. This morning, the house holder had company. There were 10 to 15 enemy, armed with AK-47s and RPGs. They were all carrying bedrolls, so they were probably not local, despite the fact that they were all wearing the Pushtun *pakhol*. They were getting water for tea. Presently, they formed up to leave the valley. They were an armed escort for someone important. He was a much-older, grey-bearded man and was not carrying a weapon. Four men moved in a line in front of him. At least four more followed in trail. They were all about 75 meters apart moving along a dry creek bed. John watched them while he called for close air support. When an aircraft flew over them, they threw their drab shawls over themselves and froze. They blended in instantly.⁴⁵

John finally got an A-10 that broke through the cloud cover to help him out. Captain Andra “Pop Tart” Kniep was on station. The terrain was “repetitious”--much of it resembled other terrain and John had a hard time talking the pilot onto the target. Andra fired a marker round, but it exploded right behind John’s six-man group. That was too close for comfort. John got busy working on another target a kilometer away. He got some through-the-clouds bombs dropped from F-18s and it looked like it did some good--maybe 11 KIA. John got back to the prime target, but the column and the old man were gone. Another group had materialized by the house. This group set out to flank John and the Australians and then to find them. The householder had ratted them out. John would splatter this group in due course, but the escort group got away. John and the Australians would eventually follow their tracks out. It was frustrating to lose a high-value target. He and the Australians

would have risked disclosing their hide if they could have had a decent shot at him, but the old man was 500 meters away and all John and the Australians had were short-range 5.56mm weapons. Their lone 7.62mm SR-25 had not been sighted in since their climb, so it was unwise to risk an engagement with only one medium-range semi-automatic weapon against a large group.⁴⁶

D+5, 0845 (The Valley)

Iron bombs slammed into the ground 450 meters east of the TAC of the 1st-187th. Rocks and spent fragments pelted the soldiers. The bombs were dropped through the clouds and controlled by CAOC in Saudi Arabia. The ETACs struggled to get the attacks shut off since the CAOC did not have a good idea of who was where in the valley.⁴⁷

D+5, 0845 (Bagram)

Colonel Frank Wiercinski was planning for the next push once the weather permitted. The Afghans were coming back into the fight. Commander Zia's force would make another attempt at the southern pass. A new Afghan force, led by Gul Haidar would force the northern pass. Gul Haidar's force had been assisting the FARP with security. Gul Haidar's force had two tanks and some personnel carriers. Unfortunately, Gul Haidar and Commander Zia did not get along. Haidar was a Tajik from the Pansher Valley and Zia was a Pushtun from Paktia. LTC Chris Haas and his white SOF would have to sort that one out. The Afghans would take the villages and then push up Ginger Pass and the Upper Shar-i Kot. Progress up the mountains had

stopped due to the miserable weather and deep snow. The lack of equipment and training was also apparent. Frank ordered the leading elements of the 1st-87th to remain at altitude, but started to shift the rest of the battalion along the base of Takur Ghar with the goal of re-entering Ginger Pass. The enemy was still in good order on the Whale, but his force in the villages was pretty chewed up and uncoordinated. There were still substantial pockets of enemy on the Eastern Wall and on the next mountain set to the East. Zia's force was now closed on Little Tir Ghol Ghar. This hill controlled the entrance to the northern pass and part of Zia's force and LTC Chris Haas and some of his White SOF had been there for most of the fight.

There was another problem. The USAF wanted to swap out all the ETACs in the valley! It was the old playground rule of "let everyone have a turn." It is certainly a good idea to have a lot of personnel with actual combat experience, but changing out key personnel who are doing a good job in the middle of a battle is a very bad idea.⁴⁸ It was not the issue of the competence or ability of the replacement ETACs. They would undoubtedly be good at their jobs. It was the issue of relationships and battle rhythm. Ground combat units are organizations of closely-knit soldiers who depend on each other and fight for each other. It takes some time to develop the necessary trust and acceptance when a person is new to a ground unit. It takes longer for an airman, who is coming from outside the army culture. This USAF battlefield mass substitution would stymie the fight and endanger the force while the troops would have had to wait for the new ETACs to get their heads into the game and develop those personal relationships that are so crucial to their ETAC mission.

This cloud cover was already creating some problems with air support. Some through-the-clouds drops had been uncomfortably close. Frank needed to keep his present ETACs. They had been able to stop the too-close drops after the first bombs fell. He fired a message up the chain protesting the USAF plan.⁴⁹

D+5, 0945–1100 (Little Tir Ghol Ghar–the Guppy)

Commander's Zia's 200-man truck convoy finally neared the Guppy.⁵⁰ The high ground had to be cleared and occupied once again. USMC AH-1 Cobra helicopter gunships flew ahead of the column and put some TOW missiles into cave openings on the Guppy. The TOW is an older, slower missile than the Hellfire, but it had its advantages in this terrain. It is an optically tracked wire-guided missile that can be flown right into the cave. Hellfire follows a laser beam--and it is very difficult to keep a laser beam steady on a cave opening while flying a helicopter.⁵¹ The troops scrambled up the Guppy and took up positions, helped set up the mortars or made camp. Their attack would be to the south, but when was uncertain. Everyone was waiting for the arrival of Gul Haidar's force.⁵²

One of Commander Zia's shot-up trucks from D-Day was still on the valley floor to the west of the Whale. It had carried communications gear, so the Combat Controller with the Special Forces ODA requested that the Cobras destroy it. The Cobras zipped it with 20mm Gatling gun fire. Later, a patrol found that an enemy had been in the vehicle and lost a leg to the 20mm fire. He bled out long before anyone found him. Some of his comrades in a nearby cave met the same fate from a TOW missile.⁵³

D+5, 1010-1300 (The Valley)

At 1010, the remaining enemy howitzer opened fire from the mouth of Ginger Pass, but the round exploded harmlessly in the mountains between Cindy and Diane Passes. The enemy had fired at LTC Paul La Camera's 1st-87th battalion as they moved on Takur Ghar, but their cave position did not allow them to hit the Summit Battalion.⁵⁴

The units were getting their supply requests together. In addition to the constant demand for food, water and ammunition, there were universal requests for batteries, blankets, jackets, sun screen, lip balm, and foot powder. It had been a cold night and it was hard to sleep more than a few hours at a time.⁵⁵

At 1150, a 500-pound bomb punched through the clouds and landed ten meters from the Bravo Company, 1st-187th command group. Fortunately, like many of the bombs dropped in the valley, this one did not explode. Some claimed that it was an act of the Almighty to protect his faithful. The ETACs yelled "Knock it off, knock it off" over their radios, trying to stop further attacks on friendly forces. Bravo Company, 1st-187th picked up and moved just in case CAOC had any further plans to bomb them.⁵⁶

The enemy DShK on Takur Ghar continued to fire at the compound. The Rakassans TAC (Major Mike Gibler and his radios) completed its move to a new location nearly HLZ 3. Major Dennis Yates and Captain Paul "Dino" Murray stayed at the compound directing fires.⁵⁷

D+5, 1252-1300 (Tir Ghol Ghar)

Aviation bombs punched through the clouds landing to the south of Zia's forces and the west of Tir Ghol Ghar. No one was sure whether they were off target or the long-awaited air support to Zia's forces.⁵⁸ The TST aviation from CAOC was focused on the Whale. For the next 48 hours, B-1 and B-52 bombers bombed the Whale around the clock. The Whale remained the dump zone that allowed American, British, and French aircraft to land without ordnance on board.⁵⁹ Soldiers in the valley swear that the Whale is four feet lower today.⁶⁰

D+5, 1434-1505 (The Valley)

At 1434, the enemy howitzer again fired at the 1st-87th. The round again passed over their heads and exploded harmlessly on the mountain slope between Cindy and Diane Passes. The howitzer position was surveyed to fire into the villages, but the Americans were not in the villages.⁶¹

At 1458, the enemy started firing a mortar from on top of Takur Ghar. He had gotten another mortar up there by SUV and hard climbing. There was still smoke rising from the former ammunition dump, but the enemy seemed determined to hold onto it. At 1505, enemy small arms fire broke out from the top of Cindy.⁶²

D+5, 1900-2400 (The Skies Above)

It was still nasty flying weather. The wings were icing and St. Elmo's fire hung on the wing tips. Captain "Soup" Campbell and Captain Ryan "Frag" Haden were flying their A-10s into the valley under the clouds. Two Spectre gunships were there as well. The four hunted together. There were fewer targets than previous

nights. Finally Spectre found a target--some mortar pits on a hill. SMSGT Hotaling, on the ground with TF64, cleared it hot. As "Soup" was rolling in on target, JSTARS stopped the attack, saying that "they must nominate it to CAOC." The senior organization, with imperfect knowledge of ground truth, wanted to make the calls on targets that the CAS pilot has eyes on and have been cleared by the on-ground FAC! By the time CAOC cleared the target, and the A-10s had returned from refueling, Spectre was working another area and was unavailable to pinpoint the target. The mortar positions survived.⁶³

A SEAL team then discovered a vehicle hidden under a tarp to the southeast of the Whale. "Soup" rolled in on the target and missed. As "Frag" was rolling in behind him, JSTARS again stopped them. They thought that the 1st-87th was in that area. A call to White Lightning 20 disclosed that the battalion was three-and-a-half kilometers east of there. CAOC did not know where the ground forces were. The vehicle exploded when hit.⁶⁴

Spectre next discovered three enemy vehicles and a "bunch" of enemy at the intersection of Ginger and Heather Pass. They were leaving the valley and not wasting much time doing so. Again, as the A-10s were preparing to take on the target, JSTARS stopped them. Spectre had hit the area, vehicles were burning, but the A-10s had to wait for 15 minutes before they were given permission to strike. At the end of their fuel, "Soup" and "Frag" each laid a 300-foot string of six Mark 82 bombs set for air-burst up the hillside where the enemy was running. Then they each flew a strafing run firing 500-700 rounds of HEI up the hillside. As they flew out of

the valley toward the tanker, two more A-10s flew into the valley, ready to continue the mayhem. Spectre announced to Major Robert “Tito” Hetland in the lead A-10. “Sorry, there are no targets remaining in the area.”⁶⁵

D+5, 1900-2400 (The Enemy)

The enemy continued to leave the valley. During the day, the Apache gunships hunted them and at night the A-10s and Spectre were back. But the cloud cover and vile weather had helped them out as they moved in small groups through the various passes. Supplies, particularly food, were becoming more difficult. It had been seven days since their last cooked meals from Zurmat and they were running low on emergency rations. They had lost men during the day who had attempted to move from the Eastern Wall and the “Whale” into the villages. They were hungry and were supposed to bring food back. Most of the Uighers and Uzbeks had left. Most of the senior leadership had left and their fight was less coordinated. There were still forces on the “Whale” and on the Eastern Wall. Part of the ammunition dump on Takur Ghar had not exploded, and they had moved another mortar up there to help out the DShK crew. But they needed time and animals to move the remaining ammunition. The forces on the mountain ridge east of the Upper Shar-i Kot were still in place. Still, it was past time to leave. During the daylight, the rear guard had put up a determined effort to mimic a much bigger force, but once the weather cleared, it would be hard to fool the infidels. The enemy moved the last 122mm howitzer out of its cave and towed it out of the valley behind a pickup truck. [Map 8-5, D+5, 1900-2400.]

Friday, 8 March 2002, D+6

The weather finally cleared. The fighter-bombers could return to the valley. The climb up the mountains had not gone well. The heavy snow, cold, lack of proper climbing gear, and lack of individual and unit mountain training had stopped the ascent. Colonel Wiercinski was still trying to figure out how to take Takur Ghar. He had to get a force behind it in the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley--but there were more enemy on the next ridge to the East. Intelligence reports were now stating that the enemy had a strong point defense on the mountain top [obvious, but true], there was at least one underground facility on the mountain top [obvious, but true], there were some 200 enemy combatants on the mountain top [false], the enemy on the mountain would all fight to the death [false], and there was probably a high-value target on Takur Ghar [false, the senior leadership had departed the valley]. Reports from SOF teams stated that enemy infiltration had ceased [true] as well as enemy exfiltration [false--the two days of bad weather had further limited the ability of the reconnaissance teams to observe enemy activity at night. The bulk of the enemy left during the bad weather]. Intelligence credited CAS with stopping enemy resupply between Ginger Pass and the Whale. Intelligence also estimated that some 30 enemy combatants remained on the Whale.⁶⁶

There were still enemy in the villages, but those were reserved for the Afghan forces. It was taking Gul Haidar longer to get into the area than originally planned. An earlier report had credited Gul Haidar with having 50 tanks, but that number was actually two. Clearing the Whale would have to wait for the Afghan capture of the

villages. Taking Takur Ghar and sealing Ginger Pass remained the thorny problem. The Americans now had the bulk of combatants in the valley, but they did not know that. The mobility advantage still remained with the enemy. Even if Colonel Wiercinski had enough CH-47s, an air assault into the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley was out of the question due to the heavy snowfall. The snow also limited the possibility of an attack on the Naka Valley.

D+6, 0600, (The Indian Ocean off Pasni, Pakistan)

The *USS John F. Kennedy* aircraft carrier and accompanying battle group was now off shore. Naval F-14s and F-18s were closer to the fight. In addition, two additional USMC KC-130T Hercules tanker aircraft deployed to Jacobabad to support extended flight operations. USMC AV-8B Harrier II jets could now get within range of the Shar-i Kot to support the fight. Like the A-10, the primary role of the Harrier is ground attack. It was a late, but welcome addition.

D+6, 0830-1100 (The North)

Enemy activity had fallen off dramatically up north. Sporadic enemy mortar fire still launched at them from the Whale, but all the fighting was long-range fire. LTC Chip Preysler, Battalion Commander of the 2nd-187th was watching aircraft circle while musing on the adaptability of the enemy. "It is good to have air support, it is good to have mortar support, but it would be great to have some artillery. Weather does not shut down artillery or mortars. There is no such thing as constant CAS, but artillery is a constant and it gives the enemy no forewarning--or no more

than two seconds if he hears the shot fired. Mortars give the enemy plenty of warning. Aircraft come overhead and fly a big doughnut in the sky before they attack. This enemy learned very quickly to go to ground when the aircraft checked in or the mortar fired. The aircraft would drop bombs or leave--and as soon as the sky was clear, or the mortar round exploded, the enemy would come back out shooting. Now at night, when the AC-130 was overhead, you could take your boots off and get some real sleep. That was fairly constant CAS, but only for a few hours . . .”

Suddenly, a 500-pound bomb slammed into the valley floor nearby. It hit at an angle and then skipped along the ground through the middle of A Company. Troops dove out of the way. The bomb finally came to rest a few meters away from Chip and CSM Mark Nielsen. It ticked, hissed and rocked ominously, but like many of the bombs dropped, it was a dud. The valley was becoming fairly littered with them. The ETACs were screaming “knock it off” into their radios.⁶⁷

D+6, 1040-1058, (The Skies Above)

Two F-16s flew over the top of Takur Ghar, releasing bombs as they went. Lots of aircraft had dropped lots of bombs on Takur Ghar, but these F-16s got lucky. They hit some of the smaller surviving supplementary ammunition dumps and the dumps exploded. Takur Ghar hosted its second fireworks exhibition in two days.⁶⁸ There was clearly no reason for the enemy to stay around any longer.

D+6, 1130-1730 (The Valley and the Skies Above)

The battalions began vigorous patrolling in the valley west of the Eastern Wall to insure that they had not missed any small enemy outposts, caves or caches during their initial drive. Nothing much came to light. There were still enemy sightings in Babukhel--a bus, two horses and a wagon, one-two combatants here and there. The enemy seemed to be concentrated on Takur Ghar, the Whale, and in Babukhel. Air support was dropping lots of bombs on all three plus the west side of the Whale.⁶⁹ Suddenly a string of 24 Mark-82 500-pound bombs splashed on the western slope of the Eastern Wall--too close to troops for comfort. Some debris rained down on C Company, 1st-187th--over a kilometer away. At the Fire Direction Center in the compound, Major Mike Gibler yelled over at Captain "Dino" Murray. "Dino, where'd that come from?"

"I'll find out."

Predator had seen a string of trucks moving through the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley and the 10th Mountain Division headquarters requested a B-52 strike against this convoy. The strike was over a kilometer off and the bombs rained on the western slope, not on the valley across the ridge line. Major Gibler asked that the 10th Mountain Division headquarters warn them in the future of any similar events.⁷⁰

A patrol from the Brigade Reserve (B Company, 1st-187th) pushed up the Eastern Wall between Cindy Pass and Diane Pass. It found a cave, some fighting positions and drew mortar fire from Takur Ghar. Enemy DShK fire rose from Takur Ghar and the Whale despite the heavy bombing.⁷¹

At 1509, the five USMC Cobras came on station to support the 1st-87th. Although there were no female pilots in the group, someone had assigned them the call sign of “Lady Ace.” The macho pilots were not amused. As they flew toward the Whale, DShK fire rose. The “Snakes” made two passes at the heavy machine gun. After each pass, the DShK gunner defiantly returned to his weapon and engaged the Cobras. Finally, after the third pass, the gunner stayed in his bunker. The Cobras then went after a mortar position on the Whale. The ammunition stores in the pit exploded and burned.⁷²

It was very difficult to spot the enemy caves, bunkers, and trench lines even when flying directly over them or alongside them. The Cobras combed the Whale. After five passes, Captain Bruce Laughlin finally saw the trench line that imagery insisted was there. It was narrow and intact. Despite all the tons of bombs that had been dropped on the Whale, the trench had not collapsed or taken a direct hit. There were other trenches all along the mountain. They also had not been affected by the bombing. Flying 50 feet above the trench line, Bruce could see the colors of enemy field gear. Here there was a blue sleeping bag with a checkered flannel lining. There was the corner of a blue tarp that the sand and snow had been knocked off of. It looked like there was some 25 feet of trench line that the enemy had covered with blue tarp and then covered the tarp with brush and sand. Further down the trench line, he could see coolers, lanterns, camping gear, more sleeping bags. It looked like the area held a bunch of campers, not an armed force. Next to one stretch of trench was a small hut with a dead horse or mule inside. It was hung up and probably frozen

solid. The back half had been sliced away and was just bones. The front was intact. Obviously, the ration supply to the Whale had been severed and the menu was horse steak Tatar.⁷³ The trenches were also full of ammunition boxes, RPG-7s and stacks and stacks of RPG-7 rounds. The fighting positions were built up with rocks. Crisscrossing the Whale, it became obvious that this was a prepared conventional mountain defense. There were fixed positions with interlocking fields of fire, kill boxes, bunkers, heavy weapons positions, trench lines and ammunition supply points. There were some enemy dead. Some were wearing Eastern European camouflage trousers. There was one corpse wearing a neon orange camouflage hunting jacket with green spots, okay when working against a color-blind deer, but not much help on a rocky, snow-covered mountain. Another corpse that was slumped over a machine gun was wearing a FUBU (For Us By Us) jersey--a brand label that had been popular in the late 1990s.⁷⁴

The Cobra has a VCR television camera. TF Summit wanted a good close-up video of the Whale. However, the abrasive dust that coats Afghanistan jammed up the cameras and some of the guns. Captain Philip Eilertson and Captain Ashford both used their hand-held personal video cameras to film the Whale. Back at Bagram, the maintenance crews were using “gorilla snot”--a homebrew dust palliative to unstick the guns. The cameras were beyond the curative powers of “gorilla snot.”⁷⁵

D+6, 1530-2400 (Takur Ghar)

The 1st-87th was coming down the mountain. It had never gotten close to the top. It was going back into Ginger Pass. The units slowly moved down the mountain

and back to Eve. C Company, 4th-31st moved laterally southwest to hold the forward position. The other companies moved down the mountain. Moving at night on snow-covered mountains is very tricky. There were a lot of falls and bumps and bruises. That night, UH-60 Blackhawks had to fly medical evacuation missions into the valley to pick up injured soldiers--one with a head injury. Spectre provided coverage.⁷⁶

D+6, 2200 (Little Tir Ghol Ghar)

General Gul Haidar's force arrived and went into a bivouac area separate from that of Commander Zia's forces. His force consisted of two T-54 tanks, four BMP-1 armored personnel carriers, some BM-21 truck-mounted multiple rocket launchers, 400 troops and 30 some trucks. Unfortunately, his trucks were not carrying much in the way of logistics. He was out of fuel, food, and water and low on ammunition. The overworked Chinooks had another customer for ammunition tonnage and fuel blivets.⁷⁷

D+6, 1830-2400 (The Enemy)

It was past time for the remaining enemy to leave the valley, but it was much harder to do so. The weather had lifted and Spectre and the A-10s and Apaches were hunting them. The groups leaving the valley were now smaller--groups of two and three. The enemy was doing a much better job of hiding his body heat from Spectre using blankets, space blankets or pieces of carpet, canvas, or tarp. Two rear guards stayed behind--the force on Tir Ghol Ghar and the smaller force on Takur Ghar. The rear guards' missions were to buy enough time for the retreating forces to blend into

the populace or get across the border to Miram Shah in Pakistan. The forces on the mountain ridge east of the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley started to withdraw as well.

There were still sufficient rations on top of Takur Ghar, but rations on Tir Ghol Ghar were sparse. Much of the enemy mobility had been discovered and destroyed by aviation and mortars. No more heavy weapons were coming out. The surviving vehicles were for the dead and wounded, but evacuation of the dead and wounded was increasingly difficult. [See Chapter 8, Map 6, D+6, 0800- 2400.]

Saturday, 9 March 2002, D+7

Enemy activity had dropped off significantly. There were still forces evident on the Whale and Takur Ghar. A few enemy had been detected leaving the valley-- some through Ginger Pass and others through the Southern Pass. Was the enemy still in force in the valley or had he managed to disengage most of his forces during the bad weather? Had the enemy gone to ground with the hope of lulling the American's into a false sense of security and then launching an attack? Gul Haidar's force was on hand, so the entry of the Afghans into the valley needed to be coordinated. The mobility advantage had finally shifted to the Afghan/American's favor, but it was all with the Afghan force. The 1st-87th would plug Ginger Pass and help with the insertion of additional special operations forces into the valley. TF64 would move in closer as well in case any of the enemy tried to escape to the south. It was also time to finalize the plan on how to extract this force out of the valley.

D+7, 0130-0237 (The Valley)

It was a miserable night. The 3rd Platoon of B Company, 1st-187th had two-thirds of its people asleep and the rest on watch. There was some movement outside the perimeter. There was someone out there. SFC Nye, the Platoon Sergeant could see him with his night observation devices (NODS) goggles. Was he an enemy or was he friendly? No one could tell and they did not want to spook him with a challenge. They reported his presence to the Brigade TAC. “Don’t shoot until you identify that he is enemy” was the guidance. Finally, the platoon slipped out a patrol. They grabbed the individual. He was not an American, but an Afghan. He was not carrying a weapon. A search of his person revealed a wad of very dirty local currency, some dates, and toilet paper. He was in sandals and thin clothing-- definitely not well dressed for the weather. They flex-cuffed him and brought him to the Brigade Intelligence team. The prisoner spoke some broken English. He claimed to be a University of Kabul student but had no reasonable explanation for what he was doing here. Since the word for student is *Talib*, there was some initial confusion if he was admitting to being a member of the Taliban.⁷⁸

D+7, (The Skies Above)

The Cobras were flying the length of the valley. Suddenly an explosion erupted underneath them. Then another explosion and another blossomed. Brunson looked up and saw a B-52. B-52s were dropping 500-pound bombs through the Cobra formation. They could not communicate with the bombers, so they quickly flew out of the valley.⁷⁹

D+7, (FARP Texaco)

Intelligence reports indicated that the enemy intended to hit the FARP. It was a tempting target with helicopters, ammunition stores and fuel sitting on an open plain protected by a small force. The report appeared to be credible, so Captain Quander supervised the deployment of the FARP back to Bagram. The Chinooks were not available for logistics support into the valley, since they were back-hauling the ammunition and stores from the FARP. The intelligence report was wrong.⁸⁰

The entire battle depended on tanking off the helicopters before they entered the valley and being able to rearm and refuel for a return trip to the valley when needed. This was not going to happen with the FARP in Bagram. Once again, the USMC came to the rescue. The USMC Super Cobra contingent established a temporary FARP (FARP Charlie) near the valley on the west side of Little Tir Ghol Ghar. The USMC CH-53 Super Stallion transport helicopters were hauling fuel as part of a “fat cow” effort to keep the helicopters flying. The CH-53s were able to take on fuel from a circling KC-130 instead of flying back to Bagram. They could then land and fuel the waiting aircraft. Their contribution was essential to keeping all the helicopters flying.⁸¹ The marines on board the CH-53 provided the perimeter security.⁸²

D+7, 1210-2400 (The South)

Enemy activity was light. The DShK crew and mortar crew on top of Takur Ghar still fired some occasional rounds, but that was it. The units were busy planning for the final push and extraction. Colonel Wiercinski had lost to the Air Force

playground rules. The USAF was going to replace all the veteran ETACs starting with those assigned to the 1st-87th. The Summit Battalion was making a night attack into Ginger Pass in a few hours and the ETACs would all be new. They would get their turn. Hopefully, their services would not be needed. At 1825, a CAS strike on Heather mountain hit yet another ammunition dump. Large explosions rocked the valley while the mountain top lit up. At 1945, the 1st-87th began the attack and then stopped. A B2 bomber was inbound to bomb the pass. At 2120, the 1st-87th resumed the attack and finally returned to Ginger Pass. They moved through “Hell’s Half Pipe” and up into the pass. There was no enemy there. Their only casualty was a soldier who fell and broke his leg. It was a bad break and he was medevaced at first light the next morning. The infantry advance netted terrain, but no enemy contact. The soldiers took up positions from which they could observe and control the pass.⁸³ Task Force 64 patrols closed up to most of the southern exits except the southern pass.⁸⁴

D+7, 1800-2400 (The Enemy)

Only the rear guard on the Whale, the slow and the uninformed were left. The infidel had won the valley. The local dead and wounded had been evacuated but a lot of the foreigners, the Al Qaeda, lay where they died. Their bodies quickly mummified in the cold, dry air. Supplies were low, but there were not that many people needing supplies. The DShK on top of Takur Ghar still barked its defiance, but the mortar had fallen silent again. Their remaining forces were on Tir Ghol Ghar.

The choices were to defend, evade or seek martyrdom. [See Chapter 8, Map 7, D+7 1800-2400.]

Sunday, 10 March 2002, D+8

It had taken a bit of shuffling and a lot of coordination, but the Afghan forces were roughly in a position from which they could launch and bring this fight closer to a conclusion. Commander Zia's Pashtun force, which had a several weeks association with the Special Forces, were controlled and fairly responsive-- particularly since the long-delayed promise of air support looked like it would now occur. The Tajik forces of General Gul Haidar were better armed, but the Special Forces had not had a long association with them and they were not yet responsive to Special Forces requests and prompting. General Haidar's force that had been guarding the FARP was not part of this force. How the Pashtun and Tajik forces would interact on the battlefield was anyone's guess. Still, it would be another day before the Afghan forces were supplied and ready to advance.

There were too many forces in the valley for the overworked Chinook fleet to support and the Afghan force was putting a severe strain on logistics. There was more air support than they could use. It was time to start thinning TF Rakassans. Enemy resistance had fallen off dramatically and existed only in small pockets. The enemy had withdrawn or lost most of his force. It was time to take out the villages and sweep the Whale, but the tyranny of logistics was slowing things down.

D+8, 0700-1500 (Little Tir Ghol Ghar)

While the Afghan forces refit and supplied, it was time for LTC Chris Haas, the Pashtun Commander Zia and Panjshiri Tadjik General Gul Haidar to put the main attack together. The plan was that the morning after next, at 0500, the Air Force would drop a 15,000 pound BLU-82B fuel-air “daisy cutter” bomb on the Whale. This was the largest conventional munition in the USAF inventory and it would signal the start of the attack. General Gul Haidar’s force would attack through the northern pass, swing south, and stop short of Sherkhankheyl. Commander Zia’s force would attack through the southern pass, take the villages of Babulkhel, Sherkhankheyl and Marzak and hold in place.⁸⁵

Commander Zia shifted his force off of Little Tir Ghol Ghar and began moving them south to take up attack positions for the morning after next. They reinforced the pass area to the northwest of Gwad Kala. Gul Haidar’s force moved onto Little Tir Ghol Ghar.

A large Afghan fighter walked deliberately through the snow toward Commander Zia’s positions. He was barefoot and wounded. He still had his Kalashnikov. He surrendered, stating that he had been wounded by mortar fire from Zia’s mortars. He was a pincushion. A Special Forces medic treated his wounds. There were several deep wounds, but the Afghan fighter did not flinch when probed. Later, an unarmed teenage Arab Al Qaeda fighter surrendered to Zia’s force. He had no weapon—just a small Koran and a small radio. He was wounded on his head and back. He stated that he was part of a group of five who manned a position as part of a

rear guard. They had orders to fight to the death, but all his comrades were dead and his weapon was destroyed. The people who gave him the orders had left. Later, an Afghan father and son were captured by a patrol. They were carrying equipment from one of the US vehicles that had been abandoned on D-Day after it was hit by a D-30 round.⁸⁶

D+8, 0830-1030 (The Compound)

There were more reporters and cameramen in the valley, and they all wanted to be where the action was. They were the lucky ones. Most of the press was waiting not-so-patiently in Bagram. TF Rakkasans wanted them to get a good story, but they did not want to lose any of them in the process. The reporters felt overly protected. There was not much action in the valley except down south where the 1st-87th had reentered Ginger Pass. Major Paul Sarat, the Operations Officer for the 1st-187th was trying to work this out and was letting them interview the members of Bravo Company who had captured a prisoner early the previous morning. Just as he had arranged for the reporters to link-up with the 1st-87th, some sporadic enemy firing broke loose in Ginger Pass. This put the reporters on hold again. This also put Paul's fifth iteration of the battalion withdrawal plan on hold until he got the reporters taken care of. Across the valley, Paul could see the USMC AH-1 Super Cobra's working over the northern part of the Whale. When they hit the towns of Babulkhel and Sherkankehl, there were some secondary explosions. One of the explosions was once an SUV.⁸⁷

D+8, 1630-1645 (Bagram)

TF Rakkasans was issuing orders, again, for the start of the withdrawal in the valley. Things take longer when mountains are involved. Tomorrow, they would, hopefully, start to withdraw the troops. In preparation for the withdrawal, the 1st-87th needed to come out of Ginger Pass that night. Outside the valley, things were moving at a rapid pace. The remaining battalion of the Brigade, the 3rd-187th, was deploying from Fort Campbell to Kandahar. They were relieving the Canadian Battalion, the 3PPCLI, who had been securing the airfield. The Canadians were flying to Bagram. They still did not have enough Chinooks to launch the Canadians into the Naka Valley and then support them.⁸⁸

D+8, 0900-1600 (New FARP Texaco)

The USMC had been doing a good job with FARP Charlie, but it was not enough. The FARP had to be set up again, this time closer to the valley. Captain Quander organized the movement. As always, everybody needed the Chinooks and so it took a long time to get on the ground and get organized.⁸⁹ FARP Charlie closed down at the end of the day and returned to Bagram.

D+8, 1614-1635 (Gunfight on Takur Ghar)

The lone DShK on top of Takur Ghar continued to fire at every helicopter and jet it saw. It never hit anything, but the muzzle report from this large machine gun was unmistakable--and annoying. Air strike after air strike had tried to kill the gun crew, but they had survived all attempts. They were just over the crest, on the east side, and mortar-proof. The DShK had been driving the fire direction center crazy for

days. Some Apaches from Bravo 3rd-101st Aviation Regiment were in the valley. They were vectored onto the target by SMSGT Hotaling and TF 64. The Apaches flew up Ginger Pass toward the backside of Takur Ghar. The top of Takur Ghar is well above the maximum altitude for the AH-64A, but the lead pilot pushed his bird higher and higher--well past its limits, well past the elevation where supplemental oxygen is required. "Blue Max" [the unit call sign], strained as its rotors clawed through the thin air, getting less responsive and maneuverable the higher it went. At last, it could go no higher and could barely maneuver, but the crew could see the DShK and its crew. In the finest tradition of "High Noon," the sluggish Apache and the determined DShK crew faced off toe-to-toe. It was only a question of who was going to hit who first. Rockets whooshed out the Apache pods and its 30mm gun coughed a long, staccato cough before the DShK could get off a round. The DShK gunners lost and the Apache immediately began its descent. The enemy resistance on Takur Ghar was over.⁹⁰

D+8, 1500-2200 (Little Tir Ghol Ghar)

Gul Haidar's men jumped the gun. Despite the efforts of the Special Forces ODA, they moved across the divide to the northern base of the Whale and began climbing to the top. They were out of control--US control not Gul Haidar's control. Bombs were still dropping on top of the Whale as the Tajiks climbed. The combat controller managed to get the air strikes turned off. Soon the Tajiks were on top of the Whale. They killed a few enemy hiding in outposts; gathered the enemy papers, letters, and photographs; then lit large cooking/celebratory fires on top of the

mountain. It was clearly a statement to Zia's Pashtuns--we are where you were unable to go. There would be no "daisy cutter" in the morning. The rivalry and posturing between the Tajiks and Pashtun would continue.⁹¹

D+8, 1800-2400 (Ginger Pass)

The 1st-87th was leaving Ginger Pass again. This departure had none of the drama and urgency of the first. The trip back in had been anti-climatic. There had been some long-range sporadic firing, but it had none of the intensity of their fight on D-Day. It was no easier walking than before. The battalion had two serious injuries going into the pass from slips and falls. Everyone was careful where they put their feet. A Company, 1st -87th flew out of the valley to Bagram that night.

Colonel Wiercinski planned on leaving a company from each battalion in the valley. He polled his commanders as to their wishes. LTC Paul Le Camera, the 1st-87th Commander, volunteered to stay behind to command this force. His command would eventually become C Company, 1st-87th; C Company, 1st-187th; C Company, 4th-31st; and C Company, 2nd -187th. This was four Charlie companies, from four battalions, from three brigades and two divisions.⁹² [See Chapter 8, Map 8, D+8, 0800-2400.]

D+8, 1500-2400 (The Enemy)

There was no way to offer organized resistance, although embattled groups held out in strong points and bunkers on the Whale. The accursed Tajiks had now

climbed on top of the northern end and killed some of their comrades. The only way out was to the south--and that was difficult.

Monday, 11 March 2002, D+9

It was apparent that the enemy was not coming back and that there was nothing left to contain. The task force had been criticized for not taking down the villages on D-Day or D+1. It was certainly within their capability, but these were reserved for the Afghans. The new Afghan Army needed legitimacy and this was an opportunity to provide that.⁹³ It was finally the day for Afghan attack. It was a hazy day with a low ceiling, but there was more than adequate aviation coverage and the mortar battery still dominated the valley. Things had clearly changed in the valley. TF Rakkasans now had more troops than they could logistically support. Enemy contact had dwindled to almost nothing. There was more air support than they could use. The American problem remained mobility. The Afghan forces were far more mobile than the Americans.

D+9, 0200 (Bagram)

LTC Pat Stogran, battalion commander of the 3PPCLI, stumbled through the dark into the 10th Mountain Division headquarters. There he was introduced to Colonel Kevin V. Wilkerson, the Brigade Commander of the 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. Colonel Wilkerson's brigade staff was truncated and his brigade was scattered across the planet. He had been assisting MG Hagenbeck in battle management at Bagram. The US Army proved that it was not immune to the

playground rules syndrome. The Canadian battalion was going to go into the Shar-i Kot Valley to systematically clear all the outposts and caves. They were fresh, they were eager and the troops of TF Rakkasans clearly needed a break. But, they were going in under Colonel Wilkerson's command. The brigade headquarters of the 3rd Brigade, 101st Air Assault Division were a complete staff who were intimately familiar with the valley, had managed the fight up to this point and had a good working relationship with the Canadian battalion. The brigade headquarters of the 2nd Brigade was a skeleton staff who had not been intimately involved with the detailed conduct of Operation Anaconda but had helped the 10th Mountain Division keep the higher headquarters at bay. They did not know the Canadians, had not lived with them and had not developed a relationship. The marriage between the Rakkasans and the Canadians had been a good one. There was now going to be another wedding between the Canadians and the 2nd Brigade. It would not be a good marriage.

Pat was eager to launch into the valley, but was aware of the burden he was carrying. This would be Canada's first time in combat since the Korean War. The very existence of light infantry in the Canadian Armed Forces rode on his shoulders. "Don't screw it up" and "last nail in the coffin of the light infantry" rang in his memory. There were supposedly 60-80 enemy on the Whale. Pat was here to get the commander's intent and commander's guidance, part of the detailed military decision making process (MDMP) that is practically holy writ for combat planning in the US Army and NATO ground forces. It is a methodical procedure designed to insure that

the subordinate commander understands the senior commander's plan and desired end state thoroughly so that when things go awry and communications are lost, he can act to insure that the senior commander's plan is met. It is drummed into every officer at branch school and staff college. It is planning 101.

Pat took out his notebook and asked for the commander's intent. Colonel Wilkerson stated, "My intent is to kill a lot of Al Qaeda. Use your imagination. You have no constraints in destroying the enemy."

That was it? What were the key tasks? What was the end state? What was the commander's guidance with its 13 elements? Pat sought out the few staff members for help. They had little to offer other than the information that the battalion would fly tomorrow into the northern valley. They gave him a flight schedule and a time to load. They also informed him that he would have an American light infantry company under his command. Alfa Company, 4th-31st, had been sitting in the Kuwait desert for months and now they had been flown in for a chance to fight. That was it. Pat walked out of the headquarters and back to his unit. This was certainly not how the Canadians did it or how the Rakkasans did it, but Pat had his flight time and he was going to make that happen. He apparently had carte blanche for whatever plan and scheme of maneuver he desired.⁹⁴

D+9, 0400-0745 (The Valley)

Task Force Rakkasans was pulling out. The battalions consolidated their trash from the mortar ammunition packing, the MREs, the water bottles and all the detritus of war. There would be no space for it on the Chinooks and burning it was not

environmentally friendly. The US Army does not bury trash, so it lay there in great heaps in the battalion areas.⁹⁵

The CH-47s picked up the tired, dirty soldiers and started shuttling them back to Bagram. Everyone had wind burn, lip sores, and other dermatological complaints, but a phone call home and some kind of wash up awaited them--along with a gaggle of reporters. What was left in the valley was the battalion headquarters of the 1st-87th and the four Charlie companies. Only the 1st-87th mortars remained of the proud mortar battery. They had dominated the valley and proven their value in the long-range fight.⁹⁶

D+9, 0800-1300 (The Northern Pass)

LTC Chris Haas, the 1st-5th Special Forces Battalion Commander, decided to stay with General Gul Haidar. General Haidar was performing the Afghan version of commander's reconnaissance. This grizzled veteran, along with a small security detail, his chief of staff and the tank commanders, was moving through the pass--clearing anti-tank mines by hand! He obviously had lots of practice. He would attach a rope to a mine, pull it out, defuse it and throw it into a creek bed. In other armies, commanders do not clear land mines, but General Haidar was not going to risk losing his precious tanks or BMPs to mines. Gul Haidar was no stranger to mines. While a young man, he had lost a leg to a land mine and was fitted with a prosthesis. Later on in the war with the Soviets, he stepped on another land mine, which blew off his prosthesis. General Haidar was clearly the more experienced Afghan commander. Chris and four of his people accompanied General Haidar. Once the pass was clear of

mines, General Haidar called his troops down off the Whale. They came down the slopes on line and then the line dissolved as they headed for the nearest houses to loot.⁹⁷ East met West. The laws of warfare first postulated by Hugo Grotius, the Geneva Conventions on the conduct of war, none of this applied to the Afghan force. They were not part of this tradition. A warrior's pay was that which he could take. One of the primary rewards for fighting was loot--and they were going to beat the Pashtun to it. The Special Forces personnel protested this marauding. There was a mission to fulfill and looting was not part of the mission. Finally Gul Haidar barked some orders into his Motorola hand-held radio and some of the Afghans returned. The Afghan-American interpreter attached to the Special Forces whispered "He's telling his men that a few must come back so that the Americans will see them, but the rest can keep going. These are very bad men." Some of the Special Forces personnel later stopped Tajik's who were trying to pilfer Special Forces gear.⁹⁸

The Tajik force moved through the pass to an assembly area in the mouth of the pass. Suddenly a loud explosion rocked the air. One of the tanks sent a 100mm main gun round into the middle of the 2nd-187th positions. It went through an ETAC's tent. Fortunately, he was not inside it. The Tajiks had mistaken the Americans for the enemy.

Commander Zia's forces knew what Americans looked like. There was a squad of engineers in full combat gear that had lived with them since before the operation had kicked off. General Haidar's forces did not have this experience and the Special Forces were not in American combat gear.

The Rakkasans grabbed for their AT-4 recoilless rifles and Javelin anti-tank guided missiles. “Check fire, check fire” the NCOs yelled. The Americans knew that the force firing on them was General Haidar’s but the Tajiks had not stopped firing. The Tajik infantry was now spread out and closing fast. They were 300 meters away. The long-anticipated close infantry fight looked like it might happen, but between the wrong combatants. Another tank round smashed into the middle of the Rakkasans. There were still no casualties. “Hold your fire, hold your fire” the NCOs yelled. The Americans still did not return fire. Captain Frank Baltazar, the Charlie Company, 2nd-187th battalion commander was on the radio with LTC Chris Haas. “Turn it off, turn it off.” Finally, the tanks slewed their turrets so that the barrels were pointed to the rear. The Tajik infantry stopped and turned around.⁹⁹

D+9, 0630-1300 (The Southern Pass)

Commander Zia’s men moved forward and climbed the southern end of the Whale and pushed into the Southern Pass. There was no resistance. They advanced toward the village of Babulkhel. They noticed the Tajiks entering Sherkhankhel. According to the plan, the Pashtun of Commander Zia were supposed to clear the villages while the Tajiks of General Gul Haidar were supposed to intercept anyone fleeing the villages and determine whether they were combatants or non-combatants. Once again, the Tajiks were trying to steal the march. Soon the Pashtun and Tajiks were nose-to-nose on the outskirts of Babulkhel. Neither side was very friendly. The Tajiks were intent on loot and they were deep in Pashtun territory. Special Forces personnel tried to separate the two forces before shooting broke out. Finally, the

Tajiks holed up in Sherkhankhel while the Pashtun cleared Babulkhel and Marzak. There was no enemy resistance.¹⁰⁰

D+9, 1000-1330 (The Sky Above)

Three USMC AH-1 Super Cobras were on an aerial reconnaissance mission. As they passed the southern end of the Whale, they saw what looked like a cooking fire. As they turned back to investigate it, they started drawing fire. The Cobras rolled in on several caves, hitting them with rockets and missiles. The enemy quit firing. After awhile, the “Snakes” began the flight back to Bagram. Originally they had enough fuel for a two-way trip, but the fight had taken time and fuel. They called for their CH-53 to rendezvous and refuel them. There was a small problem. The CH-53 was not waiting for them. It was back at Bagram, shut down. There had been no need, since the “Snakes” were on a down-and-back reconnaissance mission. They were too far past the new FARP Texaco and did not have the fuel to make it back there. They had to set down somewhere. They were near the old FARP Texaco site. Great clouds of dust rose as the “Snakes” touched down one-at-a-time, allowing the dust to settle before each touchdown. Apaches eat less dust because they are wheeled and can roll through their own clouds. The Cobras have skids and have to sit straight down into the dust and endure it. The pilots shut down the aircraft and the co-pilots grabbed their M-16s and set up security.

It was going to be a wait. Fortunately, a USAF C-130 was flying overhead, out of sight and out of sound, but he circled over them, helping with communications. The marines could see some Afghans a ways off. They appeared to be digging a

fighting position or setting up a mortar position. Whatever it was involved shovels and did not appear harmless. Finally, the CH-53s arrived with fuel and a security detachment. The Cobras returned to Bagram without ever learning what all the digging was about.¹⁰¹

D+9, 1800 (The Valley)

Night settled in on the valley. The Special Forces personnel were trying to keep the Tajik's under control and away from the Pashtun. Commander Zia had his mortar team on top of the Whale where it could control the valley. LTC Paul La Camera, the 1st-87th Battalion Commander, told his four Charlie companies to nominate one platoon to stay behind. The rest of the companies were flying out in the morning.¹⁰²

D+9, 1800-2400 (The Enemy)

There were only a few enemy left on the Whale. The Pashtun were now on the south end of it. Some enemy were determined to hold out in their bunkers while others crept south in groups of two and three. [See Chapter 8, Map9, D+9.]

Tuesday, 12 March 2002, D+10

The Shar-i Kot Valley belonged to the Americans, Australians, and Afghans. Most of the Americans were leaving. More would leave today. Effective resistance had ceased on the Whale, but it still had to be thoroughly combed, outpost-by-outpost and cave-by-cave. The Afghans refused to enter the caves.¹⁰³ There was plenty of attack aviation support available, but no real targets. B-52s were pounding Ginger

Pass and Takur Ghar, although there was no indication that there was any enemy there. The biggest problem was keeping the Tajiks and Pashtun apart.

D+10, 0800-1200 (The Valley)

The Chinooks returned to pick up the four Charlie Companies. One platoon from each remained. The Chinooks had brought in some reporters who were busy taking photos and trying to grasp all that had happened in the valley. Afghan leaders materialized for interviews with the press.¹⁰⁴

The tension between the Pashtun and Tajiks continued. LTC Chris Haas sat down with the leaders. Commander Zia had 300 more followers coming into the valley to help out. The mission of clearing the villages had been accomplished. The valley was deep in Pashtun territory. It was time for the Tajik contingent to leave. Chris thanked General Gul Haidar for his support. Soon, the diesel engines roared to life and the tanks, BMPs and other vehicles of the Tajik force departed through the northern pass. Half of Commander Zia's force left as well as a cooperative gesture to the Tajiks. Later that afternoon, many of the press corps would leave as well.¹⁰⁵ The media operations had clearly changed from the original idea of a deception operation to telling DOD's story in the evolving war against terror.

Toward late afternoon, the four remaining platoons withdrew from the mountains and took up positions around the compound and the truncated headquarters of the 1st-87th. [See Chapter 8, Map 10, D+10.]

D+10, 1300 (Bagram)

LTC Pat Stogran and his staff were having a tough time getting ready for launching into the valley. “There was no coherent battle order from 2nd Brigade and the brigade staff seemed to move in slow time. There was no analysis, no coherence and no collation of planning. There were only ‘fragmented snippets’ of information. The only thing being planned to any degree of precision was the air assault, but the ‘information vacuum’ did not allow planning for the ground tactical movement-- usually the first component of air assault backward planning.”¹⁰⁶

Wednesday, 13 March 2002, D+11

It was time to wrap up Operation Anaconda. Special Operations Reconnaissance teams had been the first troops into the fight. More of them would be brought in during the early morning hours to watch the mountain tops beyond the Eastern Wall and call in air strikes if needed. Then the rest of TF Rakkasans would leave. A new operation, called Harpoon, would begin with the insertion of the Canadians in the northern valley. Harpoon would go after the Whale, carefully combing it for remnants of the enemy force.

Of all the forces committed to the fight, the Afghans and Canadians were best prepared for mountain operations. The Afghans lived in the mountains, so they knew how to move in them. The 3PPCLI was stationed in Edmonton Garrison, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The immediate training area is rolling plain, but the Canadian Rocky Mountains are a 100 kilometers to their west. The 3PPCLI trained in them all the time. B Company was equipped and trained as a mountain warfare company.

Most of the battalion NCOs were certified mountain instructors. The entire battalion had ropes, pitons, climbing boots and they knew how to use them. The battalion was used to living and moving at altitude since they did so for months out of every year.¹⁰⁷

D+11, 0800 (The Compound)

Task Force Rakkasans was about to dissolve. The tired Chinooks landed at HLZ 3 and the four platoons and the TOC of the 1st-87th climbed on board. Dodge Billingsley carried his beat-up video camera on board. He was one of the first reporters in and the last out. The Chinooks lifted up and headed to Bagram. Operation Anaconda was over.¹⁰⁸

D+11, 1500 (The North)

Three Chinooks and two USMC AH-1 Super Cobras flew into the valley. A Special Forces Warrant Officer and some Afghans watched them land near the mouth of the northern pass. The soldiers, in forest green camouflage exited the helicopters, spread out and took cover. It was “very professionally done.” The Warrant Officer was worried about drawing fire, so he waved a bright orange VS-17 panel at them. When the soldiers responded by pointing at him, he walked down the slope with his arms out to his side. “Don’t shoot. We’re Americans.”

“Don’t worry, Yank” was the Canadian reply. The lead element of the 3PPCLI was on the ground. The rest of the battalion and the 2nd Brigade TAC would follow. Throughout Operation Harpoon, the Special Forces would continue to be

impressed with the Canadians. “They knew what they were doing and they went out and did it.”¹⁰⁹

This initial lift included the battalion TAC, B Company, the mortar platoon, the reconnaissance platoon, part of A Company, and the American Alfa Company, 4th-31st.¹¹⁰ When Alfa Company, 4th-31st landed, its mortar crews promptly started setting up their mortars in the middle of the HLZ! Major Michael Blackburn, B Company Commander of the 3PPCLI went over and told them to move them. The HLZ was their life line and it needed to stay clear for helicopters.¹¹¹ There was something not quite right about this company. They seemed disorganized and confused. The commander seemed to be all right and the lieutenants were young, inexperienced, but eager.¹¹² The Sergeants and Officers talked down to their soldiers.¹¹³ “They did not have the mental toughness, robustness and responsiveness that we had come to expect from the Rakkasans. They were not of the same caliber.”¹¹⁴ They had come from Kuwait, where they had waited and waited for a chance at combat. Kuwait has an elevation a bit above sea level. Clearly their bodies were not acclimated to the difference. They were carrying far too much gear for the mountains. But this was their one chance at combat.¹¹⁵

Night was settling in and the battalion occupied positions and waited for the morning. LTC Pat Stogran planned for the next morning’s advance. The scouts would move in front of the battalion along the spine, along with the snipers. A Company would move along the eastern slope. B Company, the mountain company and some of Zia’s forces would move along the steeper western slope. C Company,

which had only just arrived in Kandahar, would move to Bagram and join the battalion following C Company. Since the Americans were not used to working in the mountains, Pat placed them in reserve, to move along the mountain spine--the easiest and quickest place to move in the mountains.¹¹⁶

Colonel Wilkerson, the brigade commander, was also concerned about Alfa Company. The unit had set up in an area littered with unexploded ordnance--fragmentation bomblets and mines and had made no apparent effort to mark them or to warn the men away from them. He took the company officers to task over it. They laughed him off after he left.¹¹⁷

There was sporadic firing in Commander Zia's area throughout the night. Apparently some of the last enemy were trying to exfiltrate south off of the Whale and out of the valley. [See Chapter 8, Map 11, D+11.]

Thursday, 14 March 2002, D+12

Early the next morning, the rest of the battalion, except C Company arrived. Movement schedules had been tight and in some instances, Canadian infantry were getting off a transport plane in Bagram, picking up two rounds of 81mm mortar and stashing it in their packs, getting a five minute briefing and then boarding the waiting Chinook. Now that his force was assembled, LTC Stogran held a final orders check and the units moved out. The green forest camouflage uniforms of the Canadians were not that apparent against the grey rocks of the mountain side.¹¹⁸ The Canadians moved slowly and deliberately. "Slow is fast in the mountains" is an old mountaineers adage and the Canadians were mountaineers. The American company

struggled up the mountain, the difference in altitude clearly telling. They were already running out of water. At the summit, an American private collapsed. His lieutenant was kicking him in the rucksack and yelling at him to get up.¹¹⁹

“Strike 6” was the American company commander’s call sign. LTC Stogran and his TAC moved behind the Americans. Communications were good, his companies were in good order.¹²⁰ Colonel Wilkerson was somewhere forward with the Special Forces Warrant Officer who had been tagged as liaison with the brigade. Reporters were roaming the valley and mountain and several of them were wearing beards and Afghan *pakhol* hats. Some were walking unescorted and at one time three reporters were targeted by a platoon of Canadian infantry and USMC Cobras.¹²¹ There seemed to be no plan to feed, control or support the reporters. Several had shown up without food and cold weather gear. They suffered and scrounged.¹²²

It was a slow deliberate move. LTC Stogran decided the best way to clear the Whale was for the two Canadian companies to establish patrol bases where they could drop their rucksacks and then kick out patrols to scour the mountain sides. They explored over 30 caves and numerous fighting positions. They destroyed tons of ammunition and equipment.¹²³ While this was going on, the American company was impatient and wanted to walk the crest of the Whale, but this was a deliberate search and the Americans were in reserve. They kept trying to push through the scouts. The process took all day. It was now late afternoon and the force was moving toward the south end of the Whale. LTC Stogran got a call from his scouts. They had located a bunker with two-three enemy inside. It was on top of the spine.

The scouts established pickets to pin the enemy down and prevent the enemy from escaping. LTC Stogran then contacted Python, the Special Forces element, who confirmed that they were no friendly forces in the bunker. Strike 6 was in the best position to deal with the bunker. LTC Stogran called Strike 6 and stated “that’s your contact.” He trusted the company to deal with the situation like any of his companies.

Pat could hear the firing. After a while, Colonel Wilkerson walked back to LTC Stogran and asked “Pat, are you okay with what is happening up there?”

“Yes sir, recce platoon has picketed the objective now and Strike 6 is going in to deal with it. I’ve got three-quarters of my battalion down there and there, so I am not going to get sucked into this battle here unless there is a problem. I am in a position to go forward from here and check it out or go down the slopes to reinforce my other companies.”

Colonel Wilkerson replied “okay” and left. This was an instance of two commanders talking right past each other and not communicating--the result of never having had a chance to work together earlier. Colonel Wilkerson had just walked through an absolute shambles, but, from Pat’s reply, assumed that was the standard that the Canadians expected.

Pat thought “what just went on here?” He picked up his rifle and walked forward to what looked like the pack drop where light infantry troops drop their packs before moving into contact. When he got there, he saw that it was not packs. It was bodies. Two American soldiers were lying prostrate from heat exhaustion. Special Forces medics and Canadian medics were giving them intravenous drips. The trail

forward was littered with gear, packs, ammunition, and more prostate soldiers begging for water and getting IV drips. The American company commander had led his company on a dead run through the scouts at 8,500 feet elevation! It turned into a strewn-out, rag-tag, blood thirsty mob. They raced through the Canadian scouts, got to the bunker, and blazed away with AT-4 and machine gun fire. One enemy charged out firing his AK-47. He was gunned down, his head shot off his body. A mule, tethered by the bunker, fared no better. It was chewed apart by massed fire.

This was not the place for Pickett's Charge. The enemy was contained and pinned in place. The Canadian reconnaissance platoon leader had pointed out good support-by fire positions and an attack position to Strike 6 where the Americans could keep the enemy's head down while methodically inching forward. The situation called for deliberate fire and maneuver. Instead, the Americans had raced through the scouts without even a thank you. Their only remark was "do you have any water?"

Pat moved to the objective. A group of American soldiers were standing around with their hands in their pockets. They were drenched with sweat and dehydrated. They were shivering and shaking from the cold. Pat was furious. He found Strike 6. "You get your effing people together! You have kit strung out for an effing kilometer and its getting cold! Get your troops back!" The troops were completely spent, their cold weather gear was laying somewhere to the rear, and cold weather injury was a real possibility.¹²⁴

About the same time, Zia's additional force arrived in a thirty-truck convoy. They were all displaying the bright orange VS-17 panels as they drove down the road

at the foot of the Whale. Another one of Alfa Company's platoons drew down on them and were about to open fire. Fortunately, Colonel Wilkerson and the Special Forces Warrant Officer saw what was happening and managed to stop them. They were a "very aggressive" bunch.¹²⁵

Pat strode back toward his TAC in the darkening dusk. A machine gun round passed over his head. Another Alfa Company platoon had the jitters--or a cook off. Pat identified himself and stomped into the position. He confronted the platoon leader. "Get an effing grip on your people!"

The night passed. B-52s continued to hit Takur Ghar and Ginger Pass. Zia's forces fired at what may have been the last enemy leaving the valley and heading south. [See Chapter 8, Map 12, D+12.]

Friday, 16 March 2002, D+13

The next morning, Colonel Wilkerson came to LTC Stogran's TAC. "Pat, you don't look too happy."

LTC Stogran was fuming and biting his tongue, but now he launched. "Sir, get those people off of the mountain! They are a hazard! I am going to take casualties and I'm not even in contact with the enemy!" Colonel Wilkerson let him blow off steam and then left the area. Pat had calmed down by the time Colonel Wilkerson reappeared. Pat approached him now apologetically. "Sir,

I overstepped my bounds. Might be a cultural difference. We are a coalition and I have to be more tolerant."

Alfa Company returned to Bagram on the first available Chinooks. There was not a lot left to do in the Shar-i Kot Valley. Pat cut his battalion to two companies. C Company, had come in, done a sensitive site exploitation on the site that Alfa Company had stormed and then they also flew back to Bagram.¹²⁶

The Canadians cleared part of Khosa Chinah where TSgt John Wylie and his comrades from TF 64 had spent several days. There was not much left to do. The 3PPCLI left on 17 March.

Aftermath

LTC Townson, battalion commander of the 4th-31st came into theater and eventually took his companies back into the valley. The rock-steady Charlie Company and the somewhat-chastened Alfa Company climbed up the Upper Shar-i Kot Valley and to the top of Takur Ghar. They found some bodies and took some photographs. Someone took a few long-range rifle shots at them, but it was a fairly uneventful trek.¹²⁷

Commander Zia brought more forces into the valley. They climbed the mountains, found more bodies and more ammunition dumps and some hungry pack animals. They discovered the body of one woman on the east side of the Whale. There was no way to determine if she was Afghan or Arab.¹²⁸

After Operation Harpoon, the Canadians returned to Bagram. There was a plan to keep the 3PPCLI in Bagram as part of the 2nd Brigade. The Canadians wanted no part of it. The Canadians gear and vehicles were all back at Kandahar and the relations between the 2nd Brigade and the 3PPCLI were not good. It was a bad

marriage. The lowest point occurred when the 3PPCLI liaison visited the brigade TOC and found it deserted while the 3PPCLI was still in the field. LTC Stogran played the national card and brought his troops back to Kandahar. “We belong to the Rakkasans and we are comfortable with the Rakkasans.”¹²⁹ On 17 April, 2002, A Company was doing night fire training at Tarnak farms near Kandahar air field. Two USAF F-16s flew over the area and, despite explicit orders to “stand by,” dropped a 500-pound bomb on the Canadians. Sergeant Marc Leger, Corporal Ainsworth Dyer, Private Richard Green and Private Nathan Smith paid the ultimate price. Eight other Canadians were seriously wounded.¹³⁰ The Rakkasans and the Patricia’s mourned the loss of their brothers. The Canadians went on to carry out two independent operations--Tori in Tora Bora and Cherokee Sky in Zalut.

In the valley, the original families slowly started returning to see what was left of their homes. There was not much worth claiming, but they began rebuilding and slowly the villages of Sherkhankhel, Marzak, and Babulkhel rose from the debris.

¹Nadezhda Durova, *The Cavalry Maiden: Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars* (St. Petersburg, Russia 1836) trans. Mary Fleming Zirin (Indiana University Press, 1988), 201. Durova (1783-1866) was the only female cavalry officer in the Russian Army. She was personally decorated for bravery and commissioned by the Tsar and was wounded in the Battle of Borodino. She entered service disguised as a man and was allowed to continue this disguised service by the Tsar.

²Interview with Colonel David M. “El Cid” Neuenswander, Deputy Commander, 332nd Air Expeditionary Group (A-10 and F-16 pilot), Fort Leavenworth, 22 February 2006.

³Major Paul Sarat, Complete TF 1-187 Operations Log for Operation Anaconda including Operations Orders, FRAGOS and log. Billingsley.

⁴Interview with Major Scott “Soup” Campbell, A-10 pilot and Weapons and Tactics Officer, 74th Fighter Squadron, attached to 332nd Air Expeditionary Group, Fort Leavenworth, 29 August 2008.

⁵Interviews with SFC Michael A. Peterson, Heavy Mortar Platoon Leader, 1-87th at Bagram, early March 2002 and Fort Drum, 11 June 2002.

⁶Interview with Major Dennis Yates, Fire Coordination Officer, 101st DIVARTY, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002; and now LTC Dennis Yates, West Point, 8 November 2006.

⁷Interview with Major Jay Hall, S3 1-87, Fort Drum, 30 July 2002. Back in Fort Drum, C Company, 4th-31st was in a different brigade (the Second) than the 1st-87th (the First). So, LTC La Camera had to fight two companies which had different backgrounds and training.

⁸Hall.

⁹Interview with Colonel Pat Stogran, Commander 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry at Williamsburg, Virginia, 25 May 2004; Interview with Major Mark Campbell, Deputy Commanding Officer, 3PPCLI, Calgary, 8 January 2006.

¹⁰Interview with Captain Todd McClure, Battle Adjutant, 3PPCLI, Calgary, 6 January 2006.

¹¹Mark Campbell.

¹²Interview with Captain Nate Self, Commander 1/A/175th Rangers, Fort Leavenworth, 24 March 2003.

¹³"Soup" Campbell.

¹⁴John McCool, "Interview with MAJ Mark Quander" as part of the Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 7 March 2007, 10.

¹⁵Quander, 9; Interview with LTC Jim Larsen, XO 3d Bde, 101st Air Assault Division, Fort Campbell, 12 August 2002.

¹⁶Quander, 11-12.

¹⁷TF 1-187 Operations Log.

¹⁸"Soup" Campbell.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 7 February 2005), 86.

²¹"Soup" Campbell.

²²Ibid.

²³Billingsley.

²⁴Hall. The remains of the howitzers and cannon are still there. Les Grau saw them during his battlefield tour in 2005.

²⁵Billingsley.

²⁶Hall.

²⁷John McCool, "Interview with MAJ Roger Crombie," Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 15 April 2006; Lance M. Bacon, "Secret Weapons—The Airmen Who are Winning the Ground War," *Air Force Times*, 8 April 2002.

²⁸Interview with SPC Kenneth R. Paschall, Team Leader, 3rd Plt, B-1-187; SSG Justin R. Grieve, Weapons Squad Leader, 3rd Plt, B-1-187; SSG Michael D. Moore, PSG, 3rd Plt, B-1-187; PFC Zachary C. Wyant, Javelin Gunner, 3rd Plt, B-1-187; PFC Jesse G. Buckley, M203 Gunner, 3rd Plt, B-1-187; PFC Adam Sines, Javelin Gunner, 3rd Plt, B-1-187; and PFC William J. Fiers, M240 Gunner, 3rd Plt, B-1-187 at Fort Campbell, 13 August 2002.

²⁹Steve Call, *Danger Close: Tactical Air Controllers in Afghanistan and Iraq* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 84-85.

³⁰For accounts of Operation Magistral and the Battle for the Satakandow Pass, see Lester W. Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996), 61-66; Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau, "The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War" (US Marine Corps Special Study DM-980701, Quantico, 1998), 165-173.

³¹Call, 85; and LTC Dennis Yates and Major Paul "Dino" Murray, Rakassans Fire Support Officer and Air Liason Officer, "Army and Air Force Air' Ground Operations," Power Point Briefing created 7 November 2006.

³²Call, 85.

³³Interview with Cpt Philip E. Eilertson, Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters" 13th MEU; Cpt Brian Ashford, Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters" 13th MEU, Yuma; and Cpt (now civilian) Howard Brunson, Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters" 13th MEU at Yuma, 21 November 2006; Interview with Major Richard F. Sims Jr., Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 "Gunfighters," 13th MEU; Major

Bruce Laughlin, Cobra pilot HMLA-367 attached to HMLA-369 “Gunfighters” 13th MEU; and Major Will Sieve, Cobra pilot, HMLA-369 “Gunfighters” 13th MEU at Camp Pendleton, 22 November 2006.

³⁴Brunson and Laughlin.

³⁵Billingsley.

³⁶In 2000, author Les Grau was researching mountain combat and called the historian at Fort Drum to see if a trip was in order to examine their files. The historian stated that “the 10th Mountain Division does not do mountains.” The 10th Mountain Division is a proud division raised during World War II and trained specifically for that specialized combat, but now it is a premier light infantry division with no real mountain experience--or data base.

³⁷Hall.

³⁸Billingsley.

³⁹Interviews with CW2 Stephen Brisset, Chinook pilot, A/7-101 Aviation Regiment, and SGT Edwin D. Wahl, Chinook flight engineer, A/7-101 Aviation Regiment, Kandahar, March 2002.

⁴⁰Yates.

⁴¹Billingsley.

⁴²Interviews with Sakhi Jan, Nisar Jan, Shamo Jan, Delawer Khan, Mhamd Asif, and Mhamd Sharif—all members of Zia Lodin’s force. Interviews conducted in Gardez, 24 November 2005.

⁴³Interviews with LTC Christopher K. Haas, Commander, 1st Battalion 5th SF Group and 1SG Danny Lynn Van Allen, 1SG, 1st Bn 5th SF Group, Fort Campbell, 15 August 2002.

⁴⁴TF 1-187 Operations Log; Interview with Major John White, XO, 3-101 Aviation Regiment, Fort Rucker, 8 June 2004; Interview with Captain Gabe Marriott, 1st Plt Ldr, A/3-101 Aviation Regiment, Fort Leavenworth, 6 November 2004; Interview with Captain Butch Whiting, Aviation LNO from the 3rd Bn 101st Aviation Regiment to Task Force Rakkasans, Fort Campbell, 16 August 2002.

⁴⁵Interview with TSgt John J. Wylie, CCT 334 TRS/ULA, Keesler Air Base, at Hurlburt Field, 26 June 2007.

⁴⁶Wylie. The SR-25 (Stoner Rifle-25) theoretically can hold a six-inch group at 600 yards, but the sight has to be adjusted prior to precision sniping. It clearly had to be sighted-in again after the long hike and climb that this TF64 group had just undergone—but since the group was relying on remaining undetected, this was not a good idea.

⁴⁷TF 1-187 Operations Log.

⁴⁸This was the core of the very bad idea that precipitated the events that led to the deaths of seven fine Americans on Robert’s Ridge.

⁴⁹Interview with BG Francis J. Wiercinski, Commanding Officer, TF Rakkasans at Schofield Barracks, 13 January 2006; Hall; Interview with LTC Chip Preysler, Commanding Officer, 2-187 Battalion, Bagram, 18 May 2002.

⁵⁰Haas and Van Allen.

⁵¹Eilertson.

⁵²TF 1-187 Operations Log.

⁵³Eilertson.

⁵⁴TF 1-187 Operations Log.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶TF 1-187 Operations Log; Laurence Lessard, “Interview With MAJ Greg Ford,” Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 23 May 2007, 11.

⁵⁷TF 1-187 Operations Log.

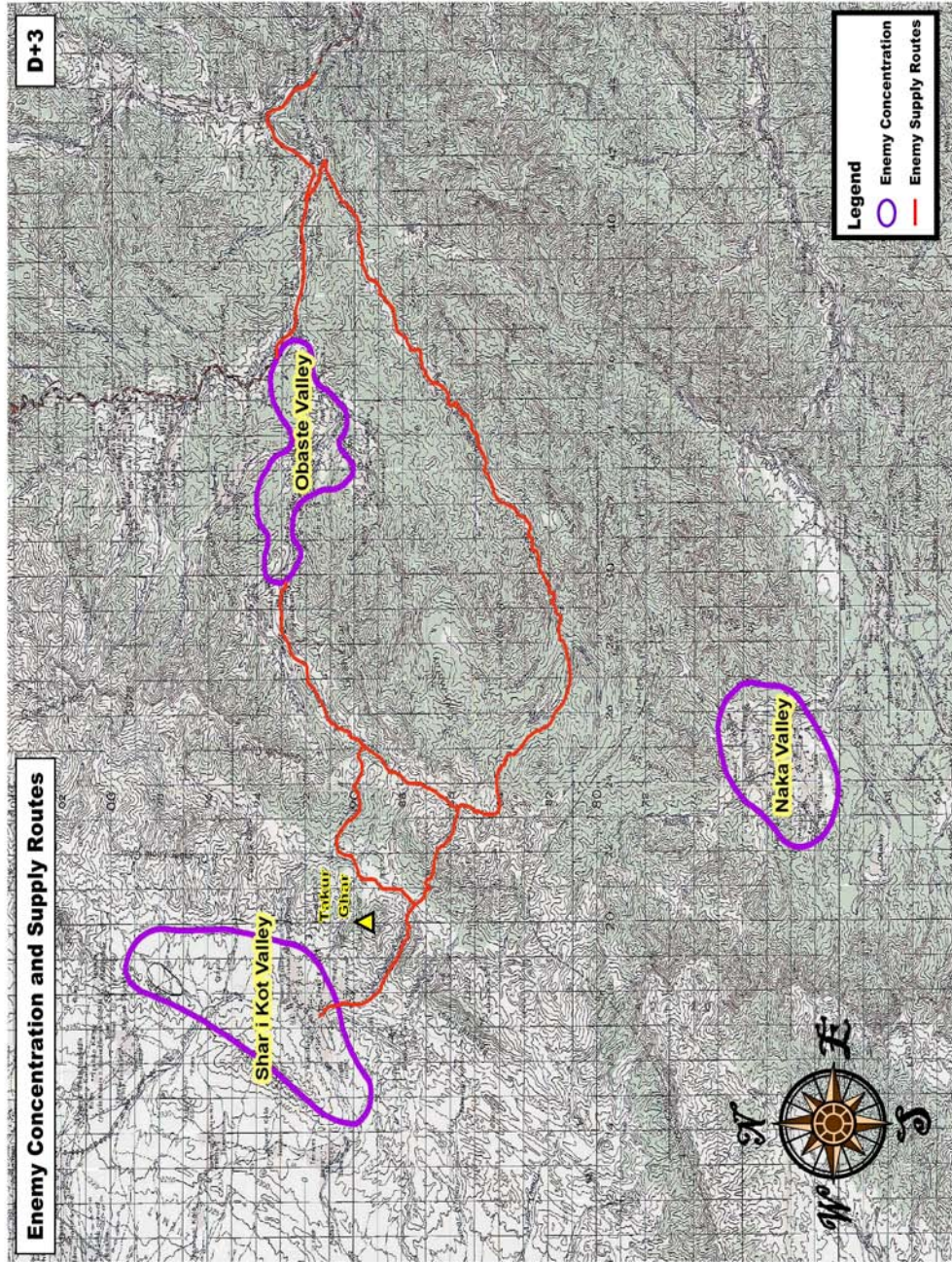
⁵⁸Ibid.

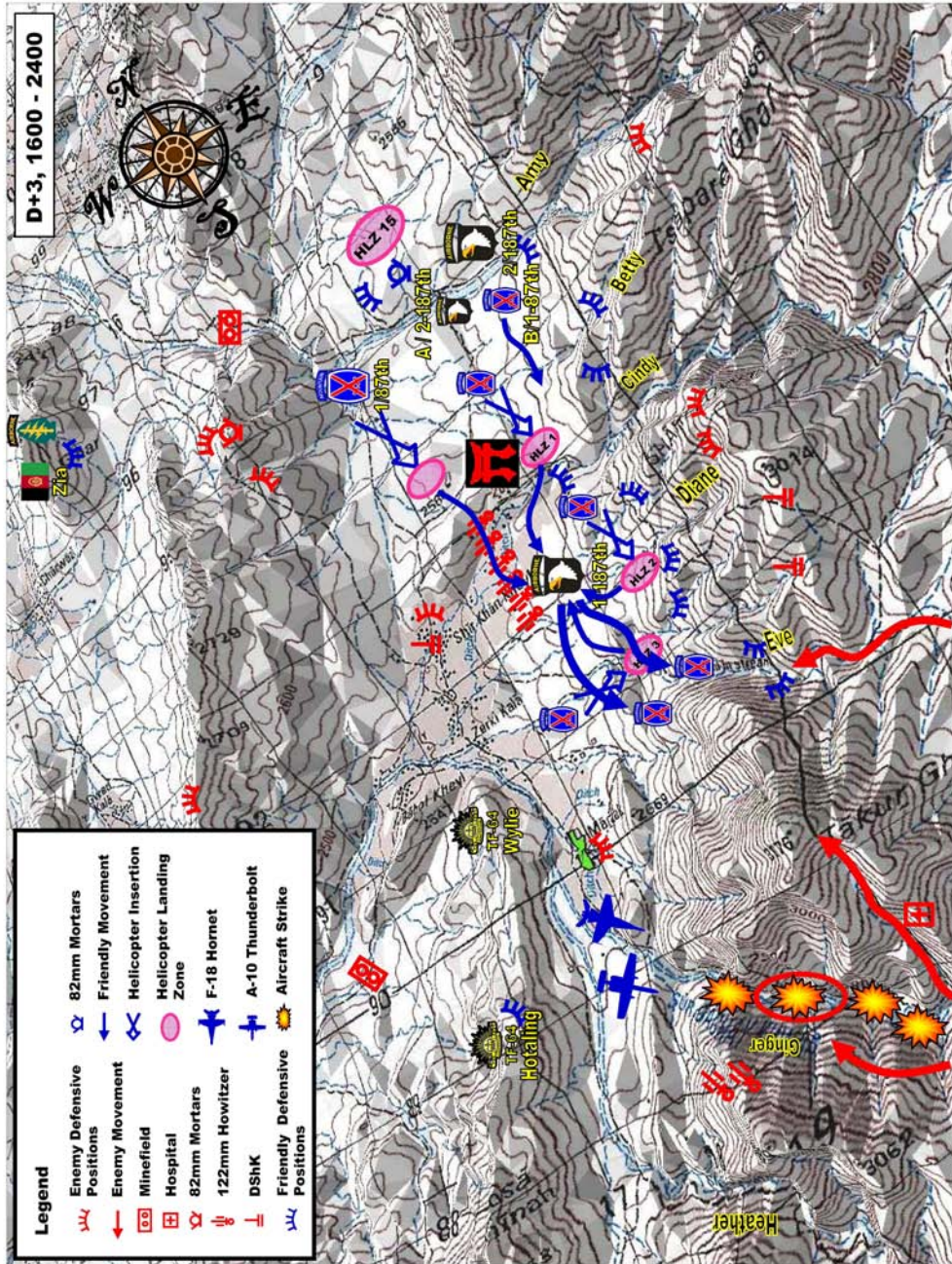
⁵⁹Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder and Kalev I. Sepp, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 321. Aviators prefer not to land with live bombs on their aircraft, so it is common practice to drop them in a designated area before returning to base.

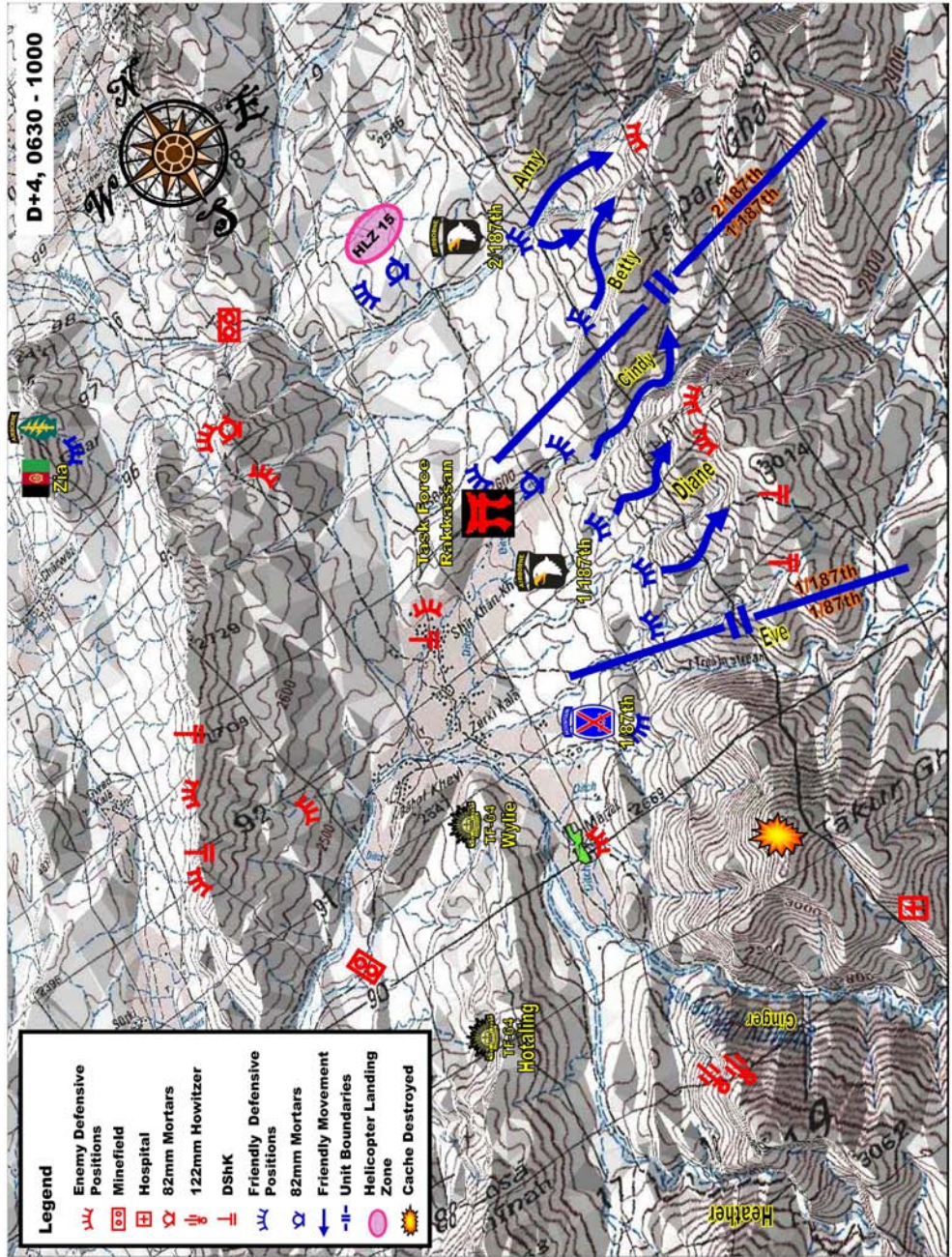
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- ⁶⁰Interview with Cpt Frank Baltazar, CO, C/2-187; SSG Christian Sheffield, 1/C/2-187; 1Lt Samuel Johnson, FDO with C/2-187; SFC Kelly Jack Luman, Platoon Leader, 3/C/2-187 at Bagram, 18 May 2002.
- ⁶¹TF 1-187 Operations Log
- ⁶²Ibid.
- ⁶³“Soup” Campbell.
- ⁶⁴Ibid.
- ⁶⁵Ibid.
- ⁶⁶TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ⁶⁷Interview with Colonel Chip Preysler, CO 2-187 Bn, (now J-2 CJTF-76), Bagram, 14 November 2005.
- ⁶⁸TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ⁶⁹Ibid.
- ⁷⁰Yates.
- ⁷¹TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ⁷²Ibid.
- ⁷³Islamic dietary laws prescribe that large animals that are slaughtered for food be hung upside down to drain all the blood out for at least a day. These combatants appear to be following the dietary rules in the middle of combat.
- ⁷⁴Laughlin and Brunson.
- ⁷⁵Eilertson.
- ⁷⁶Hall.
- ⁷⁷Haas and Van Allen.
- ⁷⁸TF 1-187 Operations Log, Ford.
- ⁷⁹Howard.
- ⁸⁰Quander.
- ⁸¹Whiting.
- ⁸²Ashford, Eilertson.
- ⁸³TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ⁸⁴Yates.
- ⁸⁵Briscoe et al. 322; Haas and Van Allen.
- ⁸⁶Haas and Van Allen; Briscoe et al. 321-322.
- ⁸⁷TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ⁸⁸Ibid.
- ⁸⁹Quander.
- ⁹⁰Yates, TF 1-187 Operations Log.
- ⁹¹Briscoe et al. 322-323; Haas and Van Allen.
- ⁹²Hall.
- ⁹³Larsen.
- ⁹⁴Interview with Colonel Pat Stogran, Commander, 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry at Williamsburg, Virginia, 25 May 2004.
- ⁹⁵Interview with CSM Mark Nielsen, CSM 2-187, Bagram, 19 May 2002.
- ⁹⁶TF 1-87 Operations Log.
- ⁹⁷Haas and Van Allen; Briscoe et al. 323-324.
- ⁹⁸Briscoe et al. 324. LTC Haas and ISG Van Allen are far more complimentary of Gul Haidar and his men than Briscoe, et al.
- ⁹⁹Haas and Van Allen; Baltazar; Johnson; Briscoe et al. 325. Dodge Billingsley remembers only one tank round being fired.
- ¹⁰⁰Briscoe et al. 324-325.
- ¹⁰¹Sims, Howard, Sieve.
- ¹⁰²Hall.
- ¹⁰³Haas and Van Allen.

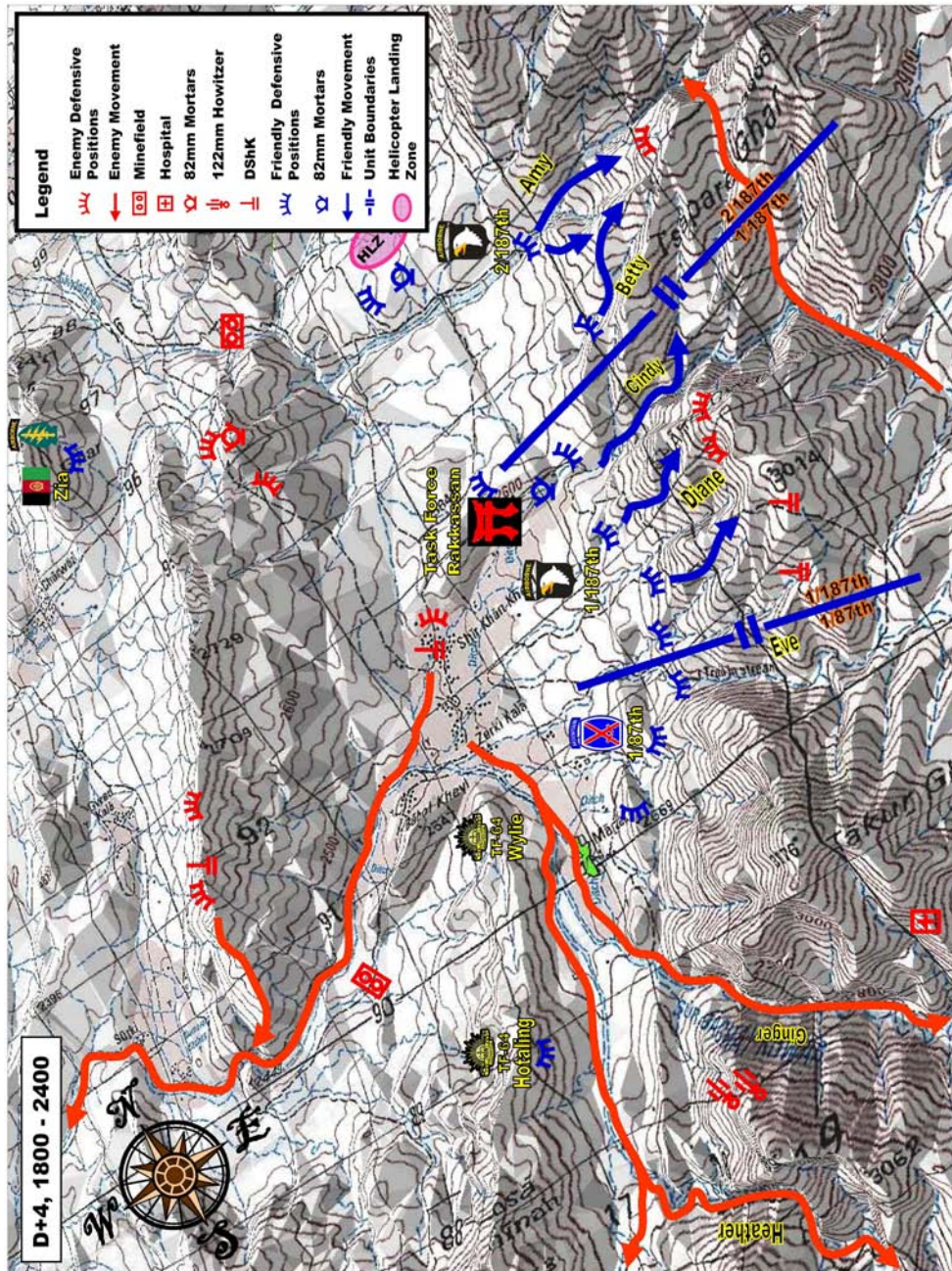
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- ¹⁰⁴Yates; Briscoe et al. 327.
- ¹⁰⁵Haas and Van Allen.
- ¹⁰⁶Mark Campbell.
- ¹⁰⁷Stogran.
- ¹⁰⁸Hall.
- ¹⁰⁹Briscoe et al. 326-327.
- ¹¹⁰Major Mark D. Campbell, Canadian Forces, "Operation Apollo Mission Briefing" presented to the United Service Institute of Fredericton Area on 20 November 2002.
- ¹¹¹Interview with Major Michael Blackburn, CO B Company, 3PPCLI, Calgary, 6 January 2006.
- ¹¹²McClure.
- ¹¹³Interview with SGT Paul Sprenger, Section CO, Reconnaissance Plt, 3PPCLI, Calgary, 6 January 2006.
- ¹¹⁴Mark Campbell.
- ¹¹⁵Andrew Exum, *This Man's Army: A Soldier's Story from the Front Lines of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004).
- ¹¹⁶Mark Campbell.
- ¹¹⁷Exum, 136-138. Colonel Wilkerson (Call Sign Commando 6) had not had much opportunity to interact with his brigade as an entity during his command tour. His brigade was scattered over the globe and so he had visited it one unit at a time. Some of his troops called him CNN 6 behind his back, mostly from jealousy of his appearances on the news. Now he was drawing additional comments from his troops and the Canadians since all he was carrying was his web gear, a helmet, a canteen and a pistol. Everybody else was wearing body armor and carrying a lot of weight. This was not to be Colonel Wilkerson's last battle. His next assignment was as Colin Powell's executive assistant. He and his boss were soon lined up against Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in the brutal, bureaucratic battle for direction of the nation. See Dale R. Herspring, *Rumsfeld's Wars: The Arrogance of Power* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008).
- ¹¹⁸Mark Campbell.
- ¹¹⁹Exum, 140.
- ¹²⁰Stogran.
- ¹²¹Sprenger.
- ¹²²Exum, 147-149.
- ¹²³Mark Campbell.
- ¹²⁴Stogran.
- ¹²⁵Briscoe et al. 327 citing the Special Forces Warrant Officer.
- ¹²⁶Stogran. Andrew Exum, who was a platoon leader with Alfa Company saw it totally differently. "My platoon apparently rankled some of the bigwigs, including the brigade commander, who accused Captain ***of jeopardizing foreign relations with Canada by outpacing them so badly on our assault over the Whaleback. At one point, I was almost a kilometer ahead of the Canadians' forward units and was sternly ordered on the radio, over much protest, to halt my movement. It was a political decision. There wasn't any threat or reason for me to be more cautious. It just looked bad for the American company to be so far ahead on what was supposed to be a Canadian operation." 152-153. Out of fairness to A Company, 4th-31st and 2nd Brigade, I have not interviewed any of them. When I visited Fort Drum, the 1st-87th made their veterans available, but no one was available to talk to me at 2nd Brigade headquarters or at the 4th-31st. This portion is based on interviews with Canadian soldiers, special operations personnel and Andrew Exum's book—which is a good book for looking at events from a lieutenant's perspective. Clearly, moving a unit from almost sea-level to 8,500 feet without acclimation is unwise. Further, the unit was not trained in mountain combat and it showed. Later, the unit returned to the valley under the supervision of its battalion commander and performed as expected.
- ¹²⁷Hall.
- ¹²⁸Sakhi Jan, Nisar Jan, Shamo Jan, Delawer Khan, Mhamd Asif, and Mhamd Sharif

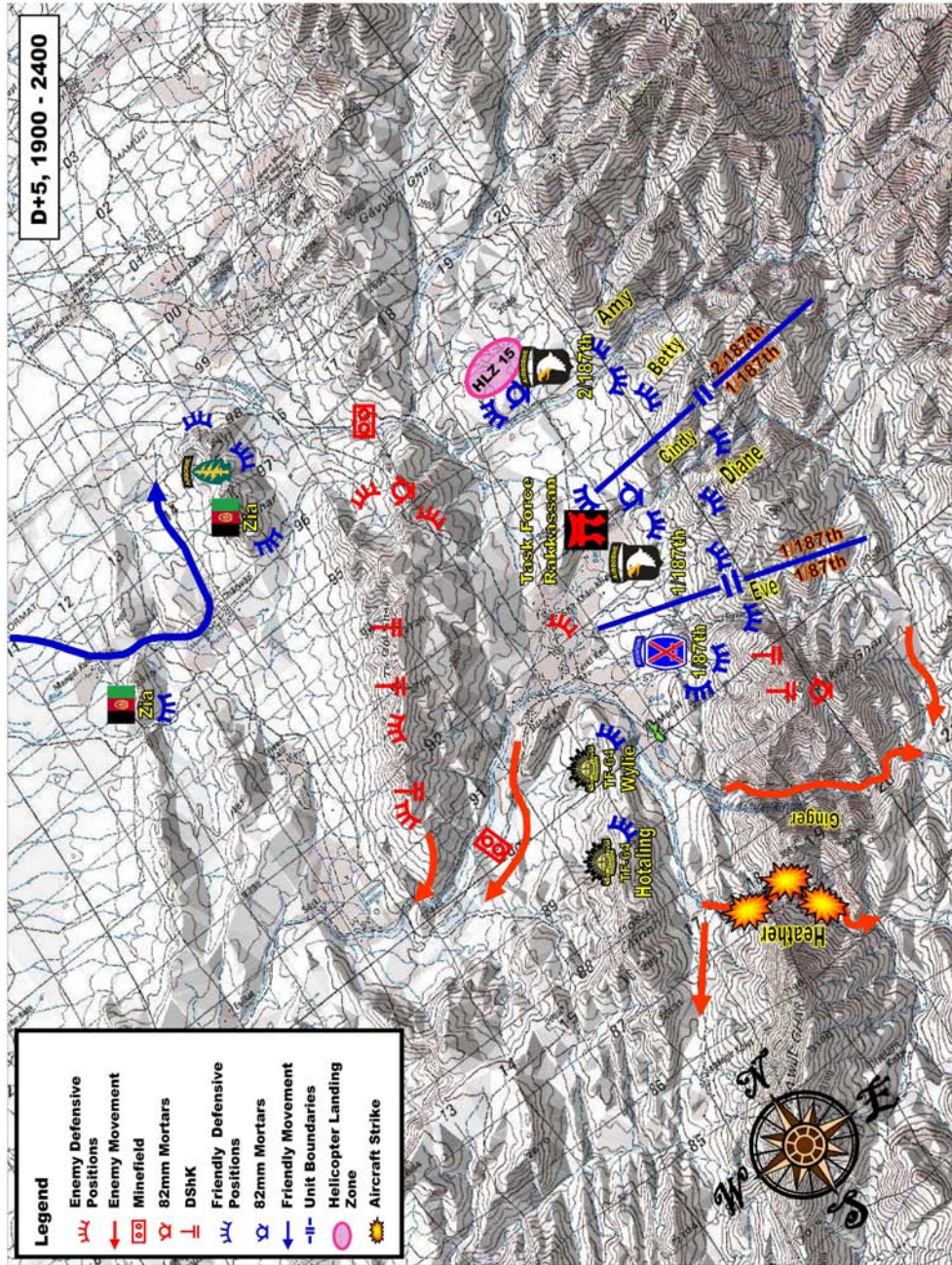
¹²⁹Mark Campbell.
¹³⁰Ibid.

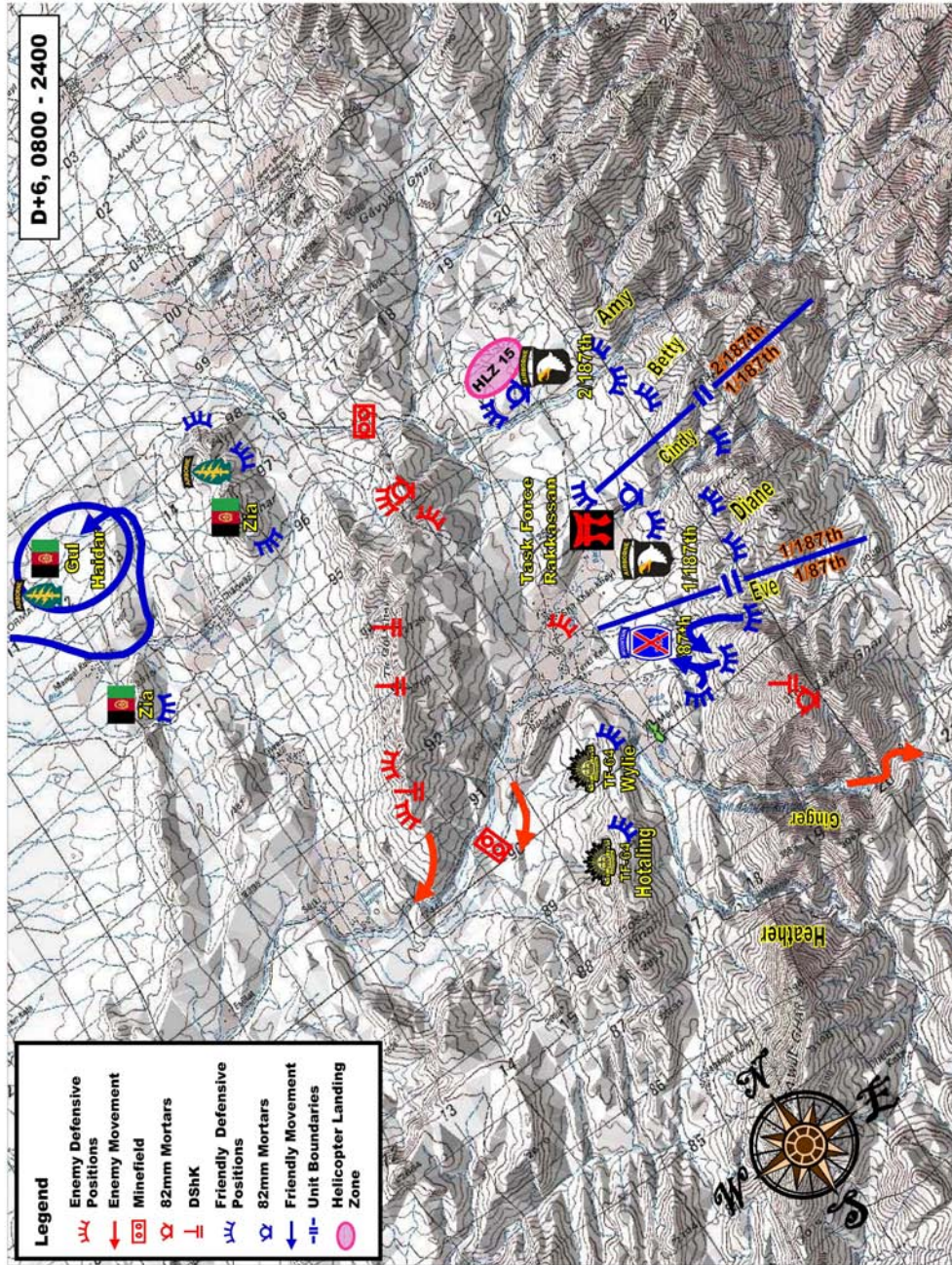


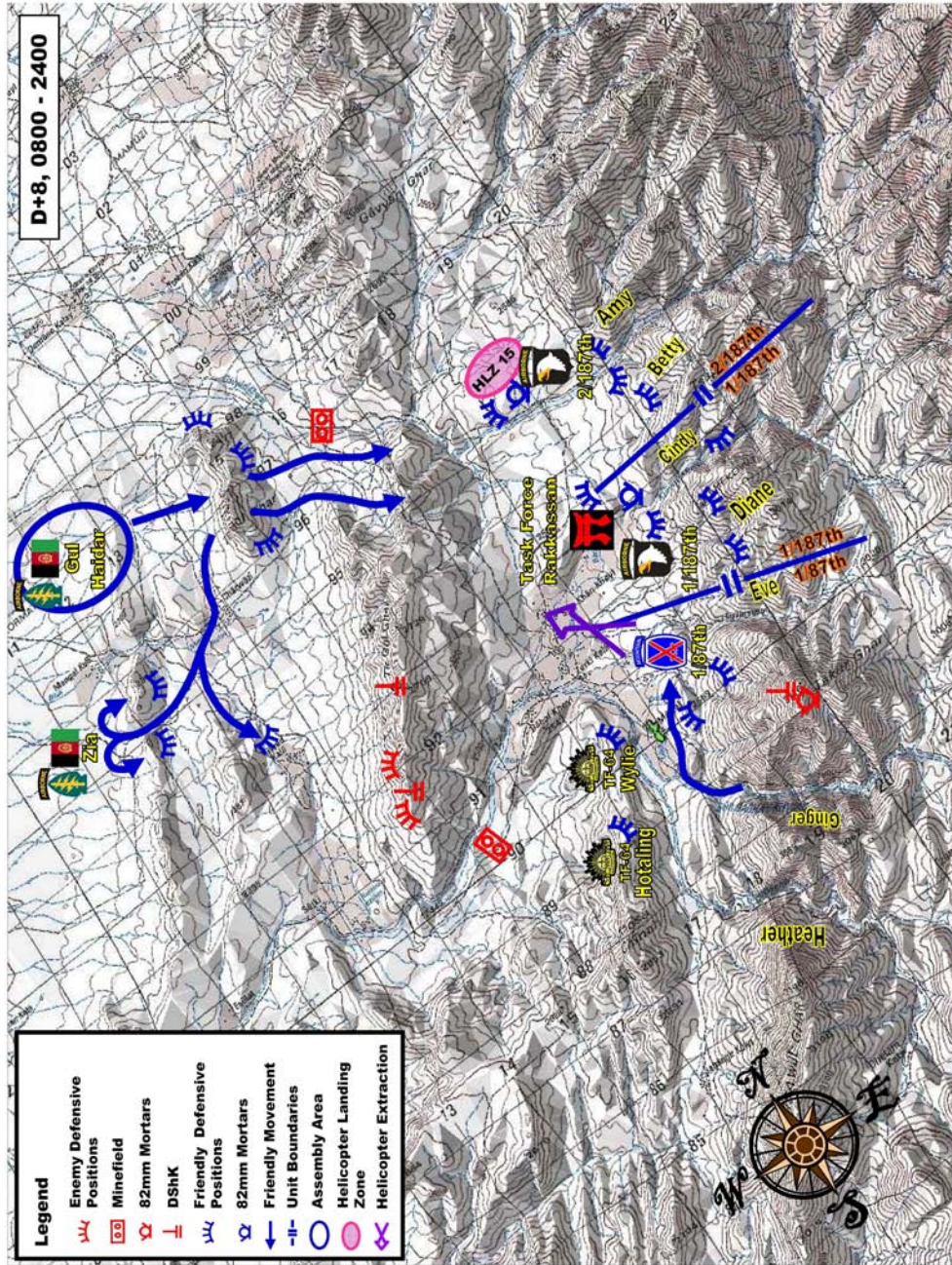


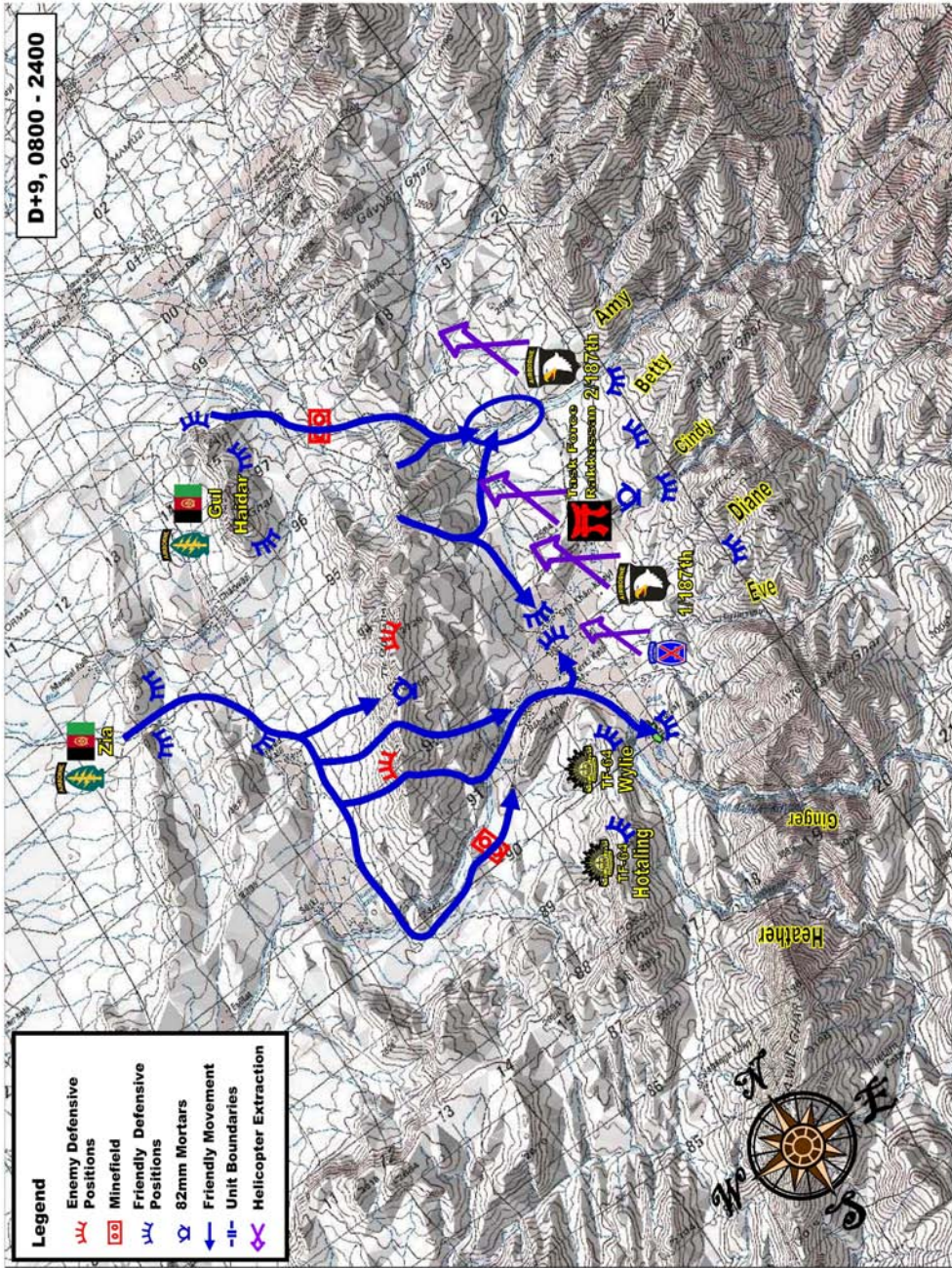


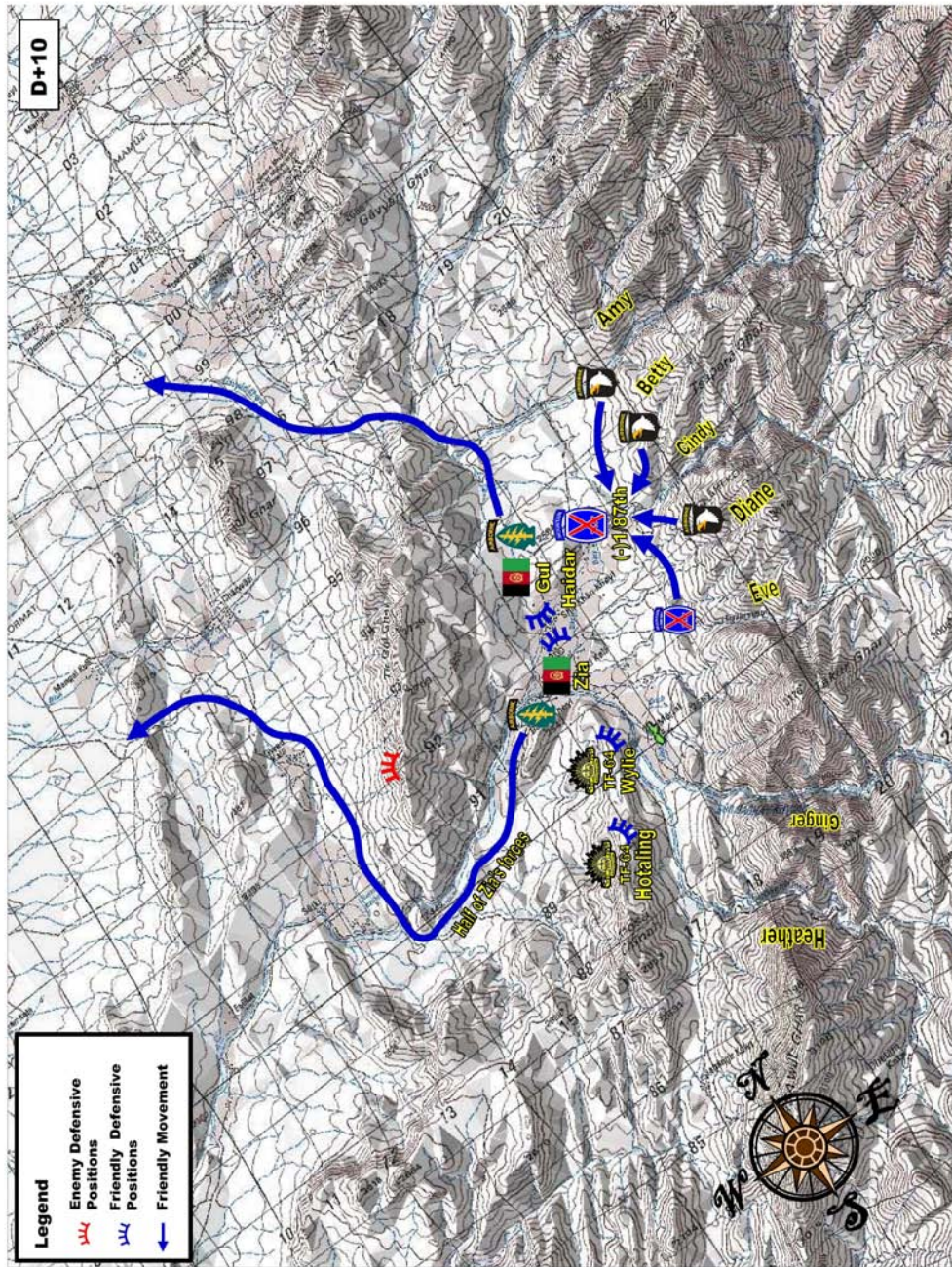


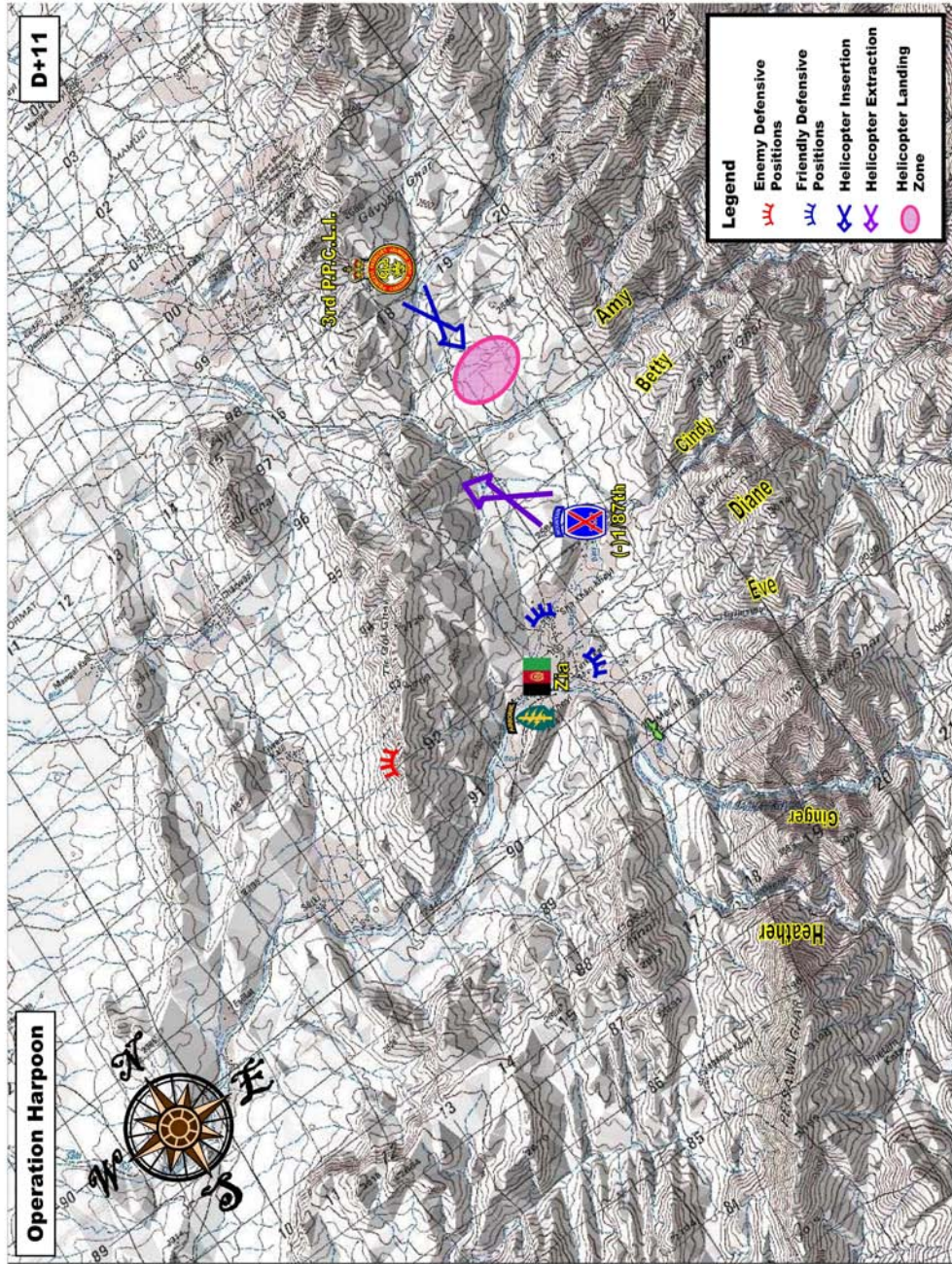












CHAPTER 9.

IMPLICATIONS OF OPERATION ANACONDA AND HARPOON

Anaconda was not won by air power. Anaconda was not won by ground power. Anaconda was not won by Special Operations Forces. Anaconda was won by the combined efforts of American Armed Forces, Afghan ground forces, Canadian Light Infantry, and special forces from a variety of nations. It was a pick-up fight that was inelegant and started off badly, but training, good will and professionalism pulled the operation together. Shortly after Anaconda, the good will and professionalism lost a bit of its sheen. The services began sniping at each other, denigrating each other's performance, and acting a bit *kindish*. The chief snipers were usually remotely connected to Anaconda, if at all. It was a blatant grab for a bigger piece of the defense budget. The US Army claimed that Anaconda proved that the Crusader gun system should not have been cancelled, despite the fact that there was no logical place to deploy it on the Anaconda battlefield and that the systems would have had to drive all the way from Bagram or Kandahar airfield to get into the fight--a logistics and security nightmare. The US Air Force claimed that Anaconda showed that the army had no business flying and that the AH64 Apache helicopter gun ship should be scrapped, despite the fact that the rugged Apache was the most effective, most responsive air support available to the ground forces--and it flew when other platforms would not. The nastiness continued with *ad hominem* attacks, some army personnel claiming that the risk-averse USAF never flew below 15,000 feet (not true). Some air force personnel counter-claimed that the army was so blood-thirsty and

vengeance-driven that they refused to cancel the operation when some of the later intelligence reports showed that there might be more enemy in the valley than initially indicated (showing a lack of appreciation of the normal spread of intelligence reports flowing into a tactical headquarters during combat planning--and perhaps a touch of risk aversion).

There was fog and friction during Operation Anaconda--as there always is during combat. For the reader who has not experienced combat, there seems to be an inordinate amount of missteps, near fratricides and botched opportunities. For the reader who has experienced infantry combat, it appears about normal--although a lot of the fog and friction was self-generated. Combat is chaos. In centuries past, infantry moved in tight, parade-ground formations to reduce the fog and friction of war to a manageable level. The lethality of modern weapons has moved the parade-ground formations from the battlefield and detailed, meticulous planning and well-trained soldiers are the only ways to maintain some amount of order and direction in the chaos of combat.

Despite all the post-combat mudslinging and diatribe, Anaconda was a success. It was Al Qaeda's last conventional fight and America's first conventional fight in Afghanistan. It broke the back of Al Qaeda as a conventional force and hastened their departure from the country. True, Anaconda did not capture or kill Osama bin Laden, but since it turned out that he was not there, it is a silly reason to criticize the operation. Lessons learned in air-ground coordination were successfully applied during the invasion of Iraq. The Special Operations community reorganized

its command and control procedures to prevent future incidents like “Robert’s Ridge.” As with any military operation or, indeed, human endeavor, Anaconda had its warts and problems.

Intelligence

Clearly, intelligence sharing was a problem before, during, and after Operation Anaconda. Intelligence communities treat intelligence as proprietary. The various intelligence agencies have different charters, areas of interest and “hot-button” items. What is critical to one agency may be of little or no value or interest to another. Sources are seldom shared. Intelligence reports are shared, but these products already have analysis and the particular spin of that agency included. Raw data is less frequently shared, but the essence of analysis is in the raw data. Data flows up the various intelligence stove pipes, but the important details do not always make the transfer to other stove pipes and get back down to the organizations that need them. Before Anaconda, all the elements of the enemy defense plan, organization, and intent were available, but they were in different intelligence stove pipes and were not assembled, collated, studied, and analyzed as a whole. Consequently, the force going into the Shar-i Kot Valley had the wrong intelligence picture and planned for the wrong battle.

Intelligence support did not improve markedly during the fight, despite the fact that national assets were now actively supporting the local headquarters--and flooding them with reams of superfluous information. The 10th Mountain Division’s ACE (Analysis and Control Element) was still in Bosnia and the division had to

assemble an *ad hoc* ACE. It was a pickup team who tried hard, but had to learn the job in the middle of a fight without common trust, awareness, or background.¹ The brigade and battalions tried to produce their own intelligence, but they were equipped with legacy systems appropriate to a large conventional war, but inappropriate for what they faced. These systems stayed back in Kandahar. There were no Afghanistan Foreign Area Officers, no Dari and Pashtu linguists and minimal cultural and regional expertise available to the brigade and battalion intelligence shops. Once the battle was joined, patrol reports and spot reports developed more understanding of the enemy, but it was still inadequate. Radio intercepts, ETAC and Combat Controller reports, shelling reports, and aerial observation provided some of the best tactical intelligence.

The intelligence picture was sparse--but even that was not common. CAOC in Saudi Arabia was working off a different picture than TF Summit, TF Dagger, TF K-Bar, and TF-Rakkasans. CAOC did not have a good picture of where friendly forces were located.

Air Support

[W]e came to rely for close support more and more on the air. We developed our own and adapted other people's methods of calling up air support, of indicating targets and of co-ordinating movement on the ground with fire from the air. We as confidently dovetailed our fire plans with the airmen as with the gunners. Talked in by Air Force officers with the forward troops, our fighters would place their cannon shells and rockets within a hundred yards of our men, and by dummy runs keep down the enemy's heads for the last infantry rush. Quick and accurate co-operation of this sort did not come in a day; it grew with the airmen's and soldier's mutual confidence, understanding and pride in one another's achievements. In peace, the function of tactical

air support of land operations is apt to fade, but in war its urgency will increase.²

The services had given lip service to the role of close air support, but before Anaconda, the Army and Air Force had grown apart and were not fully ready to work together. The US Air Force has Title 10 responsibility for providing close air support to the US Army. It is a responsibility that the USAF has tried to slough off on several occasions. The A-10 is a tremendous close air support aircraft--an aircraft that the USAF has tried to drop from the inventory more than once.³ During Operation Anaconda, the A-10 again proved its clear superiority in the close air support role over the F-16 and F-18. The Army has a great affection for the A-10 and its pilots, but close air support is not just about an airframe. It is about the complete system for conducting this support.

The US Army and Air Force developed air support procedures in the context of a linear battlefield where there is a clear demarcation between friendly and enemy forces. There were few remaining Vietnam veterans on active Army and Air Force service who had experienced fighting in small groups in the non-linear jungle. The Gulf War was rigidly linear. The Shar-i Kot Valley is a small oval (nine by seven kilometers) in which small groups of friendly troops were hugging the eastern wall or pushed up the wall's valley's. Special operations forces were positioned on various peaks. Two of the three villages were no-fire areas and the Afghan main attack force was easily mistaken for the enemy. It was a difficult area to provide close air support in, particularly since the USAF eliminated its last squadron of EC-130E Airborne Command and Control Center aircraft--the system designed to control and coordinate

air support to ground forces. AWACS, an airframe designed to handle an air operation over a theater, tried to control air support to the close fight on the ground. AWACS could not talk to the ground forces and its crew members were not trained to address the needs of the ground commander. Only the dedication and professionalism of the crews enabled them to cobble together a system that eventually worked. The cobbling included assigning JSTARS to the mission. The sensor systems on JSTARS were totally inappropriate, but the communications suite on board enabled it to talk with ground forces and relay communications once pilots, ground force personnel and special operations personnel were put on board the JSTARS.

Close air support was also provided by Navy, Marine, and Army aviators as well as French jet aircraft. AWACS tried to coordinate these assets, even though it often lacked direct communications with them.

The CAOC in Saudi Arabia kept trying to run the close air support (CAS) mission. Their job was to run the time sensitive targeting (TST) mission. Yet, the remote CAOC did not have a good idea where all the friendly units were located and several times TST missions came close to killing Americans. The CAS mission was controlled by an ETAC, combat controller, or FAC-A who had eyes on the target and had the consent of the local ground commander--yet CAOC frequently stopped CAS strikes. Enemy survived because of the CAOC desire to control all air activity.

Aircraft on TST missions were on secure networks not monitored by close air support aircraft on CAS missions. Predator added a new element of air traffic

control. Army and USMC helicopters cannot communicate with most Air Force and Navy combat aircraft. The result was near collisions, bombers dropping bombs through friendly flight formations and an air traffic control snarl.

The Apache helicopter was not designed for close air support and running gun fire. Rather it was designed for long-range anti-tank sniping. Fortunately, the Apache proved quite capable of running gun fire, although the aircrews had not trained for the technique. The Apache provided its own version of close air support (close combat attack) and was the aviation system most trusted by the soldiers on the ground. It took some rough handling during the process. The USMC Super Cobra was a most welcome addition, although it did not have the power to climb much higher than the Whale. The Spectre Gunship was the clear favorite for night-time CAS.

USAF ETACs and Combat Controllers were essential to the success of air support. They understood army culture and were integrated into the army units. They were more than liaison personnel--they were members of the team. Their skills and personal relationships were key during the critical points of the battle. By the end of Anaconda, the ground and air forces had again worked out the rhythm and techniques for close air support. This experience resulted in a much better effort during the early days of fighting in Iraq.

Organize for a Fight, and then Fight Using that Organization

Ad hoc organizations were a major impediment to the fight. Companies can be readily and successfully swapped between battalions and even divisions, but it

does not work above battalion level. The culture is very different among each of the Army's divisions and separate brigades. At the higher level, human problems such as animosity, jealousy, favoritism, pettiness, and parochialism raise their ugly heads. The notion of the modular Army is not going to change human nature, but will probably acerbate the situation with its "plug and play" concept.⁴

There is a reason for staff design. Complete staffs are needed for smooth, long-term deployments. TF Rakassans had the only complete staff between itself and CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa. Many of the problems and difficulties encountered were directly attributable to the *ad hoc* command and control structure.

Initially, there was a great deal of friction among the conventional Army forces, special operations forces, Canadian forces, USMC, Afghan forces, and supporting aviation forces. The units in the valley had not worked with each other prior to the fight. The forces finally worked it out through professionalism and a desire to win the fight. But, a lot of energy and effort was wasted that should have been avoided. A current Department of Defense mantra is 'joint and combined operations are the only way we will fight in the future,' yet the training between and among the forces in Operation Anaconda prior to the battle was minimal. The USAF ETAC integration into the Army conventional force was the exception to the rule, but Army units still did not train with USAF aircraft dropping ordnance in support.

Unity of Command

Among the first things a cadet learns in military training are the principles of war. One of these is unity of command. "Unity of command. The decisive

application of full combat power requires unity of command. Unity of command obtains unity of effort by the coordinated action of all forces toward a common goal. Coordination may be achieved by direction or by cooperation. It is best achieved by vesting a single commander with requisite authority. Unity of effort is furthered by willing and intelligent cooperation among all elements of the forces involved.”⁵

Unity of command was violated throughout the operation. The only place where there was unity of command was at CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa. It was too far away. The operation began with a special operations headquarters and a conventional force headquarters in theater and a USAF headquarters in Saudi Arabia. It grew to add another, independent special operations headquarters. No one was in charge and much happened without the knowledge of all of the players. Finally, the CENTCOM Commander put General Hagenbeck in charge of the special operations and conventional forces, but the USAF continued to operate independently.

Long Range Fight

The US Army has been preparing for the close range fight for decades. They have gone from a standard medium caliber bullet with a respectable range to a small caliber bullet with limited range but enhanced close-in lethality. They have opted for rapid-firing assault weapons optimized for close-in suppression at the expense of range and accuracy.

Anaconda was a long-range fight in the mountains. When the US force initially got on the ground, the 7.62mm M240 machine gun and the Canadian .50 caliber MacMillan sniper rifles were often the only direct-fire weapon that could

engage the enemy. Anaconda was a long-range fight and most of the infantry was ill-equipped to participate in it. The ground forces could have used more 7.62mm small arms, .50 caliber weapons, small direct-lay artillery pieces (updated versions of the 76mm pack howitzer) and a grenade launcher similar to the venerable RPG-7 that the enemy had. Air power, which was an essential element of the fight, became even more essential since they were often the only system available that could touch the long-range enemy until enough mortars and mortar ammunition came into the valley. Finding the enemy was always the first problem and improved optics are clearly necessary. Frustrated infantrymen found that they could not hit the long-range enemy with their M-16 rifles and M-4 carbines and, even if they succeeded, the bullet lacked sufficient power to do more than annoy the enemy. The optics for the M4 are set for a maximum of 300 meters. After D-Day, most small-arms shots were in the 600-800 meter range.

Mortars were clearly the dominant all-weather system in the valley, but not enough of them were on the first lift. Commanders left them for the second lift-- which could not land. The improved 81mm mortar proved its value during the fight. The AT-4 84mm recoilless rifle found application in the valley, but it still lacks the range and versatility of the ancient RPG-7.

The US Army infantry was never able to close with the enemy for the short-range, decisive fight where it could bring all its firepower to bear. The infantryman needed a weapon capable of effectively engaging the enemy in the long-range fight, which is the common fight in the mountains. The most effective infantry weapons in

Afghanistan are the mortar, heavy machine gun and the Mark 19 grenade launcher. Without a longer-range small arm, the bulk of the infantry will remain relatively ineffective in the long-range fight.

Army Transformation

The Army has spent a lot of time, energy, and resources on lightening the force so that it can be readily transported on the aged C-130. The turretless Stryker Combat Vehicle is one result of this effort. Yet, it took over a month to deliver a severely-truncated light brigade to Kandahar to the only on-going war! The force was light infantry--it did not have Strykers. The force could have gotten there quicker if it had traveled by ship, rail, and road convoy--and it could have arrived at full strength. The USAF has its own priorities in wartime and Army requirements are not Air Force requirements and Air Force requirements trump Army requirements.

The Air Force has its own transport aircraft. The Navy has its own transport aircraft. The Marine Corps has its own transport aircraft. The Coast Guard has its own transport aircraft. The Army is totally reliant on the Air Force for air transport. Until the Army has its own air transport, it is a waste of time and resources to “transform” the Army into a light-weight, less-effective force capable of air deployment, since it is not an Air Force priority to get it to the fight. Interestingly, the Stryker has yet to be delivered *en mass* to Iraq by air. They have all gone by ship.

The Army has faced this problem before. Maximum combat effectiveness is sacrificed to meet the demands of transportation technology. The US Army’s first major combat in World War II was in North Africa-a theater that it had not planned to

fight in. In 1940, the US Army mobilized to confront the German armored and airborne forces that the Wehrmacht had used so effectively in the Battle of France. The ideal US Army force structure developed during and after World War I was the square division. The Army leadership had trained and maneuvered with the square division, but it was too big to ship overseas on existing naval transport. The Navy had its own priorities and they trumped Army priorities. Therefore, General Lesley J. McNair reconstituted the division as a lighter triangular division so that it could be more readily deployed on naval transport. The US Army stormed ashore in North Africa using this new force structure. The leadership had trained with and grown up with the other more flexible, better equipped structure and now had to fight with a smaller, harder-to manage, less effective division. The battle of Kasserine Pass reflects some of the difficulties commanders had in dealing with this new structure.

Transportation issues continued throughout World War II. The US M4 Sherman tank was no technological match for German armor, but this was not because the United States could not design and build a better tank. It was because the Sherman tank fit easily into the Liberty ship, and a major change in design would have severely reduced production while factories retooled for the new model. General McNair, as chief of ground forces, championed the concepts of streamlining and pooling to create a deployable force but also force-fed a new piece of technology-an undergunned tank destroyer built on the Sherman chassis-and a questionable doctrine for employing tank destroyer battalions. The driving factor was that the Sherman chassis could be readily transported by sea.⁶

After the war, the Army resolved the transportation problem by acquiring its own naval transport. The problem remained that not all areas are accessible by ship. Air transport is key. The US Army Light Infantry Division was designed to fit on 400 C-141 sorties. Combat effectiveness and lethality was not the determining factor. The internal configuration of an obsolete aircraft was. And the Air Force did not have 300 C-141s at the time. Today, the Army needs to be able to move critical forces at critical times by air regardless of the Air Force schedule. Organic air transport is a vital piece of Army transformation.⁷

Let Competent Juniors Act Competently

The communications revolution has come at a great price. It gives generals the opportunity to play at squad leader. It started in Vietnam with the command and control helicopter where a senior commander could fly above the troops and direct them over the radio--with little appreciation of how fast and far the troops could really move. It has gotten worse. With today's communications, a squad leader could find himself talking directly to the President. There is a natural desire at senior headquarters to get into the fight and second guess the guy on the ground. The communications revolution and UAV feedback has reinforced this desire. Professionals curb that desire or run interference. One of MG Hagenbeck's main functions during Anaconda was to keep senior headquarters from interfering with the Rakkasan's ground fight. The USAF lacked this gatekeeper and CAOC was constantly stepping in and trying to run the CAS fight although they lacked the situational awareness to do so.

The business of higher headquarters is to support the lower levels and stay out of their way and let them do their jobs as long as they are doing them competently.

Everyone Gets a Turn at Bat

This may be an okay philosophy when the play ground teacher is trying to teach fairness and let the more inept children feel included and valued. It is a hazardous philosophy when fighting a battle or playing to win. Yet, this philosophy pervaded Operation Anaconda. It started when BG Trebon cut Task Force Dagger (headquartered in Bagram) out of the surveillance mission that they were performing competently to substitute Task Force K-Bar (headquartered 1,000 miles away) so that they got a turn. This led to the untimely insertion of Mako 30 on Takur Ghar, and the subsequent deaths of seven first-rate American servicemen. It continued with the USAF determination to pull out all the ETACs from the battlefield in the middle of the fight-again, so that the rest would have an equal chance at combat. This substitution would have stymied the fight and endangered the force while the ground forces would have had to wait for the new ETACs to get their heads into the game and develop those personal relationships that are so crucial to the ETAC mission. Fortunately, Colonel Wiercinski managed to stall this transfer. When the ETAC swap started, the enemy was gone--although Colonel Wiercinski did not know it at the time. This fairness philosophy culminated with the removal of the seasoned, competent, complete brigade headquarters that had successfully planned and fought the bulk of the battle, knew the terrain and enemy, and had the pulse of the fight. The Rakkasans headquarters was replaced with a new brigade headquarters that was

chronically understaffed, did not know the terrain, did not have the pulse of the battlefield, and had not ever worked with the main force it was supposed to lead in the fight. Fortunately, the remaining enemy force on the Whale was not robust, since the new command and control element had many difficulties in coping.

Commanders have a natural desire to get as many of their personnel “blooded” as possible. Up until Operation Anaconda, the US had not had a major fight for over a decade and there was not a lot of combat experience in the force. Combat experience is a great advantage for a force, but spreading combat experience by constantly substituting players is wrong. It weakens the effort and hazards the force. Once a force has the battle rhythm, it should be left intact to do the job. Substitutions need to be made for the ineffective, the cowardly, the severely wounded, and the dead, but the committed force generally needs to be left to do its job until it is triumphant, exhausted, or combat ineffective. Headquarters should be the last element swapped out. The committed force should not be told to “sit on your hands and let someone else have a chance.” Combat is about effectiveness and winning, not fairness and an expanded opportunity for awards and decorations.

Mountain Warfare Training

The US Army has one mountain division, but the 10th Mountain Division is a mountain division in name only. It is not trained and equipped for mountain warfare. It is a good, over-worked light infantry division. There are limited opportunities to train an American force for mountain combat.⁸

The US Army trains individuals in individual mountain skills. Graduates have the minimal skills for mountain movement. The USMC trains individuals as well, but it also trains infantry battalions. This is commendable, but no one is training the artillery, the engineers, the drivers, the logisticians, the medics, and water purification specialists on working in the mountains. What is missing from all of these schools is training for combat. It is about movement and survival with the emphasis on the individual, not the unit. There is no enemy or opposing force to inflict the supreme test of mountain training. Further, units do not train in the mountains long enough to become proficient.

Most personnel go through four stages of comprehension and adaptation during . . . [mountain] training. The first stage is a reinforcement of their natural fears--fear of cold, fear of heights, fear of extraordinary physical demands. The next stage consists of internalizing various techniques, skills and adaptive strategies designed to cope with the environment (as separate from the enemy) as an individual and member of a small team. The third stage is a refinement of individual and small unit skills, as well as a shift in focus from personal survival and mobility to functional combat and specialty techniques and procedures, adapted to the environment. Finally, personnel learn to integrate their military skills with the demands of the environment, and superior units and personnel continue to challenge themselves to achieve increasingly high standards of combat efficiency once they have achieved the minimal, "passing" level of comprehension, adaptation and proficiency. Units and commanders who have reached their training potential in a [mountain/ cold weather] environment are fully proficient in the requisite skill sets, and have undergone a shift in paradigm. Instead of seeing mountain and cold weather as obstacles to be overcome, they see the environment (which after all, equally affects the enemy) as an advantage, and therefore are able to leverage the environment to their advantage.

Unfortunately, in the U. S. Armed Forces, most troops receive at most only cursory training--generally focused on avoidance and prevention of cold injuries, or perhaps some form of adventure training

such as rappelling or playing on an artificial climbing wall. Even leaders rarely progress past some form of basic “familiarization training.” Such familiarization training rarely takes them mentally and emotionally beyond the first stage--that of “fear reinforcement.” The leader whose [mountain/cold weather] training has been limited to environmental familiarization is overly impressed with the difficulties of surviving and moving in the environment, let alone conducting a full range of combat operations against a thinking, capable enemy. Institutionalized risk aversion, mistaking overprotectiveness for troop welfare, assuming the enemy has similar environmental limitations as ourselves, and a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the . . . environment can easily become bound up together, with the result that military leaders come to view mountains as largely impassible terrain, and intense cold as a severe hazard. In this mode of thinking, mountains and cold weather are best avoided, instead of exploited for their effects on the enemy.⁹

High standards of physical fitness are necessary for mountain combat, but it is not enough. Altitude acclimation is necessary before introducing troops into high mountain combat. The body must adjust to the higher mountain altitude and the soldier needs to develop his climbing muscles.¹⁰ The poor performance of A Company, 4th-31st was primarily the result of lack of training in the basics of mountain combat and pulling these soldiers from almost sea level to 8,500 feet without time to acclimate. After some time in Bagram, they were able to return to the Shar-i Kot Valley and climb the eastern wall.

The Shar-i Kot Valley is not high altitude by Afghanistan standards. The Taliban currently operate at much higher altitudes. When the Soviets entered Afghanistan, there was a sharp increase in the number of their mountain training centers. Their output increased dramatically and most of the combat troops destined for Afghanistan went through mountain training. The US approach has been different. Few of the combat soldiers deploying to Afghanistan attend a mountain

warfare center. The USMC Mountain Warfare Training Center was placed on the Base Realignment and Consolidation (BRAC) list for possible closure. It was pulled off none too soon. The 3rd-172nd Infantry (Mountain) was the only battalion in the US Army that attempted to focus on mountain combat. It was part of the Vermont National Guard and had companies in surrounding New England states. It was disbanded in 2006 as part of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's modularity program that stipulates that all units have to be identical in capabilities and equipment. It was later reinstated. When it was sent to combat, it went to Iraq.

Effective combat in Afghanistan requires units that are well-trained in mountain combat and acclimated for the altitude. Driving around the valleys and leaving the enemy sanctuary within the mountains of Afghanistan is not a recipe for success.

Soldier's Load

Many of the soldiers entered combat carrying gear that weighed more than their ancestors carried in World War I. Their boots are heavier, their helmet is heavier, their M16A1 weapon weighs the same as the M1903 Springfield, but the modern infantryman carries much more ammunition. Their World War I ancestors were not fighting at altitude. The infantry company is much smaller than its World War II predecessor, yet more company equipment now has to be carried among fewer people. Some military equipment has gotten lighter, but the soldier is now carrying a greater variety of equipment and is wearing heavy body armor. Ninety five pounds of light-weight gear is no better than 95 pounds of standard gear if it has to be carried

around the battlefield on the back of an infantryman. This is an old problem. The Roman Legion called themselves Marius' Mules.

The answer is mobility. Establish small stockpiles of ammunition, food, and water at key locations to support the infantryman. Transport his bedroll, tentage, spare socks, and "snivel gear." This is easy to prescribe, but difficult to do. There were not enough helicopters to support the infantry in Operation Anaconda. There were no trucks. The few Gators were used to haul heavy weapons and ammunition. Most of the Gators broke down with a few days hard use.¹¹

Working with Other Nations and Nationalities

Operation Anaconda involved allied personnel from Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It peripherally involved many other countries that provided basing rights and overflight rights to the United States. These efforts were the early stages of a coalition. The United States is not always the nicest member of a coalition. It likes to dominate the coalition and the United States does not always seek to understand the cultural and political differences that rule other nation's forces with which it is cooperating.

The White Special Forces are the most culturally attuned soldiers in the US Army and the impact of their longer association with Commander Zia and his force sharply contrasts with their short association with General Gul Haidar and his force before joint commitment to battle. Zia's force was more responsive and disciplined.

Special Forces have a long history of working with other nation's forces after they become culturally immersed and have achieved a basic foreign language proficiency.

One might assume that the integration of Canadian forces with US forces would be fairly simple. They speak the same language, they share the same heritage, they are neighbors, and they are both members of NATO and train to NATO standards. Canada is inundated with US television programs and movies. Still, there are cultural and military differences that need to be ironed out before serious commitment. The integration of the 3PPCLI into TF Rakkasans got off to a slow start, but grew into a tight fraternity. When the USAF bombed the Canadians, the Rakkasans and the Patricias grieved as one. The integration of the 3PPCLI into the 2nd Brigade never really took. There was no program to insure that the Canadians and Americans really understood each other or understood what the commander's standards were or what he expected. The tight staff work and genuine concern that the Canadians experienced with the Rakkasans did not match their 2nd Brigade experience.

Since World War I, the US has been reluctant to put its troops under another nation's command. A Company, 4th-31st was placed under Canadian command without any time for integration. The Canadians assumed basic mountain competency from troops of the 10th Mountain Division. Today, the 10th Mountain Division is a mountain division in name only. The Canadians assumed a similar level of skills, mature leadership, and discipline in the American force as in their own companies. There was a significant difference. Majors command companies in the

Canadian Armed Forces. Captains command companies in the US Armed Forces. A Canadian Master Corporal may have 14 years service, and be one of the best NCOs in the unit. An American NCO with 14 years of service may be a Sergeant First Class or higher.

The US is gradually changing its reluctance to put US troops under foreign command. The Romanians have had a battalion in Afghanistan since 2002. Since 2005, an American company from the 1st-4th Infantry has been part of that battalion. The company is accompanied by a major from the American battalion who serves on the Romanian battalion staff. A US battalion, the 2nd-2nd Infantry, is currently serving under Canadian Command near Kandahar.

Media Relations

Operation Anaconda was a media watershed, although it did not start out that way. The original intention was to use the media to disseminate disinformation, a cover for the troop movement from Kandahar to Bagram and nothing else. This was a clear violation of the DoD Principles of Information and subsequent DoD policy and the new Counterinsurgency Field Manual, FM 3-24. Quick thinking by the CFLCC Public Affairs staff, located in Kuwait, defused the tension between the larger and more provocative IO efforts and media operations. The false start prompted part of the CFLCC PAO staff to fly to Bagram to manage the extensive media surge, and to aid the surge by proactively alerting media representatives and getting them into Bagram prior to the operation. In many ways, the CFLCC Public Affairs staff initiated an engagement with the media that was later captured in FM 3-

24; engaging personally, facilitating movement in and out of theater, helping the media tell their story, and providing the logistics necessary to help get that story out to the world.

Media on the battlefield is always a challenge to commanders and soldiers. Some commanders were reticent and did not want any media about, while others were supportive and did their best to help the media do its mission, and subsequently made sure that the army got its story told. Dealing with the media that turn up a battlefield has been part of a commander's responsibility for centuries. Straight talk from General Hagenback, Colonel Wiercinski, LTC Larson, and many unnamed soldiers went a long way to conveying the message of the operation to a global audience. Still there was friction, Doug Stanton, a producer for VH-1, came to film a documentary series about soldiers at war. He was not allowed to cover the troops in the valley and even in their tent area during the operation and afterwards. He was told bluntly by a senior NCO of the 10th Mountain Division, "VH-1, you're a virtual 5th column!"¹²

The media's agenda is not the military's agenda and media reports are bound to start healthy debates. Many reporters have never served in the military and do not understand exactly what they are reporting on. They are reporting mostly from an outsider's perspective. Many Anaconda media reports focused on the heroism and valor of soldiers like the Apache pilots that continued gun run after gun run into Ginger Pass despite heavy enemy air defense fire, or the Army Rangers and Air Force Parajumpers that gave their lives to rescue downed Navy SEALs. However, media reports are shaped by many factors that are difficult to address in a combat

environment, including file deadlines and limited operational knowledge. One of the big sticking points for many of the media was the definition of success. While the army reported unequivocal success, the media continued to debate the quantitative conditions defining success, focusing on the lack of mounds of enemy dead and or the cost of the operation as thousands of pounds of bombs, hundreds of sorties, and more than a thousand troops poured into the valley.

Still, while friction between the military and the media can be expected, Task Force Rakkasan's and the PAO's willingness to engage the media and include them in the operation, led to expansive reporting producing many print and video stories, informing the American public about the war that was being fought in far-off Afghanistan.

Communications

Communications in mountains is always difficult. Satellite communications are a godsend to the modern commander, but failure to allocate adequate bandwidth can have serious consequences. The USAF and special operations forces enjoyed wide bandwidth and a variety of channels for communication. Task Force Rakkasans, the largest component of the fight, had one channel on very narrow bandwidth. The commander could not effectively command in the field, but had to return to Bagram in order to communicate.

Line-of-sight FM communications in the valley were good. Air-to-ground communications with Army aviation were good once the aircraft entered the valley. Air-to-ground communications with the USAF and USN aircraft were not good and

the Army could not talk directly to these aircraft without going through the ETAC or Combat Controller. The ground's inability to talk directly to the air and *vice versa* has been a problem since World War II and, seventy years later, is still a problem.

Mobility

Air mobility is based on the premise that the helicopters will always be available to move forces around the battlefield. In Anaconda, there were not enough helicopters and no vehicles except for a few all-terrain vehicles that quickly broke down. TF Rakkasans unwisely destroyed the few vehicles that they captured. The enemy and the supporting Afghan forces were far more mobile than the US Army. Once TF Rakkasans was on the ground, its options were very limited due to this lack of mobility.

Political Objectives versus Military Objectives

Political objectives normally and sometimes necessarily trump military objectives and America's entry into Afghanistan was no exception. The initial air operation was a feckless attempt to show political determination while buying time to find a Pashtun force to defeat the Pashtun Taliban. The enemy concentrations in the Obaste Valley and the Naka Valley were never addressed although the 3PPCLI was prepared for either mission. Instead, it was politically more important to have a Canadian flag on the Whale for the evening news rather than undertaking a higher-risk endeavor. The operation could have ended much sooner with TF Rakkasans

taking the villages, but that mission was reserved for the Afghan forces. They eventually took the villages, but it delayed the operation.

Operation Anaconda engendered much debate during and after its conduct. As one of America's first battles, it is one of the more successful and lead to many immediate improvements. Some of the lessons, however, have not yet been fully appreciated and acted on.

¹Laurence Lessard, "Interview With MAJ Greg Ford," Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 23 May 2007, 20.

²Field Marshal Viscount William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1941-1945*, [1956; repr., New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000], 544.

³The intent was to buy more F-16s.

⁴Lessard, 19-20.

⁵Department of the Army, ROTC Manual 145-20, *American Military History, 1607-1958* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 4.

⁶Jacob W. Kipp and Lester W. Grau, "The Fog and Friction of Technology," *Military Review* (September-October 2001), 88-89.

⁷The Army pays a premium rate to ship its supplies on USAF transport aircraft. The Army must pay the Air Force \$102,000 to ship 17,000 pounds on eight pallets to Kabul, Afghanistan. The Army must also pay to truck the pallets to an airbase that will accept the shipment. FEDEX will do the same job for \$52,000 and will pick up at any Army installation. FEDEX has to pay for salaries, pension plans, fuel, warehouse facilities, administration, aircraft purchase, aircraft maintenance, taxes and airfield usage out of its fee. The US Government funds all these expenses (except taxes) for the USAF.

⁸"Mountain warfare training in the United States exists, but it is generally focused on individual or small unit skills, and does not stress the integration of the warfighting functions. The Army conducts formal individual MCW [mountain and cold weather] training in Vermont, at the Vermont National Guard Mountain Warfare School (AMWS), in Alaska, and at the Northern Warfare Training Center (NWTC), and helicopter air crew training in Colorado, at the Colorado Army National Guard's High Altitude Aviation Training Site (HAATS). The Marine Corps conducts individual and collective MCWW training at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center (MCMWTC) in the Sierra Nevada range near Bridgeport, California, as well as assault climber platoon training and certification through the Special Operations Training Groups located at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and Camp Pendleton, California. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) conducts individual and platoon training at a small site on Kodiak Island, Alaska, and at a site in southern California. Tenth Special Forces Group, designated as the USASOC proponent for military mountaineering, maintains an equipment locker and a small training cadre at Fort Carson, Colorado." Scott W. Pierce, "Mountain and Cold Weather Warfighting: Critical Capability for the 21st Century" (Monograph, School for Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2008), 55.

⁹Pierce, 20-21.

¹⁰Muhammad Asim Malik, "Mountain Warfare--The Need for Specialized Training," *Military Review* (September-October 2004): 94.

¹¹Soldier's load has always been a problem. S. L. A. Marshall published *The Soldier's Load and the Mobility of a Nation* after World War II, yet this remains a problem today. Most light infantry

units have some trucks that can follow the force and carry the heavy gear, but airborne and air assault units lack the trucks. Nations with true mountain units have pack mules, hardly a high-technology fix, but better than putting 135 pounds on the back of a soldier in the mountains.

¹²Billingsley. VH-1 is a cable television network that focuses on music video, celebrity reporting and popular music. Its target audience is slightly older than the MTV viewers. The American “left” was quite critical and concerned about media coverage of OEF. They were critical of the media’s relationship to the armed forces during the war. Some of the vocal “left” felt that the media desire to cover soldiers’ lives and to do the type of storytelling that VH-1 wanted to do was a bad thing. The media would become co-opted by the military and lose their independent voice. They even dubbed this kind of reporting/storytelling as “milatainment.”

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

1LT–First Lieutenant.

1SG–First Sergeant.

2LT.–Second Lieutenant.

A-10 Warthog–The most-effective USAF daytime close air support system. It is actually designated the Thunderbolt II, but everyone calls it the Warthog. It is an ugly but effective airframe. It is a flying tank. It is armored, carries a lot of ordnance, can fly low and slow and can loiter over the battle field for long periods of time. It's primary weapon is the very accurate 30mm GAU-8/A Avenger Gatling Gun.

ABCCC–EC-130E Airborne Command and Control Center (ABCCC) aircraft. A command and control aircraft that the USAF decertified (retired) before Anaconda. The lack of this aircraft during the fight led to some severe airspace control problems and almost resulted in several incidents of fratricide.

ABP–Afghan Border Police.

AC-130H “Spectre” gunship. This lumbering USAF ground-attack aircraft is built on a C-130 airframe and only flies on dark nights when there is little illumination from the moon. It has excellent night-vision, infrared heat-seeking and radar capability as well as radio-jamming and other electronic warfare gear on board. What makes it so popular with the Army is its role as a side-firing attack aircraft. It carries a M102 105mm howitzer with 100 rounds of ammunition, a L60 40mm Bofors automatic cannon with 256 rounds of ammunition and two M61 Vulcan 20mm automatic (six-barrel) cannons.

ACE-Analysis and Control Element. A military intelligence organization that supports a division with collection management, all-source intelligence (ASI), intelligence and electronic warfare (IEW) technical control and distribution of intelligence and targeting data.

AFO–Advanced Force Operations. A small organization drawn from the US Army Delta force that was tasked with tracking down Al Qaeda leadership.

AGS-17–Soviet-manufactured, tripod-mounted automatic grenade launcher that fires 30mm grenades from a thirty-round magazine to a maximum range of 1,700 meters. {Toggle}

AH-64A Apache—Attack helicopter armed with laser-guided Hellfire missiles, 2.75 inch folding fin rockets, and a 30mm chain gun. {Toggle}

ADVON—Advanced liaison.

ALO—Air Liaison Officer. A USAF element assigned to an army headquarters to help with air transportation and close air support planning.

Al Qaeda—The Islamic fundamentalist organization, headed by Osama bin Laden, that planned and directed the attack on the twin towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington DC. Al Qaeda found refuge in Afghanistan and formed an effective part of the Taliban forces. Al Qaeda members are mostly Arab, not Pashtu.

ANA—Afghan National Army.

ANP—Afghan National Police.

ASOC—Air Support Operations Center. A tactical level USAF command and control entity found at Army Division level. A fully-deployed ASOS will normally form an ASOC.

ASOS—Air Support Operations Squadron.

ATT—Afghan Transit Trade agreement. In 1950, Pakistan granted permission for Afghanistan to import duty-free goods through the port of Karachi under an Afghan Transit Trade (ATT) agreement. Truckers would pick up sealed containers in Karachi, drive through Quetta and the Bolan Pass into Afghanistan. Some goods would go to Kabul for sale, but the bulk would return to Pakistan for sale in Pakistani markets. Pakistani customers could thus buy inexpensive, duty-free goods. The ATT expanded to other Afghan cities during the 1980s DRA rule. When the DRA collapsed, the ATT expanded to the newly-independent countries of Central Asia.

AWACS—Airborne Warning and Control System. A command and control system mounted on board the USAF E-3 Sentry aircraft—a modified Boeing 707. This is a USAF system designed to control an air operation, but not close-air support missions in support of ground combat.

BDA—Bomb Damage Assessment. A post-strike survey of an aviation target to determine how effective the attack was.

BDU—Battle Dress Utility. The combat field uniform. BDUs come in forest, desert and urban camouflage backgrounds.

BG—Brigadier General [One Star].

Bingo fuel—aviation slang for running out of fuel.

Black SOF- “Black SOF” perform direct action and special reconnaissance missions using units like Delta Force, the 160th SOAR and the SEALs while “white SOF” train foreign militaries, conduct civil affairs actions to win hearts and minds and fight beside the foreign militaries they have trained when necessary.

BM-22—A Soviet truck-mounted, 16-tube multiple rocket launcher that fires 220mm rockets to a distance of 40 kilometers. The type of rocket warheads include high-explosive fragmentation, chemical, incendiary and remote delivery mines. The Soviet nickname for this lethal system is *Uragan* [hurricane].

BMNT—Begin morning nautical twilight. The predawn time when ground objects outlines are distinguishable and the horizon is indistinct. It is defined as time when the center of the sun is more than 6° below the horizon, but less than 12°.

BUBs—Brigade update briefings.

CAOC—Combined Air Operations Center. During Operation Anaconda, it was located in Saudi Arabia.

CAP—Combat Air Patrol, usually a pair of fighters or bombers. There are fighter CAPs and bomber CAPs.

CAS—Close Air Support.

CCT—Combat Controller. An Air Force officer or airman trained to call in close air support for special operations forces.

CDR—Commander.

CENTCOM—Central Command. This is a joint headquarters located at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida. It is commanded by a four-star general. At the time of Operation Anaconda, it was commanded by General Tommy Franks, USA. CENTCOM is responsible for planning and conducting operations in an area encompassing the Middle East (except Israel), the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, South Asia (except India and Sri Lanka) and the Seychelles Islands.
{Toggle}

CFLCC—Coalition Forces Land Component Command.

CG—Commanding General.

CGSC—Command and General Staff College. CGSC is located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and trains Majors for higher level command and staff duties.

CIB–Combat Infantryman’s Badge. The prized badge of the infantry soldier that is awarded for participation in infantry combat over an extended period of time.

CJTF–Coalition Joint Task Force.

Close Combat Attack–CCA. Under Title Ten, the USAF provides close air support. The army helicopter gunship community provides close air support but cannot call it that. Therefore, they use the term Close Combat Attack.

CO–Commanding Officer.

COL–Colonel.

Combat Controller–(CCT) An Air Force officer or airman trained to call in close air support for special operations forces.

CPT–Captain.

CSAR–Combat search and rescue. Activity involved in locating downed aircraft and rescuing the crew.

CSM–Command Sergeant Major.

Danger-close–Part of a call for supporting air or artillery fire that indicates that friendly troops are within close proximity of the target. The exact distance is determined by the munition fired.

DCU–Desert camouflage utility. The field uniform issued for use in desert regions. It sand-colored with a camouflage pattern. Troops nicknamed it “chocolate chips’ after the dark brown patterns against the tan background.

DDR–Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. Under the Bonn Accords, Japan has the government lead for disarming and disbanding the regional armies and reintegrating them into society by finding jobs or providing job training.

Deobandi Islam–an offshoot of Sunni Islam which seeks to purify Islam by returning to how it was practiced during the time of the Prophet. Deobandism originated in Deoband, India in 1867 and holds that a Muslim's first loyalty is to his religion and only then to the country of which he is a citizen or a resident; second, that Muslims recognize only the religious frontiers of their Ummah and not the national frontiers; third, that they have a sacred obligation to go to any country to wage jihad to protect the Muslims of that country. Many of the Taliban are followers of Deobandi Islam.

DIA–Defense Intelligence Agency.

DIVARTY–Division Artillery.

DRA–Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. The Communist government of Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War.

DShK–Soviet-manufactured 12.7mm heavy machine gun. It is a primary armament on Soviet-manufactured armored vehicles and is effective against ground and air targets. It has a wheeled carriage, tripod, and mountain mount for ground and air defense firing. It has a rate of fire of 540 to 600 rounds per minute, with a maximum range of 7,000 meters and an effective range of 1,500 meters against ground targets and 1,000 meters against air targets. {Toggle}

Durand Line–Boundary line between the “spheres of influence” of Afghanistan and the British Empire. The line was drawn by Major Mortimer Durand in 1893 and eventually was accepted by the British (and later Pakistan) as the boundary line between the two countries. The Afghan rulers did not accept this as it divided the Pushtu people in half. {Toggle}

EC-8 JSTARS. A USAF reconnaissance aircraft that carries an array of sensors appropriate for a maneuver war. However, the JSTARS has an impressive communications suite that allows it to talk to air and ground forces.

ECM–Electronic Countermeasures. Jamming and other technology to defeat enemy radar tracking and missile fire.

EENT–End Evening Nautical Twilight. The evening time when ground objects outlines are still distinguishable but the horizon is indistinct. It is defined as time when the center of the sun is more than 6° below the horizon, but less than 12°.

ETAC–Enlisted Terminal Attack Controller. An airman who has been trained to call in close air support. ETACs spend most of their career on army posts and supporting army field units.

FAC–Forward Air Controller. An airman or soldier that requests, coordinates and adjusts aviation strikes in support of ground forces. He can be on the ground or flying over the battlefield.

FAC-A--Forward Air Controller-Airborne.

FARP–Forward Arming and Refuel Point. An intermediate temporary site where helicopters can rearm, refuel and have emergency maintenance procedures accomplished.

Fat Cow–A CH-47D Chinook helicopter augmented with an auxiliary internal fuel tank. The Chinook can then fly to a forward point and, after landing, refuel

other helicopters. The normal CH-47D holds 1050 gallons of fuel. The fat cow tanks provide another 2,400 gallons.

FDO–Fire Direction Officer.

FLIR–Forward Looking Infrared. A device on aircraft and armored that detects infrared radiation and heat.

FOB–Forward Operating Base.

FSO–Fire Support Officer.

G1–Personnel staff officer or staff section at army division level and above.

G2–Intelligence staff officer or staff section at army division level and above.

G3–Operations and planning staff officer or staff section at army division level and above.

G4–Logistics and maintenance staff officer or staff section at army division level and above.

G5–Civil Affairs staff officer or staff section at army division level and above.

GBU-12–Guided Bomb Unit-12. The Paveway “smart bomb” that uses a laser designator to guide a 500-pound Mark 82 bomb onto its target.

GEN–General [Four Star].

“Going Winchester”–attack helicopter pilot slang for running out of ammunition.

GPS–Global Positioning System. A satellite-based navigation system that is able to determine the user’s position with a high degree of accuracy.

Harakat-e-Inqilab-i-Islami–Islamic Revolutionary Movement (IRMA) was founded by Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi. The party is moderate (traditional Islamist) and primarily Pashtun. It drew recruits from the private seminaries, liberal intellectuals, and the Andar, Gilzai, Mahmud, Hotak, and Durrani tribes. Its strength was in Lowgar Province and the Helmand valley. General Yahyah Nawroz was one of its most famous commanders.

Hazara–A people of the mountainous central part of Afghanistan. They are said to be descendants of the hordes of Ghenghis Khan and have a different physical appearance from many of Afghanistan’s other peoples. Most of the Hazara are Shia Muslims. Iran, a Shia neighbor, is often concerned about their welfare.

HE–high explosive. A mortar or artillery round (or conventional bomb) that kills through blast and fragmentation.

HEI–High explosive incendiary.

Hellfire–A semi-active laser-homing missile designed to kill armored vehicles. It has a minimum range of 500 meters and a maximum range of 8,000 meters. It weighs 106 pounds and has an 18-20 pound warhead (depending on the model). They can be launched from aircraft and ground vehicles and cost over \$50,000 per missile.

Hezb-e-Islamie-i-Gulbuddin–The Islamic Party (HIH) was founded in 1974 to fight the Daoud government. It later split as cofounders Rabanni and Khalis founded their own factions. Its leader, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar is a fundamentalist internationalist Pashtun. His radical Islamist party recruited heavily from among the government secular school and Kabul religious school graduates. Hikmatyar’s party received more outside aid from Pakistan, the United States and Saudi Arabia than any other party. Its strength was in Nuristan, Nangrahar and around Kabul.

Hezb-e-Islami-Khalis–Islamic Party (HIK) was founded by Mawlawi Mohammed Yunis Khalis who left Afghanistan for Pakistan in 1973 after the Daoud coup. Khalis is from Nangrahar Province and is very anti-Shia. His most famous commanders included Abdul Haq in Kabul, Haji Abdul Qadir in Nangrahar and Jalladuddin Hagani of Paktia Province. The party is fundamentalist moderate. Its recruits came from graduates of government schools, religious schools of the Gilhzai, Khugiangi and Jadran tribes as well as the Kabul and Kandahar regions. It also drew a lot of army deserters. Its strength was in Nangrahar, Kabul, Kunar, Lowgar and Wardak provinces.

Hezb-e Wahdat was formed from the four Iranian-based Mujahideen Hazara factions in 1991. It’s followers are Shia and Hazara.

HHC–Headquarters and Headquarters Company.

HLZ–Helicopter Landing Zone.

HUMINT–Human intelligence, specifically intelligence data gathered by agents on the ground.

HVT–High Value Target. An enemy senior leader such a Mullah Omar or Osama bin Laden.

IED–Improvised Explosive Device. A road-side bomb usually used against vehicles in a convoy.

IFR(L)–Immediate Force Readiness (Land). The Canadian army ready battalion. This battalion is considered the most ready for deployment. The IRF(L) designation lasts for a year and the battalion enjoys priority for training, personnel fill and equipment.

IMU–Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. A movement that trained in Afghanistan before and after the Civil War in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It was formed from the Tajik Islamic Movement that was forced to retreat from Tajikistan following the bloody civil war of 1992-1996. The IMU operated against Uzbekistan from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan from 1996-2001. It formed common cause with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban and ended up fighting in the Shar-i Kot Valley during Operation Anaconda. Remnants of the IMU are now holed up in Pakistan’s rugged Northwest Frontier Province and the Federated Tribal Areas.

IPW–Interrogation Prisoner of War.

ISAF–International Security Assistance Force. A creation of the United Nations Security Council to maintain security in Kabul and the immediate environs.

ISI-Inter-Services Intelligence. Pakistan’s military intelligence agency that was active in providing aid and training to the Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War.

Ittihad-I-Islami–Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan (IUA) was founded by Abd Al-Rab Abdul-Rassul Sayyaf. This used to be called the Etehad-e Islami (EIA) until 1981. The faction is militant fundamentalist and anti-Shia. In the mid-1980s, they again changed their name to the Islamic Union of Afghanistan. The IUA was heavily financed by the Wahhabi sect out of Saudi Arabia. Sayyaf was known for recruiting motivated Arab youths for jihad in his organization and had close ties with Osama Bin Laden during the Soviet-Afghan War. However, Sayyaf joined the Northern Alliance as a Pashtun commander in a Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara alliance.

J1–Personnel staff officer or staff section at a joint staff.

J2–Intelligence staff officer or staff section at a joint staff..

J3–Operations and planning staff officer or staff section at a joint staff.

J4–Logistics and maintenance staff officer or staff section at a joint staff.

J5–Civil Affairs staff officer or staff section at a joint staff.

JAAT- (Joint Air Attack Team). A concept where army attack aviation and jet aircraft share the same air space and jointly destroy the enemy.

Jamiat-i-Islami–Islamic Society (JIA) was founded by a Tajik, Burhanud-din Rabbani, who fled to Pakistan in 1974. His most famous commanders were Ahmed Shah Masood in the Panjshir valley and Ismail Khan in Herat Province. The party is primarily moderate fundamentalist and dominated by ethnic Tajiks, but has Uzbeks and Pashtun in its ranks. Its recruits came from the religious and secular government schools and northern Sunni religious schools and northern Sufi brotherhoods. Its strength was in northern Afghanistan. It had members throughout Afghanistan but was particularly strong in Lowgar, Samangan, Faryab, Farah and Nimroz provinces. It was the dominant faction of the Northern Alliance.

JDAM–Joint Direct Attack Munitions. The Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) is a guidance tail kit that converts free-fall bombs into precision munitions. The JDAM tail kit contains an inertial navigational system and a global positioning system guidance control unit. JDAM attaches to either the 2,000-pound BLU-109/MK 84 or the 1,000-pound BLU-110/MK 83 bomb.

JOC–Joint Operations Center.

Jonbesh Mili Islami was founded by Abdul Rashid Dostum as an Uzbek faction which became part of the Northern Alliance.

JRTC–Joint Readiness Training Center. Located at Fort Polk, Louisiana, the JRTC provides tough, realistic unit training primarily to light infantry and special forces units.

JSOAC–Joint Special Operations Air Component.

JSOTF–Joint Special Operations Task Force. A headquarters formed from the Special Operations Center of a major command. In this case, SOCCENT from CENTCOM violated doctrine and designated the 5th Special Forces Group as the JSOTF, without providing the necessary staff personnel, communications and “star power”.

JTAC–Joint Terminal Attack Controller. USAF combat controller who specializes in calling in close air support.

K2–Karshi-Khanabad Airbase in Uzbekistan.

Kafir–Unbeliever.

Kalashnikov–Soviet automatic assault rifle. The AK-47 and AKM Kalashnikovs fire a 7.62mm round, while the AK-74 fires a 5.45mm round. {Toggle}

Karez–A system of large underground tunnels that carry irrigation water. Open-ditch irrigation is used in the northern part of the country, where the water table is

relatively shallow, but in eastern, southern and southwest Afghanistan, the extensive underground *karez* (manmade water system) is necessary to carry quantities of water and prevent its loss through evaporation. The tunnels are also a good place for guerrillas and bandits to hide.

KHAD–*Kheda-mat-i-Etal'at-i-Dolati* or State Information Service. The DRA equivalent to the KGB Secret Police.

KIA–Killed in Action.

LANTIRN–Low altitude navigation and targeting infrared for night. A navigation and targeting system designed for night and limited visibility aviation attacks.

Lashkar–a loosely organized tribal “army” whose members supply their own weapons and provisions.

LOC–Line(s) of communication.

LNO–Liaison Officer.

LTC–Lieutenant Colonel.

LTG–Lieutenant General [Three Stars].

M203–A 40mm grenade launcher that fits underneath an M16 rifle or M4 carbine. It fires flechette, high-explosive, CS gas, illumination and smoke rounds. It has a maximum effective range of 150 meters and a maximum effective range of 400 meters. The bursting radius of the high-explosive round is five meters.

M240–belt fed, gas-operated medium machine gun that fires the 7.62 x 51mm NATO standard cartridge. It weighs 27.6 pounds, fires 650-900 rounds per minute and has a maximum effective range of 900 meters or 1800 meters when mounted on a tripod. The round fires out to 3725 meters.

Mahaz-e-Melli–National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA) was founded by Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani. This moderate party attracted a number of former officers from the Afghan Army and moderate technocrats. This royalist party recruited from the landed aristocracy, the tribes and the Sufi brotherhood. The primary power base came from the Zadran, Mangal, Jaji, Ahmadzai, Tareen, Kochi, and Sulemankhel tribes. The party was primarily Pashtun and its strength was in Paktia, Paktika, Ghazni and Kandahar provinces.

MAJ–Major.

Mark 82–500-pound general purpose bomb.

Mawlawi–Islamic religious scholar.

MBITR–The ANPRC-148 Multi-band Inter/Intra Team Radio is a two-pound, hand-held squad radio with a limited broadcasting range.

MCW–Mountain, cold weather.

MDMP–Military Decision Making Process.

Medevac–Medical evacuation.

MEU–Marine Expeditionary Unit

MILES–Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System. MILES uses blank ammunition and lasers to simulate actual combat—whether tank-on-tank or rifle squad-on-rifle squad. The soldiers wear a harness of laser sensors placed all over the body. Vehicles have sensors fitted to the frame. The sensors determine whether lasers “fired” at a soldier or vehicle during a mock battle are a hit or a miss.

MFO–Multinational Forces and Observers. This international organization provides forces and observers in the Sinai Peninsula adjacent to the international border between Egypt and Israel. The peacekeeping force, from eleven nations, operates outside the United Nations auspices since the United Nations ceased supporting the effort shortly after the treaty was signed.

MG–Major General [Two Stars].

MPSM–Multipurpose sub-munition. One of the warheads on the 2.75 inch folding-fin rockets used by the Apache attack helicopter. When fired, the rocket breaks open over the target and dispenses nine antipersonnel and antitank shaped-charge sub-munitions by parachute. Unfortunately, like most complex ordnance, the MPSM has a high dud rate.

MRE–Meals Ready to Eat. The US field ration containing an entree, a heating pouch (just add water to the magnesium and iron dust pouch), a side dish, dessert, crackers, spread, beverage powder, spoon and condiments. It comes in a heavy plastic and aluminum laminated bag and the food is in separate bags. There are no cans. MREs come in 24 entrees to provide some variety. Four of the varieties are vegetarian—and seem to be the only ones always available to visitors.

MRLS–Multiple Rocket Launcher System. A truck-mounted rocket artillery system capable of firing a salvo of rockets at a target.

Mujahideen–Afghan resistance fighters [holy warrior].

Mullah—An Islamic religious leader or Imam.

NATO—North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

NCO—Non-Commissioned Officer. The army enlisted leadership grades include Corporal, Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Sergeant First Class, Master Sergeant, First Sergeant, Sergeant Major and Command Sergeant Major.

NDHQ—National Defence Headquarters (Ottawa).

NIMA—National Imagery and Mapping Agency.

NODS—Night Observation Devices. The night goggles issued to US troops.

NPR—National Public Radio.

Northern Alliance—Taliban term for the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan. Taliban used the term to disguise the fact that many Pashtu belonged to the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan. Newsmen used the Taliban term since it was a convenient and understandable term.

ODA—Operational Detachment Alpha. The Special Forces A Team consists of a captain, a warrant officer and ten sergeants. Two sergeants each specialize in operations, weapons, engineering, communications or medical skills. All are highly trained in close combat, regional languages and working with local populaces. There are six ODA in a Special Forces company.

OEF—Operation Enduring Freedom. The overall title for the US and coalition effort in Afghanistan.

OPD—Officers' Professional Development. Classes and training given on select topics for officer education.

Operation Desert Spring—An on-going operation in Kuwait established after Operation Desert Storm to maintain a forward presence in the region while providing command and control, as well as force protection, for US Army forces in Kuwait. Conventional and Special Forces rotated through Kuwait as part of this operation. Many of them were from the National Guard and Reserve components.

OPFOR—Opposing Forces. US soldiers who portray the “enemy” during exercise training. Like an enemy, OPFOR tactics are different from US tactics. The OPFOR are first-rate soldiers who do very well due to their extensive field time.

OPNS–Operations.

OSD–Office of the Secretary of Defense.

“Pachiderms”–A Company, 7th Battalion of the 101st Aviation Regiment. This is an aviation transportation unit equipped with the CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

Pakhol–The pancake-shaped hat worn by Eastern Afghan males.

PAO–Public Affairs Officer. An officer designated to work with the media.

Pashtun–The largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. The Pashtun primarily occupy Southern and Eastern Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan. Their language is Pashtu. The Pashtun are also known as the Pushtun, Pakhtun and Pathan.

Pavelow–A USAF MH-53 Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) helicopter.

PFC–Private First Class.

PJ–USAF pararescueman. A highly-trained enlisted medic who is airborne and dive qualified. PJs are sent to rescue downed aircrew.

PNVS–Pilot Night Vision System. A system on the Apache helicopter that allows the

Point man–The soldier who moves at the front of the unit column on patrol and in combat. This is considered a high-risk job and is usually rotated among seasoned, reliable soldiers.

POL–Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants.

PPCLI–Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry

Predator–The MQ-1 Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) is a USAF remote-controlled reconnaissance aircraft that can also attack ground targets using two AGM-114 Hellfire missiles. Among the Predators sensors are a daylight television camera and an infrared television camera. Predator can broadcast instant footage of what it is televising to its ground-based operator or to television screens in a headquarters.

PRT–Provincial Reconstruction Team.

PSG–Platoon Sergeant.

PSYOPS–Psychological Operations.

PT–Physical training.

PV2–Private enlisted pay grade two.

PVT–Private

PX–Post Exchange. A store for soldiers where they can buy non-issue items.

PZ–Pick-up Zone. Area for helicopter extraction.

QRF–Quick Reaction Force. An infantry force trained for rapid reaction in support of a higher commander.

RAF–Royal Air Force.

Rakkasans–Literally Japanese for “falling umbrellas”, the Rakkasans are the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Air Assault Division. The 3rd Brigade contains the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions of the 187th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The 101st Air Assault Division gained fame during World War II as the 101st Airborne Division and was featured in the HBO series “Band of Brothers”.

Ratlines–paths that can be used for infiltration, movement, supply and escape.

RCR–The Royal Canadian Regiment

Recon–Reconnaissance.

Rgt.–Regiment.

RPG-7--Rocket Propelled Grenade Launcher Type 7. A Soviet-manufactured, shoulder-fired anti-tank weapon that fires a shaped-charge rocket. It has an effective range of 300 meters and a maximum range of 1100 meters. The RPG-7 also has anti-personnel and thermobaric rounds.

RTO–Radio/Telephone Operator. The soldier who carries and operates the unit or FDO radio.

S2–Intelligence staff officer or staff section.

S3–Operations and planning staff officer or staff section.

S3 Air–Staff officer in the operations staff section responsible for air movement and air support.

SAC–Strategic Air Command. The USAF bomber and missile command designed to conduct nuclear war with the Soviet Union. It was disbanded in 1992.

SAS–Special Air Service. The designation for Army Special Forces of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

Salwar kameez—the baggy, pajama-like trousers (*salwar*) and long shirt (*kameez*) that is the standard garb of men and women in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Also called the *pirhan tonban*.

SAMS—School of Advanced Military Studies. SAMS is located at Fort Leavenworth and takes a limited number of Command and General Staff College (CGSC) graduates for an additional year of education on the operational level of war.

Sapper—Combat Engineer.

SAS—Special Air Services. The Special Forces branch of the armies of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

SATCOM—Satellite Communications.

SAW—Squad Automatic Weapon. The M-240B machine gun which fires a 7.62mm round with a maximum effective range of 1800 yards area target and 800 yards (point target). Sometimes called the M-247 to differentiate it from its underpowered spinoff, the short-range 5.56mm M-249.

SEAD—Suppression of enemy air defense.

SEALs—(SeaAirLand) Navy direct action special operations forces designed to conduct raids and reconnaissance. They are part of the nations “black SOF” forces.

SF—Special Forces

SFC—Sergeant First Class.

SGT—Sergeant.

Shalwar Kameez—Male clothing consisting of baggy trousers and a long shirt that is common in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Sharia—Islamic law.

Shia Islam—the second largest division in Islam after the Sunnis. The Shia differ from the Sunnis in that they believe the caliphate is a lineal descent from the family of the Prophet. Most of the Shia of Afghanistan are Hazara .

SIGO—Signal Officer, also designated the S6 on a staff.

Simunitions®—are an advanced form of paint-ball force-on-force training munitions. The wax bullets are far more accurate than paint ball and provide great training

for the close fight (under 50 meters). Simunitions® require a special barrel and receiver group for the M-16 rifle.

SIP–Standardization Instructor Pilot. An experienced helicopter pilot whose duties include training, testing and evaluating pilots who are progressing toward pilot-in-command status.

Skedco®–A lightweight sled used for hauling equipment and patients.

SOF–Special Operations Forces. A generic term describing US and other nations’ special forces. They include the US Army Special Forces (“Green Berets”) and Rangers, the US Navy Seals, the US Marine Force Recon and the US Air Force Para-rescue Jumpers (PJs). SOF also includes Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) units.

SOCENT–Special Operations Command Central is located at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. It provides Special Operations support to CENTCOM, which is also located at MacDill.

SOP–Standard Operating Procedures. Those designated actions that will be executed by the unit when certain events occur.

SOW–Special Operations Wing.

Spectre–the AC-130H “Spectre” gunship..This lumbering USAF ground-attack aircraft is built on a C-130 airframe and only flies on dark nights when there is little illumination from the moon. It has excellent night-vision, infrared heat-seeking and radar capability as well as radio-jamming and other electronic warfare gear on board. What makes it so popular with the Army is its role as a side-firing attack aircraft. It carries a M102 105mm howitzer with 100 rounds of ammunition, a L60 40mm Bofors automatic cannon with 256 rounds of ammunition and two M61 Vulcan 20mm (six-barrel) automatic cannons.

Spetsnaz–from Voyska spetsial’nogo naznacheniya [forces of special designation]. Soviet and later Russian Special Operations Forces.

SPC–Specialist.

SR–Special Reconnaissance. Small teams of trained special forces that penetrate into enemy territory for extended periods to observe and call in air strikes.

SSE-Sensitive Site Exploitation. A search of an area believed to be used by the enemy.

SSG–Staff Sergeant.

STS–Special Tactics Squadron. USAF organization which controls combat controllers and PJs.

Sufi–are primarily Sunni Islam adherents who practice a form of mysticism and seek inner awakening and enlightenment. Sufi belong to brotherhoods. Some are ascetics or dervishers. Unlike most Sunni, Sufis’ have saints and erect shrines to saints. Before the Soviet invasion, a large number of Afghans were Sufi adherents.

Sunni Islam–is the majority Islamic division that believes that the caliphate is elected from the tribe of the Prophet. The majority of Afghans are Sunni.

TACP–Tactical Air Control Party. A USAF organization assigned to an Army headquarters for air planning and close air support.

TACSAT–Tactical Satellite Communications.

TADS–Target Acquisition Designation Sight. Apache sight system that is coupled with a FLIR (Forward Looking Infrared Radar) system that enables the pilots to acquire and engage targets at night.

Tajik–Ethnic Afghans from the northeastern region of Afghanistan who make up about 25 percent of the population.

Talib–Student or scholar of the Koran.

Taliban–Ethnic Pashtu followers of Mullah Omar and his fundamentalist, reactive interpretation of Islam. Taliban comes from *Talib* or scholar, referring to all the students who flocked to Mullah Omar’s movement from the seminaries (*madrassi*).

TF–Task Force. A temporary force grouping assembled from various units for a specific mission.

TF 11. The overarching CENTCOM SOF command for TF Bowie, Dagger and K-Bar.

TF 64. Australian special operations task force that deployed to the south of the Shar-i Kot Valley during Operation Anaconda. The Australian Task Force was from the Australian Special Air Service (SAS) which is a ground forces asset.

TF Blue. The SEAL portion of TF K-Bar that was deployed to the Shar-i Kot Valley.

TF Bowie. The “black SOF” task force comprised of elements of Delta Force, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and a company of the 75th Ranger Regiment.

TF Dagger. Colonel John Mullholland's Special Forces command, also known as JSOTFA—Joint Special Operations Afghanistan from October–December 2001. TF Dagger then became JSOTF-North when JSOTF-South was formed for southern Afghanistan.

TF K-Bar. Commodore Robert S. Harward's Special Operations command, also known as JSOTF-South when it was formed in December 2001. It had SEALs, coalition special forces, and some Army "white SOF" from the 3rd and 5th Groups.

TF Rakkasans. The conventional force task force based on the 3rd Brigade, 101st Air Assault Division and augmented with soldiers from 1st Battalion 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division; and the 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

TF Talon. The aviation component of TF Rakkasans.

THREATCON—Threat Condition. A measure of the likelihood of imminent hostility.

TO&E—Table of Organization and Equipment. An official document specifying the number of personnel by military specialty, the types of weapons, and the type of equipment that an organization should have assigned.

TRAP—Tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel.

TST-Time-sensitive Targeting.

UNDCP—United Nations International Drug Control Programme

USA—United States Army.

USAF—United States Air Force.

USN—United States Navy.

United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan—Opposition coalition against the Taliban. The Taliban termed this group the Northern Alliance in an effort to disguise the fact that many Pashtu belonged to it.

UTM—Universal Transverse Mercator. A grid-based mapping system that divides the world into 60 zones to designate specific points on a map. The system was developed by NATO in 1947.

Uzbek—Ethnic Afghans primarily in the north-central part of Afghanistan who make up 10 percent of the population and speak Uzbek—a form of Turkic.

VOA-Voice of America radio broadcasting.

VS-17 panel-Marking panels that are bright orange on one side and screaming pink on the other that are usually laid on the ground or tied to a vehicle for aerial identification.

WAD-*Wizarat-i Amaniyyat-i Dawlati* [Ministry of State Security]. The renamed KHAD or DRA Secret Police after 1986.

Wahhabi-Islamist Salafists or those who want to reform Islam and return it to its pure state as practiced during the time of the Prophet. Most of the world's Wahhabi live in Saudi Arabia, but adherents have been widely proselytizing in Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion.

White SOF- "White SOF" train foreign militaries, conduct civil affairs actions to win hearts and minds and fight beside the foreign militaries they have trained when necessary. "Black SOF" perform direct action missions using units like Delta Force, SEALs and the 160th SOAR.

WIA-Wounded in Action

"Widow-makers"- Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment. Armed with the AH-64A Apache gunship.

WP-white phosphorus. A mortar round used for marking targets and laying a smoke screen.

WSO-Weapons Systems Officer. A USAF term for the backseat pilot who controls the weapons. In the Army Apache, the back seat pilot flies the aircraft while the front seat pilot controls the weapons.

XO-Executive Officer.

Zakat-a mandatory charity tax on Muslim believers that is normally 2.5% of total value.

ZULU Time-Zulu time is Greenwich Mean Time, which is the universal time used by pilots and for US military operations. This supposedly assures that there is no confusion due to time zones since everyone is on the same time on a 24-hour clock. However, during Operation Anaconda, there were three times used-ZULU, CHARLIE (the time zone in Kuwait where CFLCC was located -three hours ahead of ZULU time) and local time. This book uses Afghan local time so that sunsets and sunrises occur at the expected time but it also uses a 24-hour clock. Perversely, Afghanistan is 30 minutes different than all its neighbors. Afghanistan local time is 4.5 hours ahead of Zulu time and 1.5 hours ahead of Charlie Time.

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