U.S. Marines In Afghanistan, 2001–2002:
FROM THE SEA



U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism

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U.S. MARINES IN AFGHANISTAN, 2001–2002

FROM THE SEA

U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism

by
Colonel Nathan S. Lowrey
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

History Division
United States Marine Corps
Washington, D.C.
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Foreword

This monograph is more than the story of Marine expeditionary operations in Afghanistan. It describes who our nation's enemies are; how America became involved in the Global War on Terrorism; and how the Marine Corps struggled to acquire a major role in Operation Enduring Freedom, as well as the actions of Marines and sailors who helped prosecute the air and ground campaigns against Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. In the latter regard, we see the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, already forward deployed on 11 September 2001, ready to conduct a noncombatant evacuation operation, secure a forward operating base, or provide a quick reaction force for joint special operating forces conducting the initial offensive action of the war. The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit then combined with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit and quickly maneuvered from the Mediterranean to form a provisional Marine expeditionary brigade known as Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58. Working simultaneously under the direction of U.S. Central Command's land and maritime component commanders and in association with joint special operations forces, Brigadier General James N. Mattis and his force embarked on a sequence of operations in southern Afghanistan. These included, but were not limited to, establishing Forward Operating Base Rhino, interdicting enemy lines of communications along Highway 1, occupying Kandahar International Airport, securing the American embassy in Kabul, detaining several hundred prisoners of war, and supporting special operations forces during numerous sensitive site exploitation and special reconnaissance missions. The monograph also describes the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit's rapid reinforcement of Coalition forces during Operation Anaconda, only days after Task Force 58's disbandment.

Although events did not afford the Marines an opportunity to engage the enemy in heavy combat, their contribution in southern Afghanistan was nonetheless significant. From a strategic perspective, the arrival of a sizable conventional force demonstrated America's resolve to confront the sponsors of terrorism directly and signaled an end to Taliban rule. From an operational perspective, Task Force 58 successfully blocked the western escape route from Kandahar and threatened the enemy's last remaining urban stronghold. As Lieutenant General Gregory S. Newbold, former director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, later observed:

> The insertion of Task Force 58 had a deep psychological impact on the Taliban and al-Qaeda—they were confronted with a military situation which now unhinged any hope they had for a gradual pullback from the north and a chance to hold from their area of greatest strength. . . . The insertion of Task Force 58 fundamentally changed the equation for the enemy from one of grim hope to hopelessness.[1]

The strategic agility and operational reach showcased by the Navy amphibious squadrons and Marine expeditionary units validated the utility of task-organized expeditionary forces, particularly in respect to the effectiveness of long-range, ship-to-objective maneuver. These combined

achievements contributed directly to the subsequent deployment of expeditionary strike groups in 2003. As a result, today's naval services are now in a better position to address emerging crises around the globe, regardless of whether they occur in littoral or landlocked regions of the world.

Colonel Nathan S. Lowrey began his military career as an infantry officer, serving first as a rifle platoon commander in Panama during Operation Just Cause and then as a recruiting officer in Portland, Oregon. After transferring to the Reserves to attend graduate school, he joined the History Division's Field Operations Branch in 1998 and subsequently deployed to document operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. He joined the Histories Branch as a civilian writer in 2005 and later served as head of the Field and Oral History Branch from 2008 to 2010. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Maine, a master's degree in cultural anthropology from the University of Wisconsin, and a doctorate in archaeology from American University.



Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps History

Preface

This project began almost 10 years ago, a month after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. Drawn from a variety of sources, the account reflects the combined efforts of three related, yet independent, endeavors to document Marine operations in Afghanistan during the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom. In November 2001, after it became apparent that a sizable Marine force was about to be committed to the ongoing campaign, History and Museums Division began to assemble a small field documentation team to accompany the operating forces as official observers. The team—consisting of two field historians, a combat photographer, and a combat artist—intended to collect documents, capture images, conduct interviews, and gather artifacts that would help to preserve, present, and promote Marine Corps history.

In early December, shortly after Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58 seized Objective Rhino in southern Afghanistan, Headquarters Marine Corps directed that the field history detachment join a provisional Combat Assessment Team then forming in Quantico, Virginia. Modeled on the Battle Assessment Team deployed during the Gulf War, the platoon-sized organization was a Marine Corps Combat Development Center initiative to evaluate and improve the Marine Corps' warfighting capabilities. After several iterations, this effort evolved into today's Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned.

The assessment team deployed to Bahrain in early January 2002, where it made contact with U.S. Naval Forces, Central Command; Marine Forces, Central Command (Forward); and Task Force 58 (Rear). During the next three months, Staff Sergeant Michael D. Fay and Major Christopher J. Warnke accompanied assessment personnel during short trips to Camp Doha, Kuwait; Jacobabad, Pakistan; and Bagram and Kandahar, Afghanistan, where they spoke with Marines, sailors, and soldiers involved in Operation Swift Freedom (the initial label for the Marine contribution to the campaign). While in Bahrain, Warnke also interviewed pilots from Marine Fighter Attack Squadrons 251 and 314, while Fay captured images of the Marine Security Forces Company and facilities at Shaikh Isa Air Base. Although I spent most of my time in Bahrain collecting historical information from the Task Force 58 staff and helping them chronicle their experiences during the operation, I also made a short trip to Kuwait to speak with members of Task Force Consequence Management and visited the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit at sea following Operation Anaconda. Two other researchers also contributed to the History and Museums Division's documentation effort that spring, accompanying units during their return voyages to the West Coast. Major Theodore R. McKeldin collected data from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit on board the USS *Peleliu* (LHA 5), and Dr. Fred H. Allison interviewed pilots and aircrews from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 on board the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71).

Following the operation, Task Force 58 produced a detailed multimedia account of its experiences in Afghanistan. This chronicle, principally written by Majors Michael P. Mahaney and Daniel B. Conley (the unit's assistant operations and logistics officers), eventually became the narrative portion of the organization's command chronology and the foundation for my own history of the operation. Captain Charles G. Grow, combat cameramen from the assessment team, and both the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units collated Task Force 58's impressive photo collection, which became the main source of imagery for this volume. After its return to the United States, the assessment team analyzed the wide range of data it had collected and published a comprehensive report of its findings in 2003, which contributed greatly to this project.

During the spring of 2006, after History Division had relocated to Quantico and joined Marine Corps University, Colonel Richard D. Camp, the acting director, asked that I begin work on a Task Force 58 history. I originally intended to produce a short operational monograph based heavily on the detailed narrative summary contained in Task Force 58's command chronology. Once I began my research, however, I quickly realized that a complete history would necessarily include a more robust accounting of the three Marine expeditionary units who had fought in Afghanistan before, during, and after Task Force 58's tenure in theater. Several months later, after speaking with retired Lieutenant General Gregory S. Newbold, who had helped shape the battle as a member of the Joint Staff at the Pentagon, I learned that it would also be necessary to investigate the circumstances surrounding U.S. Central Command's delayed decision to employ Marines in Afghanistan. Not only was Marine Corps participation in the joint operation intentionally limited from the earliest planning stages onward, the rationale for assigning them a larger role at the final hour of the campaign remained ambiguous. This prologue to the operational portion of the account speaks forcefully to the doctrinal and institutional significance of Task Force 58's achievement, which links directly to the development of expeditionary maneuver warfare following the end of the Cold War in 1991 and the establishment of expeditionary strike groups in 2003.

The research, writing, and publication of an official history is a collaborative affair. Behind the author stand a cadre of individuals without whose support I would have been unable to bring this project to completion. During the research phase, I was assisted by Mr. John Q. Smith at the U.S. Central Command History Office, Dr. David B. Crist of the Joint History Office, Drs. Randy Papadopoulos and Robert J. Schneller at the U.S. Naval Historical Center, Dr. Bradford Lee of the Naval War College, Mr. Frank E. Jordan of the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, Dr. James A. Ginther at the Marine Corps Archives, staff at both the Marine Corps Library and Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, Dr. Fred Allison and Mr. Anthony R. Taglianetti of our Oral History Branch, and Ms. Annette D. Amerman of our Reference Branch.

Several veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom provided additional information in the form of documentary evidence or oral history interviews. These include General James N. Mattis; Lieutenant General Thomas D. Waldhauser; retired Lieutenant Generals John G. Castellaw and Gregory S. Newbold; Colonels Christopher M. Bourne, John J. Broadmeadow, John Jansen, Clark R. Lethin, Jerome M. Lynes, James L. Stalnaker, and Michael D. Fitzgerald, USA; Lieutenant Colonel

John B. Barranco; and Majors David R. Berke, Jack G. Bolton, Michael D. Bryan, Jay M. Holtermann, Richard B. Lawson, Kevin M. McDonald, Jonathan R. Ohman, Joshua A. Riggs, Chad A. Vaughn, and Richard W. Whitmer.

During the writing phase, Mr. Paul W. Westermeyer of our Histories Branch and Lieutenant Colonel David A. Benhoff of our Field History Branch frequently served as sounding boards, listening to my speculations and providing wise counsel in return. Mr. Charles R. Smith, senior historian of the Histories Branch, and Mr. Charles D. Melson, chief historian of the Marine Corps, reviewed several draft manuscripts, offering valuable advice on the style, organization, and content of the developing history. After I produced a polished version of the manuscript, several veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom reviewed my narrative and provided critical commentary that enhanced both the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the account. These veterans include Lieutenant General Thomas D. Waldhauser; retired Lieutenant General Gregory S. Newbold; Brigadier Generals William M. Faulkner and Gregg A. Sturdevant; Colonels Christopher M. Bourne, Robert J. Charette Jr., Christopher J. Gunther, Jerome M. Lynes, Michael P. Mahaney, and Carl D. Matter; Lieutenant Colonels David B. Crist, Kevin M. DeVore, and Thomas J. Impellitteri; and Master Sergeant John A. Dailey.

Our Editing and Design Branch, capably led by Mr. Kenneth H. Williams, was instrumental in transforming the manuscript into a published product. Ms. Jeannie L. Riffe coordinated the distribution and receipt of review drafts, Ms. Wanda J. Renfrow proofread the text, and Ms. Andrea L. Connell and Mr. Shawn H. Vreeland edited the manuscript. Layout and design was provided by Mr. Vincent J. Martinez. With so many individuals assisting in the development of this history, there is always a danger of forgetting to note someone's important contribution. If I have done so, please accept my sincere apology and grateful thanks for your help.

As a final note to readers, please be aware that I have used both informational footnotes, identified by symbols (*, **, etc.), and reference endnotes, identified by Arabic numerals. Also, geographic names have been standardized according to the U.S. Board of Geographic Names (http://geonames.usgs.gov), and Afghan military and political figures' names have been standardized according to the U.S. Department of State website (http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm).

Nathan S. Lowrey
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

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PESKI KARAKUMY
(KARAKUM DESERT)
VOZVYSHENNOST' KARABIL'
PAMIRS
VÄKHAN
(WAKHAN CORRIDOR)
Iran
Jowzjān
Balkh
Samangān
Kunduz
Takhār
Badakhshān
KUSH
HINDU
KÜH-E KHÄJEH MOHAMMAD
Baglan
Konarhā
Kapisā
Parvan
Laghmān
Fāryāb
TORKESTÄN
SELSELEH-YE BAND-E
Bādghīs
Herāt
SELSELEH-YE SAFID KÜH
(PARAPAMISUS MOUNTAINS)
Ghowr
Bamyan
SELSELEH-YE KÜH-E BABA
Vardak
Kabul
Kābol
Nangarhār
Lowgar
SAFED KOH RANGE
Paktiā
Ghaznī
Uruzgan
Farāh
Paktīkā
Zābol
DASHT-E KHÄSH
DASHT-E MÄRGOW
Helmand
Nīmrūz
Kandahar
TOBA KÄKAR RANGE
SULAIMÄN RANGE
DASHT-E GOWD-E ZEREH
RĪGESTÄN
CHAGAI HILLS
Peshawar
Islāmābād
Rāwalpindi
Srinagar
KASHMIR
VALE OF KASHMIR
N
AFGHANISTAN
INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
PROVINCE BOUNDARY
NATIONAL CAPITAL
Tarin Kowt
PROVINCE CAPITAL
RAILROAD
SURFACE ROAD
UNSURFACED ROAD
TRACK OR TRAIL
CANAL
AIRFIELD
POPULATED PLACES
KABUL -600,000 (est.)
OVER 500,000
100,000 to 500,000
25,000 TO 100,000
UNDER 25,000
Spot elevations in meters
Scale 1:2,500,000
Kilometers
Nautical Miles
Statute Miles
Lambert Conformal Conic Projection, standard parallels 12°N and 36°N


UZBEKISTAN
Dushanbe
TAJIKISTAN
CHI
Mary
TURKMENISTAN
Termiz
Feyzabad
Kunduz
Mazar e Sharif
Baglan
IRAN
line of cont
Kabul
Herat
Chaghcharan
Jalalabad
Peshawar
Islamabad
Khyber Pass
INDIA
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
Kandahar
Zaranj
Zabol
N
Afghan Ethnic Groups
Iranian
Baloch
Aimak
Hazara (9%)
Pashtun (40%)
Durrani, Ghilzai
Qizilbash
Tajik (25%)
Turkic
Kirghiz
Turkmen
Uzbek
Other
Brahui
Nuristani
Sparsely populated or uninhabited
(% of total population)
Scale 1:8,340,000
Lambert Conformal Conic Projection, standard parallels 12°N and 38°N
0 50 100 Kilometers
0 50 100 Miles
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritive.
Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez



Associated Press. Photo by Steve McCurry

Prologue
Soviet-Afghan War and Beyond

Introduction

While the rationale for retaliating against al-Qaeda and the Taliban forces following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 is self-evident—to protect the United States from further foreign aggression—the reason the attacks occurred in the first place is less clear. Only 15 years earlier, for example, the United States supported many of the same freedom fighters who became the Taliban and al-Qaeda as they battled against the Soviet forces who were then occupying Afghanistan. This chapter attempts to shed light on this issue by examining certain events that occurred during the last quarter of the 20th century in order to set the stage for the rest of the book. The account identifies many of the key players involved in what was already a 20-year conflict, discusses their motives and tactics, and chronicles changing relationships in Afghanistan and abroad. The personalities and events discussed also provide insight into factors considered by key leaders in the United States when outlining an initial strategy for Operation Enduring Freedom.

The era of the Afghan monarchy ended in 1973, following more than two centuries of tumultuous rule by the Abdali line of the Pashtun. Former Prime Minister Sardar Mohammad Daoud, supported by a wide base of conservative military officers and leftist Communists, seized power from King Mohammad Zahir Shah during a successful coup and created the National Revolutionary Party the following year. Although his ambitious plan for Afghan economic growth went unfulfilled, Daoud demonstrated substantial talent in consolidating power and alienating supporters. Attempts to resolve diplomatic conflicts with Pakistan angered groups pursuing an independent Pashtunistan, the purge of leftist government officials helped mobilize the Communist movement, and efforts to acquire military and economic aid from Iran and other Middle Eastern nations infuriated the Soviets. While attempting to squelch the riled dissidents, Daoud instituted a new constitution in 1977 that established a one-party presidential system of government. Instead of eliminating resistance, his heavy-handedness strengthened the opposition's resolve and helped reunite competing factions of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.[1]

The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan

Communists seized control in April 1978, following a second military coup (known as the Sawr Revolution) during which President Daoud and most of his family were killed. Nur Muhammad Taraki, head of the conservative Khalq (Masses) faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, became prime minister, while Babrak Karmal, head of the moderate Parcham (Banner) faction of the party, became senior deputy prime minister. Hafizullah Amin became minister of foreign affairs. Despite a brief image of party solidarity, these men and their allies championed different strategic perspectives, which ultimately pitched the nation into civil war. The Khalq faction wanted to proceed directly to developing a Leninist working-class party, which appealed to its rural, lower-class following of mostly disenfranchised Ghilzai Pashtun. The Parcham faction, however, wanted to lay a foundation by developing a "national democratic front of patriotic and anti-imperial forces," which appealed to an urban, upper-middle-class constituency of Dari-speaking Pashtun and other minority groups around Kabul.[2]

Shortly after taking office, Taraki began to purge his government of the Parcham faction. He sent some members, like Karmal, abroad on diplomatic missions, while killing or imprisoning the

less fortunate. Without Parcham representation, there was no moderating voice to temper Taraki's radical reforms, which he viewed as cleansing "Islam in Afghanistan of the ballast and dirt of bad traditions, superstition, and erroneous belief."[3] In addition to symbolic changes to the Afghan flag, which promoted Communism at the expense of Islam, other decrees attempted to address issues of rural inequity and poverty through debt reform, land redistribution, and gender and ethnic equality.[4]

Like previous attempts at reform, the new progressive policies quickly alienated rural villagers by challenging their traditional ways of life and religious practices. Civil uprisings began to occur throughout the country and guerrilla camps sprang up in Pakistan. In desperation, Taraki sought a formal alliance with the Soviet Union, signing the standard Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation in December 1978. Bolstered by Soviet weapons and advisors, the struggling regime retaliated forcefully against the anti-Communist *mujahideen* (holy warriors). Yet Taraki's brutality only fueled popular dissent, and following a particularly violent exchange in Herat during March 1979, the Soviets shipped attack helicopters to Afghanistan and sent a detachment of KGB paramilitary officers to guard the Soviet embassy in Kabul.[5]

At the same time, Hafizullah Amin, the foreign affairs minister, remained protective of Afghan independence and suspicious of Soviet involvement. Although Amin attempted to maintain a positive working relationship with the United States, it quickly deteriorated following the death of American Ambassador Adolph Dubs in February 1979. Amin seized control of the government a month later, reshuffled the cabinet, and stubbornly refused to accept outside direction from the Soviets. In response, the Soviets first engineered an unsuccessful resurgence of the Parcham faction and then arranged two failed assassination attempts during September. After learning of his role in the plot, Amin had Former Prime Minister Taraki killed.[6]

The Soviet-Afghan War

By October 1979, Afghanistan had plunged headlong into yet another all-out civil war.

Ignoring warnings from the United States, Soviet officials prepared for large-scale military involvement in Afghanistan. At the same time, additional advisors and combat aircraft deployed to shore up the rapidly disintegrating Afghan National Army, and a sizable invasion force assembled along Afghanistan's northwest border—this was designated the Soviet 40th Army and headquartered in Termiz, Uzbekistan. Although the Soviets would eventually rationalize intervention by citing repeated Afghan requests for supplementary support and their right to aid friendly socialist countries under duress, their real purpose may have been to repair perceived holes in the Soviet "strategic arc" of influence.[7]

In mid-December, while operating under the guise of protecting Soviet interests in Afghanistan, brigade-sized units stationed themselves at key air bases in Bagram, Kabul, and Shindand.[8] This tactic was similar to the deception used during the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 in which the deployment of Soviet troops was supposed to be part of a training exercise.[9] Beginning on 24 December, these garrisons and another at Kandahar were strengthened by elements of two airborne divisions during a massive two-day airlift.[10] The following evening, a battalion of motorized infantry crossed the Amu Darya River.[11] On 27 December, operating with cooperation from the Afghan General Staff, Soviet forces isolated the capital city, seized its major command and control centers, and killed President Amin during a violent assault on Darulaman Palace.[12] Two motorized rifle divisions crossed into northern Afghanistan the next day: one departing Termiz, Uzbekistan, for Bagram and Kabul, and the other leaving Kushka, Turkmenistan, for Herat and Kandahar.[13]

On 21 January 1980, shocked by the invasion, President James E. Carter Jr. declared, "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian

Territorial Sovereignty

The Soviet-Afghan War (1979–89) was not the first conflict in which a foreign army maneuvered to control or influence Afghan sovereignty. On the contrary, during the 19th century the fledgling monarchy found itself serving as the playing field for the "Great Game." In this military-diplomatic contest between the Russian Empire to the north and the British Empire to the east, rival superpowers struggled for control over Central Asia and the positioning of Afghanistan's borders.

From the British perspective, the principal issue was where to establish the western boundary of its Indian colonies. While one political faction argued that the Indus River served as a natural border and that Afghanistan should serve as a buffer zone between India and the Russian Empire, a more aggressive faction argued that the defense of India required extending the frontier westward to the Hindu Kush. While pursuing the more aggressive policy, British expeditionary forces encountered strong Afghan resistance during the First (1839–42) and Second (1878–80) Anglo-Afghan Wars. Although the conclusion of the second bloody conflict left the Afghan monarchy intact, it agreed to submit to British authority.[14]

Fearful of further British encroachment from the east, the Afghan monarchy argued for a permanent boundary with India, which became a reality in 1893 during negotiations with the British Indian foreign secretary, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand. Although Durand sought to "engineer" tranquility by delineating between Pashtun tribes politically aligned with Kabul and others affiliated with Peshawar, he inadvertently institutionalized a century of regional political conflict with what has become known as the *Durand Line*. Historian Sally Ann Baynard describes the Durand Line as having cut through tribes and villages with little relationship to the topographic, demographic, or military strategic realities, resulting in bloodshed and laying the foundation not for peace in the border regions, but for heated disagreements between the governments of Afghanistan and British India, as well as later between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan.[15]

After having settled its territorial dispute with Russia in 1907, and putting down yet another insurrection during the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, Britain finally recognized Afghan independence and ceased its colonial pursuits west of the Khyber Pass. Sovereignty issues resurfaced during the dissolution of British India in 1947. In independence, British India split into today's predominantly Hindu and Sikh India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Since 1901, the British had maintained the North-West Frontier Province as a rural buffer zone east of the Durand Line. Recognition of the Pashtun-dominated mountain region—isolated from more developed provinces in southern and eastern Pakistan—at the time of partitioning revived earlier arguments for either Afghan annexation or the creation of an independent Pashtunistan. Rather than provide an opportunity to choose independence, however, British authorities limited voting options in the frontier province to either joining Pakistan or India. Although the Pakistani government adopted a conciliatory attitude toward its Pashtun citizens following the vote, the ethnic issue remained unresolved and poisoned future relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.[16]

Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America." In addition to initiating efforts to establish a "regional security framework" that would capitalize on enhanced relations with Pakistan,[17] he levied economic sanctions against the Soviet Union, boycotted the 1980 Olympics, and refused to forward the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II to the Senate for ratification.[18] Rather than withdraw, Soviet reinforcements continued to flow into Afghanistan during the following six months, establishing additional garrisons at outlying population centers. Estimates of the initial Soviet deployment ran as high as five divisions and more than 85,000 troops.[19]

The Soviets installed Babrak Karmal, former deputy premier and head of the Parcham faction, as the new puppet leader of Afghanistan. Although he pursued a path of conciliation, proclaiming the preeminence of Islam and the *loya jirga* (traditional meeting of tribal elders to solve problems) and attempting to entice support from the *mullahs* (religious leaders schooled in Islamic law) by providing additional food and money, he proved incapable of unifying the fractured nation under a moderate socialist regime.[20] The Soviets subsequently found themselves in the uncomfortable role of catalyst, transforming a conglomeration of 10 competing resistance groups into a loose Islamic-nationalist coalition bent on expelling an invading army of foreign infidels. As additional reinforcements arrived during 1981, the number of Soviet troops in Afghanistan increased to approximately 100,000.[21]

Initial military operations usually involved division-level offensives, primarily in the east, often along major transportation routes and with the goal of establishing control over the Pakistani border region. After several bloody encounters with the rebels, the Soviets learned to appreciate the limitations of employing large conventional forces against guerrilla fighters in mountainous terrain and gradually adapted to the unpredictable combat environment by becoming more agile. They exchanged armor for infantry, downsized to regiment- and battalion-sized operations, relied heavily on helicopter and jet fighter support, and employed special operations forces to ambush the rebels.[22]

As the conflict spread throughout Afghanistan, the Soviets realized that they could only maintain operational control over any given area by establishing a permanent presence in the region. Reluctant to assume an occupying role, they chose instead to pursue a measured strategy by establishing large garrisons to control the urban infrastructure, combat outposts to secure critical points along the major supply routes, and fortified base camps from which to launch attacks against the mujahideen. In association with conducting direct combat operations, they also attempted to eliminate logistical support for the resistance groups by spoiling crops, mining fields, destroying irrigation systems, and evacuating villages. Besides creating a refugee population of at least 5 million, the Soviets significantly strengthened anti-Soviet sentiments throughout the world through their use of these brutal tactics.[23] Many of the displaced Afghans migrated to refugee camps along the Iranian and Pakistani borders.[24] Recruitment of mujahideen from the camps was greatly facilitated by the Assembly of Islamic Clergy (Jamiat Ulema-e Islam), which established hundreds of *madrassas* (religious schools) along the Pashtun belt in western Pakistan, providing the recruits an opportunity for food, shelter, education, and military training.[25]

Various estimates suggest that the mujahideen were composed of approximately 90,000 regulars and 110,000 reserves. As an ad hoc army, it reflected the geographic, ethnic, tribal, and religious diversity of the country, with ranks filled by fighting men who "ranged from preadolescent boys to grizzled veterans of the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919."[26] The mujahideen had various internal ideological divisions as well, with most groups supporting either Afghan traditionalist or Islamic fundamentalist perspectives (Table 1), and then dividing still further to pursue competing political agendas.[27] The two largest and most effective fundamentalist groups were Gulbuddin

Table 1: Major Mujahideen Groups

Islamic Fundamentalists	***Group Name***
Gulbuddin Hekmatyar	Hizb-e Islami (Party of Islam)
Burhanuddin Rabbani	Jami'at-e Islami (Islamic Society of Afghanistan)
Mawlawi Yonus Khalis	Hizb-e Islami (Party of Islam—Khalis Faction)
Abd al-Rab al-Rassul Sayyaf	Ittehad-e Islami (Islamic Unity)
Afghan Traditionalists	
Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi	Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami (Islamic Revolutionary Movement)
Hazrat Sibghatullah Mojaddedi	Jabha-e Nijat-e Milli (National Liberation Front)
Pir Sayyid Gailani	Mahaz-e Milli Islami (National Islamic Front of Afghanistan)

Hekmatyar's radical Party of Islam, a Pashtun-based organization of 30,000 situated to the south and east, and Burhannudin Rabbani's moderate Islamic Society of Afghanistan, a minority-based organization of 25,000 situated to the north and west.[28]

The mujahideen received assistance from a wide range of benefactors. During President Ronald W. Reagan's administration, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) covertly funneled weapons, equipment, technical support, and funding through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), which also benefited materially and financially from the partnership.[29] Influenced by Pakistan's own Islamist leanings, Hekmatyar's hard-liners received the bulk of American aid.[30] In addition to providing additional funding, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and 42 other Muslim nations also contributed from 10,000 to 35,000 foreign fighters to the war effort.* Although the "Arab-Afghan" volunteers played only a limited role in ousting the Soviets from Afghanistan, and their presence actually alienated non-Pashtun and Shia Muslim groups located to the north, they would boost the rise of Islamic terrorism and spearhead the global *jihad* (holy war) following the war.[31]

The mujahideen pursued a tripartite strategy: prove that the regime was not in control of the countryside, undermine public support for the government, and weaken the army.[32] Although resistance leaders sometimes conducted bold raids against Soviet and Afghan national forces, they usually employed less direct methods such as mining roads, destroying bridges, ambushing supply convoys, and severing communication lines. As the conflict evolved, they adapted to changing Soviet tactics by employing U.S.-supplied antiaircraft missiles with devastating effect against Soviet helicopters and counterambushing special operations forces. They also initiated an effective urban terror campaign in 1981, which included kidnapping, assassination, and bombing.[33]

Although the Soviets may have been willing to orchestrate a quick regime change followed by sustained stability and support operations, such as they had orchestrated in Hungary during 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, they were reticent to enter into a protracted conflict like the one the United States had encountered in Vietnam.[34] They began to seek a political solution to the insurgency problem as

*Although Iran and Saudi Arabia each contributed to the Afghan cause, the former supported the Hazara Shia Muslims, while the latter supported the Pashtun Sunni Muslims. This was a bitter rivalry that survived the Soviet-Afghan War, with Iran supporting Rabbani and the Northern Alliance, and Saudi Arabia supporting Mullah Omar and the Taliban. (Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* ([New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2001], 198–99, hereafter Rashid, *Taliban*)



Photo courtesy of the Reagan Library

Soviet General Secretary Mikhail S. Gorbachev, left, meeting with President Ronald W. Reagan at Hofdi House during the Reykjavik Summit in October 1986. Gorbachev chose to end Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan by announcing the withdrawal of troops in early 1988.

early as 1981, and by 1983, they were trying to integrate more Afghan army units into combat operations.[35] Both attempts failed and a stalemate ensued, with the mujahideen disrupting Soviet control over 80 percent of the countryside by 1985.[36] Perhaps even more ominously, seven major resistance groups combined that same year to form the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen in Peshawar, with assent from General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, president and military leader of Pakistan.[37]

During 1986, a year after taking office as the general secretary of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, Mikhail S. Gorbachev frustratingly referred to the continuing impasse and heavy losses in Afghanistan as a "bleeding wound" and decreed that the situation must be resolved within one or two years.* In a decision that reversed the expansionist policies of his predecessors, he chose to reduce Soviet military involvement by transitioning it to a supporting role. By 1987, the Soviets ceased participating in major offensive operations, unless provoked, and began to redeploy some of their military forces. Early in 1988, Gorbachev announced the general withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, effectively abandoning the failing socialist regime and the almost 14,000 Soviet dead by February 1989.[38]

President Karmal resigned in favor of Muhammad Najibullah, chief of the Afghan secret police, in 1987. Although Najibullah attempted to initiate a national reconciliation program as part of the changing Soviet strategy, he was unable to secure popular support for the regime or extend its reach into the rural areas.[39] The mujahideen interpreted the announcement of the Soviet withdrawal as a clear sign of victory and formed an interim Afghan

*Although Soviet special operations forces had been initially successful in combating the mujahideen, U.S. armament of the Afghan resistance with Stinger antiaircraft missiles limited the effectiveness of heliborne operations and ultimately turned the tide of war against the Soviets. (LtCol David B. Crist comments on draft manuscript, 13Jan09, hereafter Crist comments)

government, headed by Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, in anticipation of the eventual fall of the national government. With victory now in sight, however, intramural fighting intensified among the resistance factions led by Ahmad Shah Masood and Hekmatyar, prompting the latter to withdraw from the alliance in 1988.[40]

While the national army had successfully defended Jalalabad and Kabul from mujahideen attacks in 1988, resistance groups captured Kandahar, Herat, and Khost by 1990.[41] Najibullah was able to sustain a stalemate for two more years, although the combined loss of Soviet military assistance, Russian petroleum, and militia support eventually proved too much for his struggling regime to bear.[42] The end appeared in early 1992 when General Abdul Rashid Dostam defected to the resistance with the National Islamic Movement, a previously progovernment Uzbek militia. He joined Masood, the "Lion of Panjshir," a highly respected Tajik commander who had repeatedly thwarted the Soviets and was aligned with Rabbani's Islamic Society of Afghanistan.[43]

The warlords took Mazar-e Sharif in February, Bagram in April, and then headed south for Kabul. Although lead elements of Hekmatyar's faction reached the capital first from the south, the Masood-Dostam alliance forced them to relinquish the city when they arrived. Mojaddedi temporarily assumed control but quickly yielded to Rabbani in June, which placed a member of the Tajik minority in charge of the government. Hekmatyar contested the new presidency by initiating a series of devastating rocket attacks on Kabul, and the country again descended into anarchy. During the next two years, competing tribal leaders reestablished their fiefdoms around several of the traditional power centers. Ismail Khan (Tajik) controlled Herat, Dostam (Uzbek) controlled Bagram, and Hekmatyar (Pashtun) controlled Kandahar. Confusing matters further, Dostam turned on Masood (Tajik) in an unsuccessful bid for Kunduz and realigned himself with Hekmatyar in a failed attempt to seize the capital from Rabbani.[44]



Official Department of State photo

Although he is the leader of the Taliban and headed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the enigmatic Mullah Mohammad Omar has avoided the limelight. This photograph is allegedly of the elusive leader who formed the Taliban in 1994 and sheltered Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network in the years preceding 11 September 2001. Since Operation Enduring Freedom removed the Taliban from power, Mullah Omar has remained at large and in hiding.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

The Taliban (religious students) militia emerged from the chaos as an ultraconservative Sunni Muslim reform movement in 1994.[45] Genesis for the organization reportedly occurred that spring when Mullah Mohammad Omar, a 35-year-old veteran of the Soviet-Afghan War, mobilized 30 other students to rescue two teenage girls that mujahideen near Kandahar had kidnapped and raped.[46] Wielding the *sharia* (Islamic law) harshly in an effort to restore civil order and end corruption throughout Afghanistan, the movement initially enjoyed widespread support from the war-weary southern population, who envisioned a revival of peace and Pashtun power. Six years later, disillusioned by continuing hostilities, oppression,

corruption, and a devastating drought, the Pashtun would begin to demonstrate growing resentment against the Taliban.[47]

In addition to an ever-expanding opium trade, Saudi and Pakistani support networks established during the Soviet-Afghan War also sustained the Taliban's meteoric rise. While the Saudis continued to promote the spread of Wahhabism (a conservative Islamic reform movement) throughout the Sunni Muslim world, Pakistan's strategic motives were more complex and frequently exercised through both the ISI and Assembly of Islamic Clergy. One goal was to establish a direct land route for trade to the Central Asian republics, while another was to promote a domestically focused regime that would simultaneously curb Pashtun nationalism in the North-West Frontier Province and provide an outlet for Pakistan's own Islamic radicals.[48]

The United States also supported the Taliban from 1994 to 1997, working indirectly through its political allies in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. In addition to viewing the Taliban as an anti-Iranian, anti-Shia, and pro-Western influence, America was also interested in facilitating the development of a pipeline linking the Caspian oil fields to Pakistan and India without going through Iran. Regional opposition to the Taliban primarily came from the Central Asian republics and Soviet Union, reflecting prior Cold War ties.[49]

In his book on the Taliban, Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid sums up the regime's radical philosophy: "The Taliban are vehemently opposed to modernism and have no desire to understand or adopt modern ideas of progress or economic development," and their "new style of Islamic extremism…rejects all accommodation with Muslim moderation and the West."[50] From the beginning, they banned entertainment and deemed most forms of electronic mass media a source of corruption. As the principal focus of Taliban reform, women could not participate in normal society. The religious fundamentalists ejected them from the workplace, schools, and markets; required them to wear *burqas* (an enveloping outer garment designed to cloak the body) while moving about the community; forced them to live behind blackened windows within the home; and even obliged them to choose their children's names from a sanctioned list.[51]

Likewise, the Taliban prohibited men from wearing Western-style clothing, sporting stylish haircuts, or trimming their beards. Violations of the dress codes were punishable by jail sentences and flogging, while amputation and public execution were the penalties for more serious criminal offenses, such as theft, adultery, rape, and murder. When Western agencies began to question the tyrannical regime, the Taliban responded by ordering the United Nations (UN) to leave in 1997, followed by nongovernmental organizations in 1998.[52]

The Taliban drew recruits from refugee camps along the Pakistani border, where youths educated in local madrassas had been "taught a strict interpretation of Islam that required total acceptance of the Koran and advocated eliminating the corrupting influence of the West."[53] As Rashid emphasizes, the Taliban perspective differed significantly from that of their traditional mujahideen predecessors:

> These boys were from a generation who had never seen their country at peace—an Afghanistan not at war with invaders and itself. They had no memories of their tribes, their elders, or their neighborhoods…. Their simple belief in a messianic, puritan Islam which had been drummed into them by the village mullahs was the only prop they could hold on to and which gave their lives some meaning.[54]

The Taliban quickly took control of the southeastern third of Afghanistan, seizing control of Spin Boldak in October, Kandahar in November, and Ghazni in February 1995. Once they encountered organized resistance to the north and west, however, their offensive began to stall. Masood repelled an attempt to take Kabul in March, and



Associated Press

Jubilant Taliban fighters greet each other in Kabul's Aryana Square on 27 September 1996. The bodies of former Afghanistan President Mohammed Najibullah, right, and his brother Shahpur Ahmedzai hang unceremoniously from a traffic post. The Taliban said that their bodies would remain in place for three days.

Ismail Kahn delivered a serious blow while counterattacking near Shindand in May. After receiving reinforcements from Pakistan, however, the Taliban resumed their push toward the northwest and captured Herat in September.[55]

Rabbani's international standing and ability to solicit foreign aid rose as the frontlines stabilized and the future of Kabul appeared more secure. To counter this development, the Taliban hosted a massive gathering of southern religious leaders in Kandahar in the spring of 1996. In a move to solidify their movement, the leaders proclaimed Mullah Omar "Commander of the Faithful" and emir of Afghanistan on 3 April. Boldly appearing in a relic cloak of the Prophet Mohammed the following day, he claimed to be the new *caliph* (leader of all Muslims) and declared a jihad against Rabbani's regime. In a surprise offensive that fall, the Taliban captured Jalalabad, Bagram, and finally, Kabul.[56]

While the fall of Kabul raised apprehensions among Iran, Russia, and the four Central Asian republics—each of whom pledged support for the beleaguered alliance—Pakistan and Saudi Arabia asked what assistance they might provide the victorious Taliban. Shaken by the setbacks, Rabbani, Masood, Dostam, and Abdul Karim Khalili joined forces in the mutual defense of Afghanistan on 10 October, foreshadowing what would eventually become the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. Although Masood counterattacked successfully as the Taliban forces began to thin, last minute reinforcements from the Pakistani madrassas halted his advance as he approached the capital.[57]

The Taliban resumed their northward push during the spring of 1997. Aided by the defection of General Abdul Malik from Dostam's army, they succeeded in temporarily capturing Mazar-e Sharif in May.[58] Although seizure of the northern city and gateway into Uzbekistan convinced Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to recognize

Taliban sovereignty, that decision proved premature. Four days later, the city's residents staged a bloody revolt that resulted in the death or capture of hundreds of Taliban, including 10 of their top leaders.[59] Exploiting the unexpected reversal, Masood and Khalili inflicted heavy losses during a counterattack that recaptured Bagram and forced Taliban forces southward. However, as the anti-Taliban alliance approached Kabul, Omar requested additional reinforcements from the Pakistan madrassas and was again able stabilize his frontlines and go on the offensive.[60] Dostam subsequently repelled yet another Taliban attempt to seize Mazar-e Sharif that September.[61] During the bloody summer campaigns of 1997, both sides participated in ethnic cleansing and religious persecution, effectively dividing the country along geographic and cultural lines.[62]

Inspired by their successful defense of the north, the warlords formed the United Islamic and National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (usually referred to in the West as the *Northern Alliance*). Establishing their capital in Mazar-e Sharif, they reappointed Rabbani president and made Masood his defense minister. Despite their optimism, factional infighting stymied the Northern Alliance's effectiveness, and the Taliban eventually succeeded in recapturing Mazar-e Sharif in August 1998. This led to another round of indiscriminate killing as they took revenge on the city's Hazara population, attempted to exterminate the Shia Muslims, and executed 10 Iranian diplomats. Ultimately, the long-sought capture of Mazar-e Sharif proved to be a pyrrhic victory for the Taliban. The UN Security Council admonished them for harboring international terrorists, violating human rights, promoting drug trafficking, and refusing to accept a cease-fire, while Saudi Arabia ceased providing financial support. Pakistan, the only country to oppose the UN's sanctions, fell into international isolation.[63]

In central Afghanistan, the ancient city of Bamyan fell to the Taliban during October. This prompted an already angry Iran to mobilize more than 200,000 troops along its eastern border in an effort to dissuade the Taliban from additional indiscriminate killings. The prospect of invasion temporarily diverted Taliban attention from Masood, who used the opportunity to reorganize his forces, refit them with Russian equipment, and launch a counteroffensive that succeeded in recapturing much of the lost territory. On 7 December, following the collapse of the Hazara and Uzbek factions, Masood was appointed supreme commander of the Northern Alliance forces.[64]

Although the two combatants entered into negotiations during the spring of 1999, each side prepared for a continuation of hostilities. The Northern Alliance recaptured Bamyan, approximately 150 miles northwest of Kabul, in April, while the Taliban recaptured Bagram to the northeast in July. Masood then counterattacked toward Kabul with some success, but as he approached the capital, the Taliban employed brutal scorched-earth tactics and once again halted the alliance advance with reinforcements from the madrassas.[65] The Taliban launched three successive offensives during the spring and summer of 2000, and although the Northern Alliance repulsed the first two attacks, the third succeeded in surrounding Masood's headquarters at Taloqan, forcing him to retreat that September. By early 2001, the Taliban had reduced the alliance's area of influence to a tiny corner of northeastern Afghanistan.[66]

The International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders

American tolerance for the Taliban began to wane late in 1997 as the totalitarian regime refused to endorse the pipeline project and their suppression of the Afghan people drew increasing international criticism.[67] During a November visit to Pakistan, Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright declared, "We are opposed to the Taliban because of the opposition to human rights and their despicable treatment of women and children and great lack of respect for human dignity."[68] The final straw occurred on 7 August 1998, when dissidents linked

to Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda terrorist network, situated in Afghanistan as guests of the Taliban, bombed the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.[69]

Osama bin Laden*, a tall and lanky Sunni Muslim, was described as being soft-spoken, mild mannered, and well kempt, yet also vicious, vain, and vindictive.[70] He was born around 1957, the son of a wealthy Yemeni businessman with ties to the Saudi royal family. After attending an elite secondary school in Jeddah, where teachers with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood may have influenced him, he enrolled in King Abdulaziz University.[71] According to conflicting accounts, he may have earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, a master's degree in public administration, and studied Islamic law as a graduate student.[72]

In 1980, bin Laden joined the mujahideen with his family's consent. During the Soviet-Afghan War, he worked for Abdullah Azam, a Jordanian Palestinian and former professor from King Abdulaziz University, who coordinated the World Muslim League and Muslim Brotherhood offices in Peshawar, Pakistan.[73] They established the Maktab al-Khidamat (Office of Order) in 1984 to channel money, weapons, and fighters into Afghanistan. By 1988, however, bin Laden had broken with the organization, arguing that Arab volunteers should take an even more prominent role by leading their own combat operations against the Communists.[74] Following Azam's assassination in 1989, bin Laden assumed control of the Maktab al-Khidamat and established al-Qaeda (The Base) as a logistical center for the Arab-Afghan fighters and their families.[75] Influenced by Egyptian extremist Ayman al-Zawahiri around that time, he gradually transformed the center into a private mujahideen force for prosecuting a global jihad.[76]

Although bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia in 1990, the government forced him to leave after he vigorously criticized the royal family for hosting American troops during and after the Gulf War. He



Associated Press

The son of a wealthy Yemeni businessman, Osama bin Laden was the leader of the international terrorist organization al-Qaeda. In 1998, bin Laden issued a* fatwa *(religious ruling) under the banner of the International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders stating it was the duty of all Muslims to kill Americans and their allies. He was the mastermind behind the attacks on 11 September 2001 that prompted the United States to launch the Global War on Terrorism.

subsequently joined Sudan's ongoing Islamic revolution in 1992 and continued to develop a following of Arab-Afghan veterans who shared his ideological frustration with the West.[77] As his movement gained momentum, al-Qaeda affiliates bombed a hotel used to house transiting military personnel in Yemen during 1992, trained Somali militiamen to shoot down helicopters with rocket-propelled grenades in 1993, and conducted two additional bombings in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996.[78] By the mid-1990s, intelligence sources estimated that bin Laden was training 1,000 militant Islamic revolutionaries and financing terrorist camps in Somalia, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen, and Afghanistan.[79]

*Nearly a decade after the 9/11 attacks, bin Laden was shot and killed by U.S. Navy SEALs and CIA operatives on 2 May 2011 in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

President William J. Clinton signed the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act in April 1996 and pressured Sudanese officials to evict the al-Qaeda leader from their country in an effort to deter terrorism and provide justice for the victims of terrorists.[80] A month later, bin Laden arrived in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, and that August issued his first *fatwa* (religious ruling): "A Declaration of War against Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places (Mecca and Medina)." In a lengthy discourse, he spoke of a global "Zion-Crusader alliance" against Islam, chastised the House of Saud for conspiring against the *ummah* (Muslim nation), and called for a jihad "to expel the occupying enemy." He proclaimed, "There is no more important duty than pushing the American enemy out of the holy land" and "the mujahideen, your brothers and sons, request that you support them in every possible way by supplying them with the necessary information, materials, and arms."[81]

After meeting Mullah Omar following the fall of Kabul in 1997, bin Laden moved to Kandahar and gradually turned a developing friendship into a firm partnership with the Taliban leaders. In February 1998, during a meeting of al-Qaeda affiliates at the original Arab-Afghan training camp at Khost, bin Laden issued a manifesto under the banner of the International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders that effectively expanded al-Qaeda's terror campaign to include liberating the entire Muslim Middle East and attacking Americans around the globe.[82] The organization's manifesto presented three talking points and a second *fatwa*:

> First, for more than seven years the U.S. has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places—the Arabian peninsula—plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples.
>
> Second, despite the great devastation inflicted upon the Iraqi people by the Crusader-Zionist alliance … the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war or the fragmentation and devastation.
>
> Third, if the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jew's petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there.
>
> All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims …. On that basis, and in compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which is possible to.[83]

A Response from the White House

The August 1998 bombing of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania forced the Clinton administration to confront the reality of a rising terrorist threat. Two weeks after the attack, the president retaliated by firing cruise missiles at terrorist camps in Sudan and northeastern Afghanistan, proclaiming to the world, "There will be no sanctuary for terrorists. We will defend our people, our interests, and our values."[84] He amended Executive Order 12947 two days later, enabling the Department of Justice to freeze bin Laden's assets, and in November the Department of State posted a five million dollar reward for his capture.[85] During the following year, the administration directed more than six billion dollars toward America's war against terrorism and doubled the allocation of financial and labor resources to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) counterterrorism effort. Allied nations arrested more than 80 Islamic militants in a dozen countries around the globe, and the CIA claimed to have thwarted at least seven attacks planned against government facilities overseas.[86]

The Clinton administration also pursued several ineffective diplomatic options. Although Pakistan maintained close military and intelligence ties with the United States, it was reluctant to jeopardize the

funding and training of Kashmiri militants in Afghanistan and refused to help arrest bin Laden. While Saudi Arabia did approach Mullah Omar on America's behalf, he refused to extradite bin Laden and so insulted the Saudi envoy that Saudi Arabia withdrew its long-standing support of the Taliban regime.[87] State Department officials eventually communicated directly with Omar, demanding that he deliver bin Laden into the United States' hands by February 1999. In a telling turn of events, although Omar refused to turn over bin Laden, even declaring him a guest of the Afghan people, he did offer to exchange the terrorist for official diplomatic recognition of the Taliban regime. Whether bin Laden felt personally threatened or believed the Taliban considered him a growing liability, the terrorist leader left Kandahar and went into hiding. After bin Laden's reappearance in Jalalabad, President Clinton froze the Taliban's financial assets in July.[88]

The United States solicited support from Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during September 1999, lifting some of the trade sanctions it had imposed the previous year to curb Pakistan's nuclear arms race with India.[89] In return, his government discretely informed several Persian Gulf states of its intent to demand bin Laden's extradition from Afghanistan and insisted that the Taliban stop training Pakistani dissidents.[90] Just as the situation appeared to be improving in October, General Pervez Musharraf orchestrated a military coup "as a last resort," pledging to reduce tensions along the Indian border and "achieve a just and peaceful solution" to the Afghanistan issue.[91] As a frustrating consequence, the CIA had to abandon covert plans to train Pakistani commandos to capture bin Laden in Afghanistan and then turn him over to legal authorities; an alternate option of ordering Afghan trackers currently engaged in following the terrorist leader to eliminate bin Laden was not pursued either because of the presidential ban on assassination.[92]

The situation continued to deteriorate during 2000. In February, CIA Director George J. Tenet reported that bin Laden was still America's principal terrorist threat and he intended further aggression against the United States.[93] In March, President Clinton urged President Musharraf to restore democratic rule in Pakistan and reiterated his opposition to regional terrorism.[94] In April and May, Under Secretary of State Thomas R. Pickering warned both the Pakistani chief of intelligence and Mullah Omar not to side with America's enemies.[95] The Taliban, undeterred, attacked north in July and captured Masood's Taloqan headquarters in September. This victory convinced President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan to acknowledge Taliban sovereignty over Afghanistan in October, hoping to garner influence over the rising Islamic fundamentalist movement in his own country.[96] Al-Qaeda also captured global headlines that month by bombing the USS *Cole* (DDG 67) during a routine refueling stop in Yemen.

In January 2001, the new year appeared to begin on a more positive note with the trial of terrorists accused of bombing the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Yet only 4 of 17 indicted suspects were available for trial. The others, including bin Laden, remained at large, giving the eventual May conviction a sense of hollow victory.[97] As if to emphasize that point, the terrorist leader released an al-Qaeda recruitment video during June, stating, "It's time to penetrate America and Israel and hit them where it hurts."[98]

A New Administration

After a hard-fought campaign and bitterly contested election in November 2000, George W. Bush followed in his father's footsteps by being elected the 43d president of the United States.[99] Although Bush had fronted national missile defense and Iraq as major concerns while on the campaign trail, he was advised during a meeting with President Clinton in December that his top priorities should include "al-Qaeda, Middle East diplomacy, North Korea, the nuclear competition in South Asia, and, only then, Iraq."[100] A week before Bush's inauguration on 20 January 2001, CIA Director Tenet also voiced his concern about terrorism.

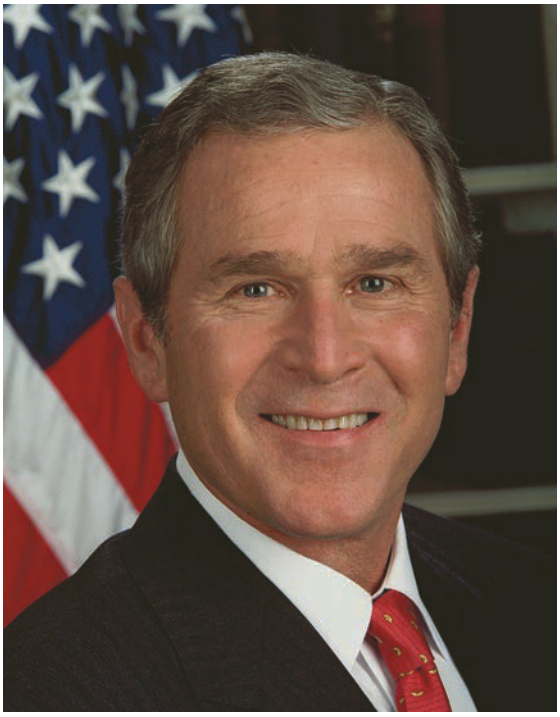


Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: DD-SP-01-04699

George W. Bush, 43d president of the United States. As commander in chief he initiated the Global War on Terrorism and launched Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. His primary objective, in response to terrorist attacks conducted against America on 11 September 2001, was to remove the Taliban from power in Afghanistan and destroy al-Qaeda's global network.

While briefing the president-elect, Vice President–elect Richard B. "Dick" Cheney, and National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleezza Rice, Director Tenet and his deputy director for operations listed the top three threats facing America as Osama bin Laden, weapons of mass destruction, and Chinese expansion. They warned that, although there was no doubt that bin Laden was going to strike the United States, it remained unclear how, when, or where that attack might occur.[101]

In April, the National Security Council deputies' committee recommended that one way to weaken al-Qaeda in Afghanistan would be to arm the Northern Alliance. Although the Clinton administration had previously rejected this option, the CIA was already providing limited funding to the resistance movement, and Secretary of State Colin L. Powell thought that the impending threat provided sufficient cause to change the direction of foreign policy. The deputies' committee ratcheted up its plan two months later, recommending that, in addition to arming the resistance, it support a Northern Alliance offensive to destabilize the Taliban and eliminate al-Qaeda. The National Security Council agreed to fund the covert campaign in early September, and Rice prepared National Security Presidential Directive Number 9 for President Bush's signature by 10 September.[102]

During the campaign, President Bush and his advisors had argued against American involvement in lengthy peacekeeping operations and nation-building ventures like the Clinton administration had pursued in the Balkans. Instead, they advocated a leaner, more lethal military that harnessed new technologies in the form of "advanced reconnaissance systems, command and control networks, and precision weapons to strip away the fog of war and strike the enemy with devastating effect."[103] They needed a strong ally at the Pentagon to implement the plan—one who would challenge the status quo within the military.

President Bush chose Donald H. Rumsfeld, then 68 years of age, for his secretary of defense. In addition to serving as a Navy fighter pilot, legislator, ambassador, and head of a pharmaceutical company, he had also been President Gerald R. Ford's chief of staff and secretary of defense, and then had led commissions investigating ballistic missile threats and space policy during the Reagan and Clinton administrations.[104] Given this range of experience, Rumsfeld appeared to possess the necessary qualifications to pursue the president's strategy of "bringing U.S. armed forces into the 21st Century," which he outlined for Congress on 11 January during his confirmation hearing:

> First, we must strengthen the bond of trust with the American military.



Photo by Helen C. Stikkel. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 010627-D-2987S-072

Donald H. Rumsfeld opens a briefing on the Bush administration's amended defense budget at the Pentagon on 27 June 2001. As secretary of defense, he frequently challenged the status quo at the Pentagon.

> Second, we must develop the capabilities to defend against missiles, terrorism, and newer threats against our space assets and information systems.
>
> Third, we must take advantage of the new possibilities that the ongoing technological revolution offers to create the military of the next century.[105]

Yet confrontation plagued the transformation agenda from the very beginning. Rumsfeld approached the Department of Defense as an absolute authority, envisioning the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a rival source of power. Although none would question that he was an intelligent, energetic, and supremely confident leader, some employees might add that he was also an ambitious micromanager, wary of subordinates, and not much fun to work with. His tests of will ranged from challenging the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's right to brief the president to chastising junior officers over minor typographical errors.[106]

Rumsfeld argued against the Pentagon's tendency to focus on a few traditional Cold War threats rather than acknowledge the full range of potential dangers, cautioning that such oversight could lead to unwelcome surprises.[107] Tying this to transformation, he stated, "While much of the existing defense establishment can be adapted to 21st-Century needs, a good deal cannot. We must move forcefully to rationalize the costly burden of force structures and practices that do not contribute to current and future U.S. security needs."[108] In other words, instead of continuing to maintain a force capable of fighting in two theaters simultaneously, the nation would now address dual antagonists in succession, thus negating the need to maintain four standing Army corps and the requisite transportation assets to move them around the globe. This strategy would allow for a subsequent reduction in both military personnel and equipment and, adding to the attractiveness of this concept, the resulting savings could be used to fund the development of advanced military technologies and address emerging threats.



Photo by GySgt Charles Portman

Gen Tommy R. Franks, USA. As commander in chief of U.S. Central Command, he was responsible for planning and directing the Coalition's initial military operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

When the military balked at the changes, Rumsfeld concluded that his principal battlefield was the Pentagon, that his biggest obstacle was the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that the U.S. Army leadership was "too old-fashioned, wedded to heavy forces, and too slow to change."[109] Army General Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, countered that Rumsfeld was not only partial to the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps because of his prior naval service, he was also biased by the Army's heavy forces and its earlier involvement in the Balkans.[110] On 10 September, in a most telling statement, Rumsfeld brought the controversy to the forefront of public attention during a town meeting at the Pentagon:

> The topic today is an adversary that poses a threat—a serious threat—to the security of the United States of America…. From a single capital, it attempts to impose its demands across time zones, continents, oceans, and beyond. With brutal consistency, it stifles free thought and crushes new ideas. It disrupts the defense of the United States and places the lives of men and women in uniform at risk…. You may think I'm describing one of the last decrepit dictators of the world. But their day, too, is almost past, and they cannot match the strength and size of this adversary. The adversary's closer to home. It's the Pentagon bureaucracy…. I have no desire to attack the Pentagon; I want to liberate it. We need to save it from itself…. If there's to be a struggle, so be it.[111]

General Tommy R. Franks, USA, was serving as commander in chief of United States Central Command at the time. Headquartered in Tampa, Florida, he orchestrated one of the nation's five geographic joint commands and was responsible for overseeing military affairs in 25 countries extending from East Africa to Central Asia. Marine Lieutenant General Michael P. DeLong, deputy commander of U.S. Central Command, said of his boss:

> Like so many brilliant men, Franks was paradoxical. He was hard on the staff, but he loved and respected them. He was a loner, yet he rarely made a decision alone. He wasn't trusting, yet he delegated tremendously. Franks was one of the few men I couldn't figure out, but then, nobody else could either.[112]

DeLong, who also told of being professionally threatened, publicly chastised, and verbally affronted by his senior, observed that members of the Central Command staff who had previously worked for "laid-back" Marine General Anthony C. Zinni seemed "shell-shocked" by Franks's abrasive leadership style.

On the same day as Secretary Rumsfeld's town meeting at the Pentagon, General Franks met with General Mahmoud Ahmed, head of the Pakistani ISI, in Washington, DC. Franks later recalled his "polite… but bare-knuckled" discussion with the

Pakistani intelligence officer on 10 September: "With Secretary Rumsfeld's blessing, and CIA Director George Tenet's encouragement, I had informed General Mahmoud that cooperation was a two-way street." Pakistan needed parts for its military aircraft and America needed targeting information on al-Qaeda; Mahmoud "got the message" and promised to brief President Musharraf[113]. Before the National Security Council, Department of Defense, or Central Command could implement any of their developing plans, however, al-Qaeda had already dealt each a serious blow. Just a day earlier, terrorists masquerading as journalists had assassinated Ahmad Shah Masood, the famed "Lion of Panjshir" and one real leader among the beleaguered Northern Alliance.[114]



Chapter 1
The Global War on Terrorism

Another Day of Infamy

For those living along the eastern seaboard of the United States, 11 September 2001 began as an uncommonly pleasant day. As parents headed to work and children returned to the classroom that Tuesday following a long summer vacation, each welcomed the cool temperatures, low humidity, and clear blue sky. Without warning, a series of unprecedented terrorist attacks that President Bush would later characterize as "the Pearl Harbor of the 21st Century" abruptly shattered the morning calm.[1]

In New York City, a fuel-laden Boeing 767 jetliner flew into one of the World Trade Center's famous Twin Towers at 0845. A second aircraft hit the other tower at 0903, and a third aircraft slammed into the west side of the Pentagon at 0943. The passengers of United Airlines Flight 93, who resisted their hijackers and crashed their aircraft into a field near rural Somerset, Pennsylvania, around 1010, narrowly averted a final attack likely intended for either the U.S. Capitol building or the White House. By this time, back in New York, one of the Twin Towers had dramatically collapsed at 1005, followed by disintegration of the second at 1028.[2] Alarmed by the possibility of further attacks, the Department of Defense (DoD) raised the alert status of all deployed military forces, the Federal Aviation Administration closed U.S. airspace, and President Bush granted permission to shoot down commercial airliners.[3] That evening, a third structure of the World Trade Center complex collapsed from ancillary damage at 1720. In the wake of three devastating attacks and one air crash, approximately 3,000 people from 80 nations lay dead.[4]

In the immediate aftermath of the first attacks, a shocked nation struggled to grasp the magnitude of the events it watched on television. Citizens



Photo by Jeff Christensen, courtesy of Reuters

A jagged hole indicates the point of impact where a plane crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City on 11 September 2001. Three hijacked planes crashed into major U.S. landmarks that day, destroying both of New York's Twin Towers and plunging the Pentagon in Washington, DC, into flames.

across the country remained glued to cable news networks for continued on-scene coverage, breaking updates, and anticipated responses from their government. Following the first two attacks, at 0930 President Bush spoke to the nation from an elementary school in Florida. Echoing his father's famous statement preceding the Gulf War, he proclaimed, "Terrorism against our nation will not stand."[5] He amplified these remarks when speaking from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana at 1230:



Photo by Eric Draper, courtesy of *Time* magazine

President Bush speaks with key members of his National Security Council in the Oval Office during October 2001. From left to right are George J. Tenet, director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Vice President Richard B. "Dick" Cheney; Condoleezza Rice, national security advisor; and President Bush.

> I want to reassure the American people that the full resources of the federal government are working to assist local authorities to save lives and help the victims of these attacks. Make no mistake: The United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly attacks…. We have taken all appropriate security precautions to protect the American people. Our military at home and around the world is on high alert status, and we have taken the necessary security precautions to continue the functions of your government.[6]

At 1530 that afternoon, during a National Security Council meeting at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, President Bush learned that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were almost certainly responsible for the attacks. Director Tenet explained that it was the only terrorist organization with the ability to orchestrate such a large undertaking, that officials had identified several of its operatives' names on the airliners' passenger manifests, and that postattack communications chatter included the exchange of congratulatory messages among terrorists.[7] Arriving back in Washington, DC, early that evening, the president returned to the airwaves for a third time that day. In what historians would later call the "Bush Doctrine," he not only reaffirmed his promise to go after the perpetrators of the surprise attacks, but announced his intent to target those who supported the terrorists as well.[8]

The president chaired a second meeting of the National Security Council following his speech, first as a comprehensive gathering and then with only his principal advisors. He set the tone of the smaller group by stating that it was a great opportunity to advance foreign policy. Tenet identified the need to deny al-Qaeda sanctuary, Powell stated that it was time for Afghanistan and Pakistan to take notice, and Rumsfeld added that the problem included other

countries that also supported terrorism. After listening to the remaining comments, Bush decided that he would force the offending countries to choose sides and then pick off any resulting adversaries one at a time.[9]

This type of exchange quickly became the pattern for prosecuting the war on terror. As senior advisor, Vice President Cheney would often ask the hard questions or focus the discussion, while Rice would chair the smaller meetings with the principals. President Bush, who acknowledged that he was not a "military tactician" and preferred to follow "gut" feelings rather than "textbook" solutions, would listen to the advice of his war council and then render guidance.[10] Douglas J. Feith, the under-secretary of defense for policy, later described the dynamics among these key players in his memoir, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*:

> President Bush often connected with Rumsfeld—or bumped up against him—on the level of ideas and strategy; the same was true of Cheney and often of Rice. Disagreements among the four of them, which were rarely fundamental, had the effect of polishing or refining their colliding ideas, as debates among generally like-minded people often do. But there was a ships-passing-in-the-dark quality to disagreements between Powell and the others—not just because they differed about philosophy or policy, but because Powell chose to confine his contributions to operational and tactical thoughts.[11]

As Lieutenant General Gregory S. Newbold, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, later described, the environment at the Pentagon was extremely tense—they truly thought another attack might be imminent.[12] United States military commands around the globe reflected this unease by instituting heightened force protection measures and assessing the status of forces in each geographic region.[13] Lieutenant General DeLong had been chairing the weekly staff meeting at U.S. Central Command when the first plane hit the World Trade Center. After the second attack, when it became apparent that the crashes were not accidental, he immediately raised security levels throughout the Middle East and Central Asian theaters of operation, stood up the headquarters' crisis reaction team, and told his assistant to contact General Franks in Crete.[14]

General Franks concurred with General DeLong's decisions, adding that they needed to make contact with the Joint Staff's crisis action team. Later in the day, during a conference call with his deputy commander and the director for operations, Air Force Lieutenant General Victor E. Renuart Jr., Franks charted a rudimentary course of action. According to staff calculations, they would be able to amass 80 Tomahawk land attack missiles in the Arabian Sea within 24 hours and up to 200 in 48 hours.[15] As Franks recalls, strike locations were determined in the following manner:

> Let's build the target sets based on five assumptions. . . . First, the attack on America was delivered by an al-Qaeda operation out of Afghanistan. Second, the people who planned and ordered the strike are located in Afghanistan. Third, there will be a national decision to strike. Fourth, the reason for our action will be legally undisputed, which means we will build a coalition of cooperative nations. And fifth, we will receive either acquiescence or cooperation from all the regional leaders to hit Afghanistan.[16]

On Board the USS Peleliu *Amphibious Ready Group*

General Franks also contacted Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore Jr., commander of the Fifth Fleet and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command. He ordered that all ships put to sea and cancel future port visits to avoid the possibility of another incident like the bombing of the USS *Cole*.[17] At the time of the attack, the USS *Peleliu* (LHA 5) Amphibious Ready Group (*Peleliu* ARG), composed of approximately 5,000 Marines and sailors, was in Darwin, Australia, for a port call en route to the theater. Amphibious Squadron 1, commanded by Captain William E. Jezierski, USN,



Photo by PO G. Leech, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: DN-ST-84-06777

The helicopter assault ship USS Peleliu *(LHA 5) underway in the Pacific Ocean. Commanded by Capt William E. Jezierski, USN, the* Peleliu *Amphibious Ready Group transferred from the Seventh Fleet to the Fifth Fleet during the opening month of Operation Enduring Freedom to support noncombatant evacuation operations, joint special operations forces, and Coalition air attacks in Afghanistan.*

provided the Navy component, and the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU), commanded by Colonel Thomas D. Waldhauser, provided the Marine component.

Prior to deploying, the 15th MEU had become special operations qualified, undergoing six months of intensive training oriented toward developing both conventional and enhanced mission capabilities. The more specialized skill sets focused on close quarters battle, demolitions, reconnaissance and surveillance, maritime interdiction, direct action, gas and oil platform operations, tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel, hostage recovery, and clandestine operations.[18]

The *Peleliu* ARG had initially set sail as part of the Seventh Fleet (Task Force 76) on 13 August, transiting Hawaii on its way to Australia, where it conducted routine field training from 7 to 11 September. The Marines learned of the terrorist attacks around 2100 on their first night of liberty in Darwin.[19] Lieutenant Colonel Carl D. Matter, the commanding officer of MEU Service Support Group 15, recalled that he had just walked into an empty wardroom to fetch a glass of water when he saw an airplane crash into a building on the television:

> At first, I thought it was some kind of a mockup and then I realized that there was a terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. I immediately came over to the [executive officer's] room and I banged on his door. I said, "You got to see this terrorist attack on the World Trade Center." We raced in there to look at the TV and about that time here comes the second… airplane slamming into the building.[20]

First Sergeant O'Neil O. Weilbacher of Company B, Battalion Landing Team 1/1, was calling his wife from the mainstay of the USS *Dubuque* (LPD 8) when he learned of the attacks:

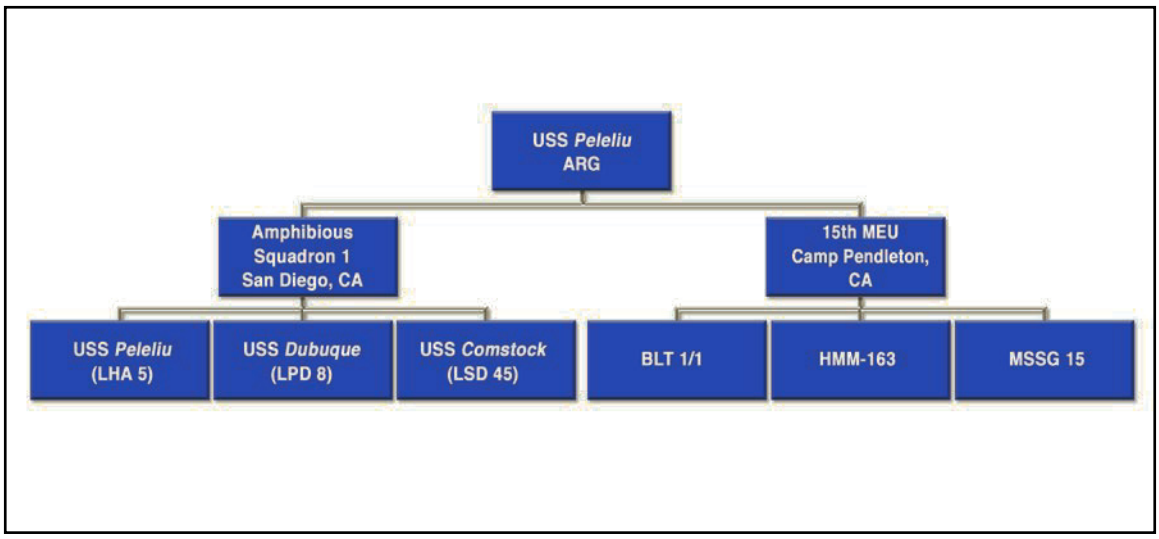


Diagram 1: USS *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group

> The AT&T rep was, "Hey, look on the TV. Look at that airplane, it went in the building." I looked up there, I see the smoke coming out of the World Trade Center, and I was thinking, "Oh, maybe it's just an accident." Everybody was thinking it was an accident…. And as we're looking at it, that's when the second airplane came in.[21]

Shortly afterward, he remembered, news coverage shifted to the attack on the Pentagon, and the Marines began to recall their liberty parties. Lieutenant Colonel Gregg P. Olson, 15th MEU's operations officer, elaborated on the command element's perspective:

> My other recollection of that evening was the uncertainty of what was going to happen next. Was this an "around the world simultaneous attack," so that when the sun comes up the next planes are going to come crashing out of the sky? There was some anxiety over how vulnerable we three warships in port might be. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. We realized that… those ships… were not exactly a target of the magnitude that the people who dropped the World Trade Center were looking for. While we might have been a USS *Cole*-like target, in the aftermath of 11 September, we were just another group of Americans somewhere away from home.[22]

Defining Military Options

During the president's daily brief on the morning of 12 September, Director Tenet confirmed al-Qaeda's involvement in the terrorist attacks and then described his agency's connections in Afghanistan. He explained that it was funding the Northern Alliance, possessed contacts with tribal leaders in southern Afghanistan, and had been running paramilitary teams in and out of the country for years. During successive meetings later that day, the National Security Council principals reaffirmed the previous night's discussion.

Vice President Cheney and Secretary Powell agreed that, while al-Qaeda would serve as the initial target and facilitate the formation of a multinational alliance, a broader objective would be to highlight state sponsors of terrorism and force them to choose sides on a case-by-case basis.[23] Although Secretary Rumsfeld emphasized the need for the DoD, rather than the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), to lead the military response, when President Bush later asked what the military could contribute to the developing campaign, he responded, "Very little, effectively."[24]

That afternoon, after returning to Central Command headquarters following the National



Photo by Eric Draper, White House photographer

President Bush outlines the new course for his administration while meeting with the National Security Council in the Cabinet Room on 12 September 2001.

Security Council meeting, General Franks spoke by telephone with Secretary Rumsfeld and General Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This may have been the instance when Rumsfeld pointedly informed Franks that he did not have months to draw up plans and stage forces for a major military assault in Afghanistan—that Franks should think in terms of days and weeks, and that Rumsfeld wanted something creative between "launching cruise missiles and an all-out military operation."[25] When Shelton asked for a full range of options for Afghanistan, Franks responded that he would have a draft of conceptual options ready the following day and a complete course of action within a week to 10 days.[26] But when Rumsfeld pressed Franks for the criteria he would use to select targets, the combatant commander asked the secretary to trust him and let him run the war.[27] Franks said, when reflecting on the exchange, that was when he realized he would have to differentiate the art (tactics) and science (logistics) of war for both President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld.[28]

General Franks assembled his senior staff after the phone call and stated, "President Bush has ordered the secretary to prepare a robust response to yesterday's attacks." He said that the question was "how and when," adding that he had told General Shelton it was "better to do nothing if we don't intend to respond forcefully." As the discussion continued into the early morning, he commented, "No doubt about it guys—[Afghanistan] is definitely landlocked. We can't make use of the Marines' amphibious capabilities. Whatever the final shape of the operation, it'll depend on airlift."[29] In reaching this conclusion, General Franks may have been acknowledging that that the doctrinal capability of Marine expeditionary units limited amphibious operations to within 200 miles of the Pakistani coast.

On 13 September, during the morning National Security Council meeting, Director Tenet and his counterterrorism chief elaborated on the CIA's developing plan for Afghanistan. They proposed synthesizing intelligence, technology, CIA paramilitary teams, and indigenous forces into a covert action to defeat the Taliban, potentially augmented by special operations forces. During the afternoon meeting, President Bush announced his

intent to approve the agency's initiative. Except for conventional cruise missile attacks, General Shelton had little to offer in the way of complementary military options. This limitation prompted both Secretary Rumsfeld and President Bush to demand new tasks, targets, and options from the military.[30]

Back in Tampa, the Central Command staff continued to plan. On the morning of 14 September,* General Franks reiterated, "The long poles of this operation will be *access* and *sustainment*. Any operation we conduct in Afghanistan will be dependent on airlift . . . thousands of tons a day." He noted that rugged terrain, extreme weather, and humanitarian aid requirements would impede the task.[31] A day earlier, he had acknowledged that while basing rights at an old Soviet air base at Karshi Khanabad, Uzbekistan, would be crucial, President Islam A. Karimov would be hesitant to provide access for fear of antagonizing Islamic fundamentalists in his own country.[32]

The staff developed ideas and compiled possible courses of action into four successive options. The first option was for immediate action, ordering the U.S. Navy to launch a massive Tomahawk missile attack against Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan from the Arabian Sea. The second option was to follow the missile attack with a 3- to 10-day air war, using the U.S. Air Force's strategic bombers to eliminate enemy camps and bases. The third, which would become known as "boots on the ground," was to follow the missile and bombing attacks with special operations forces from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and CIA. These small, but lethal, detachments would direct close air support in conjunction with the Northern Alliance's campaign against the Taliban.[33] If the Alliance proved incapable of remedying the situation with the special forces' assistance, a final option was "to run the first three simultaneously, as the lead-in for the deployment of conventional American ground combat forces." In this case, conventional forces meant "battalions and brigades of American soldiers and Marines."[34] In his account, General Delong indicates that Central Command forwarded only the first three options to the DoD, apparently choosing not to suggest the possibility of deploying conventional ground forces.[35] President Bush assembled his war cabinet at Camp David, Maryland, on 15 September to review and evaluate developing plans. Director Tenet presented a multidimensional plan of global proportions: in addition to creating a northern front, the CIA could also solicit support from a dozen tribal leaders in southern Afghanistan who opposed both the Taliban and Northern Alliance. He also proposed attacking the terrorists' financial resources and tracking down terrorist sympathizers in the United States, requested "exceptional authorities" to conduct covert operations and to detain al-Qaeda operatives, and presented a "Worldwide Attack Matrix" listing 80 proposed or ongoing operations. President Bush responded enthusiastically to the plan.[36]

When General Shelton's turn came to speak, he presented the first three options developed by the Central Command planners, "noting that it would take a minimum of 10 to 12 days just to get the initial forces on the ground because bases and overflight rights would be needed in the region for search and rescue teams to bring out any downed pilots."[37] President Bush later admitted that he found Shelton's suggestions unimaginative, and Secretary Rumsfeld agreed that the military options were outdated. He argued for unconventional approaches—especially those employing special operations forces—to gather intelligence on the ground. He stated, "Get a group functioning fast. Lift out of the conventional mind-set."[38]

When President Bush asked his advisors to list potential risks, they identified two worst-case scenarios. Vice President Cheney pointed out that escalating chaos in Afghanistan could convince

*The chronology is muddled at this point, with Gen Franks indicating that it was either the morning of the 13th or 14th of September. The potential for a missing day raises the question of whether Central Command was actually told to begin planning on the 12th or 13th and raises the possibility that the option of an interim missile attack may have been forwarded to Gen Shelton on the 13th. (Shelton's comments during the afternoon National Security Council meeting)

extremists in Pakistan to challenge Musharraf's government, which could provide Islamic fundamentalists with access to nuclear weapons. Dr. Rice warned that the United States could become mired in Afghanistan like the British in the 19th century and the Soviets in the 20th century. When the president asked for recommendations, the consensus was that the United States should negotiate forcefully with the Taliban, attack al-Qaeda's infrastructure, and then go after other state sponsors of terrorism at a time of their choosing.[39] Around this time, Pentagon officials issued a warning order to the U.S. Army's XVIII Airborne Corps,* alerting it to prepare for a "possible imminent combat mission."[40]

Returning from Camp David the following afternoon, President Bush told media representatives that America faced a "new kind of evil" and characterized the war on terrorism as a "crusade" that was "going to take awhile."[41] This was an unfortunate choice of words—not only did it remind some in the Islamic world of invading Christian armies a millennium earlier, but also Osama bin Laden had used the term "crusader" to demonize non-Muslims.[42]

President Bush reconvened the National Security Council on the morning of 17 September, stating, "The purpose of this meeting is to assign tasks for the first wave of the war against terrorism—it starts today."[43] He approved all of Director Tenet's previous proposals and said that he wanted the CIA to be first on the ground. He also directed Secretary Powell to send an ultimatum to the Taliban, demanding that they turn over Osama bin Laden or suffer the consequences. The consequences would be "missiles, bombers, and boots on the ground."[44] He continued, "Let's hit them hard. We want to signal this is a change from the past. We want to cause other countries like Syria and Iran to change their views. We want to hit as soon as possible."[45]

General Shelton responded that it would take up to a week to establish the airlift to the Afghanistan border and even longer to infiltrate the special forces. To this, Secretary Rumsfeld retorted, "This is chess, not checkers. We must be thinking beyond the first move."[46] On the same day, the Joint Staff issued its planning order for Operation Infinite Justice, which was a play on retaliatory bombings conducted against Osama bin Laden in 1998 as part of Operation Infinite Reach.[47] This, too, proved to be an unfortunate choice of words, as some Islamic leaders quickly pointed out that only Allah could deliver infinite justice. Therefore, on 25 September, Secretary Rumsfeld publicly changed the name to Operation Enduring Freedom.[48]

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

During the 1990s, Central Command existed as an "economy of force theater" that was primarily tasked with enforcing operational restrictions levied on Iraq following the Gulf War. Despite the presence of several high-profile figures, before 11 September 2001, the Marine Corps maintained only a limited force at Central Command headquarters in Tampa, Florida, and its operational involvement in the command's area of responsibility was episodic.[49] The Marine component was one of three subsidiary organizations that fell under U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific, headquartered at Camp H. M. Smith in Hawaii. Lieutenant General Earl B. Hailston, who had taken charge of the Pacific post on 10 August 2001, had two corps-level units at his disposal. Lieutenant General Michael W. Hagee commanded I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), located at Camp Pendleton, California, and Lieutenant General Wallace C. Gregson commanded III Marine Expeditionary Force, located in Okinawa, Japan.

The small Marine headquarters at Tampa was "housed in a tan building that looked something like a double-wide trailer on cinder blocks. It stood almost literally in the shadow of the imposing, and very

*Headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the U.S. Army's XVIII Airborne Corps was composed of the 82d and 101st Airborne, 3d Infantry, and 10th Mountain Divisions.

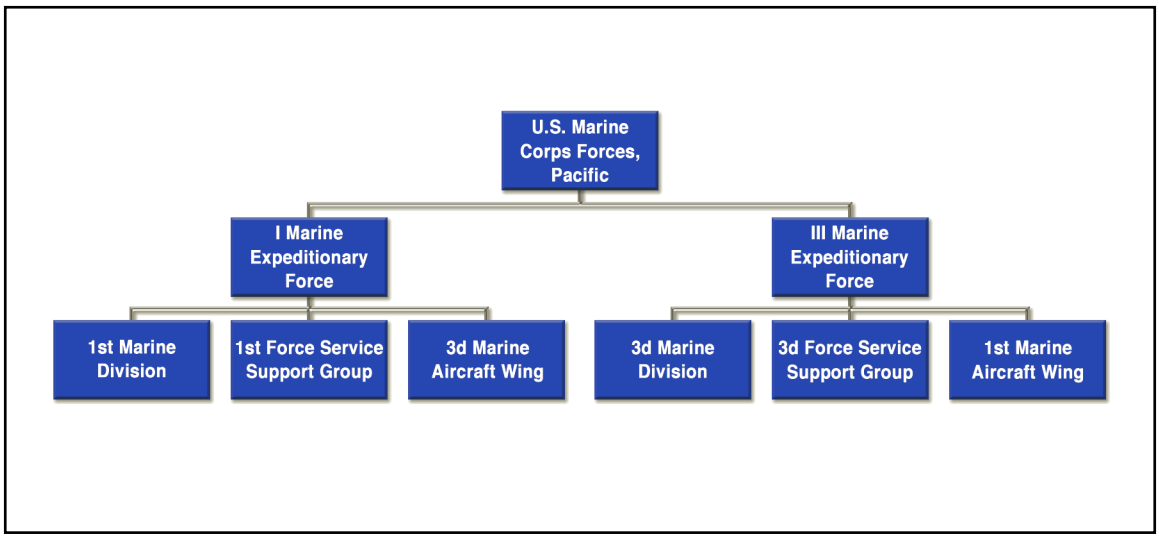


Diagram 2: U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

permanent-looking, CentCom headquarters."[50] In lieu of a general officer, the organization was initially run by Colonel John A. Tempone, who served as the chief of staff. If a situation arose that needed a general officer's attention, that role could be temporarily filled by the senior Marine assigned to Central Command, or a more permanent fill could be sent from Marine Forces Pacific. The Tampa Marines often worked in conjunction with an equally small counterpart at Naval Support Activity, Bahrain. Commanded by Colonel John B. Kiser, the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MarCent) Coordination Element was situated to promote liaison with the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NavCent).[51] The underlying rationale for the skeleton force, which ultimately proved to be a liability, was that the Marine Corps could always surge if its presence were required in the Middle East.[52]

Before the war, Lieutenant General Hailston's vision was focused toward the Pacific; therefore, Brigadier General John G. Castellaw, who had been the deputy commander since the spring of 2000, spent much of his time dealing with people and issues in the Middle East. He participated in exercises in Kenya and Eritrea, attended meetings in Bahrain, and helped establish a Marine presence at Camp Commando in Kuwait. Castellaw later reflected that neither of his two bosses—both three stars—went over to the Middle East until after 9/11.[53]

In the immediate aftermath of the 11 September attacks, General Hailston stood up his crisis action team, mobilized all of the reserves assigned to his headquarters, and provided additional security for a variety of organizations and installations. Shortly thereafter, he was officially designated commander of MarCent and divided his attention among the tasks of providing forces for antiterrorist operations in the Philippines, countering conventional threats in North Korea, and supporting developing contingencies in Central Command's theater. In order to best exploit the additional assets provided by reserve augmentation, he fashioned two distinct staffs to focus on each of his geographic regions of responsibility.[54]

Brigadier General Castellaw was attending the Joint Flag Officer Warfighting Course at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, when the terrorists struck. He returned to Hawaii once the national airspace reopened on 13 September and within 24 hours was headed nonstop to Tampa in a Gulfstream Aerospace C-20 aircraft. After arriving at MarCent around the 15th, he began to build a functioning wartime staff and coordinate Marine operations from eastern Africa to central Asia. The

staff, which grew to include approximately 60 Marines, was primarily composed of mobilized reserves, a few regulars, and even retired personnel. One of the retirees was Colonel Peter T. Miller, a former British Army officer and commanding officer of the 1st Marines, who became Castellaw's operations officer.[55]

Brigadier General Castellaw described his role as "the senior Marine at Tampa. I represented MarCent and the Marine Corps in day-to-day matters, I went to meetings, I was involved in planning, I ran the headquarters there."[56] In addition to attending daily meetings with the Central Command staff, he also maintained regular communications with I MEF and Marine Forces Pacific. In his liaison role, Castellaw acknowledged minor friction with the latter two commands. Lieutenant General Hailston rightfully envisioned himself as the senior Marine authority in theater and wanted the forward Tampa liaison element to work through Hawaii—a difficult task given their extended separation in both time and space. At the same time, General Hagee was "straining at the seams" to become involved in any large operations occurring overseas.[57]

An unofficial line of communications also ran between Central Command and Headquarters Marine Corps. General Franks reportedly wanted a Marine general officer on duty in his command center at all times, so Lieutenant General Emil R. Bedard, then serving as deputy commandant for plans, policy, and operations, first chose Brigadier General Jerry C. McAbee and then Brigadier General Emerson N. Gardner as "the night watchman."[58] General Castellaw described that they had to report to General Bedard every morning about what was going on, and if he was not getting the updates he wanted from MarCent, he received direct feeds from the floor of the command center in Tampa.[59] General Bedard also pursued Marine interests through his counterpart at the Pentagon, Lieutenant General Newbold, who served as the director for operations for the Joint Staff.[60] Closing the complicated information loop, Newbold provided directions to and coordinated operations with Major General Renuart, the director for operations at Central Command.

East Timor

Responding to guidance received from higher headquarters after the terrorist attacks, the *Peleliu* ARG headed for open waters with due haste. Seventh Fleet had intended to transfer tactical control of the group to U.S. Support Group, East Timor, as the ships approached Dili so the Marines and sailors could provide humanitarian assistance to the tiny island nation.[61] Yet in the immediate aftermath of 11 September, even routine humanitarian operations were subject to intense scrutiny from a force protection perspective.

After assessing the risk associated with operating in a developing country adjacent to the Republic of Indonesia, which possessed the largest Muslim-majority population in the world, the commander of Task Force 76 decided to modify the original plan but go ahead with the engagement mission. Initially, the three ships were going to head toward different parts of the island, maximizing the scope of humanitarian support provided by the Marines and sailors. Under the new concept of operations, however, they would remain in closer proximity to each other, enabling the ready group to establish a defensive umbrella that included small-boat security patrols.[62]

While these restrictions precluded the support originally planned for Suai, the ready group was still able to conduct several days of productive engagement and humanitarian operations in Dili and Oecussi from 15 to 17 September.[63] Colonel Waldhauser noted in the expeditionary unit's command chronology that "the environment in Dili was hospitable, and the population was very grateful for our contributions and presence."[64] As if to emphasize that point, Lieutenant Colonel Christopher M. Bourne, commanding officer of Battalion Landing Team 1/1, remarked that



Photo by AA Stephanie M. Bergman, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011030-N-9802B-003

Marines talk with children in Dili, East Timor. The Peleliu *Amphibious Ready Group and 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit participated in many humanitarian and civic assistance projects to help the people of East Timor.*

> on the first night, several hundred people came to the port facility that served as a base for the operation. They held a candlelight vigil and sang songs in solidarity with the United States and to express their appreciation to the Marines and sailors for conducting the humanitarian mission despite the attacks that occurred on September 11. There weren't many dry eyes on the beach that night.[65]

By the end of its stay, the 15th MEU had provided medical and dental treatment to more than 200 patients and airlifted over 100 tons of rice, lumber, tractors, plumbing supplies, and construction materials to remote locations that were inaccessible by road.[66] On 15 September, Colonel Waldhauser and Captain Jezierski were also invited by the United Nations transitional administrator to attend the inauguration ceremony for East Timor's new constituent assembly. As Lieutenant Colonel Olson, 15th MEU's operations officer, later reflected:

> We had thumbed our noses at the terrorists and said, "We're going to continue doing the same kinds of things we've been doing, and you're not going to stop us. You're not going to cause us to change our commitments to all of our allies in nations around the world."
>
> What was good for the Marines and sailors, after watching days and days of Cable News Network, of "this is happening in America," is that they could turn to each other and say, "Well, regardless of what's going on in America, we've at least done something for the people of Timor." They're a country that was emerging from a United Nations mandate, headed for independence, and its progress in that direction was uninterrupted by the events of September 11th.[67]

Noncombatant Evacuation Operations in Pakistan

Seventh Fleet resumed tactical control of the *Peleliu* ARG shortly after the conclusion of its engagement mission in East Timor. Two days later, as the Marines and sailors headed toward Singapore for sustainment training and ship repairs on 19 September, they were ordered to head toward the Fifth Fleet's area of operations* and begin planning for the possible evacuation of American citizens and third-country nationals from Pakistan.[68] Pakistan, although on speaking terms with the United States, was governed by a military strongman whose control over the population appeared tenuous at best.[69] Consequently, while the Department of State had not yet requested military assistance, some thought it might be prudent to prepare for the possibility of an Islamic uprising in response to President Bush's demand that the Taliban hand over Osama bin Laden. Assembling its crisis action team the following day, the 15th MEU started to consider how best to rescue noncombatants in the event of an emergency.[70]

The planning team began to consider the evacuation of four widely dispersed major population centers. Karachi, located on the southern coast of Pakistan, contained a U.S. consulate and approximately 10,000 American citizens. Islamabad, situated 690 miles inland to the northeast, housed the U.S. embassy and another 2,500 American citizens. Two outlying sites—Peshawar, 95 miles northwest of Islamabad, and Lahore, 130 miles southeast of Islamabad—each contained a smaller, but still significant, American presence.[71]

Although Karachi's coastal location seemed well suited to support ship-to-shore operations during an evacuation operation, personnel at the U.S. embassy recommended avoiding the city if possible. Anti-American sentiment was reportedly strong among the local population, rumored to serve as a recruiting source for the Taliban. Peshawar, at the opposite end



Associated Press

Pro-Taliban demonstrators hold a picture of Osama bin Laden and a banner reading "Attention America Mujahideen Are Coming," during a rally following Friday prayers in Karachi, Pakistan, on 28 September 2001.

of the country, presented its own challenges. Located near the mouth of the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan, the city was situated in the heart of the remote tribal territories, where drug trafficking prevailed and the Pakistani government had only marginal control over the population. Fortunately, the situation in Islamabad was better—the consulate there was situated in an isolated diplomatic enclave, located away from the city's center and international airport, and could be cordoned off by Pakistani security forces. Lahore, near the Indian border to the east, provided the best operational environment.[72]

The number of flights that would be required to evacuate the American citizens and the tremendous distances the pilots would encounter while traveling between the Pakistani coast and interior cities

*While negotiating the Strait of Malacca, the *Peleliu* ARG actually changed direction three times before finally heading toward the Indian Ocean and North Arabian Sea. (LtCol Olson intvw, 4)

compounded the degree of difficulty. To help mitigate these obstacles, Colonel Waldhauser called for his Lockheed KC-130 Hercules detachment from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (VMGR-352), the "Raiders," from whom he requested two extra tankers to facilitate aerial refueling of the helicopters involved in shuttling citizens, in addition to the two aircraft normally allocated to deployed Marine expeditionary units.[73] The pilots, aircrews, and maintenance personnel were more than ready to deploy. Not only had they worked with the 15th MEU during their predeployment training, but their officer-in-charge, Major Brian L. Magnuson, was also a former student of Colonel Olson's.[74] The four-plane detachment departed* from Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar, California, on 23 September.[75]

The *Peleliu* ARG stopped briefly in Kuwait on 25 September, transferred to the Fifth Fleet on the 28th, and was stationed off the coast of Pakistan by the beginning of October. While underway, 15th MEU's crisis action team collaborated with NavCent to develop the evacuation plan, eventually briefing their concept of operations on 27 September. Meanwhile, after encountering a minor delay while waiting for diplomatic clearance at Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy, and then negotiating their position within the increasing flow of forces into the theater, the first refueler aircraft from VMGR-352 finally reached Shaikh Isa Air Base in Bahrain around 5 October. Operating from a fighter strip where the U.S. Air Force was already flying KC-130s, the Marine crews received a small portion of the apron from which to base their aircraft.[76] As Lieutenant Colonel Olson summed up the situation, "Now we had a theme with which we could consider doing an evacuation of the inland sites."[77]

The next step toward making the evacuation operation a tangible possibility was determining which airfields in Pakistan were suitable for KC-130 operations. In addition to being long enough to land the aircraft, the runway also needed to be strong enough to bear the full weight of a loaded tanker. Although the 15th MEU had overhead imagery and U.S. Transportation Command classifications for most of the airfields, it had to verify the capability of potential sites by putting a senior Marine aviator on the ground for a visual inspection or at least ensuring that Pakistani forces had recently sustained similar operations at the airfield. The expeditionary unit's forward command element, which had gone ashore on 30 September, facilitated the ability to arrange for the survey visits. Working through the American embassy and Central Command's liaison cell in Islamabad, 15th MEU's executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kevin P. Spillers, and nuclear, biological, and chemical defense officer, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Alexis M. Robinson, articulated the unit's operational concerns to the Pakistani government, negotiating for overflight permissions and landing rights.[78]

As events continued to unfold, the nature of the *Peleliu* ARG's mission began to change. On one hand, President Musharraf had stabilized an uncertain situation through the combined application of sound leadership and internal security measures, and it gradually became apparent that the evacuation of American citizens from Pakistan was unnecessary. The ready group's initial three-pronged evacuation of the northern cities was eventually pared back to Islamabad, and ultimately canceled. On the other hand, Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan had emerged as the first target in the war on terrorism, and it was clear that Pakistani assistance would be required to prosecute that campaign. Airfields originally surveyed as evacuation sites in places such as Shamsi and Dalbandin, Pakistan, now became potential locations for forward operating and logistical support bases for the gathering Coalition special operations forces. This, in turn, influenced the future employment of the 15th MEU.[79]

*During oral history interviews with the squadron pilots, Maj Wayne M. Bunker and Capt K. Schmidt indicated that the detachment had departed on the 26th and 27th of September.



Chapter 2
Operation Enduring Freedom

Developing a Concept of Operations

The relentless pace continued at Central Command headquarters; while his staff planned around the clock, General Franks discussed their progress with senior officials at the Department of Defense several times each day.[1] The first two months of the war, which the staff referred to as the "dark days" of the operation, were particularly difficult.[2] Secure working space was in short supply, the functional sections were undermanned, staff augmentation was almost transient, and the few available planners—unable to go home for weeks at a time—took to sleeping in shifts at the "McDill Inn." At the same time, the staff also had to incorporate an influx of foreign liaison officers and assemble a "Coalition village" out of trailers in the Central Command parking lot. Fortunately, the situation began to sort itself out around mid-November, as the execution phase neared culmination and the augmentees transitioned to longer rotations.

One obstacle, communicated upward by both Central Command and the Joint Staff from the beginning of the crisis, was that there was no stock contingency "plan for conventional ground operations in Afghanistan. Nor had diplomatic arrangements for basing, staging, overflight, and access been made with Afghanistan's neighbors."[3] Regarding specific actions against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan, the closest alternative was a series of proposed target sets and covert operations that had been formulated following the bombing of two U.S. embassies in East Africa during 1998.[4] Ranging from selective air attacks to ground actions involving up to 2,000 U.S. Army Rangers, the operations targeted bunker and cave complexes, major airports, government buildings, and Taliban residences in eastern Afghanistan.[5] Although this provided a foundation for operational planning, planners also realized that suitable airfields, roads, communications systems, and power and water sources were all in short supply.[6]

Planners were at least able to work from Operations Plan 1003-98 when it came to the assembly of a military force to operate in Central Command's area of responsibility. General Franks and his predecessor, Marine General Anthony Zinni, had developed the plan three years earlier as a blueprint for fighting a protracted war with Iraq. Although elements of the logistical framework were relevant to operations in Afghanistan, the concept was oriented toward gradually building up an overwhelming force in the Middle East, invading Iraq with 380,000 troops, and then occupying the country for up to a decade.[7] This was obviously not what President Bush and the National Security Council had in mind for Afghanistan; several months later, for example, Secretary Rumsfeld characterized the model as "the product of old thinking and the embodiment of everything that was wrong with the military."[8]

Army Colonel Michael D. Fitzgerald, who served as chief of plans in the Future Operations Section at the time, described the ad hoc and tentative nature of the initial planning process at Central Command: "You start it in the traditional way—what do you know, how do you go about [accomplishing the assigned task], what are the courses of action?"[9] Although initial ideas tended to follow conventional lines of reasoning, the staff quickly departed its comfort zone and broadened the scope of inquiry to explore the full range of options. At the conventional end of the continuum was the notion of sending in a large ground force, establishing a forward position, and then expanding to accomplish the desired objectives. At the

unconventional end was the notion of letting "the Afghans do the fighting; look[ing] to align ourselves with people who will support our objectives and then provid[ing] those things that we can provide that they can't, like precision fires and logistics."[10]

Colonel Fitzgerald noted that although the planning sessions involved "a lot of discussion about the Russian experience in Afghanistan," logistics ultimately proved to be the determining factor in choosing the unconventional option:

> The logistics and strategic movement alone, of driving a conventional force into there, with no sea [lines of communication], access only by air over Pakistan or Turkmenistan, really proved to be a huge logistical challenge. As you start looking at this . . . the only thing you can do is go the path . . . that we did, which is embedding the [special operating forces] with the Northern Alliance, trying to undercut the Taliban, at least initially, and then over time expanding your presence in country and parallel building this partner security force.[11]

As early as 12 September, only a day following the terrorist attacks, General Franks had already decided that the landlocked nation was untenable for Marine amphibious forces and that ground operations would require U.S. Army combat power supported by U.S. Air Force logistics.[12] He shared this opinion with his staff several days later during an initial planning session in Tampa, proclaiming that the Marine Corps was more suited to small-scale contingency operations than the large-scale ground offensive they were facing in Afghanistan.[13] When General John Castellaw challenged that perspective, advocating for a more active role in the impending operation, he was forcefully rebuked by the combatant commander, although Franks acknowledged that the Marines may possess additional capabilities and consented to discuss the issue later.[14] His decision may have had less to do with Service parochialism than a limited appreciation for changes in naval doctrine following the end of the Cold War. As his Marine deputy remarked, "Franks was one of the most joint-oriented commanders I have ever met; he never once favored his Army background."[15]

Colonel Fitzgerald, who confirmed that "the Marines were not an element that we considered in the initial development of [Operation Enduring Freedom]," described the planners' perspective of Marine Corps capabilities at Central Command during September 2001:

> There was a push to get them recocked and reloaded as the global 911 force and… there was some additional concern about their ability to sustain themselves that far inland for a longer period of time…. We viewed the Marines as an initial force that would go in and react and respond, and that over time the Army would come in and be the one that would sustain an effort and allow the Marines to come back, recock, go afloat, do the missions that they were initially chartered to do. So, when you look at that, we said, "Since… we don't have basing or access anyway, and it's going to have to be introduced by air, then let's just introduce the Army."… So, quickly we went away from—at least initially—consideration of the Marines as that conventional force.[16]

The U.S. Army Special Forces Command, a robust and varied command with a long history of unconventional warfare operations, was more successful in arguing its case for becoming the point of main effort in Afghanistan. It presented its successful bid for more than a support role during a special briefing that occurred sometime after the ultimatum to turn over Osama bin Laden had been delivered to the Taliban on 17 September but before the end of the month.[17] As a result, the Army Green Berets would be the ones to bear the brunt of the war in Afghanistan.

Within several days after the 11 September attacks, General Franks and his planners combined each of the previously identified military options into a four-phase concept of operations plan (ConPlan),*

*A *concept of operations plan* (ConPlan) is an abbreviated operations plan that contains the combatant commander's strategic concept and those annexes and appendixes necessary to complete planning. With expansion or alteration, it could become an operations plan or operations order.

The Evolution of Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare

With publication of *From the Sea: Preparing the Naval Service for the 21st Century* in 1992, the Navy and Marine Corps shifted their operational focus from countering the Soviet global maritime threat to projecting power across the sea and maneuvering to influence events occurring in the littoral regions of the world.[18] *Forward . . . From the Sea* restated tenets of the new approach two years later, and, in succeeding years, a series of interrelated concept papers—*Operational Maneuver From the Sea: A Concept for the Projection of Naval Power Ashore* (1996), *The MAGTF in Sustained Operations Ashore* (1996), *Ship-to-Objective Maneuver* (1997), and *Sea-Based Logistics* (1998)—refined the operational mechanics of the evolving strategy.[19] *Marine Corps Strategy 21* (2000), "the capstone strategy" describing the Marine Corps' "axis of advance into the 21st Century," and then *Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare* (2001), the "capstone concept" guiding "how the Marine Corps will organize, deploy, and employ its forces" later articulated these combined concepts.[20]

From an intellectual perspective, expeditionary maneuver warfare encouraged Marines to "outthink, outmaneuver, and outfight enemies by embracing the chaotic nature of warfare."[21] From an operational perspective, the Marines were to accomplish this by exploiting the Navy's seaborne maneuverability to access trouble spots around the globe, establishing offshore operating and logistical bases, and then rapidly deploying self-sustaining assault forces directly from ship to inland objectives as part of a joint force.[22] From an organizational perspective, the new approach was supported by variably sized Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs), generically composed of command, aviation combat, ground combat, and combat service support elements that could be appropriately tailored to address the full range of potential crises around the globe.[23]

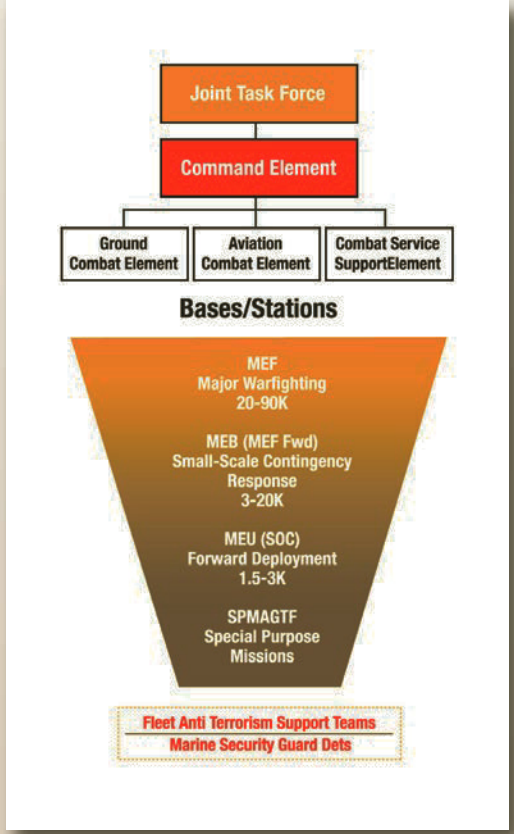


Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Diagram 3: *The Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF): scalable, versatile expeditionary forces able to respond to a broad spectrum of crises and conflict situations in a timely fashion.*

Three Marine expeditionary forces, each commanded by a lieutenant general, served as the Corps' primary *standing* task forces and provided the principal warfighting organization for large-scale conflicts in major theaters of war.[24] Based in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Camp Pendleton, California; and Okinawa, Japan, these corps-level organizations were composed of an infantry division, aircraft wing, and force service support group, and manned by approximately 50,000 Marines and sailors.[25] Designed to deploy in echelon, the lead element, designated the Marine

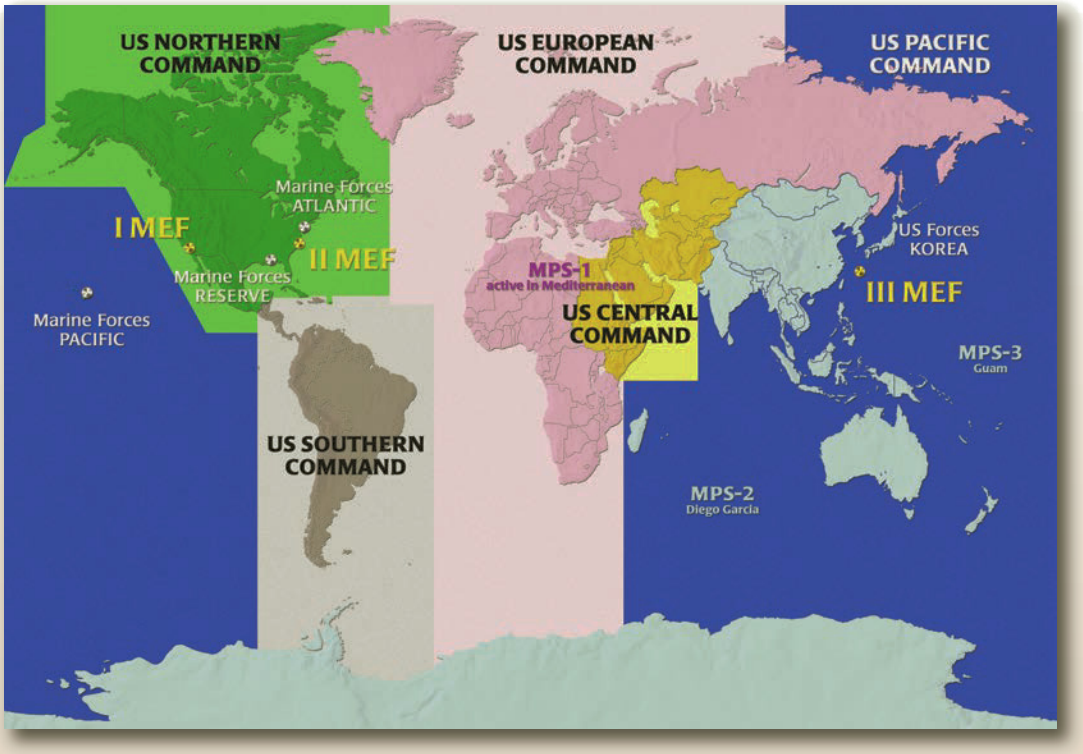


Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Locations of U.S. component commands and the disposition of Marine forces.

expeditionary force (forward), was capable of reaching the theater within 30–45 days and then conducting simultaneous amphibious operations along the coast or self-sustained operations ashore for up to 60 days duration.[26]

At the next lower level, three Marine expeditionary brigades were derived from each of the standing Marine expeditionary forces, for which they could serve as a forward echelon. Although post–Cold War structural realignments had relegated them to a conceptual status in 1994, General James L. Jones elevated them from a cadred capability in 2000 by embedding brigade command elements within each of the expeditionary forces.[27] Led by a brigadier general, usually the deputy expeditionary force commander, the brigades were to serve "as the preferred midintensity Marine air-ground task force . . . and supporting establishment in direct support of forward operations."[28] Notionally organized around an infantry regiment, aircraft group, and brigade service support group, they could be tailored to "respond to a full range of crises, from forcible entry to humanitarian assistance."[29] Containing approximately 17,500 personnel, the brigades were capable of reaching a supported combatant commander's area of responsibility within 7 to 30 days, penetrating up to 200 nautical miles inland, and then sustaining operations ashore for 30 days duration.[30] Yet the ability to operate 200 nautical miles inland for up to a month hinged on the future availability of the Bell-Boeing MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, General Dynamics Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicle, and the USS *San Antonio* (LPD 17) class of amphibious landing ships.[31]

Seven standing Marine expeditionary units, three of which were continuously deployed to the Mediterranean Sea or western Pacific and Indian Oceans, represented the smallest of the standard air-ground task forces. Each commanded by a colonel, they contained approximately 2,200 personnel and were organized around an infantry battalion, aircraft squadron, and service support group. Normally embarked on one of the Navy's three-ship amphibious (now expeditionary) squadrons, they represented the Marine Corps' contribution to the seaborne amphibious ready group and served as "the joint force commander's immediately employable combined arms force of choice." Employable within six hours of reaching a specified joint operations area, the special operations capable expeditionary units could serve as the forward echelon for a brigade-sized force and were "prepared to fulfill missions ranging from disaster relief to evacuation of noncombatants from dangerous areas."[32] Although able to "maneuver an infantry battalion from the sea, vertical and surface assault over the horizon to the objective, 200 nm [nautical miles] within 24 hours," these units remained a marginal capability in 2001.[33] Whether by design or default, the expeditionary units' forward presence, rapid response time, and demonstrated operational effectiveness not only made them the hallmark of the Marine Corps' expeditionary warfare capability but may also have overshadowed the potential possessed by the larger expeditionary brigades and forces.

adding a collateral effort to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghan civilians displaced by the impending conflict. After the operation, Franks would write, "The campaign hinged on linking special forces, Northern Alliance units, and air power…. The plan involved considerable risk. But it was not a reckless gamble."[34] According to aviation historian Benjamin S. Lambeth, "Among the strategies' many premises and unifying themes, the most crucial was the abiding importance of avoiding noncombatant fatalities and collateral damage to nonmilitary infrastructure to signal both to the Afghan rank and file and to the Muslim world at large that the war was against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, not against Afghanistan or Islam as a whole."[35] In practice, this would manifest itself in rules of engagement "that would allow only low collateral damage. General Franks would have to [request] permission to strike a target if moderate or high collateral damage was expected."[36]

During phase I of the evolving ConPlan, Central Command would "set conditions and build forces to provide the National Command Authority credible military options."[37] As the Department of State negotiated basing and staging agreements with Afghanistan's neighbors—Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north and Pakistan to the east—Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers would liaise with the anti-Taliban groups, provide them with additional funding and equipment, and eventually coordinate the arrival of U.S. Army Special Forces. Preparations would also be made for incorporating Coalition allies into the fight and forestalling the anticipated humanitarian crisis.[38]

During phase II, the goal was to "conduct initial combat operations and continue to set the conditions for follow-on operations."[39] The air and maritime component commanders would begin by attacking a variety of targets with missiles, strategic bombers, and strike fighters. By eliminating Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders, command and control facilities, early warning radar, and air defense systems, they would create as much confusion as possible. Once the antiaircraft threat had been reduced, targeting would become more opportunistic, focusing on enemy troop concentrations, caves and bunker complexes, training facilities, and logistical hubs.[40] U.S. Army Special Forces would insert during the second part



Photo by PO Mark D. Faram, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 000927-n-6157f-002/dn-sd-03-11954

The Joint Chiefs of Staff testify before the Senate Armed Services Committee in September 2000. Seated from left to right are Gen Eric K. Shinseki, Army Chief of Staff; Adm Vernon E. Clark, Chief of Naval Operations; Gen Henry H. Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs; Gen James L. Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps; and Gen Michael E. Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff. Generals Ryan and Shelton retired in October 2001.

of the air campaign to direct air operations in support of indigenous forces and carry out direct action missions against high-value targets. In practice, Central Command "would rely heavily on Navy and Marine Corps carrier-based strike fighters, supported by Air Force and [British Royal Air Force] tankers, owing to the limited availability of accessible bases in the region within easy reach of Afghanistan by land-based fighters."[41] Having diminished al-Qaeda and the Taliban's ability to react, Coalition ground forces would then go on the offensive.[42]

During phase III, Central Command planned to "conduct decisive combat operations in Afghanistan, continue to build coalition, and conduct operations [area of responsibility]-wide."[43] General Franks described this mopping up in his memoir:

> Once our indigenous allies, augmented by about 200 [special operations forces], had routed the enemy, we would bring in Coalition troops—including American soldiers and Marines—to seek out and eliminate pockets of resistance. I estimated we would need no more than ten to twelve thousand American ground troops to complete this phase.
>
> Secretary Rumsfeld and I agreed that the U.S. force should remain small. We wanted to avoid a cumbersome Soviet-style occupation by armored divisions. It hadn't worked for the Soviets, and it wouldn't work for us. Flexibility and rapid reaction—airborne and helicopter-borne night assault by small, lethal, and unpredictable units coupled with unprecedented precision—would be the hallmarks of America's first war in the 21st Century.[44]

During phase IV, Central Command planned to "establish capability of coalition partners to prevent the reemergence of terrorism and provide support for humanitarian assistance efforts."[45] For three to five years following the initial conflict, the United States and its Coalition partners would work to rebuild and stabilize Afghanistan. Ominously, this

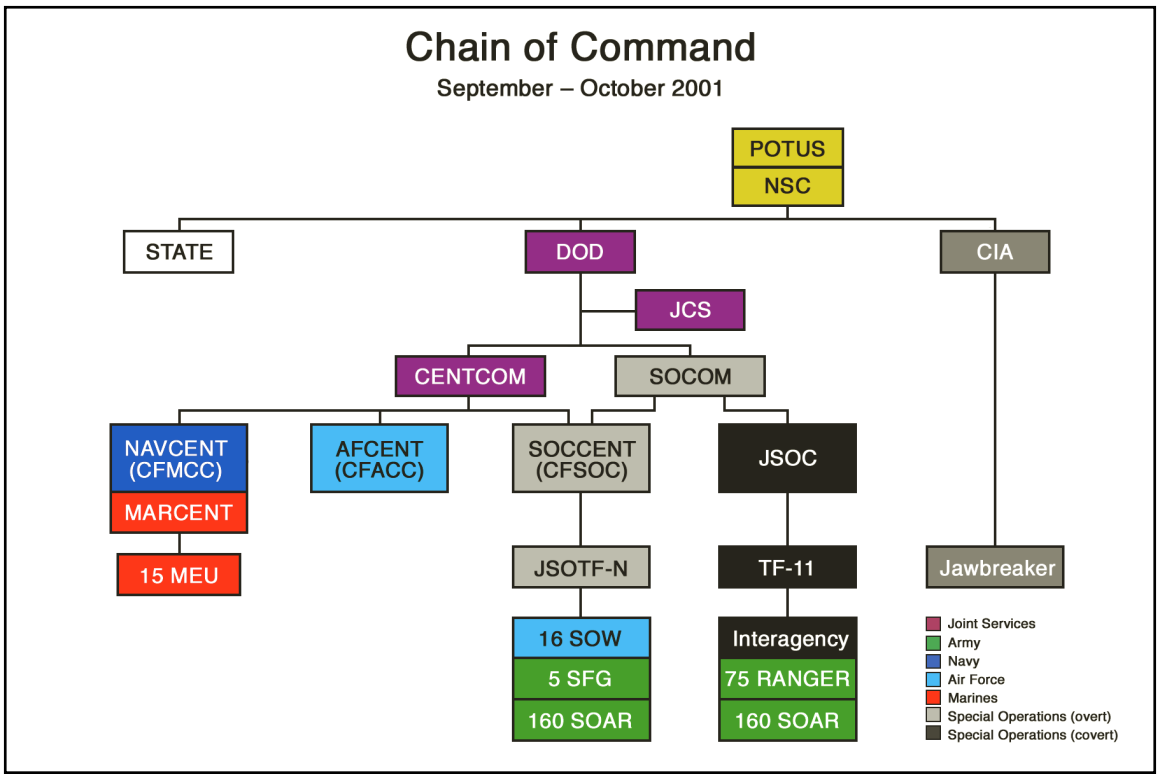


Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Diagram 4: *Command relationships between forces involved in Operation Enduring Freedom during September and October 2001.*

task involved battling surviving Taliban and al-Qaeda guerrilla units through a combined counterinsurgency and civil affairs campaign.[46]

General Franks headed to Washington, DC, with his operations officer on 20 September, ready to present Central Command's concept plan to President Bush and the National Security Council. General Shelton informed him that the Joint Chiefs had requested the customary prebriefing and asked that Secretary Rumsfeld attend as well.[47] As the senior representatives of the Services who would provide the actual forces for operations in Afghanistan, the chiefs held a dual responsibility to provide objective feedback on the war plans and to look out for their organizations' own best interests.[48]

The meeting quickly turned confrontational. The chiefs apparently agreed that the unconventional plan was risky; there were too few ground troops and insufficient air support on one hand, and too much confidence placed in the abilities of the Northern Alliance on the other.[49] The remedies, according to General Franks and his deputy, varied according to Service advocate. The Air Force wanted to be the focus of the air campaign, rather than the Navy, while the Navy wanted additional aircraft carriers. The Army wanted more ground troops but noted the difficulty of sustaining them, while the Marine Corps wanted to attack from the sea.[50] After arguing for some time, one of the chiefs remarked, "What you're proposing is completely unprecedented" and "we don't think it will work." To which General Franks responded that it was his plan, that he was responsible for its execution, and on this note he exited the room.[51]

Although General Franks believed Secretary Rumsfeld had been satisfied with the brief, the secretary had his own concerns with the plan. During a meeting with Douglas Feith later that afternoon, he admitted that Franks's proposal

disappointed him. While complimenting Central Command's efforts, ingenuity, and boldness and acknowledging that time, scope, and intelligence limitations made it difficult to develop an initial course of action that would meet the president's desire for a sustained global effort, he cautioned that focusing on limited objectives in Afghanistan could produce mundane results that might actually inspire confidence among the terrorists. They might achieve a more spectacular demonstration, he speculated, by teaming up with the Northern Alliance* in their battle against the Taliban.[52]

While the offending critics of Franks's Pentagon brief remain anonymous and, according to General DeLong, the Marine Corps was "basically supportive," it is interesting to note that the following morning General James Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and Admiral Vernon E. Clark, Chief of Naval Operations, met privately with General Franks.[53] They assured him of their support and explained that the previous day's comments were meant to be constructive. He replied that he wanted advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff rather than individual Service chiefs and pointed out that each Service already had its own three-star component commander to represent its interests at Central Command. To emphasize his point, he concluded by stating, "Yesterday in the tank, you guys came across like a mob… not like the Joint Chiefs of Staff."[54] After the exchange, Franks apparently met with Secretary Rumsfeld and advised, "We should not allow narrow-minded four-stars to advance their share of the budget at the expense of the mission."[55]

This was not how General Jones remembered the meeting. While noting that "Tom Franks' performances gave us some humorous moments for which we were grateful," he said that the commander's recollections were "flawed, self-serving, and inaccurate."[56] He explained that Franks "did not tolerate being questioned by the Joint Chiefs, whose responsibility… is to critically examine plans involving the use of the nation's combat forces. His complaints of turf battles and parochialism are both inaccurate and absurd."[57] Jones continued, "Despite the absurdity of [Franks's] behavior toward us, the Joint Chiefs never lost sight of their role of providing military advice even as he was doing everything possible to emasculate their influence."[58] At this critical time in the mission, the Commandant also offered Franks the use of two Marine expeditionary units to help in the campaign in Afghanistan, which he reportedly accepted with expressed appreciation.[59] Four days after the Pentagon briefing, General Jones and Admiral Clark forwarded a memorandum to Secretary Rumsfeld describing their ability to provide "an integrated Navy-Marine Corps Maritime Strike Force" composed of a carrier battle group and an amphibious ready group.[60]

At the White House on the afternoon of 21 September, General Franks briefed President Bush; Vice President Cheney; Secretary Rumsfeld; Chairman Shelton; and his deputy, Air Force General Richard B. Myers. Franks outlined his four-phase concept plan, recommending the simultaneous execution of air, ground, and humanitarian operations for maximum effect. He also suggested that the operation be launched in about two weeks, explaining that although Pakistan had recently granted overflight permission and agreed to basing and staging activities necessary for operations in southern Afghanistan, the Department of State had not yet acquired staging rights in Uzbekistan. Army Major General Dell L. Dailey, head of Joint Special Operations Command, was also present to review special mission unit targets in Afghanistan.[61] After Dailey's brief, Rumsfeld noted that lots of lines were going to be crossed in the upcoming conflict and proposed "that operational control of the Central Intelligence Agency be given to the Defense Department."[62]

*According to these reports, it appears that a conceptual disconnect existed between Central Command and the Office of the Secretary of Defense on 20Sep01. While General Franks clearly recalls proposing a plan that involved the eventual overthrow of the Taliban regime, Douglas Feith claims that the notion of a collaborative campaign in support of the Northern Alliance was suggested by Secretary Rumsfeld to broaden the scope of military operations in Afghanistan.



Photo courtesy of U.S.Army Special Operations Command History Office

The former Soviet airfield at Karshi Khanabad, Uzbekistan, known as K-2.The Joint Special Operations Task Force North was based at this airfield.

Colonel Fitzgerald described the nature of the developing operations plan at Central Command: "It took awhile to take the specific functional directorates, which are stovepiped… vertically, and drop them on a horizontal plane so that you can move strategies to plans, plans to orders, orders to execution and task products, and go though that 24/7."[63] "It wasn't… well written, well documented, describing every step. It evolved over time, based on a fairly broad intent and strategy, and then individual actions by key leaders on the ground, and then staffs react and respond to requirements as they evolve."[64] He elaborated on the spiral planning and execution process, necessitated by having to start from scratch and work under extraordinary time constraints:

> The first [step] was getting all the pieces in place for the U.S. part of it, which was very challenging. We had no basing in central Asia. We had no access that we had… tested and exercised…. So, the planners never knew what you could count on…. You went in with a wish list to sort of drive people to do things, but your whole plan was based on this wish list, and as the thing appeared and disappeared, then your plan would have to change…. It was just real hard… to continually turn and face the constant changes and readjust your plan, then get written products out to the components, who weren't [in theater]. NavCent [U.S. Naval Forces Central Command] [was] the only one that was really forward. ArCent [U.S. Army Forces Central Command] hadn't been officially established as the [Combined Forces Land Component Command]…. We went through multiple iterations of "What's the command and control for Afghanistan? What are the control measures as [the special operations forces go] in and out? Who owns the land? How do you balance freedom of action by air with the protection of U.S. forces on the ground? How do you know where the Northern Alliance is?" So, all these things… trying to put squishy stuff into a framework that you can articulate in an order so that people can go out and execute, it was very hard.[65]

As the plans section began to focus more on future than current operations, it developed three



Photo courtesy of U.S.Army Special Operations Command History Office

Air Force Col Frank J. Kisner, left, and Army Col John F. Mulholland. Col Kisner and elements of the 16th Special Operations Wing established the operating base at K-2 in Uzbekistan and controlled airfield operations, while Col Mulholland and the 5th Special Forces Group served as the Army special operations task force.

sequential options for the theater campaign plan. The first option was to focus on Afghanistan and then worry about the rest of the theater later. The second was to fight in Afghanistan and develop a theaterwide counterterrorism capability, and the third was to fight in Afghanistan; develop a theaterwide counterterrorism capability; and go after state sponsors of terrorism such as Sudan, Iran, and Iraq. After asking General Franks for guidance several times, the planners were finally told to focus on the second option. No sooner had the plan been signed around the end of November, however, than the planners' focus switched to the third option and they began to look at Iraq.[66]

Joint Special Operations Task Force North

From a doctrinal perspective, Central Command's special operations should establish a joint special operations task force headquarters during times of conflict to direct attached units contributed by the Army, Navy, and Air Force. However, with the component already leading the theaterwide counterterrorism effort, Rear Admiral Albert M. Calland III, USN, who was in charge of Central Command's Special Operations Command, decided that it made more sense to create several subordinate task forces to prosecute the war in different geographic regions. He subsequently established Joint Special Operations Task Force North (Task Force Dagger) to handle operations in Afghanistan occurring above the east-west highway running from Herat to Kabul. Although a parallel effort was tentatively envisioned for southern Afghanistan, Joint Special Operations Task Force South (Task Force K-Bar) was not formally established until December 2001.[67]

Joint Special Operations Task Force North would be based at the former Soviet airfield at Karshi Khanabad, Uzbekistan, known as K-2. Admiral Calland anticipated that although its primary mission was to recover aircrews downed

during the impending air campaign, it would become increasingly involved in ground, humanitarian, and unconventional warfare operations as the war progressed. This involvement in different arenas presented a confusing set of command relationships, if not a potential conflict of purpose. Without a clearly defined chain of command, it could become difficult to prioritize missions and allocate limited resources.

Air Force Colonel Frank J. Kisner and elements of the 16th Special Operations Wing would establish the operating base and control airfield operations, while Army Colonel John F. Mulholland and the 5th Special Forces Group (5th Group) would serve as the Army special operations task force, providing the unconventional warfare capability. In support, the U.S. Army's 2d Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, would serve as the joint special operations air component, providing the combat search and rescue capability. Lieutenant General Bryan D. Brown, head of the U.S. Army's Special Operations Command, resolved the problem of command relationships by convincing Admiral Calland to put Colonel Mulholland in charge of the northern campaign, although this created subsequent staffing and logistical problems for the special forces group.[68]

While trained, equipped, and organized to fight in the desert as a subordinate task force, 5th Group was not designed for the unprecedented mission of managing base operations at Karshi Khanabad or coordinating special operations throughout northern Afghanistan. This problem was partially minimized by U.S. Joint Forces Command, which dispatched training teams to instruct the 5th Group staff in joint special operations task force operations and enhance their organic communications capabilities. Upon review of the situation, however, Army Colonel Michael L. Findlay, the special operations commander from Joint Forces Command, recommended that Admiral Calland relieve 5th Group's overburdened staff by assembling a separate task force headquarters. Yet the admiral chose to continue the original command arrangement. To help offset the deficit in experience, several personnel from Joint Special Operations Command joined 5th Group and assumed key staff positions, including intelligence, operations, logistics, and assistant communications officers and the chief of joint planning.[69] Once in theater, the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division and 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and the U.S. Air Force's 16th Special Operations Wing provided the task force headquarters with additional fire support and aviation planning expertise.[70]

Adjusting Expectations

On 25 September, General Franks warned that it might be necessary to postpone aviation operations in the north. None of the Central Asian republics had yet provided basing rights or agreed to allow Coalition forces to run combat search and rescue missions from within their borders, which was considered a prerequisite for bombing a narrow set of targets identified in that region. Conversely, although the United States had acquired permission to operate from bases in Pakistan or conceivably off carriers in the Arabian Sea, quality targets in the south were in short supply.[71]

On 26 September, the CIA's first paramilitary team, codenamed Jawbreaker, arrived by helicopter in northeastern Afghanistan. The 10-man northern Afghanistan liaison team was led by Gary Berntsen, a former station chief in Kabul and Islamabad who had most recently served as the deputy chief of the Near East and South Asia operations division.[72] The next day, Jawbreaker made contact with General Mohammad Qasim Fahim, who had assumed command of the Northern Alliance following Ahmed Shah Masood's assassination. Berntsen asked for Fahim's cooperation during the upcoming conflict. Fahim welcomed the Americans and their financial assistance, asking the question on everyone's mind, when would the operation begin?[73]

On the same day that Jawbreaker entered northern Afghanistan, the CIA's plan for a nationwide covert campaign began to unravel. At the daily National Security Council meeting, Director Tenet admitted that although his agency was working



Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Led by General Mohammad Qasim Fahim (after the assassination of Ahmed Shah Masood on 9 September 2001), the Northern Alliance was a loosely linked coalition of ethnic and religious groups, including Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Shiite Muslims, that opposed the mostly Pashtun Taliban.

with resistance leaders and developing targets in the north, it was still trying to mobilize anti-Taliban forces in the south.[74] Vice President Cheney, who had recently visited CIA headquarters, already realized that their southern contacts were weak at best and that there was no real sign of an indigenous resistance movement. He then suggested that the operational focus shift toward supporting the Northern Alliance campaign against the Taliban rather than dividing the southern Pashtun into opposing sides.[75]

President Bush had already revealed his growing restlessness by tentatively asking members of the war council if they would be ready to attack by 1 October. After receiving tentative affirmatives from several of his principal advisors, he reluctantly acknowledged that he might be amenable to running sequential, rather than simultaneous, air and ground campaigns in Afghanistan. Although they would not be as dramatic, the campaigns would still send the appropriate message to nations harboring terrorists.[76] The following day, as restlessness gave way to impatience, Dr. Rice explained the dilemma they faced: because the United States had not yet acquired host-nation basing rights, it could not yet deploy the agents who would gather the ground intelligence necessary to confirm the targets.[77] Ten days after intelligence gathering occurred, according to General Franks, the special forces teams would be ready to begin collecting information.[78] When the principals met by themselves that evening, Vice President Cheney remarked, "The president wants

to avoid putting any artificial constraints or timelines on our military action. Let's do it right. Let's not do something stupid for PR [public relations] purposes."[79]

White House expectations continued to undulate during the nine days between 28 September and 7 October, when the Coalition began its offensive operations against the Taliban. President Bush wanted to attack on 6 October, but even if Uzbekistan did finally acquiesce and provide operational access to its territories, the military would need 12 days to establish a forward operating base at Karshi Khanabad and position the USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63) off the Pakistani coast.[80] As General Franks had speculated, holes in the once grand strategy began to appear now that it was caught between the art and science of war.

When the principal advisors met on 30 September, General Myers, scheduled to succeed General Shelton as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the following day, discussed the "quarter loaf" alternative. Without a search and rescue capability in the north, the initial air campaign would be limited to southern Afghanistan, and there would be no special operations activity. At the same meeting, Secretary Powell summarized the tentative courses of action: phase I involved continued diplomatic efforts, phase II-A involved getting the CIA into Afghanistan, phase II-B involved limited military action, and phase III involved adjusting to targets of opportunity as the situation developed. On 2 October, Secretary Rumsfeld offered a partial solution, noting that search and rescue capabilities would not be necessary in the north if they limited initial air operations to missiles and strategic bombers.[81]

During the same period, however, political and logistical obstacles began to crumble when, on 28 September, Uzbekistan finally agreed to accept a small assessment team to consider the feasibility of running combat search and rescue missions from within its borders.[82] Over the next few days, this opening gradually broadened to include private and then public permission to run operations from the Central Asian state. Largely through Herculean efforts, Army and Air Force personnel shattered the previous time estimates and established an operational capability in time for D-Day on 7 October. As the operational estimates began to improve, so did the war cabinet's optimism. By 3 October, they had agreed that the goal was no longer to simply destroy al-Qaeda and promote a more compliant Taliban regime—it was now to eliminate the Taliban and help the Afghans establish a new democracy. Their remaining question was how involved the United States would become in the post-Taliban stabilization effort.[83]

Stronghold Freedom

On 29 September, an advance liaison team of 14 individuals arrived at Karshi Khanabad; their mission was "to assess the logistics and operational facilities of the base and to coordinate with local officials to build an infrastructure that would support approximately 3,500 people."[84] Within 24 hours, the team reported that the airstrip possessed limited ramp and taxiway parking space and would not be able to receive the large Lockheed C-5B Galaxy transports currently loaded and waiting at airports in Spain and Turkey. Moreover, because the airfield could only handle one or two of the smaller Boeing C-17 Globemaster III transports at a time, and it would take approximately sixty-seven C-17 flights to ferry in the necessary personnel, equipment, and helicopters to become mission capable, they estimated the buildup would now take from 5 to 12 days.[85]

A 50-person detachment from the Air Force's theater airlift control element arrived at Karshi Khanabad on 3 October, shortly after Uzbekistan privately agreed to allow the United States to operate from its base. It was not until a press conference in Tashkent on 5 October, however, that President Karimov publicly granted Secretary Rumsfeld permission to conduct humanitarian operations and rescue missions from within Uzbekistan's borders.[86] European airfields immediately began to push aircraft east, if only to clear their own runways. Personnel at



Photo by TSgt Scott Reed, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011109-F-4884R-010

A KC-130 Hercules aircrew from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 performs a rapid ground refueling of two Navy Sikorsky SH-60 Seahawk helicopters at Shahbaz Airbase in Jacobabad, Pakistan, on 9 November 2001.

K-2 were soon working around the clock and receiving twelve C-17s a day. Colonel Kisner and his staff arrived shortly before the first C-17 landed and quickly established the task force headquarters, and elements of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment began to arrive shortly thereafter. Within 48 hours, the soldiers had assembled four Boeing MH-47E Chinook and two Sikorsky MH-60L Black Hawk helicopters and were ready for the personnel recovery mission on 7 October.[87]

The first elements of 5th Group arrived in Uzbekistan on 7 October. As the advance echelon, Company B, 3d Battalion, was responsible for force protection at K-2 and for establishing an isolation facility for 11 U.S. Army Special Forces A-teams (Operational Detachments Alpha)* to prepare for their unconventional warfare mission inside Afghanistan. The group's headquarters and main body arrived on 10 October. The two Army and Air Force staffs quickly merged, with Colonel Mulholland assuming command and Colonel Kisner becoming his deputy. The task force became known as Task Force Dagger, and the camp was renamed Stronghold Freedom. Later, soldiers from 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, assumed responsibility for base security and built checkpoints, fighting positions, and an earthen barrier around the camp's perimeter.[88]

Combat Search and Rescue at Jacobabad, Pakistan

Before the onset of hostilities, NavCent forwarded the requirement for establishing a combat search and rescue force to retrieve downed pilots and aircrews in southern Afghanistan, adding that it must be protected and situated to respond to calls

*The U.S. Army Special Forces traditionally deploy in 12-man teams, each known as an Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) or A-team. The special forces company, known as an Operational Detachment Bravo (ODB), is composed of six A-teams plus a command element, while the special forces battalion, known as an Operational Detachment Charlie (ODC), is composed of three B-teams plus a command element. Three battalions comprise the special forces group.

for help. Another crisis action team formed on 2 October in response to this requirement. At first it considered basing the rescue personnel on board naval vessels off the southern coast of Pakistan, but the USS *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group (*Peleliu* ARG) possessed the only available landing platforms at the time and they were already being employed. After evaluating several inland locations, the team recommended establishing a forward operating base at Shahbaz Air Force Base.[89] Located along the western outskirts of Jacobabad, approximately 300 miles north of Karachi, Pakistan, and 300 miles southwest of Kandahar, Afghanistan, the secondary airfield possessed a single 10,000-foot runway with hardened aircraft shelters. Although designed to support jet fighter aircraft, the facilities were also available for commercial use.[90]

On 5 October, the *Peleliu* ARG delivered its confirmation brief and embarked pararescuemen and three Sikorsky MH-53J Pave Low III helicopters from the U.S. Air Force's 20th Special Operations Squadron.[91] Two days later, following a day of mission rehearsals, elements of Battalion Landing Team 1/1, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Bourne, landed at Shahbaz Airfield and linked up with Pakistani military forces. The initial assault force and its interim fast-attack vehicles were transported directly to the airfield in four Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James K. LaVine. The pilots departed from the amphibious force positioned near Karachi and covered a distance of more than 300 nautical miles. Follow-on forces were then shuttled to the port city of Pasni, Pakistan, in Boeing CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters, where they boarded KC-130 transport aircraft from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (VMGR-352) for the flight into Jacobabad.

Colonel Waldhauser, the expeditionary unit commander, recalled that the exercise was not without significant challenges:



Photo by Sgt Joesph R. Chenelly

LtCol Christopher M. Bourne, left, commander of Battalion Landing Team 1/1, discusses current operations with Col Thomas D. Waldhauser, commander of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, on 16 October 2001. The Marines provided security for Air Force combat search and rescue personnel operating from Shahbaz Airbase in Jacobabad, Pakistan, during the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom.

> We essentially had to take *Peleliu*, the LHA, and position the ship as close to the beach as possible near Karachi. Next, we had to strip off any excess weight from the CH-46s. Finally, we had to jam as much gas into the helos as we could. Then we would put a handful of troops into the back so the aircraft could make the flight. By the time the helos arrived in Jacobabad, they were pretty low on gas. This is an example of how we had to figure out ways to make all of this work.[92]

Lieutenant Colonel Olson, the expeditionary unit's operations officer, further elaborated on the exercise:

> While it certainly wasn't an amphibious assault, it had many characteristics of it. We wanted a rapid combat [capability]. We wanted to make sure we brought enough sustainment with us to



Photo by TSgt Scott Reed, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011022-f-4884r-004

Members of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit arrive at Shahbaz Airbase via a CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter on 22 October 2001. The Marines provided perimeter security for Air Force combat search and rescue personnel operating from the airbase during the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom.

> keep it going, where the ship's going to have to go away from the coast or for some reason the weather turned bad and we were unable to sustain the Marines ashore. So, while it was not [a defended beach]… we still had to worry about all kinds of things you have to worry about during an amphibious assault. We inserted folks over the course of a couple days, built up combat power rapidly, and then immediately followed up with the combat search and rescue [CSAR] force. By the end of the first day, the CSAR forces were able to conduct combat search and rescue from the Jacobabad airfield into Afghanistan.[93]

Conditions at the air base were austere at best. While living in fighting holes and dealing with an ambiguous threat, the 90-degree temperatures, high humidity, blowing dust, bacteria-ridden water, open sewage, and ever-present smoke from local rubbish fires all conspired to facilitate the rise in upper respiratory and gastrointestinal infections among the Marines and sailors.[94] If that were not rough enough, the airfield was surrounded by former rice fields with poor drainage, an ideal environment for breeding encephalitis-carrying mosquitoes.[95] Basic resources were also in short supply, requiring that the KC-130 aircrews fly two seven-hour shuttle runs between Bahrain and Jacobabad each night to ensure that the security forces had enough food, water, and fuel.[96]

The situation improved with time. Prepackaged meals-ready-to-eat were brought ashore and stockpiled for the troops' use. If not made palatable, the contaminated water was at least made potable by running it through a lightweight, mobile, tactical water purification system. Basing several of the KC-130s in Jacobabad and tapping into local Pakistani fuel reserves lessened some logistical obstacles.[97] As the antiaircraft threat waned and the Air Force intensified its airfield operations at Shahbaz, including the arrival of civil engineers and support personnel in late October, the base's infrastructure began to develop exponentially.[98] Four months later, a combat artist visiting Marines at Jacobabad noted that "virtually all interviewees have been favorably impressed by the creature comforts provided by the Air Force in the form of showers, air conditioned tents, and chow."[99]

Although initially directed to provide security at Jacobabad for three to five days, the battalion ended up remaining ashore for 43 days before soldiers from the Army's 101st Airborne Division relieved them.[100] During their stay, the three rifle companies; artillery battery; and smaller communications, intelligence, and logistics detachments were periodically rotated at one to three week intervals. Captain Eric A. Putman's Company A, part of the initial assault force, was replaced by Captain Richard W. Whitmer's Company B, which in turn was replaced by Captain James P. Fallon's Company C.[101] Colonel Olson noted that these early experiences helped ready the Marines for future operations:

> We kind of had to set the conditions for success at Jacobabad. And in doing that, learning how to stage things in preparation for the next day, learning how to move over long distances. And bringing in bulk fuel and such helped set us up for success in Afghanistan later on.[102]

While the battalion focused on security around the airfield, Pakistani forces maintained a second perimeter about five miles out, nearer to the local villages.[103] The squadron provided medical evacuation and logistical support, while air controllers from Marine Aviation Control Group 38 (MACG-38) conducted around-the-clock operations in both Jacobabad and Pasni.[104] In addition to its airfield security mission, 15th MEU was also prepared to provide a quick reaction force or execute the tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel when required.[105] VMGR-352 eventually began to maintain a two-plane presence at Jacobabad, cycling crews and aircraft through Bahrain in order to support this latter requirement.[106]



Chapter 3
Striking Back

Late in the morning on 7 October, General Franks addressed senior military and government officials via video teleconference from his headquarters in Tampa, Florida. He began by summarizing the situation:

> We have a force of 40,000 men and women involved in this operation. There are 393 aircraft and 32 ships. A total of 31 nations are involved. You have received the rules of engagement. Command and control is in place. I have the Execute Order from the Secretary [of Defense].[1]

After confirming the readiness of his air and maritime components, as well as that of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Joint Special Operations Command, he concluded, "All right. I'm satisfied. Kinetics begin at 1230 hours East Coast time, 1630 Zulu, 2100 hours Afghanistan time…. My final point is this: Use adult common sense. This is the beginning of tomorrow's history. I want you to focus on two things: accomplish the mission and protect the force."[2]

Air Operations

America retaliated against al-Qaeda at 2100, striking military installations near five major population centers in northern, western, and southern Afghanistan. While the administration intended to achieve several material goals through its air campaign, Lieutenant General Newbold later commented that there was one significant strategic purpose: to inform America's enemies that "there is a dear price to be paid for actions like 9/11 that strike at the United States."[3]

The initial attack against 31 preplanned targets involved 17 of the U.S. Air Force's strategic bombers, 25 of the U.S. Navy's tactical fighters, and 50 Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from American and British vessels in the Arabian Sea. As described by Air Force Lieutenant General Charles F. Wald, Combined Force Air Component commander, the main goals of the operation were to establish uncontested control over Afghan airspace by neutralizing Taliban air defenses, disrupt or destroy terrorist activities, and shape the battlefield for future military actions.[4]

Within minutes of the attack, two Air Force C-17 transport aircraft dropped 34,000 packages of food and medical supplies to the Afghan people. Propaganda leaflets, transistor radios, and broadcasts explaining America's intent to the general population soon followed.[5] During an address to the nation at 1300, President Bush reiterated America's position on terrorism and outlined his reasons for attacking the Taliban and al-Qaeda:

> Good afternoon. On my orders, the United States military has begun strikes against al-Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.
>
> More than two weeks ago, I gave Taliban leaders a series of clear and specific demands: close terrorist training camps, hand over leaders of the al-Qaeda network, and return all foreign nationals, including American citizens, unjustly detained in your country. None of these demands were met. And now the Taliban will pay a price.
>
> At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we'll also drop food, medicine, and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan.
>
> The United States of America is a friend to the Afghan people, and we are the friends of almost a billion worldwide who practice the Islamic

> faith. The United States of America is an enemy of those who aid terrorists and of the barbaric criminals who profane a great religion by committing murder in its name.
>
> Today we focus on Afghanistan, but the battle is broader. Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murderers themselves. And they will take that lonely path at their own peril.[6]

During the first week and a half of the war, the bombing campaign grew in depth, breadth, and intensity. Approximately 85 percent of the targets hit on the first day were damaged or destroyed, contributing to the defection of 35–40 commanders and 1,200 soldiers from Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan the following day.[7] The Coalition achieved air supremacy by the third day of the operation, enabling pilots to fly sorties during daylight hours, and targets now included installations in and around the capital city of Kabul.[8] By the fifth day, pilots conducted their first attacks against mountain cave complexes harboring terrorist personnel and equipment.[9] By the ninth day, two Lockheed AC-130 Specter gunships joined the fight, engaging targets near the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar.[10] On day 10,* coordinated attacks involving 5 Tomahawk missiles, 10 Air Force bombers, and 90 Navy fighters from the USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65), USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70), and USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63) were conducted against 12 target complexes near Kandahar and Kabul.[11] A similar effort involving 85 aircraft, including Navy fighters from the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71), was launched the following day.[12] Encouraged by the growing intensity of the air campaign, Lieutenant General Newbold,** director of operations on the Joint Staff, observed optimistically that opposing forces near Herat had been "eviscerated."[13]

In other regards, the effectiveness of the initial air campaign had been disappointing. In a defensive move that may have been initiated prior to 11 September, al-Qaeda had abandoned most of its training camps, dispersing critical resources to safer locations in anticipation of American retaliation.[14] Some of the Taliban facilities and equipment hit during the first two days of the operation remained active and had to be reengaged several times before they were neutralized.[15] Central Command's director of intelligence, who insisted on stringent requirements for reporting battle damage assessments, may have hindered progress in this regard, and "it was not until October 25 that Pentagon officials finally declared that the campaign had effectively taken out the Taliban's air defenses and severed most of their communications."[16] As the initial target list was gradually cleared, a subsequent shortage of approved objectives emerged, which led to loitering attack aircraft and the occasional cancellation of scheduled fighter missions.[17]



Official Marine Corps photo
Ordnancemen on board the USS* Theodore Roosevelt *(CVN 71) arm a F/A-18 Hornet from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 with an AIM-120 advanced medium range air-to-air missile.

* The chronology and composition of the maximum effort air raids remain unclear. In *Air Power Against Terror*, aviation historian Benjamin Lambeth identifies the first 100-plane effort on both 15 and 16 October and indicates that Navy and Marine aircraft from all four carriers were involved. Yet in *Naval Aviation News*, historians William T. Baker and Mark L. Evans state that the *Theodore Roosevelt* did not participate until the 17th and that the Marines were not involved until the 18th. LtCol Raymond C. Damm Jr., commanding officer of VMFA-251, recalled leading the first Marine mission from the *Theodore Roosevelt* on 17 October.

**LtGen Newbold later recalled that intelligence reports at the time indicated that the unit in question had been reduced to 20 percent of its initial strength. (Newbold comments)



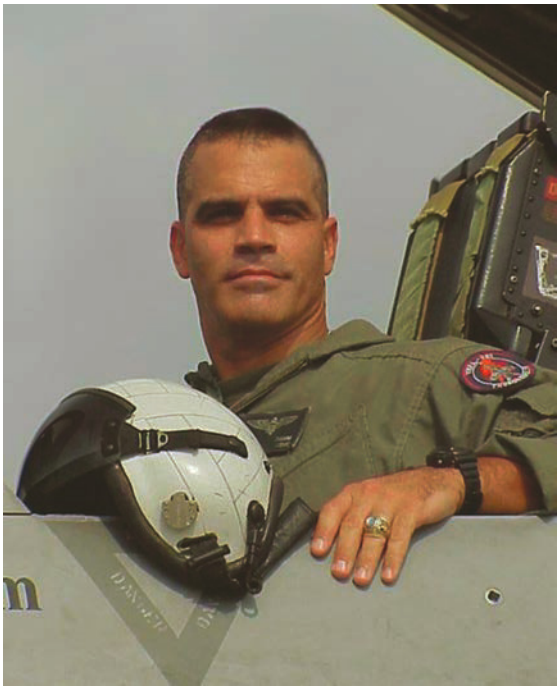
Photo by SSgt Michael D. Gaddis, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011107-f-5795g-017

Two F/A-18 Hornets from Navy Fighter Attack Squadron 97 patrol the skies over Afghanistan on 7 November 2001. Both carry external fuel tanks and are armed with Paveway II laser guided bombs and Sidewinder missiles.

While commenting on the progress of the first week of the war, one U.S. Air Force general remarked pessimistically that the air campaign was trapped at the tactical level, attacking targets as an end in itself.[18] Indeed, on 11 October a CIA operations specialist informed President Bush's war council that the bombing was not dividing the moderate Pashtun from the hard-core Taliban as planned, and the next day the intelligence agency's special operations chief reported that approximately 100 Taliban recruits were crossing the Pakistani border into Afghanistan each day.[19]

If the Taliban forces were unimpressed by the repeated bombing of static targets, perhaps even growing to believe they could withstand Coalition air power, the Northern Alliance was becoming equally disappointed.[20] General Fahim asserted that he could take Kunduz and Kabul if the United States would only break the Taliban frontlines, but this request essentially went unheeded. Although Jawbreaker could provide limited on-scene guidance, it was using Russian maps and lacked night-vision equipment, direct communications to the tactical aircraft, and laser target designators.[21] On the other hand, withholding close air support also provided American leaders with a means of checking the Northern Alliance's advance until the Coalition had aligned its political and military strategies.[22]

The air campaign transitioned to a more aggressive phase of operations around 17 October, following the gradual degradation of the Taliban's air defenses. Target lists expanded, engagement zones were established, and emphasis shifted from bombing preplanned static targets, such as military installations, to attacking targets of opportunity, such as troop concentrations and vehicles. In this phase, airborne forward air controllers would first validate identified targets and then direct loitering tactical aircraft to attack opposing forces in particular engagement zones. Once the U.S. Army Special Forces teams inserted, ground-based combat controllers from the U.S. Air Force would be able to guide the fighters' bombs onto the targets with laser designators.[23] Coincidental to the shift in tactics, Air Force fighters from the 366th Wing arrived in Kuwait and were now able to fill a four-hour gap in the daily coverage provided by the *Enterprise* (daytime) and *Carl Vinson* (nighttime).[24]



Official Marine Corps photo

LtCol Raymond C. Damm Jr., commander of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251. During the opening months of Operation Enduring Freedom, his "Thunderbolts" served with Carrier Air Wing 1 on board the USS Theodore Roosevelt.

On 18 October, two pilots flying McDonnell-Douglas F/A-18C Hornets from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 (VMFA-251) conducted the Marine Corps' first strike missions of the war. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Raymond C. Damm Jr., the "Thunderbolts" hailed from Beaufort, South Carolina, but were currently serving with Carrier Air Wing 1 on board the *Theodore Roosevelt*, which had arrived to relieve the *Enterprise*.[25] Before heading home on 3 March 2002, they would fly 682 combat sorties and drop 486 bombs in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (Table 2).[26]

Less than a month later, on 12 November, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314) joined the Thunderbolts. Lieutenant Colonel James L. Stalnaker commanded the "Black Knights," based out of Miramar, California, who also flew F/A-18Cs. While in theater, they served with Carrier Air Wing 9 on board the USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN 74), which relieved the *Carl Vinson*.[27] By the time they headed home in April 2002, they had flown 483 combat sorties and dropped 69,000 pounds of ordnance on Taliban and al-Qaeda positions (Table 3).[28]

Refining the Operational Strategy

As the first phase of the air war raged over Afghanistan, President Bush and the members of the National Security Council continued to develop their strategy for toppling the Taliban regime and seizing control of northern and eastern Afghanistan.[29] Historian Benjamin Lambeth notes that

> the decision-making process for Enduring Freedom was very much the opposite of that of

Table 2: VMFA-251 Sorties Flown and Ordnance Delivered in Support of Operation Enduring Freedom

Month	*Sorties Flown Combat/Total*	*GBU-31(v2) Dropped*	*GBU-31(v4) Dropped*	*GBU-16 Dropped*	*GBU-12 Dropped*	*AGM-65 Dropped*	*Mk83 Dropped*	*Total Delivered*
OCT	96/389	13	8	20	63	14		118
NOV	207/320	38	–	8	142	–	29	217
DEC	179/344	17	–	–	98	2	18	135
JAN	128/365	4	–	–	–	–	–	4
FEB	62/292	2	–	–	–	–	–	2
MAR	10/**	–	–	–	10	–	–	10
Total	**682/1,710**	**74**	**8**	**28**	**313**	**16**	**47**	**486**



Official Marine Corps photo
LtCol James L. Stalnaker, commander of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314. During the opening months of Operation Enduring Freedom, his "Black Knights" served with Carrier Air Wing 9 on board the USS John C. Stennis *(CVN 76).*

> the Gulf War, in which General Norman Schwarzkopf led from his forward headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, issuing broad guidance to his component commanders and expecting them to develop and execute specific operational-level plans. Instead, decision making for Afghanistan was closer in character to Operation Allied Force [in Yugoslavia], in which top civilians and the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] chairman in Washington kept General Wesley Clark on a short leash.[30]

Although the war council's discussions sometimes seemed to go in circles, the general consensus among the principal advisors (particularly Secretary of State Colin Powell) was that the focus of main effort should be on seizing Mazar-e Sharif and securing the 40-mile overland supply route into southern Uzbekistan. At the same time, the CIA proposed that collateral operations to capture Taloqan and Baghlan might succeed in trapping the Taliban in the northern portion of the country. Yet time was running out—an intelligence estimate suggested that once unleashed, the Northern Alliance would only be able to conduct offensive operations in the mountains into early November before adverse winter weather conditions halted its advance, although it could continue to operate into early December on the Shamali Plains. In Bush's opinion, this was another reason to prioritize northern operations.[31]

A secondary objective, largely championed by Director Tenet and the CIA, was to strike south and seize Kabul. However, although the Northern Alliance wanted to liberate the capital city, an Uzbek- and Tajik-dominated government would not sit well

Table 3: VMFA-314 Sorties Flown and Ordnance Delivered in Support of Operation Enduring Freedom

Month	*Sorties Flown Combat/Total*	*GBU-12 Dropped*	*GBU-31 Dropped*	*BLU-111 Dropped*	*Mk82 Dropped*	*AGM-65 Dropped*	*AIM-7 Dropped*	*Total Delivered*
DEC	**/**	5	–	–	5	–	–	10
JAN	286/351	6	5	–	–	–	–	11
FEB	85/326	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
MAR	112/265	2	19	14	30	–	–	65
APR	**/258	1	–	–	–	1	1	3
Total	**483/1,200**	**14**	**24**	**14**	**35**	**1**	**1**	**89**

with either the southern Pashtun population or Pakistan. At the National Security Council meeting on 15 October, President Bush proposed that they halt the Northern Alliance's advance outside the city but allow the resistance fighters limited access to pursue their own agenda. John E. McLaughlin, Tenet's deputy, added that they could incorporate Pashtuns into the force and arrange for control of the capital. President Bush, however, had already reiterated that he did not want the United States to become mired in nation building and peacekeeping activities once the Taliban had been defeated. The tentative solution, proposed earlier by Secretary Powell but also endorsed by Vice President Cheney and President Bush, was to turn Kabul over to Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations special representative for Afghanistan, and hand over responsibility for administering the new government to the international community.[32]

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and the others also acknowledged the need for a southern operations strategy and a plan for dealing with the Taliban stronghold at Kandahar.[33] This third piece of the ground campaign remained more difficult to address than the other two. Although there was still no southern corollary to the Northern Alliance, intelligence officers were now in contact with Hamid Karzai, a minor Pashtun leader who had returned to Afghanistan from the United States on 8 October and surfaced near the rural village of Tarin Kowt, situated some 50 miles north of Kandahar.[34] The CIA also proposed building an airfield and establishing a forward operating base in southern Afghanistan. In response, on 16 October, Secretary Rumsfeld remarked that he had "a candidate in Helmand Province" and would "ask Franks to look at it."[35] He may have been referring in this case either to the provincial capital at Lashkar Gah, which was located on the main highway 78 miles west of Kandahar and which possessed an operable gravel-surfaced public runway, or to a more remote desert airstrip farther to the southwest.

After several days of brainstorming, President Bush apparently realized that the war council was getting ahead of itself. During the National Security Council meeting on 15 October, he announced that "there's been too much discussion of postconflict Afghanistan…. A rush to conclusion on Afghanistan after just one week is too premature."[36] Indeed, the growing tension was palpable among members of the war council as they sought solutions to obstacles encountered during current operations while simultaneously charting a strategy for the future. The mounting frustration culminated during the following day's meeting when Secretary Rumsfeld complained that the Department of Defense had been relegated to executing the CIA's strategy and following its operatives into Afghanistan. McLaughlin, deputy director of the agency, maintained that General Franks was in charge and the CIA was merely supporting Central Command, while Richard L. Armitage, deputy secretary of state, interjected that he did not know who was in charge, but the situation was "FUBAR" (fouled up beyond all recognition).[37]

After the meeting, Dr. Rice separately advised President Bush to become more of a coach than a quarterback and counseled Secretary Rumsfeld to take charge of the military operations. Several days later, Rice's deputy, Stephen J. Hadley, reiterated her warning to Rumsfeld, explaining that "somebody needs to pick this up and design a strategy" and "it's yours for the taking."[38] Secretary Powell also offered his views around this time concerning the secretary of defense's responsibilities. In response to such high-level criticism, Rumsfeld directed Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith to outline an overall strategy for Afghanistan and pressured personnel throughout the chain to initiate ground operations in Afghanistan.[39]

By this time in the campaign, Secretary Rumsfeld and Generals Myers and Franks had begun to conduct twice-daily video teleconferences. According to Benjamin Lambeth, "Franks would present his ideas and indicate his assessment of the campaign's progress and what he needed, and Rumsfeld and Myers would then provide overall direction and guidance."[40] General Franks reflected, "Throughout those early days, the slow pace of our operations was a constant source of frustration."[41] During the period

between 7 and 18 October, which his staff referred to as the "Ten Days from Hell," Secretary Rumsfeld would begin each conversation concerning the special operations forces by asking, "When is something going to happen, general?"[42] Although Franks denied that Rumsfeld had ever been personally abusive, he did acknowledge that the "genetically impatient" secretary was anything but "user-friendly" and noted his tendency toward "relentless" questions.[43]

Deference toward authority defined the relationship between General Franks and Secretary Rumsfeld.[44] In one instance, Franks told the president, "Sir, I think exactly what my secretary thinks, what he's ever thought, what he will ever think, or whatever he thought he might think."[45] Yet "Franks and his staff found ways to circumvent Rumsfeld's rigid control," and he was not afraid to speak his mind when riled.[46] On 15 October, after learning of an unsuccessful attempt to infiltrate a special operations team into northern Afghanistan, Rumsfeld had remarked, "General Franks, this isn't working. I want you to build options that will work."[47] When Franks called Rumsfeld back that evening, advising him to select another commander if he had lost confidence in the general's ability to lead, the secretary replied, "You have my complete confidence. This operation will succeed."[48]

Initial Ground Operations

Enabling a Surrogate Army

On 12 October, 2d Battalion, 120th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, the aviation component for Joint Special Operations Task Force North, began planning for air insertions into northern Afghanistan.[49] Unfortunately, its first attempt to ferry in a Special Forces A-team on the 14th had to be aborted after encountering extreme weather conditions and opposing ground fire, the former compelling one aircraft to conduct an emergency landing onto snow-covered slopes.[50] A second attempt the following day was similarly aborted due to adverse weather and hostile fire, while a plan to insert another CIA liaison team was postponed due to diplomatic considerations.[51] On the third try, launched on the moonless night of 16 October, the agency's eight-man team finally reached Northern Alliance forces, located approximately 50 miles south of Mazar-e Sharif, and linked up with General Dostam's militia the next morning.[52]



Official Department of Defense photo.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011112-d-0000x-001
Advisors from the U.S. Army Special Forces and Task Force Dagger ride horseback alongside Northern Alliance cavalry while battling al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan on 12 November 2001.

Following yet another aborted insertion on the 17th, the first two A-teams successfully infiltrated into northern Afghanistan on the evening of 19–20 October. Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 555, led by Chief Warrant Officer David W. Diaz, joined General Shariff in the Panjshir Valley, while ODA 595, led by Captain Mark D. Nutch, joined General Dostam in the Darya-ye Suf Valley. Within days, the teams, sometimes split into smaller groups to extend their coverage among the Northern Alliance forces, had reached the frontlines and begun to direct lethal aerial attacks against Taliban defensive positions. During the next three weeks, Task Force Dagger gradually fed additional A-teams into Afghanistan as it identified allied resistance groups who could benefit from the special forces' technical and tactical expertise (Table 4).[53]

The need to balance the allocation of resources among competing warlords complicated the buildup of special forces in Afghanistan. This reality and a brief conversation in which Secretary Rumsfeld

Table 4: Special Forces Units Inserted into Afghanistan to Assist Indigenous Militias[54]

Detachment	*Date*	*Location*	*Northern Alliance Leader*
ODA 555	19 Oct	Panjshir Valley	General Shariff
ODA 595	19 Oct	Darya-ye Suf Valley	General Dostam
ODA 585	23 Oct	Kunduz	General Burilla Kahn
ODA 553	2 Nov	Bamyan	General Karim Khalili
ODA 534	4 Nov	Darya and Balkh Valleys	General Atta Mohammad
ODA 586	8 Nov	Farkhar	General Daoud Khan
ODA 594	8 Nov	Panjshir Valley	General Shariff
ODA 554	11 Nov	Herat	General Ismail Khan
ODA 574	14 Nov	Tarin Kowt	Hamid Karzai
ODA 583	18 Nov	Shin Narai Valley	Gul Agha Sharzai

asked General Franks about the ability of junior special forces officers to liaise with senior Northern Alliance leaders may have contributed to Colonel Mulholland's decision to assign two eight-man battalion headquarters elements (C-teams) to help manage command and control issues among the principal faction leaders.[55] One team, led by Army Lieutenant Colonel Christopher K. Haas and comprising several staff members, deployed on 24 October to advise General Burillah Kahn during the Shamali Plains campaign.[56] Another team, led by a special forces battalion commander, deployed on 2 November to help General Dostam coordinate the advance on Mazar-e Sharif.[57]

A Show of Force

On the same night that Task Force Dagger infiltrated northern Afghanistan, other special operating forces conducted a complex direct action mission against several al-Qaeda and Taliban targets in southern Afghanistan. The members of Task Force Sword were part of a composite organization composed of special mission units from U.S. Joint Special Operations Command and attached special operation forces from the United Kingdom.[58] While coordinating the interagency effort in Afghanistan to include organizations like the CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, Special Operations Task Force Delta, and Navy Special Warfare, Task Force Sword would concentrate on gathering intelligence and eliminating individual terrorist threats.

Although each objective was operationally significant, compelling al-Qaeda and the Taliban to retain combat forces in the south, the strategic purpose of the raids was to demonstrate that America could project its military power at will and emphasize that there were no safe havens for terrorists in Afghanistan.[59] With the nation anxiously awaiting the commitment of ground forces in retaliation for the terrorist attacks, this message was as meaningful for American's citizens as it was for its enemies. The domestic importance of such information had been anticipated a month earlier, and General Myers was now provided with video clips of the operation that he presented during a press briefing the following afternoon.[60]

The first phase of Task Force Sword's raid operation was to seize a dirt landing strip (codenamed Objective Rhino) in the remote south-central desert and then establish a temporary forward arming and refueling point for a follow-on raid force that would pass through Rhino on its way to the primary target in Kandahar.[61] Initially established as a United Arab Emirates hunting camp, Objective Rhino possessed several primitive outbuildings, and a walled compound containing reinforced concrete structures and guard towers was located at the southern end of the 6,400-foot-long runway. National intelligence agencies had monitored the facility since the late 1990s, when Osama bin Laden was reported to have resided nearby.[62]

The insertion of a small U.S. Army pathfinder team, who provided reconnaissance of Objective Rhino and confirmed that the airfield was clear of Taliban forces, initiated the operation.[63] This was followed by preassault fires delivered by U.S. Air Force pilots flying Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit stealth bombers and AC-130 gunships.[64] Then, around 2315 local time, approximately 200 soldiers from the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment (Task Force 3/75), conducted a night parachute jump from four Lockheed MC-130 Hercules transports from the U.S. Air Force 16th Special Operations Wing.[65]

As Ranger Company A secured the airfield perimeter and established a blocking position to repel a potential counterattack, Ranger Company C cleared the walled compound and buildings. The first support aircraft landed 14 minutes into the operation, and 6 minutes later, the transient raid force's helicopters began to arrive. Although the rangers sustained only two injuries during the parachute drop, 11 enemy soldiers were reportedly killed by preparatory fires, and another was shot during the ground assault while orbiting gunships engaged several vehicles and foot mobile reinforcements as the operation progressed. Having accomplished its mission, Task Force 3/75 boarded MC-130 transports and withdrew from Objective Rhino after a little over five hours on the ground.[66]

A month later, Marines and sailors from Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58 would reoccupy Objective Rhino. Although the expeditionary task force had not yet been formally established when the rangers seized the desert airfield, both General Franks and his deputy later recalled that the two raids were operationally linked. In the first account, Franks wrote that "the goal of the rangers would be to secure the field as a lodgment for U.S. Marines, our first conventional forces in Afghanistan."[67] In the second, Lieutenant General DeLong wrote that the rangers had built the runway and enabled the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) to fly in from carriers off the Pakistani coast.[68] When questioned after the fact, however, neither Lieutenant General Newbold, director of operations for the Joint Staff, nor Colonel Fitzgerald, chief of plans at Central Command, were aware that such a relationship existed.[69]

While Ranger Companies A and C were assaulting Objective Rhino, rangers from Company B were conducting parachute and helicopter insertions into another remote airfield in Dalbandin, Pakistan. Their mission was to establish a support site (codenamed Objective Honda) for contingency operations related to Rhino. One MH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, disoriented by adverse flying conditions encountered while landing, hit hard, lost a wheel, and rolled onto its side. Tragically, Specialist John J. Edmunds, USA, and Private First Class Kristofor T. Stonesifer, USA, died in the accident and three others were injured.[70]

After refueling at Rhino, the primary raid force continued on to Objective Gecko, a residential compound belonging to Mullah Mohammed Omar, on the outskirts of Kandahar.[71] The complex included a brick house used by the reclusive Taliban leader and several thatched huts for a small security force.[72] The purpose of the raid was to capture key personnel, gather intelligence, and disrupt the Taliban's command and control systems.[73] Following preparatory fires delivered by Specter gunships and Black Hawk helicopters, 91 special operations personnel disembarked from four Chinook helicopters with their assault vehicles.[74]

Establishing security positions, the special operations forces stormed the compound and began clearing buildings. As the raiders exited the buildings, they came under intense Taliban small arms and either rocket-propelled grenade or mortar fire. While several smaller groups remained behind to cover their withdrawal and Black Hawk helicopters provided close air support, the main assault force worked its way back to the waiting Chinook helicopters. Approximately an hour after initiating the assault, the final ground elements departed Kandahar.[75]

Although the mission was a strategic success as a show of force, and, according to one account, may have left as many as 30 Taliban dead in its wake, Mullah Omar was not present, and subsequent media reports about the quality of the intelligence gathered during the operation varied.[76] Furthermore, 12 soldiers had apparently been wounded during the ensuing firefight, and one aircraft had smashed its undercarriage while pulling away from the compound during extraction; the Taliban would later display part of the damaged landing gear as a trophy.[77]

Problems encountered during the Kandahar raid reportedly led to controversy among some of the special operations forces who resented being subordinate to General Franks and Central Command and complained that the large-scale operation had been too deliberate and provided the Taliban with an opportunity to react.[78] These complaints subsequently "triggered a review of commando tactics and procedures at Central Command," while "British military authorities assigned to CentCom [U.S. Central Command] were urging the Pentagon to forgo its airborne operations inside Afghanistan and bring the war to the Taliban by establishing a large fire base in Afghanistan."[79]

Task Force Bald Eagle

During the week preceding Task Force Sword's raid, the 15th MEU had received an ambiguous warning order to be prepared to provide a quick reaction force or conduct the tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel in support of the special operating forces. At first the Marines did not know who was conducting the operation, much less when and where it would occur, and limited requests for their helicopters and aerial refueling capability made them feel like little more than a resource pool for piecemeal exploitation.[80] The situation became clearer after the 15th MEU's executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Spillers, and two captains from the air and ground combat elements traveled to Masirah Island, Oman, to personally liaise with Task Force Sword. After linking up with two Marine officers already assigned to the Joint Staff, they were able to open secure communications with the amphibious ready group and relay information necessary for planning how to best support the operation.

The liaison team learned that the Marines were needed to provide a tertiary quick reaction force to reinforce the rangers' primary and secondary reserves, should they both become committed during the raid on Mullah Omar's residence in Kandahar.[81] The crisis action team assembled on 15 October, and Lieutenant Colonel James R. Parrington, Battalion Landing Team 1/1's (BLT 1/1's) executive officer, informed Captain Richard W. Whitmer that Company B was being assigned the ground combat portion of the mission.[82] According to First Lieutenant Nathaniel C. Fick, who commanded the company's weapons platoon, their mission statement read as follows:

> On order, Task Force Bald Eagle launches from PEL in 4 x CH-53 to OBJ RHINO, links up with Task Force SWORD mobile reserve, and conducts relief in place. Defend RHINO with Bravo Company for up to twenty-four hours. O/o turn over OBJ RHINO to Task Force SWORD and withdraw to ARG shipping.[83]

On 18 October, the 15th MEU successfully delivered the confirmation brief for its portion of the operation to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NavCent).[84]

As the operation unfolded, the expeditionary unit commander, Colonel Waldhauser, and his



Photo by Spec Jerry T. Combes, USA. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 050622-a-0363c-019

A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter similar to the aircraft damaged during Task Force Sword's October 2001 raid on Kandahar and subsequently recovered from Pakistan by the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Olson, were allowed to monitor Task Force Sword's progress on a receive-only radio station that had been set to the mission commander's net. Although a U.S. Navy SEAL (Sea, Air, and Land) was on hand to help translate some of the more obscure communications, security requirements precluded anyone else's presence in the landing force operations center.* Nearby, 16 infantrymen from BLT 1/1 and 4 aircrews from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM-163) stood by on a 120-minute strip alert, ready to launch if necessary.[85] Some of the Marines anxiously monitored the mission's progress from the tactical logistics group's compartment, presumably on a different radio frequency, while others tried to get a few minutes rest.[86]

Colonel Olson described the vicarious experience of listening in on another unit's operation, which was invaluable as a source of situational awareness but gave rise to an uncomfortable sense of voyeurism:

> As we were following along with the mission, in real time, we heard the helicopter go down on the insert of the Dalbandin airfield in western Pakistan. A helicopter "browned out" and crashed, and two Army soldiers were killed. As important, a helicopter saying "USA" on the side was now down in western Pakistan. Pakistanis didn't want it there; we didn't want it there. We had shades of Desert One** with crashed helicopters…. When we heard the helicopter go down, Colonel Waldhauser and I looked at each other, and it's kind of significant we were the only two who were listening to the radio that night.[87]

NavCent contacted the *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group around 0300 that morning, asking if it could retrieve the special operations forces' downed

*The U.S. Navy Special Warfare Command is composed of four groups; each group possesses two 300-man SEAL teams. Depending upon operational requirements, the teams normally deploy as troops, platoons, squads, or fire teams.

**Desert One refers to the failed U.S. military rescue mission of Americans held hostage at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran.

Black Hawk helicopter. Although initially prepared to provide a quick reaction force, 15th MEU's mission had suddenly changed to the tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel. Its crisis action planning team convened 20 minutes later.[88] Working from generic contingency plans with predetermined refueling procedures, communication networks, and security strategies, they quickly devised a workable course of action and delivered their confirmation brief.[89] One significant change, requested by the special operations forces, was to leave the Marine security element behind. The reasons for this request were twofold: first, they were flying into a Pakistani airfield already occupied by rangers, and second, they wanted to use their own security personnel from the *Kitty Hawk*, which was currently serving as a floating forward operations base off the Pakistani coast.[90]

The recovery force, a section of two CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters commanded by Captain Jay M. Holtermann, launched from the USS *Peleliu* around 0500. As the sun began to appear over the horizon, they headed toward Dalbandin, 300 miles to the north. They stopped briefly at an intermediate staging base in Shamsi, Pakistan, (otherwise known as Forward Operating Base Impala) to pick up several Army aircraft mechanics to assist in dismantling the damaged Black Hawk and slinging it for an external extraction.

After taking on fuel from an airborne KC-130 Hercules tanker, they reached Dalbandin and recovered the helicopter hulk, most of its component parts, and the Army security forces without incident.[91] Corporal Jose M. Pazos, a landing support specialist explained, "The Black Hawk is a very heavy bird, and we needed to get it as light as possible for the long haul back. We gathered up all the debris from the accident and packed it into the other birds with the panels and things being pulled off. Everyone was moving fast. There wasn't any sense of fear, just a strong sense of purpose."[92]

In order to lift the 10-ton Black Hawk, the Marine helicopters had to jettison some of the fuel needed for the flight to the Pakistani coast. While this could normally have been replaced through in-flight refueling as the mission progressed, the heavily laden recovery aircraft were unable to maintain the airspeed necessary to receive fuel from another aircraft. The solution was to stop at a hastily established forward arming and refueling point at an auxiliary airfield in Panjgur, Pakistan, where they would take on fuel from another section of the expeditionary unit's CH-53 helicopters.[93]

The recovery force was the first to reach Panjgur. While waiting for their inbound fuel supply to arrive, the pilots met with Pakistani officials in the control tower, the aircrew started eating lunch, and the landing support personnel began to inspect the damaged Black Hawk and cargo harness for serviceability. Approximately five minutes later, 12 men wearing black robes and carrying AK-47 assault rifles suddenly appeared atop the surrounding dunes. The gunmen opened fire and sporadic rounds impacted within 20 feet of the landing support team's position, compelling them to seek cover in a nearby ditch. Meanwhile, the aircrew and soldiers had also received several incoming rounds. They quickly repositioned an armored fuel tank, salvaged from the Black Hawk, for cover and returned fire with M16 assault rifles and the door-mounted .50-caliber heavy machine gun. As the pilots hastened to start the helicopter's engines for an emergency takeoff, one of the soldiers sprinted 200 meters to cover the landing support team's withdrawal and conceal their movement with smoke.[94]

Captain Holtermann decided to abort the recovery and temporarily abandoned the damaged Black Hawk in Panjgur. The helicopters lifted off as soon as he had accounted for all personnel, but they were running out of fuel and unable to notify the inbound aircraft of the change in plans. Fortunately, the two flights crossed paths, and direct communication was finally established, enabling them to designate an alternate refueling position along the coast in Pasni, Pakistan. After refueling in record time (approximately 20 minutes), the aircraft and crews returned safely to the amphibious ready group.[95]

Although the 15th MEU began immediate preparations for a more robust, forcible recovery effort the following day, there was some discussion regarding whether the Marines or special operations forces would retrieve the helicopter or if the effort was even necessary at all.[96] During the first attempt, they had worried more about dangers presented by adverse flying conditions than by opposing forces, as the original crash had resulted from "brownout" and they believed they were landing at a secure airfield. This time, however, they were returning to a location where they had already encountered small arms fire.

The 15th MEU briefed its concept to NavCent, intending to go in under cover of darkness with a security force from the ground combat element, and the plan was approved.[97] Yet the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Wendy J. Chamberlin, was concerned that another encounter with hostile tribesmen might result in the death of Pakistani nationals, perhaps threatening President Musharraf's tenuous political position and endangering the fragile alliance between the two countries.[98] NavCent subsequently came up with a plan to delay the mission until the Pakistani security forces could cordon off the airfield from the general populace.[99]

Colonel Waldhauser, the overall mission commander, convened the final confirmation brief at 1600 hours on 23 October, during which each of the participants repeated his previous role in the impending operation.[100] Major Peter D. Zoretic led the aviation element, which included three CH-53E transport helicopters and four Bell AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopters flying escort. Two of the CH-53s would carry the security force, totaling 85 Marines from Company B, while the third transport would retrieve the damaged Black Hawk. Several McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harrier jets would also be on station, ready to provide close air support if required, as well as one of the U.S. Navy's Lockheed P-3 Orion maritime patrol craft for overhead observation, and even a KC-130 to relay radio transmissions.[101] Captain Richard Whitmer led the ground element, a rifle platoon reinforced with the machine gun and assault sections from his company's weapons platoon.[102] Lieutenant Colonel Parrington, the executive officer for BLT 1/1, was also on hand to coordinate with Pakistani military officials.[103]

The recovery force launched early the following morning, heading north to Panjgur.[104] On landing, the infantry spread out to secure the perimeter around the Black Hawk, and the Pakistani security forces surrounded them. After explosive ordnance disposal personnel had inspected the aircraft hulk for booby traps, the landing support personnel rigged it for external transport and slung it beneath Captain Holtermann's hovering CH-53 helicopter. At 0500 hours, after 42 minutes on the ground, the security element boarded its aircraft and Task Force Bald Eagle headed south toward the Pakistani coast.[105] They returned the Black Hawk to the *Kitty Hawk* at around 0630 without further incident.[106]

Confirming the old adage of "no rest for the weary," the 15th MEU also retrieved its military police and radio battalion detachments from the *Kitty Hawk*; continued security operations in Jacobabad, Pakistan; hosted a command visit from General James Jones, 32d Commandant of the Marine Corps, and Sergeant Major Alford L. McMichael, 14th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps; and began planning for a bilateral training exercise in Djibouti on the same day the they recovered the downed Black Hawk.[107] Little did they know this was only the beginning of their involvement in Afghanistan.



Chapter 4
Changing Plans

Despite reorientation of the bombing campaign on 16 October and the subsequent arrival of special forces teams in Afghanistan on the 19th, the anticipated Northern Alliance offensive was slow to materialize. Meanwhile, the number of Taliban forces facing General Mohammad Fahim Khan in the northeast had continued to increase by up to 50 percent. This apparent lack of progress continued to plague the Bush administration's plans for a late autumn victory and added to the war council's growing unease. On 23 October, amid continued debate concerning where to focus the Coalition's military resources, Vice President Cheney asked if the United States should wait for the Northern Alliance to advance or simply go ahead with conventional forces. In some regards, this was almost becoming a rhetorical question, as Central Command was already developing contingency plans for deploying approximately 50,000 ground troops into Afghanistan.[1]

On 25 October, Dr. Rice privately asked President Bush if he wanted to consider sending in several Army or Marine divisions during the spring. The president replied that it was too early in the campaign to begin second-guessing their initial strategy, and the following day he urged his advisors to "be confident but patient." Yet only a day later, Secretary Rumsfeld checked with General Franks to ensure that Central Command was preparing for the possibility of a major land war. During a National Security Council meeting on 2 November, Franks acknowledged that he and the Joint Chiefs were exploring options for a more direct U.S. role in Afghanistan, and he committed to presenting tentative courses of action the following week.[2]

The lack of discernable progress raised concerns outside the White House as well.[3] The media, for one, had become increasingly skeptical of the campaign strategy, with one reporter at the *New York Times* comparing the developing stalemate to the quagmire faced in Vietnam.[4] Legislative officials also started to criticize the intensity of the campaign, with Senators John S. McCain III (R-AZ) and John F. Kerry (D-MA), for example, calling for an escalation of the air war and potential employment of ground forces.[5] Equally dismayed by the operational delays, senior members of the military began to quietly debate the prosecution of the war among themselves.[6] The central question within the halls of the Pentagon was if the air attacks, commando raids, and indigenous ground assault would ultimately prove to be a decisive combination in defeating the Taliban and al-Qaeda.[7] On 1 November, Secretary Rumsfeld responded to America's growing uncertainty with a reality check—he reiterated that this was a different kind of war, that it would take time to achieve America's global objectives, and that significant progress had been made in the three weeks following the terrorist attacks.[8]

Spoiling for a Fight

MarCent-Tampa

Shortly after General Franks rejected U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command's (MarCent's) offer of assistance in mid-September, General Castellaw and his staff began to consider ways to better represent the case for Marine Corps involvement in Operation Enduring Freedom. If their efforts were driven by doctrine, they were probably influenced more by the expeditionary nature of the special purpose Marine air-ground task forces than the formal constructs developed for the expeditionary units, brigades, and forces. The inherent utility of this ad hoc formation rested in the ability to train, organize, and equip a temporary task force to accomplish a specific mission at a particular time and place.[9] Although traditionally

smaller than the permanent Marine expeditionary forces, brigades, and units, and usually oriented toward addressing emerging civil emergencies, the special purpose task force could involve larger organizations focused on warfighting.[10] Indeed, that was the rationale behind the "scalable" and "tailorable" aspects of the task force hierarchy, a nuance of expeditionary maneuver warfare, that may have been lost to General Franks and his Army-heavy staff at Central Command.[11]

Working with available forces, they devised a plan for assembling a composite amphibious brigade that Central Command could maneuver and employ as necessary. Although they had not envisioned a specific mission for the brigade, Castellaw later noted that there was growing operational interest in both Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa at the time. In addition to the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the MarCent staff proposed incorporating vessels from the British, Australian, and Dutch navies, which were also seeking to play a role in the war. While Operation Enduring Freedom would eventually take on a cosmopolitan air, Castellaw reflected that Central Command did not seem to be very interested in its Coalition partners, perhaps because it would have been much more difficult to coordinate a multinational effort. The MarCent staff recorded details of their plan on a white board and pitched the concept to anyone who happened to stop by their office.[12]

1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade

During the same period, Brigadier General James N. Mattis and more than 2,200 Marines from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade (1st MEB) were participating in Exercise Bright Star in Egypt. Two years in the planning, this biannual, multinational military exercise was the world's largest joint war game and involved 65,000 personnel from 25 different nations, including Egypt, France, Italy, Greece, Spain, Kuwait, Germany, Great Britain, and Jordan.[13] Because the United States was currently prosecuting its war against terrorism in Afghanistan, carrying off an exercise of this scope and nature held even greater strategic significance than it did during previous years. In addition to providing cover for the staging of additional personnel and equipment in the Middle East, it also demonstrated that America would not shy away from its international commitments.[14]



Photo by MSgt Buzz Farrell.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 030328-M-0049F-030
On 1 November 2001, while serving as the commanding general of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command (Forward), BGen James N. Mattis took charge of all amphibious forces in theater and formed them into Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58. His sailors and Marines subsequently conducted the first major deployment of conventional forces into Afghanistan, established Forward Operating Base Rhino to the enemy's rear, and then occupied Kandahar International Airport.

As a case in point, during his predeployment brief to brigade personnel at Twentynine Palms, California, on 21 September, General Mattis had emphasized that their individual professionalism would convey a message to the world that there is "no better friend, no worse enemy" than a U.S. Marine.[15] The troops took note. On 14 October, following a live-fire breaching exercise during Bright Star, Lieutenant General Delong commented, "This is exactly what the chief of training wanted. He wanted the Egyptian leadership to see that the U.S. military can break through any obstacle, anywhere, and how to do it."[16]



Photo by SrA D. Myles Cullen, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011014-F-0193C-004

Elements of 1st Tank Battalion roll into position on a range outside of Mubarak Military City, Egypt, on 14 October 2001. The Marines conducted an in-stride breech during Bright Star 01/02, a multinational training exercise designed to enhance regional stability and cooperation between the United States and its allies.

Beyond the strategic realm, General Mattis had also knowingly warned both his staff and brigade to take Bright Star seriously, as it might serve as a precursor to combat action in Central Command's theater of operations. At the beginning of August, for example, Mattis had encountered Lieutenant Colonel Clarke R. Lethin at Weapons Training Battalion, Camp Pendleton, California. The two men had served together a decade earlier as commanding and executive officers at Recruiting Station Portland, Oregon, and Mattis now predicted, "I don't know where it is, but we are going to do something, and I want you to come along."[17]

On 3 October, General Mattis and his small personal staff settled in for the long flight to Egypt. In addition to his aide, Lieutenant Warren C. Cook Jr., the general was also accompanied by two planners, Lieutenant Colonel Lethin and Major Michael P. Mahaney. Mattis spread a variety of documents on the floor of the aircraft and said, "Okay, this is what we're going to do. We're going to get over there and form a very small team… and we're going to start thinking about what we are going to do to go kick some ass."[18]

During the first three days following their arrival on 5 October, the small operational planning team began to explore contingency possibilities in earnest. With the exception of Major Mahaney, who until recently had been a I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) staff officer working on the Bright Star field training exercise, the team's members remained divorced from the ongoing operation.[19] Sequestered in a partitioned portion of a canvas general-purpose tent in the Mubarak Military City complex situated outside Alexandria, they reviewed information supplied by the I MEF intelligence section and gleaned from Marine contacts at Central Command.[20]

One of these contacts was Brigadier General Castellaw, who happened to be in Egypt with members of his MarCent staff for the Bright Star

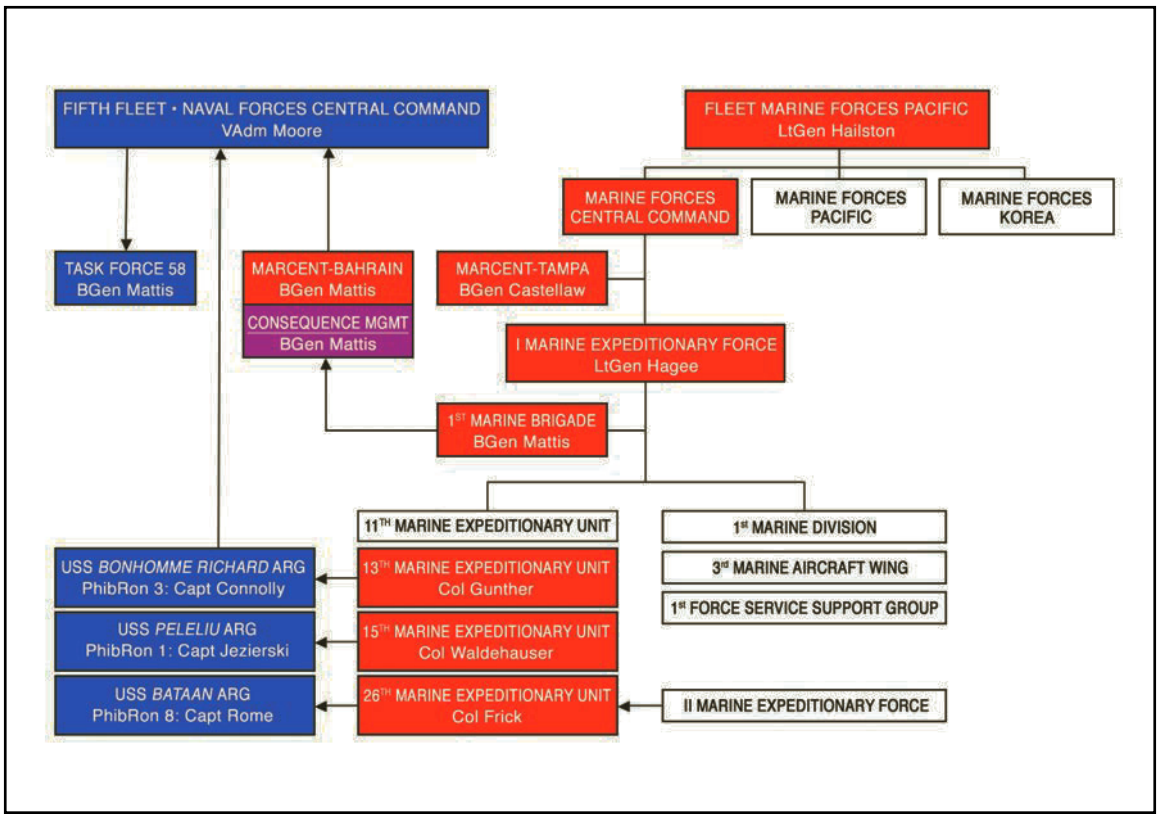


Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Diagram 5: *Navy and Marine command relationships and the contribution of maritime forces comprising Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58. Although Marine forces in Afghanistan came under operational control of the Combined Forces Land Component Command during December 2001, the Maritime Component Command retained control over those forces remaining in Pakistan or at sea.*

exercise. Castellaw recalled that he and Mattis talked frequently, visited, shot the breeze, drank coffee, and e-mailed when they were apart. It was easy for him to communicate with Mattis because of Mattis's personality and the fact that they were in the same peer group.[21] According to Mattis, it was during one of these informal conversations, while sharing a soda under a palm tree, that Castellaw first raised the notion of a composite amphibious brigade.[22] Castellaw recalled, "My grand scheme was, 'Okay Mattis, you can be the MEB commander… but I want to be on the staff at… Bahrain and Fifth Fleet headquarters, and I'll be MarCent Forward.'" He added with a hint of disappointment, "I don't know the reason why, but as we were transplanting [MarCent headquarters in Bahrain] I was told to get off the airplane and come back."[23] This was likely related to the fact that on 25 October, U.S. Pacific Command transferred operational control of its Marine assets to Central Command for the duration of Operation Enduring Freedom.[24] In addition to refocusing Lieutenant General Earl B. Hailston's attention on Central Asia and the Middle East, Central Command eventually ordered MarCent to deploy its headquarters to Bahrain in order to provide in-theater component level command and control. It accomplished this move on 17 January 2002.[25]

Working in close proximity forced Major Mahaney, an artillery officer and graduate of both the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College and the School of Advanced Military Studies, and Colonel Lethin, an infantry officer and graduate of the Marine Command and Staff



Photo by Sgt Thomas Michael Corcoran

Sgt John D. Barto guides his assault vehicle to the beach during an amphibious capabilities demonstration conducted by Battalion Landing Team 3/6 near Mubarak Military City, Egypt, on 24 October 2001. The Marines were participating in Bright Star 01/02, a multinational exercise designed to develop cooperation and promote stability within the region.

College, to negotiate their working relationship. Although minor tensions initially existed between the two planners, they capitalized on shared experiences and quickly defined complementary roles for one another. Synthesizing form (Mahaney) and function (Lethin), the two officers were able to develop an abbreviated planning process* that would serve them well during future operations. Although they had begun to familiarize themselves with the Taliban center of gravity near Kandahar, it was not their main priority and no one had yet raised the idea of conducting helicopter raids from Pakistan.[26]

By 9 October, the planning team had begun to focus on two particular possibilities. The first, Combined Joint Task Force Consequence Management, was a Central Command initiative to establish an initial response force at Camp Doha, Kuwait, to assess, secure, and assist host nations in dealing with nuclear, chemical, or biological emergencies that might occur in their area of responsibility. The second, expeditionary unit-level amphibious operations along the coast of Somalia, involved speculations regarding possible missions, available resources, and how they might influence action in the region if given an opportunity to participate.** As the contingency plans began to solidify, members of the brigade staff occasionally augmented General Mattis's personal staff and the planning effort. Lieutenant

*Col Lethin likened the abbreviated planning process developed by Task Force 58 to the rapid response planning process traditionally employed by the Marine expeditionary units. (Lethin-Broadmeadow interview)

**Unbeknownst to the small planning team, staff officers at I MEF were developing a similar, but significantly larger, brigade-sized operation within Central Command's area of responsibility. (Lethin-Broadmeadow intvw)

Colonel Steven P. Martinson represented intelligence, Lieutenant Colonel John J. Broadmeadow represented logistics, and Major Scott E. Stebbins represented communications.[27]

On the same day as the Bright Star breaching exercise, General Mattis, who was already serving in a dual billet as commander of the 1st Marine Brigade and deputy commanding general for I MEF, was also designated as the commanding general for Marine Corps Forces, Central Command (Forward), and Combined Joint Task Force Consequence Management. As the Service component commander's leading representative, Mattis was now responsible for ensuring the proper employment of all Marine forces in Central Command's theater of operations, as well as providing necessary administrative and logistical support.

In a roundabout way, the assignment of so many responsibilities to one individual made sense. First MEB was derived from I MEF, commanded by Lieutenant General Michael W. Hagee; in turn, I MEF was one of two subordinate elements assigned to Marine Corps Forces, Pacific (MarForPac), commanded by Lieutenant General Earl B. Hailston, who himself was dual billeted as the commander of MarCent. As a collateral duty, I MEF was subsequently required to provide an on-call consequence management capability to both U.S. Central and Pacific Commands.[28] Therefore, the responsibility for overseeing MarCent forces, expeditionary or otherwise, fell to General Mattis, as the senior Marine in theater. Shortly after learning of his new assignments, General Mattis sent a portion of the 1st MEB staff home to prepare for an extended deployment to Kuwait, while a 12-man quartering party headed directly to Camp Doha to prepare for follow-on forces at the conclusion of Bright Star.[29]

On 26 October, as 1st MEB's role in Bright Star ended, General Mattis and his personal staff traveled through Cairo, Egypt, to Naval Support Activity, Bahrain.[30] After reaching the tiny island nation the following day, Mattis made an in-call with Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore. The admiral, in addition to commanding the Fifth Fleet and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NavCent), was also the region's Combined Forces Maritime Component commander. Mattis later recalled that Moore "was very aggressive, very supportive. He's a fighting admiral. He was very comfortable with his authority and power and not restrained in his thinking about how we could get naval forces into Afghanistan. He was a superb leader."[31]

Mattis and his tiny entourage also introduced themselves to the NavCent staff and MarCent Coordination Element, headed by Colonel John B. Kiser.[32] In anticipation of future amphibious operations, General Mattis offered to augment the NavCent staff with his Marine planners. The compartmentalized Navy staff was leery of outsiders, so he advised his officers to maintain a low profile until they could establish a working relationship. Fortunately, they soon encountered Lieutenant Colonel Jerry D. Howell, a I MEF liaison officer assigned to NavCent's Future Plans section, who helped them build rapport and gain access to the Navy community.[33]

On 30 October, NavCent hosted a nine-man planning team to share information and begin mission analysis for potential interdiction or noncombatant evacuation operations along the Horn of Africa.[34] From General Mattis's staff were the two Bright Star planners, Lethin and Mahaney. From NavCent's Future Plans section were Howell, the I MEF liaison officer; Lieutenant Colonel John W. Carl, a MarCent liaison officer; and three Navy officers—Captain Richard Hascup, Commander Thomas J. Lafferty, and Lieutenant Michael E. Prall. Lafferty and Lethin were already familiar with one another, having attended Command and Staff College together at Quantico, Virginia. Captain Damien L. Spooner, a Marine assigned to NavCent's amphibious operations intelligence staff, provided intelligence representation. Major Brian L. Magnuson, officer-in-charge of the 15th MEU's KC-130 aircraft detachment, drove an hour from Shaik Isa Air Base to participate.[35]

Of the initial questions faced by the planning team, the primary concern was to identify the availability of operational forces and any logistical shortfalls that might inhibit their employment. The planning team's immediate need was to request a second amphibious group from another theater of operations, as they envisioned a task force consisting of two amphibious ready groups. In addition to the composite organization's organic resources, the planners also surmised that they would require four additional CH-53 helicopters to transport the landing force, two additional KC-130 aircraft to sustain operations ashore, and enhanced medical capabilities to treat the wounded. At this time, the additional KC-130 aircraft that Colonel Waldhauser had previously requested to support tentative evacuation operations in Pakistan had not yet arrived in theater due to force flow issues. Anticipating the imminent formation of an amphibious task force, the planners submitted a request to Fifth Fleet for forces based on their initial assumptions.[36]

USS Peleliu *Amphibious Ready Group*

In addition to conducting security operations at Jacobabad, the *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group was directed on 28 October to prepare for the possibility of augmenting security for the World Trade Organization conference, which was scheduled for early November in Doha, Qatar. While visiting the USS *Peleliu* two days later, Gordon R. England, secretary of the Navy, hinted that the group might assume a more offensive role in the future. He emphasized to the crew that the war against terrorism was going to be a protracted affair and that it would require the deployment of conventional forces ashore.[37] The Marines and sailors of the ready group were more than ready. As Colonel Waldhauser later explained, after having planned for or participated in such a wide range of contingencies during the first half of its deployment, the 15th MEU had already encountered many of the issues it would face while operating in Afghanistan.[38]

USS Bataan *Amphibious Ready Group*

The USS *Bataan** (LHD 5) Amphibious Ready Group (*Bataan* ARG) was operating in the Mediterranean as part of Sixth Fleet and U.S. European Command. Although not yet committed



Photo by PO3 Kleynia R. McKnight, USN.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 061203-N-WJ362-125
The helicopter assault ship USS* Bataan *(LHD 5). Commanded by Captain Kenneth M. Rome, USN, the* Bataan *Amphibious Ready Group transferred from the Sixth to the Fifth Fleets during the opening months of Operation Enduring Freedom to augment Task Force 58 in Afghanistan.

*Capt Martin R. Allard, USN, whose father-in-law had participated in the infamous Bataan Death March during World War II, commanded the *Bataan*. LtCol Kevin M. DeVore, 15th MEU's aviation combat element commander, recalled, "In Captain Allard's eyes, the Marines . . . were special and deserved anything they asked for. . . . The *Bataan* was the most professional and most fun ship, crew, and support that I ever experienced in my career." (DeVore comments)

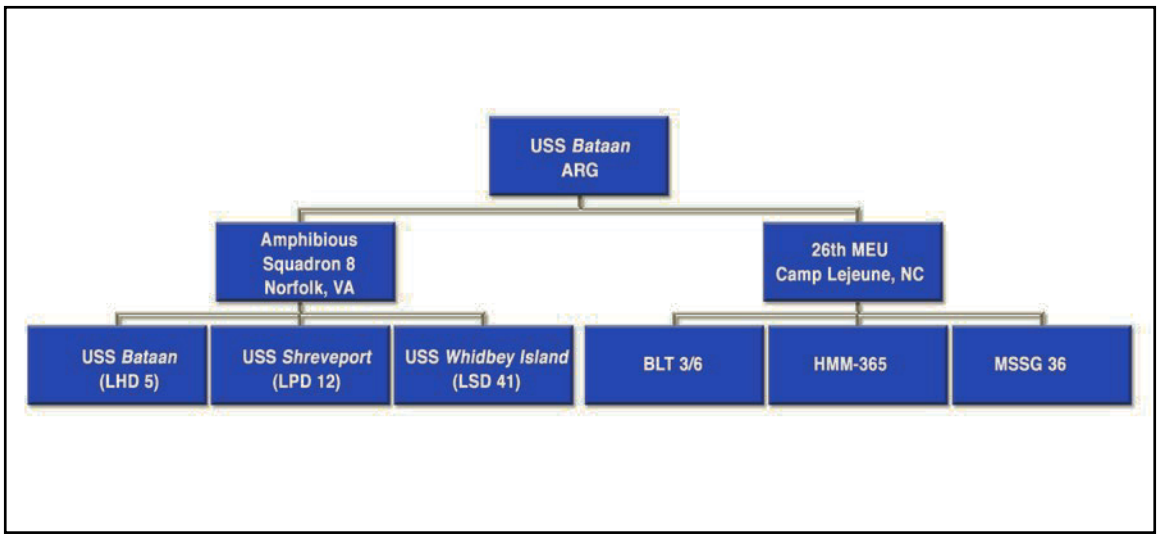


Diagram 6: USS *Bataan* Amphibious Ready Group

to supporting operations in Afghanistan, General Mattis had expressed an interest in the unit's capabilities while he was in Egypt, and the planning team speculated that the ready group would eventually transfer to Central Command's theater of operations. Amphibious Squadron 8, commanded by Captain Kenneth M. Rome, provided the Navy component and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (26th MEU), commanded by Colonel Andrew P. Frick, provided the Marine component.

When the terrorists attacked on 11 September, Marines and sailors of the 26th MEU were approaching the last day of their predeployment leave period. After receiving a directive from U.S. Joint Forces Command, all personnel were immediately recalled, and the *Bataan* ARG stood by to provide domestic support to New York City. The call to steam north from Norfolk did not come, however, and the ready group began its transatlantic voyage on 20 September.[39]

On 1 October, the *Bataan* ARG joined Sixth Fleet in Rota, Spain. Following a brief turnover with the outgoing group, it continued east across the Mediterranean to the Egyptian coast. Arriving on 10 October, the Marines and sailors participated in Exercise Bright Star for the next two weeks. Their role culminated in an amphibious capabilities demonstration on 23 October that General Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps, observed. General Jones was not the only senior officer to visit the ready group during the exercise: Lieutenant General Delong, Brigadier General Mattis, and Egyptian General Amin visited the *Bataan* on 18 October.[40] Occasions like this provided an opportunity for General Mattis and Colonel Frick to establish a working relationship that would facilitate future operations.[41]

Although alluring rumors of a transfer to the Fifth Fleet began to surface within the 26th MEU during Exercise Bright Star, the command remained focused on its European Command mission.[42] After completing its portion of the exercise on 24 October, the *Bataan* ARG headed north to conduct port calls in Italy, Greece, and Turkey. Members of the staff attended a maritime interdiction conference, conducted a Kosovo Forces leader's reconnaissance, and continued to plan for training exercises in Albania and Israel and for the potential evacuation of noncombatant personnel from U.S. embassies in Syria and Lebanon.

Indications that the *Bataan* ARG's situation was about to change began to appear on 30 October, when it was asked to consider the feasibility of replacing the USS *Kitty Hawk* battle



Official Marine Corps photo

Major subordinate element commanders of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit pose in front of the main terminal at Kandahar International Airport. Standing from left to right are LtCol Jerome M. Lynes, commander of Battalion Landing Team 3/6; LtCol Kevin M. DeVore, commander of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365; and LtCol William M. Faulkner, commander of MEU Service Support Group 26.

group in the North Arabian Sea. At that time, the aircraft carrier was serving as a floating forward support base for the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), which was then serving in Afghanistan. If carried out, this reassignment would involve an offload of the 26th MEU at an undetermined port facility.[43]

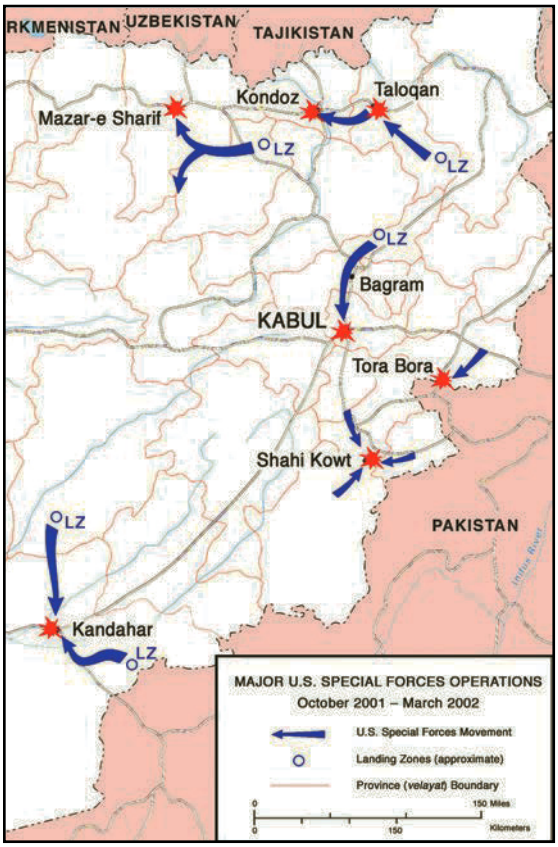

15
RESCUE

Chapter 5
Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58



Courtesy of U.S.Army Center of Military History
During November 2001, U.S.Army Special Forces from Task Force Dagger direct close air support to facilitate Northern Alliance attacks against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

By early November, Task Force Dagger had been operating in Afghanistan for several weeks, coordinating massive air attacks that demoralized the Taliban and al-Qaeda while simultaneously energizing the Northern Alliance.[1] Although Taliban and al-Qaeda forces had initially responded to the attacks by reinforcing their positions, they quickly learned that this only provided additional targets for prowling Coalition aircraft.* Once Coalition forces had tipped the scales in their favor, the opposing strongholds began to fall like dominoes. In the northwest, Taliban forces gradually withdrew to Mazar-e Sharif, where they outnumbered the attacking Northern Alliance fighters by eight to one. This resulted in a stalemate that was resolved through the use of Coalition air power, eventually enabling General Dostam's resistance fighters to seize the city on 10 November.[2] In the north-central area, General Daoud Khan's forces secured Taloqan on 11 November and Kunduz on 23 November. To the northeast, General Fahim Kahn's forces pushed south from Bagram to liberate the Afghan capital city of Kabul on 14 November.[3] As each of these strongholds fell, retreating Taliban and al-Qaeda forces fled in disarray toward either Kandahar to the south or the cave-riddled mountains to the east.

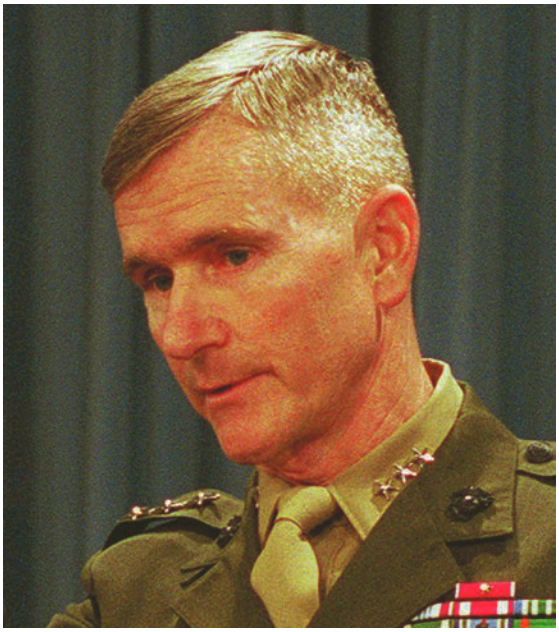


Courtesy of U.S.Army Center of Military History
Map of Major U.S. Special Forces Operations, October 2001–March 2002.

*Through late November, naval aviators provided the vast majority of tactical air support used in Afghanistan, operating from the aircraft carriers USS *Enterprise, Carl Vinson, Theodore Roosevelt,* and *John C Stennis*. The *Kitty Hawk* served as a sea base for special operations forces working in southern Afghanistan.

This sudden change in the balance of power created new concerns over ethnic conflict, security for the capital city, and preventing the enemy's escape. On 12 November, as Kabul was about to fall, Secretary Rumsfeld reminded other members of the cabinet that U.S. Marines were stationed off the Pakistani coast, and they could help stabilize the situation in the capital city.[4] A more international appearance was apparently preferred, and three days later American and British special operating forces welcomed the arrival of 100 British Royal Marines to the Bagram airfield.[5]

Sometime between late October and early November, as the Northern Alliance gathered momentum and the balance of power began to shift, Lieutenant General Newbold, the Joint Staff's director of operations, and Army Lieutenant General John P. Abizaid, the Joint Staff's director of plans and policy, approached Air Force General Myers, the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They asked Myers to contact General Franks and recommend that he open additional fronts in southern and eastern Afghanistan.* Newbold had already suggested the idea of a second front to his counterpart at Central Command, Air Force Major General Victor E. Renuart Jr., but had not yet received any indication that they would pursue the advised course of action.[6]



Official Marine Corps photo

LtGen Gregory S. Newbold, Director of Operations for the Joint Staff (October 2000–October 2002). During the first month of Operation Enduring Freedom, as Northern Alliance victories against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces mounted, he championed the opening of a second front in southern Afghanistan. A month later, he also advocated the buildup of Marine forces ashore to engage the enemy and block avenues of escape into Pakistan.



Associated Press

Northern Alliance militiamen cheer as they ride a tank through Kabul, Afghanistan, on 13 November 2001. Taliban troops had abandoned the capital city without a fight, retreating to safety under the cover of darkness.

Although General Myers initially declined to intervene in a combatant commander's affairs, Generals Newbold and Abizaid persisted. They felt that the Coalition possessed a narrowing window of opportunity in which to undermine the Taliban's command and control network and bring about an early moral or mental collapse. Myers eventually signed a message to General Franks that encouraged him to consider opening a second front. Ultimately, Franks ordered Admiral Moore to deploy his Marines into southern Afghanistan.[7]

General Franks commented in his memoir that Central Command "pushed strategy up" rather than waited for Washington to "push tactics down."[8] He

*This was not a unique position. Most members of the Joint Staff believed that Coalition forces needed to unhinge the Taliban's defenses at Kandahar by positioning a sizable force to their rear. Kandahar was the Taliban's spiritual center, and they enjoyed much greater popular support there than they had possessed in the occupied cities of northern Afghanistan. (Crist comments)



Photo by Scott Davis, courtesy of the Department of Defense. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: da-sc-07-24597

LtGen John P. Abizaid, USA, Director of Strategic Plans and Policy for the Joint Staff. During the first month of Operation Enduring Freedom, as the Northern Alliance confronted and defeated al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, he campaigned for the opening of a second front in southern Afghanistan.



Official Department of Defense photo

Gen Richard B. Myers, USAF, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (October 2001–October 2005). During the first month of Operation Enduring Freedom, as the Northern Alliance mounted victories against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, he recommended that Central Command pursue a second front in southern Afghanistan. A month later, he raised questions to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld regarding a cap on Marine forces in southern Afghanistan.

continued, "While Dick Myers and [Marine General] Pete Pace, the vice chairman, were quick to provide support and slow to critique, a number of officers on the Joint Staff were on their own tactical wavelengths, and it was these officers who were the focus of my strategic 'push'."[9] General Newbold, who acknowledged that he was probably one of the meddlesome staff officers criticized by Franks, held a different opinion.[10]

Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) maintained an intense operational tempo during the first half of November. At one point, elements from each of the three subordinate commands were operating simultaneously from Jacobabad, Pakistan. A rifle company from Battalion Landing Team 1/1 continued to provide airfield security, logistics personnel from MEU Service Support Group 15 (MSSG 15) and members of the KC-130 detachment conducted sustainment operations, and three CH-53 helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163) assisted with theater combat search and rescue operations between 2 and 5 November. While on station, the CH-53 crews also stood by as a quick reaction force during a direct action mission conducted by Task Force Sword on 4 November.[11]

Aviation operations were not restricted to those originating from Jacobabad, Pakistan. On 3 November, four Harriers from the USS *Peleliu* conducted their first bombing missions of the war.[12] Although the expeditionary unit had experienced initial resistance while attempting to get its aircraft onto the Air Force–generated air tasking order, it overcame that obstacle with the assistance of Commandant Jones (who had visited the ready group on 24 October).[13] After twice receiving fuel from airborne KC-130 tankers, the Harriers attacked a Taliban and al-Qaeda training camp near Garmabak Ghar with 500-pound Mk82 bombs, some of which

ordnance personnel had inscribed with messages commemorating the victims of the terrorist attacks on New York. The squadron flew two additional missions against the camp on 5 November.[14]

The *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group (*Peleliu* ARG) departed the North Arabian Sea on 6 November, reaching the Persian Gulf approximately three days later. It remained on station off the coast of Qatar through the 11th, with expeditionary unit personnel standing by to evacuate American citizens should terrorists strike the World Trade Organization conference. Fortunately, personnel were not needed and the primary outcome was additional training for the aircraft and crews on alert.[15]

Concurrently, a detachment of 70 Marines and sailors from MSSG 15 participated in Exercise Image Nautilus from 10 to 14 November. Held in Djibouti, this humanitarian assistance operation contributed to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NavCent) and Marine Forces Pacific engagement objectives along the Horn of Africa by providing expeditionary unit personnel an opportunity to deliver medical and dental care to almost 1,400 patients and help repair a local clinic in Holhol village.[16] With its forces distributed between Djibouti and Pakistan on 10 November, the 15th MEU's area of operations temporarily encompassed a distance equaling the width of the United States.[17]

For their part, Marines of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (26th MEU) initially remained tied to the Sixth Fleet and European Command missions: supporting North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operations in Kosovo, participating in a bilateral training exercise in Albania, and planning for another training exercise in Israel. From 3 to 10 November, their focus was primarily on planning and preparing for the engagement exercise involving live fire and maneuver training and a naval surface fire support shoot with Albanian military forces.[18]

Unified Command

On 29 October, Central Command released its 30-60-90 day plan for Operation Enduring Freedom, as well as Operations Order 002-02 for the conduct of phase II, stage 2 operations in Afghanistan.[19] General Mattis traveled to Kuwait the following day to assess conditions at Camp Doha. This was to be the first of many visits, as he intended to commute between Kuwait and Bahrain while juggling his dual role as commanding general of Marine Corps Forces Central Command (Forward) and Joint Task Force Consequence Management. However, Colonel Kiser called from the Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MarCent) coordination element that evening with a priority message from Admiral Moore.[20] Central Command had just notified NavCent of a forthcoming warning order (issued the following day) alerting them to the possibility of conducting future amphibious raids into Afghanistan, and Moore wanted Mattis back in Bahrain to discuss the developments in person.[21]

That evening at Camp Doha, General Mattis and a handful of Marine officers sat down together to develop his initial commander's estimate of the situation. In attendance were Brigadier General Emerson N. Gardner Jr., commanding general of Combined Joint Task Force, Kuwait; Colonel Peter T. Miller, then on assignment from MarCent headquarters in Tampa, Florida; and Major Timothy J. Oliver, who was in the midst of a six-month deployment as deputy intelligence officer with Task Force Kuwait.* General Mattis put Oliver on the spot by asking for any available information on Afghanistan. The briefing went well and Oliver obviously impressed Mattis, for the general announced that if he were heading to Afghanistan, the young intelligence officer would accompany him.[22]

The same evening, General Mattis conferred with Lieutenant General Hagee at I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) and with Lieutenant

*Task Force Kuwait was the precursor to what would shortly become the Combined Forces Land Component Command.



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020109-N-2383B-513

VAdm Charles W. Moore, USN. During the opening months of Operation Enduring Freedom, he served as commander of the Fifth Fleet, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, and the theater's Combined Forces Maritime Component. Eschewing controversy, he ordered BGen James N. Mattis to take charge of all amphibious forces in theater and form Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58. In this photo, taken on 9 January 2002, he is shown climbing into a light armored vehicle while visiting the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit in Kandahar.

General Hailston at Marine Forces Pacific. Hailston, who understood that Mattis would need to focus his attention on planning and directing combat operations in Afghanistan, gradually relieved him of the Task Force Consequence Management assignment and other additional duties.[23] Mattis's small operational planning team subsequently passed off its preliminary work on Consequence Management to the larger 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade (1st MEB) staff for continued development.[24] A month later, when Consequence Management formally stood up under the command of Marine Brigadier General Christian B. Cowdrey, the staff was primarily composed of Marine Reserve officers supplemented by an ad hoc joint technical augmentation cell, a platoon from the U.S. Army's 51st Chemical Company, a German chemical reconnaissance company, and a Czech medical company.

On 31 October, General Mattis met briefly with Admiral Moore at NavCent headquarters in Bahrain.[25] In an unprecedented move that surprised many in the naval community, Moore placed Mattis in charge of all amphibious forces in theater and designated him commander of Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58.[26] This decision may have been partially influenced by the notion of combining existing amphibious forces under a small headquarters staff (given space constraints in Bahrain) as opposed to pursuing a more traditional configuration involving multiship brigades, large support staffs, and command and control vessels, which at the time, was a plan that was reportedly being developed by I MEF in Camp Pendleton.[27]

Admiral Moore summed up the current operational situation by explaining that the Taliban could not hold Mazar-e Sharif or Kabul and that

they would likely consolidate around their spiritual center in Kandahar. As the Taliban withdrew from the north, General Mattis later explained, their ability to reinforce remaining positions grew, raising the potential for collateral damage during subsequent military operations. The admiral wanted to move against Kandahar before the following spring, ostensibly denying the Taliban a chance to strengthen their defenses, and asked Mattis if the Marines could get into Afghanistan and what role they might play once ashore.[28]

After confirming that the Marines could indeed go ashore, Admiral Moore tasked General Mattis with conducting three to five raids during a 30-day period to disrupt Taliban command and control in southern Afghanistan.[29] Further conversation between the two senior leaders was apparently short, with Moore providing little more than the basic intent to establish a foothold in southern Afghanistan. Moore did not give detailed planning orders or engage in lengthy discussions regarding how to conduct the operation; instead, Moore simply told Mattis to think about the mission, inviting him to ask additional questions if necessary, and then devise a plan based on what he wanted to do.[30] Shortly following the meeting, based on preliminary recommendations offered by Mattis during his discussion with the admiral, Moore requested that 26th MEU be transferred to the Fifth Fleet and that the 15th MEU security element in Jacobabad, Pakistan, be relieved for future offensive operations.[31]

At this time, it remains unclear whether Central Command expected the *Peleliu* ARG to conduct the raids by itself or envisioned the impending formation of a naval expeditionary task force commanded by a flag officer. When Central Command issued the planning directive, the Marines and sailors had already been operating successfully in theater for more than a month, and by mid-November, a detachment from the Army's 101st Airborne Division would relieve the 15th MEU security force in Jacobabad for follow-on missions. Reconstituting the ready group to support an existing joint task force would have been consistent with Commandant Jones's guidance of 25 September 2001—to coordinate an expeditionary unit program that would "ensure the continued relevance of forward deployed Marine Forces for the National Command Authority and Geographic Combatant Commanders."[32]

Although Admiral Moore had discussed the matter with Admiral Vernon E. Clark, Chief of Naval Operations, before making his decision, some Navy officers were uneasy about the prospect of having a Marine in charge.[33] Not only did it fly in the face of tradition, but to some officers it also appeared to disregard doctrinal agreements ironed out between the Navy and Marine Corps for decades.[34] However, viewed in light of evolving naval doctrine and command relations, it is clear that Moore was exercising his responsibility to ensure the unity of command and effort by organizing the amphibious force to best support his concept of operations. His duty was to define the most logical command relationship based on anticipated mission requirements, which he did by drawing from a wide range of potential configurations, some derived from Service considerations and others from functional requirements. In this particular case—inland raids with no coastal threat—the preferred doctrinal arrangement was for the amphibious task force commander to support the landing force commander.[35] Moreover, because Moore intended to combine two ready groups into a single amphibious task force, putting a Marine flag officer in charge was advantageous—particularly if the assignment involved coordinating ground combat operations with special operations forces and the Northern Alliance.

Everyone Fills Sandbags

On 31 October, after receiving Admiral Moore's verbal warning order to establish Task Force 58, General Mattis returned to the MarCent building and announced, "We are going to invade Afghanistan… and I'm going to need to know what else we're going to need."[36] At that time, his staff was limited to three Marines from 1st MEB, two from MarCent, and one from Consequence Management. Despite the

Changing Amphibious Command Relationships

Toward the end of the Cold War, conventional naval operations were conducted in accordance with the Composite Warfare Commander concept. Developed by proponents of the "blue water" Navy during the early 1980s, this placed operational control of the carrier battle group in the hands of an overall commander, who then delegated tactical control to subordinates responsible for the air, surface, subsurface, strike, space, and electronic realms of the battlespace. According to this configuration, the forward Marine air-ground task force commander would retain coequal status with the Navy amphibious ready group commander until the publication of an initiating directive, usually released prior to deployment, that specified the former as commander of the landing force (CLF) and the latter as commander of the amphibious task force (CATF) during a particular operation.[37]

As the focus of America's maritime forces switched to "green water" operations in littoral regions of the world in the 1990s, command and control relations between the Navy and Marine Corps needed to be reevaluated; almost a decade lapsed before they eventually reached a consensus.* While the Marine Corps had shown no interest in continuing to operate under the composite warfare concept, the Navy was similarly hesitant to accept the notion of a naval expeditionary task force commander.[38] Under this concept, carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups could operate either independently as individual task groups or together as a combined task force under a designated commander. Although experience suggested that amphibious groups would more likely deploy under the cover of one or more carrier groups, multiple amphibious groups could conceivably combine to form a task force in their own right. As Lieutenant Commander Thomas J. Lafferty, assistant operations officer for Task Force 58, explained, the Navy "wasn't going to stand for [the possibility of] a Marine being [placed] in charge of the entire amphibious task force."[39]

As a form of compromise, the Navy and Marine Corps gradually entered into an unofficial "supporting-supported" relationship. Accordingly, command authority would oscillate between the two ranking on-scene service commanders, depending on the operational focus at the time. This arrangement fit well with the evolving Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations. On one hand, the command relationship "established among the CATF, CLF, and other designated commanders of the amphibious force… should be based on mission, nature, and duration of the operation, force capabilities, command and control (C2) capabilities, battlespace assigned, and recommendations from subordinate commanders."[40] On the other hand, regardless of the relationships designated in the initiating order, commanders would remain "coequal in planning matters decisions."[41]

In January 2001, a number of senior Navy and Marine Corps flag officers participated in the Sea II Seminar War Game, designed to address "critical issues with regard to naval command relations for amphibious warfare."[42] The Chief of Naval Operations disseminated the outcome of the game a month later. In the results, the participants echoed the developing joint doctrine by deciding that it was "not desirable to prescribe a particular command authority" and that the supported commander should be determined by such factors as "mission, threat, type/phase, and duration of operation, command and control capabilities, force capabilities, battlespace assigned, and recommendations from subordinate commanders."[43] They also clearly established the amphibious force as a hierarchical entity composed of "an amphibious task force and a landing force together with supporting forces that are trained, organized, and equipped for amphibious operations," noting that the "command relationship among the CATF, CLF, and other supporting forces shall be specified in the initiating order and/or establishing directive" issued by the shared senior commander.[44]

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*While attending the Marine Corps Command and Staff College in 1992, Col Waldhauser had written a research paper titled "Entering the Golden Age with The Composite Warfare/Amphibious Doctrine Dilemma" that discussed the merits of employing the amphibious ready group as a warfighting command within the larger naval architecture.



Photo courtesy of Maj Michael P. Mahaney

Members of the Task Force 58 staff pose for a holiday photo while deployed to Forward Operating Base Rhino in southern Afghanistan during December 2001. In the front row, from left to right, are LtCol Clarke R. Lethbine (operations officer-ground), Col Peter T. Miller (chief of staff), and LtCol John J. Broadmeadow (logistics officer). In the back row, from left to right, are Maj Michael P. Mahaney (assistant operations officer, ground), Maj Daniel B. Conley (assistant logistics officer), Maj Scott F. Stebbins (communications officer), Maj Robert J. Charette (air officer), Lt Clifford A. Smith, USN (Seabee liaison), and Maj Michael J. Lindemann (assistant intelligence officer).

assistance being provided by the Marine liaison officers and Navy amphibious planners at NavCent, additional manpower was obviously required; yet Moore had indicated that he did not want a standard-sized brigade staff.[45] Not only was NavCent already approaching critical space constraints in Bahrain, but without a command ship, space on board the amphibious vessels would also be limited.

Fortunately, Moore's indication matched General Mattis's staffing philosophy. Just weeks earlier, while planning for potential amphibious operations off the Horn of Africa, he had already considered 90-, 150-, and 200-person staffs and concluded that approximately 80 personnel were optimal.[46] A small staff focused on planning and populated with forward-leaning officers would require less space and could respond more quickly than a standard-sized staff of 300 personnel.* Several weeks later, Mattis even decreased his estimate for the small staff he had envisioned for 1st MEB, calculating that 25 to 30 members would provide Task Force 58 with the manpower necessary to plan several short-term raids into southern Afghanistan. There was no need to replicate medical, religious, legal, public affairs, or troop handling capabilities that already resided in the subordinate commands.[47] Should the situation change, he could always bring in a more robust staff from Camp Pendleton, California. Task Force 58's staff, including liaison officers from other Services and agencies, would temporarily peak at 40 before settling at approximately 32 individuals.[48]

*The alternative figure of 135 personnel for a conventional brigade staff is based on notional numbers used by the Total Force Structure Division to develop the maritime prepositioning force list and reflects only the brigade headquarters: 58 Marine and 6 Navy officers, and 69 Marines and 2 Navy enlisted personnel. Including personnel from the communications, force reconnaissance, intelligence, Artillery and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, radio, and liaison detachments would raise the figure to 723.

During the impromptu discussion that evening, General Mattis defined key personnel requirements for his staff, who then recommended candidates for his immediate consideration. Mattis's guidance on growing the staff was simple: regardless of rank, he wanted a small group of staff officers who possessed operational experience, initiative, and sound judgment.[49] He emphasized that there would be few enlisted Marines to support the staff, so each member would be required to "fill sandbags."[50] In addition to Colonel Miller from MarCent headquarters, who became the chief of staff, eight additional members were identified at that time and ordered to depart for Bahrain within 96 hours of notification.[51]

All of the requested individuals were affiliated with I MEF, and many had worked together on the initial operational planning team during Exercise Bright Star.[52] Several of the new officers included Staff Sergeant Benny A. Rodriguez in administration, Lieutenant Colonel Martinson and Major Oliver in intelligence, Lieutenant Colonel Broadmeadow and Captain Samson P. Avenetti in logistics, Major Robert J. Charette Jr. in fixed-wing aviation plans and operations, and Major Stebbins in communications.

The three NavCent planners—Hascup, Lafferty, and Prall—also volunteered to join Task Force 58 after learning that Navy representation was lacking.[53] Assigned to the plans and operations section, they proved a ready-made and welcome addition to the team, contributing East and West Coast amphibious experience. Aware of the need for an integrated staff, General Mattis chose to employ the traditional naval nomenclature (N),* rather than the standard Marine general (G) or staff (S) designators to delineate his staff sections.[54]

Setting Up Shop

According to Central Command's chronology of Operation Enduring Freedom, 1 November marked the "end of Phase II–Stage 1, Initial Strike Operations–Air Operations." Admiral Moore released two key messages on that day. In the first, he officially established Task Force 58, designating Captain Jezierski as the commander of subordinate Task Group 58.1 and Colonel Waldhauser as the commander of subordinate Task Group 58.2. In the second, he reiterated his direction that the Marines and sailors prepare to "conduct a minimum of three to five raids into Afghanistan over a 30-day period."[55] Task Force 58 physically stood up the following day and temporarily occupied the MarCent coordination element building: a narrow two-story structure with a conference room, locker room, and several small offices.

As the staff expanded, Task Force 58 quickly outgrew the MarCent facilities. Despite aggressive efforts by the chief of staff, Colonel Miller, and logistics officer, Lieutenant Colonel Broadmeadow, the only available space they could find was a sandy, vacant lot outside NavCent's mobile integrated command facility. This was a sprawling single-story building, surrounded by a chain-link fence, which housed the regional maritime patrol force, Task Force 57. Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133, who built three concrete pads, set up three tents, and surrounded the compound with concertina wire within five days, alleviated the space problem. The Navy's quick response time and "can-do" attitude impressed the Task Force 58 staff, influencing their decision to request Seabee support for ground operations in Afghanistan.[56]

Task Force 58 moved into its new quarters on 8 November. In Bahrain, the staff encountered a new variety of tent made of vinyl-coated polyester duck cloth, unlike the canvas tents used during Exercise Bright Star. Supported by aluminum frames, the structures (referred to as TEMPER [Tent, Extendable, Modular, Personnel]) were modular in form, and designed to grow into multiple configurations, and they provided a controlled

*Traditional naval staff nomenclature included the N-1 (administration), N-2 (intelligence), N-3 (operations), N-4 (logistics), N-5 (planning), and N-6 (communications) sections.

environment to protect the wide range of electronic equipment needed on the modern battlefield. In addition to a conference room and office for General Mattis, one tent housed administration, intelligence, and operations sections, while the other was home to the logistics and communications sections. This time- and labor-intensive transition validated Mattis's prediction that everyone would be required to "fill sandbags."[57] The staff borrowed radios and computers, moved furniture, procured office supplies, and reestablished e-mail accounts on a new domain.

Anticipating a long campaign, General Mattis attempted to influence the command's battle rhythm by emphasizing that the staff should approach the upcoming operation as if it were a marathon, rather than a sprint. Despite efforts to pace the staff by establishing normal working hours, most officers found it necessary to remain at headquarters from between 14 to 16 hours each day. In addition to planning for future operations, they also monitored incoming information, participated in daily meetings, and attended nightly video teleconferences.[58] Many of the staff members contributed simultaneously to several functional areas; for example, Major Charette, Task Force 58's air officer, was responsible for processing air requests, obtaining maps, and contributing to both current and future operations. He later recalled, "It was a very electric time, a lot of long hours…. I didn't sleep for two days."[59] Colonel Lethin echoed similar sentiments saying, "I don't think I have ever been so tired in my life."[60]

As the augmentation personnel began to arrive, veteran staff officers needed to remain cognizant of changes and to take time to introduce new members to the command's battle rhythm.[61] Yet a myriad of daily tasks already consumed their time. The solution was the creation of a "brain book," which contained pertinent references, briefs, orders, and intelligence.[62] Arriving personnel were required to read the book, ask for necessary clarifications, and then roll up their sleeves and join in the fray. Sometimes, however, there was not even enough time to peruse the brain book, as illustrated by the experiences of Navy Lieutenant Clifford A. Smith, the Seabee liaison officer:

> I showed up in one of these tents, and they were planning follow-on attacks that they were going to base out of FOB [forward operating base] Rhino. They were coordinating that in the morning and I just kind of walked in, sat down, and started listening. About three hours later, early in the afternoon, they started talking about the needs at Rhino and Kandahar. I had been doing a little bit of studying as they were talking, trying to review what it would take to make it C-130 and C-17 capable…. I hadn't had a chance to introduce myself and basically got thrown right into the fire and started discussing what it would take to repair the runway at Kandahar with permanent repairs for concrete. I started asking for a request for information with the S-2: "Hey, is there a concrete match plan? We're going to need concrete, so we would need that capability." So he started researching that and I started talking about, "Well we'd have to contract that out to get the supplies" and the Marines said, "Well, we'll just go secure it. We'll just go attack it, take it over, you guys will run it, and we'll start using the concrete for repairs." I was the only one in the room who was laughing, because I kind of got a chuckle out of that. I looked around and everyone else was serious and I was like, "Oh, okay, these guys mean business, it's good to go."[63]

For the uninitiated, an introduction into Task Force 58 could be more than a little intimidating, if not downright painful. In addition to the intensity and immediacy of operational planning, there was also an informal "break-in" period where General Mattis measured his new officers to determine their strengths and weaknesses.[64] Colonel Broadmeadow reflected on his early days at 1st MEB during Bright Star:

> I was a pretty cocky guy. I was a boot lieutenant colonel, went to a top-level school. I came to the MEF staff and I thought I had things pretty locked on. I was doing an MPF [maritime prepositioning force] exercise and I know a little

> about MPFs, so I came in with a lot of confidence. But after my first couple of meetings with General Mattis, I went home and told my wife, "You know, forget all of this confidence. I think for the first time in my career, I don't know if I'm going to cut it with this guy." It took awhile; the first 30 days were rough.[65]

Remembering his own trial period while on recruiting duty two decades earlier, Colonel Lethin added that it was a really good feeling once he made it—once he was in that circle of confidence.[66]

General Mattis's goal was not necessarily to identify the perfect officer or to build the perfect staff, but to blend staff officers with complementary capabilities into a unified team so they could respond with speed and decisiveness to any situation. Although he might provide the staff with general guidance, he wanted his officers to think outside the box and was always receptive to new ideas. Rank meant little when compared to an individual's capability, and large egos were a definite disadvantage.[67]

Insight into some aspects of General Mattis's command philosophy were revealed in one interview, where he confirmed his appreciation for James C. "Jim" Collins's *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap… and Others Don't*. The book emphasizes "getting the right people on the bus, getting the right people into the key positions. And also there is getting the right people off the bus, the ones who are not primarily fitted for those jobs, and recognizing the role that leaders play… the animating spirits of the leaders."[68] From a more pragmatic perspective, Colonel Lethin offered these observations regarding the working relationship between Mattis and his staff:

> We'll say, "Well, sir, we can't do that." He'll say, "Okay, let me handle that." At which point in time you go one of two ways. You go, "Well, okay, got to walk away" or you… rush out and try to get ahead of him. The winners get ahead.
>
> What he expects is that you are going to go out and look under all of the rocks to find the solution, and he expects you to make decisions. Sometimes there are decisions that he should make, and if you have made one of his decisions, he'll tell you in a very tactful manner.
>
> You definitely know where you stand, and if you don't get on board quickly, he will break you.[69]

Lethin also stated that General Mattis "is much harder on his staff than he is on his commanders."[70]

The staff meshed quickly, for the most part, with each individual's professional knowledge, operational experience, dedication, and ability to build from previous personal relationships contributing toward a common purpose. As is often the case, concentric bands of influence radiated outward from the commanding general. Nearest the center was the inner "staff within the staff."[71] This included a few key players and trusted assistants, mostly functional area experts who had proven their mettle during Exercise Bright Star or others derived from General Mattis's personal staff.

The general staff, composed of recently arrived augmentees from I MEF, NavCent, and MarCent, occupied the middle ground. In each case, these were capable Marines and sailors—some officers and enlisted personnel—working diligently to meet operational requirements related to their particular functional specialties. On the periphery, some individuals were not up to the task or unwilling to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the common enterprise. In these few cases, more dynamic members of the staff tended to shoulder additional responsibilities, while those found wanting were marginalized and occasionally returned to their parent units.[72]

Context and experience often mediated collaboration between the two inner staff groups. For example, according to the generic table of organization, Captain Hascup served as the operations officer and Lieutenant Colonel Lethin as the future plans officer. Yet each possessed widely different skill sets, so it made sense for Hascup and Lieutenant Commander Lafferty to focus on planning and conducting amphibious operations,

while Lethin and Major Mahaney increasingly asserted themselves in the planning and conduct of operations ashore. There was also a nondoctrinal division of labor along strategic and operational lines between Lethin and the chief of staff. Colonel Broadmeadow later recalled that Lethin always led from the front, and his sense of purpose drove the staff's planning cycle.[73]

The staff developed plans according to a compressed timeline that imbued every action with a sense of urgency. They briefed the plans, once developed, at adjacent and higher levels in the chain-of-command. Some concepts would survive the process intact, while others would require modification according to additional guidance—usually verbal—provided by Central Command in Tampa, Florida. To sustain the development of multiple plans, the staff not only had to initiate requests for forces and deployment orders in advance, but also monitor the requests and adjust tentative timelines as their arrival dates or the concept of operations fluctuated. In this pressure-cooker environment, leaders continually fostered team building and trust throughout the command, which remained a key ingredient to the Marines' overall success.

Team Building

From the outset, General Mattis sought to establish a supporting-supported relationship between the Navy and Marine Corps, as well as among the Marine commands.[74] The challenge in creating a unified task force along those lines lay in developing internal relationships that would synthesize the subordinate commands into a common entity, while concurrently preserving their individual strengths and character. To facilitate this process, General Mattis released a personal message to each of his four Navy and Marine commanders, seeking their cooperation and support in defeating the Taliban. He remarked during an interview following the operation—while commenting on the importance of maintaining a sense of humor and friendly discipline among comrades—that there was "no need for adversarial relationships when trying to kill the enemy; the battlefields are not crowded."[75]

After establishing the overall command climate, the next challenge was to build an even closer working rapport between the two expeditionary unit commanders, Colonels Andrew Frick and Thomas Waldhauser. Not only are expeditionary units intentionally designed to operate independently, their commanders are also specifically selected for their aggressive initiative. Moreover, although Marines share common doctrine, many expeditionary units develop organizationally specific standard operating procedures. General Mattis was aware of that and, while developing his initial concept of operations, chose not to composite the 15th and 26th MEUs into a single expeditionary brigade.

By adopting a strategy of "centralized planning and decentralized execution," General Mattis sidestepped the formation of a brigade staff, regimental landing team, and aircraft group, which was understandably agreeable to the two subordinate ground commanders.[76] Colonel Waldhauser summed up the quasi-"joint" relationship from the expeditionary unit perspective: We wanted "to complement each other but… also… to… maintain our own identity, if only for the reason of trying to keep things simple."[77] Colonel Frick expanded on this concept:

> It worked… because you had two organizations—15th MEU and 26th MEU—that had trained together, worked up together and were functioning as units, and were postured for success in their own way. You have the right personalities in the structure, both in the command structure and also in the staff structure. On top of that, you put in… a general officer… who has a warfighter's attitude and tries to let the warfighter do his job.[78]

Task Force 58 would provide operational support to the expeditionary units by developing future plans, validating potential targets, and issuing mission-type orders. For their part, the expeditionary units retained their operational autonomy but entered

into an alternating supporting-supported relationship with one another. In this sense, while one expeditionary unit executed a mission, the other could be preparing for a second, and Task Force 58 could be planning a third. Although this increased Task Force 58's operational flexibility, it also required that responsibilities and requirements for each expeditionary unit be clearly established to avoid redundancy or working at cross-purposes. For example, General Mattis would eventually task the 15th MEU with seizing and securing a forward operating base, from which the 26th MEU would conduct follow-on raid, interdiction, and seizure missions. In addition, the assignment of independent missions to each expeditionary unit could facilitate operations by creating a sense of healthy competition between the two subordinate commands.[79]



Chapter 6
Operational Maneuver from the Sea

Battle Rhythms and Intelligence-Driven Operations

The first three weeks in November—the planning phase—was a hectic time for members of Task Force 58. Balancing a myriad of overlapping and concurrent tasks, they worked to develop their concept of operations and scheme of maneuver, assemble their forces and lay down the necessary supporting architecture, and coordinate their plans with joint and Coalition commands operating in the theater. The small command group began each morning with a quick meeting attended by both General Mattis and Colonel Miller. Following the brief, the staff continued its planning efforts into the evening, when it halted briefly for a second meeting. Colonel Lethin described this routine, highlighting the interaction between Mattis and his staff:

> If we needed his guidance, we would go up and talk to him. I mean, "Sir, okay, what do we need to do?" I think we all had that kind of access to him. At the end of the day, we would come in and we would brief him up on where we were and what we [had] done so far. He would say, "Yeah, okay, I like it, change this, go back." Then he would leave the room for the night and… we would go back and work on those things, and we would come back in the morning and say, "Okay, here is where we are." It was a constant dialogue in his involvement in the planning process about where we were going and how we were shaping.[1]

Informed by U.S. Naval Forces Central Command's (NavCent's) warning order and Central Command's 30-60-90 day planning guidance, General Mattis continued to refine his initial directions.[2] Intelligence support, he emphasized, would be critical to the operation's success, driving the types of operations developed and tactics employed by Task Force 58.* He intended to begin with small-scale helicopter raids, conducted against strategic targets along the southern border of Afghanistan. Exploiting the element of surprise, assault forces would establish and defend temporary tactical positions along the border, leveraging theater aviation to destroy any attackers. By focusing on the more accessible targets first, which Mattis referred to as "low-hanging fruit," the expeditionary units would be able to further develop their fighting skills and prepare for longer-range operations.[3]

During the first three weeks in November, Task Force 58's intelligence section gradually grew to include four officers and three enlisted linguists. Because this small staff was hard pressed to provide the quality and quantity of information needed to support the full range of operations being planned, it focused instead on "facilitating intelligence reach-back" capabilities to support information requests from those units preparing to deploy.[4] Initial interests, which required target imagery, included border camps, drug facilities, main lines of communication extending from Kandahar, potential landing zones and interdiction points, route studies, enemy reaction assessments, and traffic pattern analyses.[5] Later in the month, as the mission transitioned to establishing a forward operating base, the intelligence focus shifted toward identifying airfields that could support sustained operations ashore.[6]

Working from the NavCent headquarters in Bahrain, Task Force 58's intelligence section situated

*Although I MEF had provided a limited reach-back capability to Task Force 58 at the beginning of the operation, communications between the two organizations declined sharply thereafter. Partially influenced by operational security issues, this change also reflected BGen Mattis's new association with Fifth Fleet—what one staff officer referred to as "atypical command relationships." (Lindeman intvw; Lethin-Broadmeadow intvw)

itself to serve as a conduit between the intelligence producers and intelligence consumers, as well as a liaison among the myriad organizations. The principal producers included the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity in Quantico, Virginia; the Army's National Ground Intelligence Center in Charlottesville, Virginia; the Joint Intelligence Center at Central Command; and the two deployed Marine expeditionary units.[7] Daily video teleconferences among these organizations, conducted via the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System, became the primary means for identifying information requirements and then disseminating the information by e-mail throughout the intelligence community for action. The operations section at Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, led by Lieutenant Colonel Mark S. Chandler, shouldered much of this burden and "essentially became a 24-hour intelligence support and production center providing direct support to Task Force 58."[8] One of their more innovative ideas was the creation of a secure website repository, from which intelligence personnel in Bahrain and Afghanistan could access relevant information for planning purposes.[9]

Once ashore, General Mattis tended to interact less with his own intelligence personnel in Bahrain than with those from the two expeditionary units, who were co-located with Task Force 58's forward headquarters. Although this taxed the organic capabilities of the subordinate commands, intelligence sections under the direction of Majors James B. Higgins (15th Marine Expeditionary Unit [15th MEU]) and Gregory G. Koziuk (26th Marine Expeditionary Unit [26th MEU]) fulfilled most of the task force's daily intelligence requirements.[10] As one analyst observed,

> While the intelligence sections of both MEUs valued the support of the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, their own accomplishments and efforts cannot be understated. The Marines of these two staffs supported not only the requirements of their own organic units but also the additional requirements of a higher headquarters (Task Force 58) and adjacent U.S. and coalition force units. The MEU intelligence sections maintained the current intelligence picture and produced hundreds of specialized intelligence products in support of MEU, special operations forces, and coalition force mission planning. The MEU intelligence sections possessed a significant forward deployed analytical and production capability utilizing both national technical means imagery and geospatial data. Their products were in high demand in both the joint and coalition environment in which they operated.[11]

While working on their initial mission statement, the staff realized that they needed a radio call sign for communications with other units. General Mattis preferred to choose a name that symbolized the spirit of his command rather than pull an arbitrary alphanumeric designation from a list of unused call signs. Because his intent was to inflict a sense of chaos on Taliban and al-Qaeda forces operating in southern Afghanistan, the staff suggested they use the term as their call sign. A request to use "Chaos" as Mattis's call sign was subsequently forwarded up the chain-of-command and eventually approved by Central Command.[12]

Task Force 58 had begun to collaborate with the two expeditionary units immediately following the release of General Mattis's personal message. As described by Colonel Lethin, the "iterative" planning process was constantly "back and forth."[13] "We were working the [concept of operations] and… we're sharing it through the MEUs… getting their estimates of supportability, what they think they might need or not need and have them start doing their planning—giving it to them early, so that they will do a lot of concurrent and parallel planning."[14] The staffs used video teleconferencing to enhance real-time coordination and promote integration among the commands, which was further facilitated by the presence of a two-man liaison team from the 26th MEU.

While the two staffs remained in communication throughout the planning process, the expeditionary units conducted much of the

detailed raid planning independently of Task Force 58.[15] This included nominating potential targets as well as evaluating the 15th MEU's ability to accomplish different types of missions at each site.[16] "The big thing that 58 did for us," commented Colonel Waldhauser, "was to define our mission."[17]

As might be expected, the division of labor and differences of opinion between the operationally oriented task force planners and tactically focused expeditionary unit staff could become an occasional source of frustration. This tendency became increasingly apparent as changing command relationships redefined their roles and reporting responsibilities while serving in Afghanistan. Yet each unit acknowledged that friction was the nature of organizational hierarchy and fast-paced combat operations, and everyone remained focused on the desired end state.

Coalition Building

From the beginning, General Mattis emphasized the importance of establishing solid working relationships with other military Services, Coalition forces, and allied countries participating in the campaign. It came as no surprise, therefore, that one of his first orders of business was to visit adjacent and supporting commands, often exchanging liaison officers with them. Underlying his interest in coordination were Mattis's views regarding operations involving joint and Coalition forces: "there's a job for everyone," "they must be interoperable," and they must possess "tactical mobility."[18]

While in Bahrain, General Mattis was able to renew an old friendship with Navy Captain Robert S. Harward, with whom he shared several similar experiences. Harward had grown up in Iran and

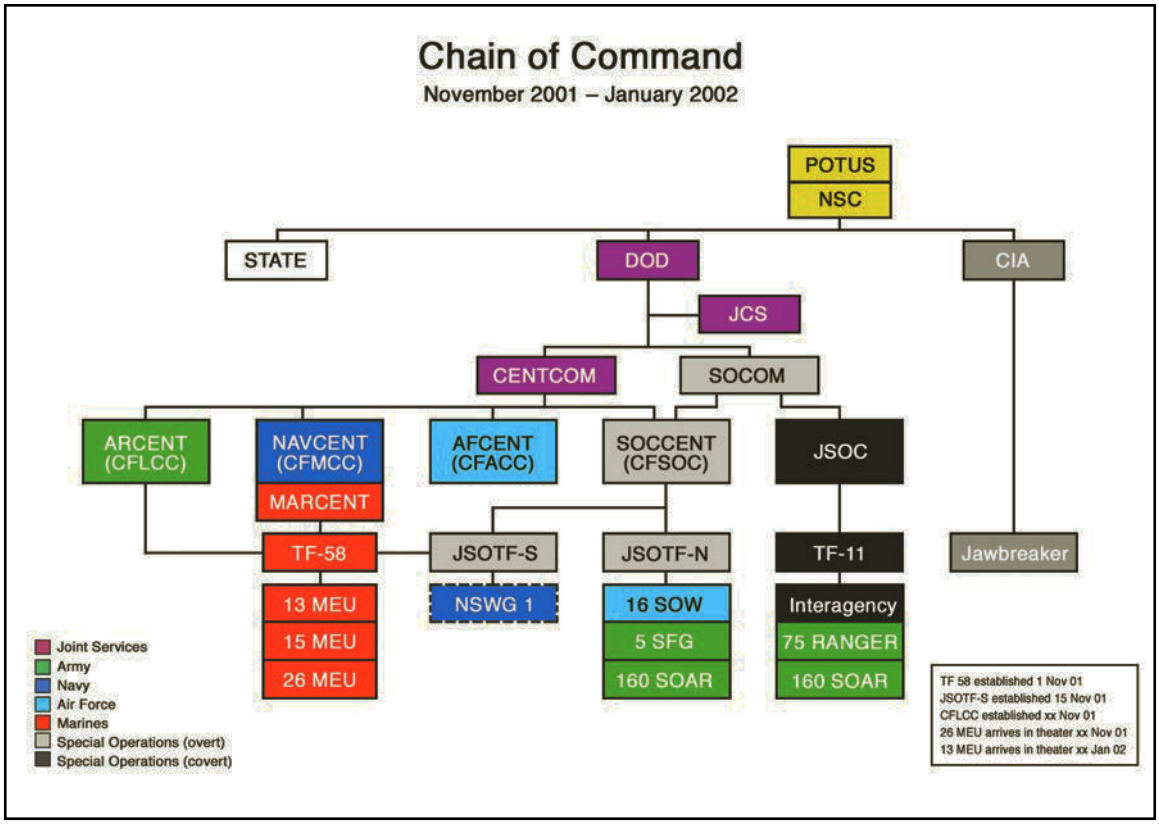


Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Diagram 7: *Command relationships among the principal forces involved in Operation Enduring Freedom during November 2001 and January 2002.*



Photo by SSgt. Joe Laws USAF
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020109-N-2383B-513
VAdm Robert S. Harward, USN. As a captain, during the first months of Operation Enduring Freedom, he commanded Naval Special Warfare Group 1 and led Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force South (Task Force K-Bar) in Afghanistan. The sailors of Task Force K-Bar enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the Marines of Task Force 58, providing reconnaissance and direct action support in return for air support and security forces.

hitchhiked from Tehran to New Delhi at the age of 16, while Mattis had hitchhiked across the United States during his youth. Mattis and Harward had also spent time together at the Naval Academy Prep School, the former as a battalion officer and the latter as a student.[19] The two men had met briefly again during 2001 at the Naval Amphibious Base in Coronado, California.[20] Late on the evening of 31 October, as Mattis walked home following his meeting with Admiral Moore, their paths crossed a third time in Bahrain.[21]

Captain Harward, commander of Naval Special Warfare Group 1, was in the process of forming Joint Special Operations Task Force South, also known as Task Force K-Bar, and spoiling for action. When General Mattis asked, "What… are you doing here," Harward responded, "I'm trying to get into the fight, but I don't have any helicopters."[22] To his dismay, these assets had been redirected to support Task Force Dagger's operations in northern Afghanistan.[23] Mattis quickly seized on the opportunity by extending an invitation to Harward. Based solely on a handshake, they agreed that the Navy SEALs would provide a liaison officer to Task Force 58 and conduct strategic reconnaissance for the Marines.[24]

Formally established on 15 November, Task Force K-Bar served under tactical control of the Combined Forces Land Component, but under operational control of the Joint Forces Special Operations Component. Gradually incorporating other joint and Coalition forces from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Turkey, and the U.S. Army and Air Force, it carried out a wide variety of strategic reconnaissance, maritime search and seizure, and direct action missions.[25] The latter included, to no small extent, the exploitation of "sensitive" sites located throughout southeastern Afghanistan that were suspected of containing materials related to al-Qaeda or the Taliban. In recognition of its service during Operation Enduring Freedom, Task Force K-Bar would later receive the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in action against hostile forces.[26]

From the beginning, the relationship between Task Forces 58 and K-Bar was mutually supporting. By affiliating himself with Task Force K-Bar, General Mattis not only gained access to the special operations community then dominating Operation Enduring Freedom, he also acquired a long-term support mission to justify the Marines' continued presence in Afghanistan. At the same time, by affiliating himself with Task Force 58, Captain Harward acquired a base of operations as well as access to logistics, communications, ground support, and aviation assets that his command did not yet possess.[27]

During its time in Afghanistan, Task Force 58's ground combat element provided quick reaction and security forces for many of K-Bar's site exploitation missions, while the aviation combat element fulfilled



Official Department of State photo

Ambassador Wendy J. Chamberlin. A veteran diplomat, she was the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan from 2001 to 2002.



Official Army photo

LtGen Dell L. Dailey, USA. As a MajGen, during the opening months of Operation Enduring Freedom, Dailey was in charge of Joint Special Operations Command and directed Task Force 11 (Task Force Sword) operations in southern Afghanistan. He advocated daily for the establishment of a Marine forward operating base in southern Afghanistan as well as a major offensive role for Task Force 58.

75 percent of the SEALs assault support requirements.[28] Lieutenant Colonel Mark A. Clark, one of three Marines serving with Task Force K-Bar, greatly facilitated coordination between the two organizations. Originally trained as a CH-53 pilot, Clark had also flown MH-53 helicopters during an exchange tour with the Air Force's Special Operations Command and could serve as a conduit* between the conventional and unconventional forces.[29]

In addition to Task Force K-Bar, units from the Australian Special Air Service (ASAS) were also actively searching for an invitation to participate in operations in Afghanistan. By happenstance, Colonel Miller, Task Force 58's chief of staff, happened to be socializing with an Australian officer in a bar in Bahrain. The Australian commented that he wanted to send another officer over to Task Force 58 to speak on the potential usefulness of the ASAS. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Gilmore, Australian Defence Force, arrived several days later and spent 30 minutes in conference with General Mattis. After the Australian commander had outlined his unit's capabilities, Mattis offered, "Now this is what we're going to do… if you want to come along and work with us, we'll take you, and take care of you, and employ you."[30] A day later, Gilmore notified Task Force 58 that his government had consented to the arrangement and the ASAS would be working for the U.S. Marines. Their first mission as Task Force 64 would be to dislocate the Taliban in Kandahar.[31]

General Mattis also traveled to Islamabad, Pakistan, with Lieutenant Colonels Broadmeadow and Carl, where he paid a surprise courtesy call on Wendy J. Chamberlin, U.S. ambassador to Pakistan. Situated to the south and east of Afghanistan, Pakistan possessed a number of enabling seaport

*The success of the symbiotic relationship between Task Forces 58 and K-Bar likely helped to quell anti-Marine sentiments within the special operations community and facilitated the eventual establishment of a Marine component within Special Operations Command in 2004. (Crist comments)

and airfield facilities critical to Task Force 58's future logistics operations. When Chamberlin asked forcefully what a Marine was doing in her embassy in Pakistan, Mattis replied with a grin that he had come with a thousand of his best friends to "go to Afghanistan to kill some people."[32] Impressed by his candor, she invited him to sit and talk.[33] Mattis later commented that Chamberlin, who had been born at Camp Pendleton, California, was "magnificent" in opening doors to the Pakistani joint headquarters staff and helping to coordinate military details.[34] "Frankly, we couldn't have done the job without her leadership and assistance and her guts in taking risks," he reflected. "I hid nothing from her, held nothing back on the details of our coordination with the Pakistanis and the ConOps [concept of operations] for our attack."[35]

On 7 November, while returning from Pakistan, General Mattis stopped at the U.S. embassy in Muscat, Oman, to meet with Major General Dell L. Dailey, USA, and the commanding officer of the British 22d Special Air Service (SAS) Regiment.* Although the two American flag officers had previously spoken, they had never met in person, and this encounter marked the beginning of a collaborative affair between the commanders of Task Force 58 and Task Force Sword. While their headquarters might be physically separated by the Persian Gulf, the men would exchange occasional phone calls, and Dailey sometimes provided support during the nightly video teleconference or while talking privately with Central Command.[36]

According to General Mattis, General Dailey was a "great soldier, great advisor, one who rapidly gained my total confidence."[37] He possessed practical knowledge of the ongoing operations and shared his opinions openly. Dailey described the limits of basing his forces far to the south on board the USS *Kitty Hawk* in the Arabian Sea and suggested that establishing a forward operating base in southern Afghanistan would benefit both conventional and special operations forces. He also believed that the presence of Marines ashore would undermine the Taliban cause by contributing to the loss of strategic power in their spiritual center of Kandahar.[38] General Mattis considered the notion, figuring "there was nothing the enemy could do to throw us out if we got sufficient combat power in," and decided to pursue it further.[39] While Task Force Sword conducted missions requiring surgical precision, he thought Task Force 58 would introduce brute force to the fight.[40]

Yet not all of General Dailey's comments were optimistic. He acknowledged that close coordination would be required and that the identification and development of targets would be difficult, and he made it clear that the Marines and their aircraft would be operating at the very edge of their performance envelope. The dust in southern Afghanistan was so thick, he described, that the special operations helicopter pilots had to maintain forward movement while taking off and landing to retain ground visibility.** If this were not bad enough, he added that the Taliban's employment of antiaircraft weapons was ingenious and the Marine pilots might encounter rocket-propelled grenades as they attempted to land. Dailey also emphasized that the Taliban were not afraid to fight and that they would probably "move to the sound of the guns."[41] When asked what he intended to do for targets, General Mattis replied, "I'm just going to go in and stick a Marine battle color out in the sand and say, 'Bring it on.'"[42] Dailey reflected, "If you establish a forward operating base… the enemy may not come because you are Marines."[43]

In order to simplify coordination between the two organizations, General Mattis decided to use the same flight routes, boundaries, and control measures previously employed by Task Force Sword. Unfortunately, only a few of Task Force 58's planners were

*This meeting led to the addition of a British 22d SAS liaison team to Task Force 58's staff on 18 November.

**The special operations forces pilots were apparently flying horizontal flight paths while following terminal guidance systems to their objective, which kicked up dust in their wake. To compensate for this, the Marine pilots later flew less direct routes with sharp vertical landings. (Crist comments)



Official Navy Photo. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 021101-N-0780F-005

A U.S. Navy P-3C Orion on patrol during Operation Enduring Freedom. The Orion aircrews provided Task Force 58 with overhead intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support on numerous occasions while operating in Afghanistan.

granted full access to the information because the special forces' operations were highly classified and details about their activities were closely safeguarded. Although this constraint initially challenged the staff, they developed new coordination procedures and terminology to facilitate planning.[44]

General Mattis assigned Major Oliver, the former intelligence officer from Kuwait, as a liaison to Task Force Sword in Masira. His task was to assist the special operations forces by providing situational information, evaluating support requests, and coordinating movements within the joint battlespace. He also rotated with two other officers, serving as the command's representative on nightly aerial reconnaissance missions conducted by Fifth Fleet's Coalition maritime patrol force.[45]

Known as Task Force 57, the patrol force provided Task Force Sword with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support, and it earned high praise from General Dailey. Its P-3C Orion aircraft possessed a number of unique capabilities that General Mattis believed would enhance Marine operations ashore. He later explained,

> With its [Anti-Surface Warfare Improvement Program] enhancements, my own intel… rep on board, and the P-3 squadron's total commitment to our mission, I trusted those sailors more than a brittle request system for the [General Atomics MQ-1] Predator that did not provide feedback or the downlink that I got with the P-3.[46]

General Mattis, Lieutenant Colonel Carl, and Major Charette also traveled to Saudi Arabia to meet with two Marine air request liaison officers and other representatives of the Combined Air Operations Center at Prince Sultan Airbase. The staff articulated its needs, emphasizing concern about sufficient fire support, and the center personnel assured them that there would be around-the-clock close air support when the operation began. This was key, because only after establishing a robust fire support capability would Task Force 58 be able to focus organic assets on airlifting troops and rapidly building combat power in Afghanistan.[47]

Mattis later recalled his discussion with General T. Michael Moseley, USAF, who had recently assumed command of the theater's Combined Forces Air Component Command:



Photo by A1C Nathan Doza, USAF.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 070204-F-0199D-025
Gen T. Michael Moseley, USAF, Air Force Chief of Staff, at Balad Air Base, Iraq, on 4 February 2007. As a LtGen, he commanded Ninth Air Force and U.S. Central Command's combined forces air component from November 2001 to August 2003.

> I walked in on him with [my] map, and it showed some ships out on the ocean and a big arrow going to Afghanistan. I wasn't quite sure where I was going to go, I hadn't figured it out yet. He took one look at it and thought, "Three- to four hundred nautical miles," and immediately he registered the danger, the risk we were going to be taking. And General Moseley, at that point, said, "I'm going to take your two Marine air liaison officers out of the [sensitive compartmented information facility]… and put them up here on the [command] deck, and if you get in any trouble, you just call them, and I'll turn every airframe in the air over your head."… And based on the trust I had in General Moseley… I left my artillery behind for the first time in an assault wave in my some 30-odd years in the Marines…. [It] defined how many more assault troops I could pack in on that critical first and second day [of the assault].[48]

Task Organized and Scalable Raid Options

General Mattis delivered his initial concept of operations brief to Admiral Moore on 3 November, limiting his presentation to eight key PowerPoint slides.[49] He offered three scalable options, reflecting a range of potential objectives, force packages, and mission lengths. The first option focused on a short duration raid, 6–12 hours long, employing a company-sized force. The second option utilized a nearly simultaneous raid concept, 24–36 hours long, with two companies operating on two different objectives. The final option involved a long duration raid, 48–72 hours long, employing a battalion landing team ashore. In each case, Task Force 58 would be operating beyond doctrinal limitations, at least 350 miles from the coast.[50]

Admiral Moore was pleased with the brief and inquired about the task force's ability to conduct an indefinite-duration raid into southern Afghanistan, asking how many men would be required and how long the Marines would stay. General Mattis responded enthusiastically, "Give me 1,000 men ashore for 30 days and we could make the enemy's life hell on earth for raids."[51] This exchange was important in two respects. First, although the staff perceived this course of action as the least likely of the three options they had presented to the admiral, they ultimately received that assignment. Second, the figure of 1,000 men was only a rough estimate, although it mirrored the force cap eventually employed to limit the scope of Marine involvement in Afghanistan. As Mattis reflected after the operation, "When [the mission changed from raids] to sustained operations ashore, that 1,000 men would come back to haunt me."[52] Before concluding the meeting, Moore emphasized the importance of bold action: the Marines, he said, were not to conduct a "show of force," they were to conduct raids that would quickly and decisively defeat Taliban and al-Qaeda forces.[53] He continued, "Marines don't give themselves enough credit. A squad of Marines running through Kandahar would turn the tide."[54]

With Moore's approval of the developing concept of operations, General Mattis provided additional guidance by issuing a formal planning directive on 5 November.[55] For the next three days, in addition to the ongoing mission in Pakistan and an impending mission in Qatar, the 15th MEU conducted raid planning.[56] As General Dailey had forecast, while Task Force 58 had compiled a list of more than 120 potential targets, the two staffs discovered that definable hard targets were difficult to come by. The objectives were ambiguous and what limited information was available on specific sites was often incomplete or obsolete. It took considerable amounts of time and effort to build the target folders, often requiring that the staffs request current information from national intelligence organizations based in the continental United States.

Even when Marines could identify solid targets, competition for viable missions with Task Forces Sword and Dagger clouded the issue. For its first mission, Task Force 58 planned a 24-hour raid against a drug-processing facility in Chuttu, located 40 miles north of the Pakistani border. However, Task Force Sword had also focused on that target and ultimately ordered squadrons of the British 22d SAS regiment* to conduct the raid.[57]

When the Marines' initial targets were assigned to the special operations forces, General Mattis visited Task Force 57 with his aide, Lieutenant Cook, and communications officer, Major Stebbins.[58] While flying over southern Afghanistan on board a P-3C, they inspected Rhino, Kandahar, and Route 1 to the west.[59] After observing the collapse of retreating Taliban and al-Qaeda forces around Kandahar, the Taliban's center of religious power, Mattis was convinced that he could indeed accelerate the enemy's downfall by seizing a stronghold to their rear and forcing a turning movement.[60] Impressed by this flight and its aircrew, Mattis established a close working relationship between the two task forces and involved Navy P-3 aircraft in the Marines' future operations.[61]

Sustained Operations Ashore

On 9 November, General Mattis and Major Mahaney visited briefly with the 15th MEU on board the USS *Peleliu* off the coast of Qatar. After meeting with Colonel Waldhauser and his staff, they returned to Bahrain, and Mattis presented his formal concept of operations** to Admiral Moore.[62] A day later, he briefed the plan to Central Command by video teleconference from Bahrain,*** addressing General DeLong, the deputy commander in chief; General Victor Renuart, the operations officer; and a third officer from the plans section. Staffs in Hawaii, Doha, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the Pentagon also watched the brief, with several viewers openly questioning the Marines' ability to operate 350 miles from the coast and avoid conflicting with the efforts of special operations forces. General Dailey observed the exchange and weighed in, stating that he supported the Marines' mission and that it had already been coordinated with his organization.[63]

General Delong was pleased with what he heard and told General Mattis to continue planning**** and to include seizing and holding a forward operations base in southern Afghanistan.[64] Mattis's staff had anticipated this development and were already assessing the suitability of a former United Arab Emirates hunting camp in the southwestern desert

*The SAS raid may have been Operation Trent, an attack against an $85 million opium storage plant in Helmand Province that doubled as a local al-Qaeda command center.

**Maj Mahaney later recalled that the staff cancelled its scheduled visit to the *Peleliu* in order to prepare the brief for VAdm Moore. (Mahaney comments, 10Dec08)

***BGen Mattis recalled that the brief was delivered from the *Peleliu* (12Jul06 interview), although Task Force 58's command chronology indicates that it took place in Bahrain.

****An informal chronology of significant events maintained by Task Force 58 indicates that Central Command had directed its land component to begin planning for the establishment of a forward operating base in Afghanistan on 8 November 2001, although it does not specify if this was to be located in the northern or southern region of the country. (TF 58 Informal Chronology, 2)

as a possible location for an operating base. Given its austere operating environment, the site was particularly attractive because it possessed a limited infrastructure, including buildings; the possibility of fuel and power sources; and a 6,400-foot-long dirt airstrip for building, sustaining, and projecting combat power.[65]

Some Marines already knew of the site. During September, the future operations section at I Marine Expeditionary Force [I MEF] had considered the hunting camp and a nearby lakebed, ambiguously referred to as the "Desert Airstrip" and "Dry Lakebed," for conducting humanitarian operations in southern Afghanistan.[66] In October, 1st MEB's small operational planning team had also looked at this and other locations while participating in Exercise Bright Star and remained interested in the site's existing infrastructure.[67] The same month, Task Force Sword used the airstrip, codenamed Objective Rhino, as a forward staging area during its raid into Kandahar. It was based on this experience that General Dailey recommended the site as a suitable location for Task Force 58's forward operating base.[68] Around the same time, General Mattis telephoned Colonel Waldhauser on board the *Peleliu* and indicated that there was still much uncertainty as to where he would insert the 15th MEU. Waldhauser recommended retaking Rhino, as his Marines and sailors were already familiar with the objective area and it would provide a location for the task force to assemble its combat power and take the fight to the enemy.[69]

Although the notion of establishing a forward operating base remained relatively solid from this point forward, planning efforts during the next six days were complicated as the objective shifted from the desert airstrip at Rhino to Kandahar airport, then to airfields located near Herat, Shindand, Lashkar Gah, and then back to Rhino. The target selection process appears to have culminated one evening as staff officers from the 15th MEU and Task Force 58 acknowledged that, regardless of which follow-on objective they eventually chose, they would require a forward operating base in the southern desert to overcome the logistical obstacles presented by operating 460 miles north of the Arabian Sea.[70] As Colonel Waldhauser explained, his staff argued their case:

> We are kind of going around and around with what the mission would actually be. We knew we could take Rhino; whether we go to Herat, whether we go to Kandahar, whatever the case may be, we need to have that initial location. So… let's take Rhino and then we can move on to other things from there.[71]

Situated in an isolated region 100 miles southwest of Kandahar, Rhino was located outside the scope of special operations occurring to the north, and it provided a relatively secure operational environment in which to mass combat power rapidly before engaging the enemy.[72] The sudden, unexpected buildup of a substantial combat force behind the collapsing Taliban and al-Qaeda forces would in turn allow Task Force 58 to block their westward retreat, if not force the decisive turning engagement that Generals Mattis and Dailey had discussed only a week earlier.

Meanwhile, a *Newsweek* release appearing on 11 November stated that differences over how to follow up the Mazar-e Sharif victory had developed between General Tommy Franks and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Franks, who questioned the ability of indigenous forces to take Kandahar and Jalalabad without U.S. support, wanted to exploit the current momentum by launching "a series of airborne assaults into southern Afghanistan in the coming months, using U.S. Marines along with special forces as raiding parties on Taliban strongholds." Rumsfeld, on the other hand, still hoped that Afghans could accomplish most of the ground fighting and wanted to delay Franks's request for a brigade from the Army's 1st Cavalry Division.[73]

Portions of this news item were consistent with the unsubstantiated rumor that, although planners considered employing a significant number of airborne forces in southern Afghanistan, this

particular course of action had proved logistically untenable in November 2001. As General Newbold explained, efforts to support tactical aviation consumed most of the strategic airlift capability, so the assets necessary to move and then sustain heavy ground forces in theater were unavailable.[74] Colonel Fitzgerald later confirmed that, although planners had not considered the Marines when developing their initial concept of operations (believing that heavier airborne Army forces would eventually need to replace the Marines), the provisional brigade ultimately proved to be the only short-term alternative for opening a southern front.[75] Another staff planner who was assigned to the land component command at the time recalled that the Marines were sent into Afghanistan because they were willing to land their KC-130 aircraft at Camp Rhino, while the Air Force would not land until a 12-mile security perimeter had been established around the remote desert airstrip.[76]

On 16 November, while touring military facilities in Pakistan with Lieutenant Colonel Lethin, General Mattis issued a warning order to his subordinate commanders.[77] After special operating forces had established surveillance over the two main objective areas, 15th MEU would secure desert airstrip Rhino (Task Force 58, Objective 1) on 21 November and support the rapid buildup of Coalition forces at the newly established forward operating base. The 26th MEU would subsequently flow through Rhino to seize Kandahar airport (Task Force 58, Objective 2) on 24 November, enabling the 15th MEU to eventually close the desert airfield and consolidate with other Task Force 58 elements in the city. On order, the Marines would also interdict opposing forces moving along Asian Highway Route 1 (Task Force 58, Objective 3), the principal two-lane paved road linking the major cities in southern Afghanistan. As Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Bourne later explained, the general concept was for Battalion Landing Team 1/1 (BLT 1/1) to cut the road between Kandahar and Lashkar Gah, while Battalion Landing Team 3/6 cut the road between Kandahar and the Pakistani border.[78]

Efforts to deconflict special and conventional operations influenced the tentative timeline established for Task Force 58's impending assault. By mid-November, Task Force Sword had been prosecuting the Afghan war nonstop for more than a month, and it was now looking for a convenient opportunity to refit and reorganize before continuing the fight.* By the end of the month, the level of lunar illumination would exceed the special operations forces' comfort zone, presenting an opportunity for an operational pause between 20 November and 8 December.[79] In a series of undated, handwritten notes outlining the "Commander's Planning Guidance-Ph. III," Lieutenant Colonel Lethin indicated that the operational intent was to retain the initiative or at least maintain the shifting balance of power as Task Force Sword prepared to withdraw from the battlefield.[80]

Although he knew the Marines would be operating at the "edge of [the] envelope" and against tenacious fighters familiar with the terrain, General Mattis told his staff, "If we can draw the enemy out of prepared defenses by seizing something he values, or by cutting him off, we may be able to annihilate him as he moves against us. If he remains on the offensive, we will exploit his vulnerability to air attack. If we can dislodge him, our air forces can hit him as he moves away."[81] In addition to ensuring responsive fire support, success would require "adroit handling of [close air support], quick reaction forces, and maximum initiative and aggressiveness of all hands."[82]

*On 13 November, 32 soldiers from Company B, 75th Ranger Regiment, and an eight-man Air Force special tactics squadron element parachuted into a desert landing strip southwest of Kandahar, codenamed "Bastogne." After securing the airfield, two MC-130 aircraft delivered four attack helicopters, and two raids were conducted before retrograding early the next morning. On 16 November, 48 soldiers from Company A, 75th Ranger Regiment, and elements from an Air Force special tactics squadron inserted into desert landing strip Anzio with six desert mobility vehicles. The rangers then moved to secure desert landing strip Bulge, enabling subsequent MC-130 operations, establishment of a forward arming and refueling point, and several helicopter raids. (Briscoe, 140–44)



Photo by SSgt Manuel J. Martinez, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 100826-F-0856M-166

U.S. Marines and airmen spot a Marine Corps CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter as it is unloaded from a C-17A Globemaster III aircraft. Air Force C-17s such as the one shown here were used to supply Marines at Forward Operating Base Rhino.

The 15th MEU's crisis action team completed its preliminary mission analysis on 16 November, with Colonel Waldhauser assuming the role of mission commander. As part of his initial guidance, he directed MEU Service Support Group 15 (MSSG 15) to concern itself with conducting landing support operations along the coast of Pakistan, BLT 1/1 with seizing the desert airfield and establishing forward operating base Rhino, and Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163) with providing mission support throughout the operation. The team also identified several areas in which the expeditionary unit required assistance from Task Force 58.[83]

First, it needed help in selecting and then arranging for the use of a suitable coastal offload site. The staff emphasized that the offload site needed to support both air cushioned and utility landing craft, possess exits for both tracked and wheeled vehicle movement off the beach, and be located in close proximity to an airfield capable of handling C-17 Globemasters. Based on these requirements, they requested locations in Gwadar and Pasni, Pakistan. Second, the expeditionary unit needed help selecting and then arranging for the use of a C-17 capable airfield near the Afghan border. The staff recommended sites at Dalbandin and Shamsi, Pakistan. Third, it required sufficient theater airlift to transport forces that it could not move efficiently over the required distances with organic assets. The 15th MEU staff also questioned the rules of engagement, which required that the enemy demonstrate hostile intentions toward the Marines before they could employ deadly force. Asking for clarification of the current definition for "hostile," they requested permission to consider Taliban encountered during the reconnaissance and assault on Rhino as hostile forces.[84]

The Task Force 58 staff had already recognized the need for intratheater assets to complete the initial airlift into Afghanistan. Being concerned with the

timely movement of combat forces (including more than a company of light armored vehicles) into Rhino, they were anxious to acquire C-17 support from the Air Force for the initial buildup.[85] Designed to operate on 3,000-foot-long dirt airstrips, the Globemaster could carry three times the number of vehicles that the Marines' venerable KC-130 Hercules could.

Task Force 58 began working the request through NavCent headquarters in Bahrain and Marine liaison officers at the air operations center in Saudi Arabia on 17 November, asking for 20 sorties during the first three days of the operation.[86] They also coordinated directly with the Air Force C-17 squadron. While the pilots expressed interest in demonstrating the Globemasters' capabilities in combat for the first time, officials at U.S. Transportation Command were reluctant to commit the aircraft to southern Afghanistan because of the antiaircraft threat.[87] As the transportation situation became increasingly critical, Lieutenant Colonel Broadmeadow brought the matter to General Mattis's attention. He, in turn, approached the Joint Forces Air Command and threatened that, unless provided with the necessary airlift, he would inform the press that the expensive new piece of military hardware appeared to be incapable of accomplishing its designed mission. Leveraging all of his resources, Mattis finally acquired the necessary aircraft, fittingly configured for special operations forces.[88]

General Mattis also agreed with the 15th MEU that the rules of engagement were overly restrictive for the assault force. He asked for a modification allowing the ground force commander to treat any personnel encountered during an assault on or extraction from landing zones in enemy-held territory as hostile. Although NavCent fully supported the request, Central Command initially resisted the change. Mattis's persistent conviction that he required the freedom to engage opposing forces proactively, coupled with his trust and confidence in the abilities of the young Marines carrying out the mission, eventually led to a broadening of the criteria for defining hostile forces.[89]

On 17 November, General Mattis returned to Islamabad and met with Major General Farooq Ahmed Khan, chief of plans of the Pakistani Joint Headquarters Staff. Air Force Brigadier General Ronald F. Sams's Central Command liaison cell at the American embassy greatly facilitated the Task Force 58 staff's ability to communicate directly with the Pakistani military officers—a capability the Marines occasionally found necessary as the operations continued into the winter months.[90] Their primary conduit at the embassy was Lieutenant Colonel Asad A. Khan, a Marine Corps Forces Central Command liaison officer assigned to General Sams's team. As a foreign area officer of Pakistani descent, Khan was intimately familiar with the local culture and language. Earning the trust of the Pakistani staff, he turned years of political disengagement into a supportive personal and professional relationship.[91]

The purpose of General Mattis's current visit was to brief General Farooq on his concept of operations and to obtain additional host nation support for Task Force 58's impending operation. Although prepared for this diplomatic mission, Mattis acknowledged afterward that it was more than a little difficult.[92] Before negotiating for access to the critical seaport and airfield facilities, he had to overcome a decade of neglected political relations and ease Farooq's concerns regarding the perceived disconnect between Central Command's original intent to prosecute the war on terrorism using indigenous Afghan freedom fighters and Coalition special operations forces, and the planned operations, which involved the use of conventional military forces.[93]

After describing in detail Pakistani frustrations with the United States to General Mattis, General Farooq asked him how he was going to resolve the situation. Mattis replied candidly that there was nothing that he could do to rectify past injustices, although he pledged his personal commitment to open and honest communication with Farooq in the future. The Marine general remained true to his word:

> The Pakistanis knew the whole operation three weeks before we went in, right down to H-Hour and D-Day and the objective; they never revealed it. When I moved on to Kandahar, I flew in first to them and talked with them. I also asked their advice on each of these [operations] and how to deal with the anti-Taliban forces there. They gave me very good advice and we were able to create very close working relationships with the anti-Taliban and that sort of thing. It was very, very helpful.
>
> Something you have to remember is the Marines and sailors would never have gotten there… if we hadn't had their help. That was also important and a reminder that senior officers… have got to be able to proactively go in and work with the people, [who] at times are legitimately going to have a problem with [our intentions], and gain their support. It's real quantitative; if you don't get it, then you don't pull off the operation.[95]

Having laid the groundwork for continued discourse, Mattis and Farooq progressed toward a discussion of increasing Marine access to Pakistani military facilities and expanding the scope of Coalition operations to include an active role for Task Force 58 in Afghanistan. Although the exchange was ultimately fruitful, the Pakistani government had its own set of concerns regarding the disclosure of its support.

General Pervez Musharraf, president of Pakistan, was an ally in the war on terrorism and was already contributing fuel, several forward operating and logistical support bases, and security forces for the campaign along the Afghan border. Yet he faced tremendous political opposition and was struggling to contain both Islamic extremists and Taliban and al-Qaeda sympathizers in his own country.[96] He consequently sought to conceal or at least limit the amount of information released to the public concerning Pakistani support of U.S. military operations, and he required discretion from Coalition forces. Colonel Waldhauser recalled watching a televised Pentagon press conference from on board the *Peleliu*:

> When… [reporters] there would ask directly, "Are there U.S. forces on the ground in Pakistan," the answer was, "You'll have to talk to the Pakistani government about that, we don't discuss those things."… They tried to keep a very close hold on the fact that… we were there, that we were supporting Enduring Freedom…. So, we never really could [acknowledge] what we were doing or where we were.[97]

As a result, host nation support bases were routinely cordoned off by 250–300 Pakistani security forces, and airfield operations were limited to search and rescue missions. This, in essence, required that the Coalition launch its raids against the Taliban from either the special forces base in Uzbekistan or the *Kitty Hawk* in the Arabian Sea.

Against this backdrop of operational understatement, the Marines now proposed to move a brigade-sized air-ground task force through western Pakistan, seize a remote desert airstrip in southern Afghanistan, and establish a semipermanent forward operating base to sustain Coalition forces for at least a month. The possibility of a decisive engagement with opposing forces further threatened to broaden the scope of the war in the region. Yet, from a strategic standpoint, an explicit demonstration of American combat power, not unlike Lieutenant Colonel (at the time) James H. Doolittle's defiant air raid against Tokyo during World War II, would at once emphasize and strengthen American resolve in the war on terrorism. As Lieutenant Commander Lafferty explained, emphasizing America's role in a highly successful campaign—that had until then been waged silently by special operating forces—was a principal reason for creating Task Force 58 and adding conventional forces to the mix:[98]

> We were told to think "out of the box." They wanted something to happen now. The American people wanted more, and more, and more—something to happen fast. And they weren't getting enough information from the Task Force Sword guys, [it was] as if nothing was happening. So, this was a "put boots on the ground" in Afghanistan and show the Marine Corps and the U.S. troop concentration inside the country [type of operation].[99]

Captain Eric A. Putman, who commanded Company A, BLT 1/1, spoke more bluntly while reflecting on the experience after the operation. He recalled, "For us to get that far into Afghanistan…, put boots on the deck, and tell not only the Taliban and al-Qaeda, but the rest of the world, that America is not b–s–ing anymore, was awesome."[100]

As the operation solidified, Task Force 58 logisticians spent an increasing amount of time coordinating the mobility portion of the plan to establish a forward operating base. Their principal focus was on getting Marines and equipment ashore in Pakistan for follow-on transportation to the objective. While it was possible to send Marines directly from the amphibious ships to Rhino, this would require using CH-53E helicopters and refueling en route, either in the air or on the ground. Furthermore, employing the CH-53E as the principal insertion platform limited the amount and type of equipment that the Marines could transport ashore. It quickly became clear that they would have to establish intermediate support bases in Pakistan, from which organic and intratheater fixed-wing aircraft could transport personnel, equipment, and supplies into Afghanistan.[101]

As Generals Mattis and Farooq spoke, the Marine commander explained that he was considering three potential seaport-airfield facilities along the southern coast of Pakistan. During the discussion, it was determined that one facility was not suitable and another was located too close to Karachi.[102] This left the remote coastal fishing village in Pasni, located approximately 186 miles west of Karachi, which the 15th MEU had used a month earlier while recovering the downed Black Hawk helicopter. In addition to its proximity to the Pakistani naval base at Ormara, it possessed suitable beaches for an amphibious offload and was located 10 miles from a secluded commercial jetport naturally camouflaged by the surrounding mountains.[103] Although this solved the immediate problem of landing the Marines and their equipment and then transporting each to the objective, political constraints ironed out with Ambassador Chamberlin complicated the process by restricting movement operations to the hours of darkness and limiting the number of forces allowed ashore at any given time.[104]

General Mattis next inquired about the availability of intermediate support bases for staging forces and refueling transiting aircraft. Although his staff had assessed numerous airstrips during the planning process, they rejected many due to aircraft restrictions, terrain limitations, or proximity to hostile populations. Mattis now wanted to use the remote commercial airfield at Dalbandin that the Army Rangers had employed during their October raid on Kandahar. Situated among sand dunes near the Chagai Hills, Dalbandin was located 255 miles due north of Pasni, 23 miles south of the Afghan border, and 117 miles southwest of Objective Rhino. Instead, General Farooq offered access to a small airstrip at Shamsi that special operations forces were already using.[105]

Situated in a desolate area 46 miles south of the Afghan border, Shamsi was located 212 miles northeast of Pasni and 196 miles southeast of Rhino. Although the route through Shamsi was less direct than the one offered by Dalbandin—extending helicopter flights into Rhino by 35 miles—General Mattis later concluded that Shamsi was "isolated" and the "right choice" for an intermediate support base in Pakistan. As Operation Enduring Freedom matured and special operations in southern Afghanistan were phased out, some of the special operations equipment and facilities at Shamsi were transferred to Task Force 58. Approximately 80 Marines would eventually provide security, refueling, and air traffic control capabilities at the remote airfield. The Marines also continued to use the airfield at Jacobabad. In addition to offering a bed-down site for the four KC-130 aircraft from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadrons (VMGRs) 252 and 352, the airfield would become a critical logistics hub and provide the single source of bulk fuel and water for Coalition forces at Rhino and Kandahar.



Photo by CWO-2 William D Crow

On a forward operating airstrip, Marines from VMGR-352 prepare their KC-130 for a flight into Kandahar while a KC-130 from VMGR-252 taxis behind it for a flight into Kandahar during Operation Enduring Freedom.

On 17 November, having coordinated his plans with General Farooq, General Mattis issued his official operations order, formalizing the efforts of numerous staff planners during the previous two and a half weeks. In the end, regardless of whatever wrinkles needed to be ironed out, Mattis emphasized that Pakistani military support was never lacking and their staff "always came through," going "above and beyond every time."[106] Pakistan's initial contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom included the activation of two navy bases, deployment of frontier battalions along the Afghan border, and the employment of 42,000 army and air force personnel to support aviation operations and provide base security.[107]

The tempo of activity continued to increase during the next few days, as Marines throughout Task Force 58 concurrently planned for, prepared for, and conducted operations in support of the war in Afghanistan. In addition to video teleconferences between General Mattis and his commanders, staff representatives from each of the subordinate elements met at NavCent headquarters in Bahrain, where they continued to refine the assault plan and develop the logistics framework.[108] The detachment of four CH-53 helicopters that they had previously asked for arrived, and the staff submitted another request for the air detachment from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133, commanded by Commander Douglas G. Morton.[109] Although homeported in Gulfport, Mississippi, the Seabee detachment was currently forward deployed to Guam, mission capable, and ready to work. Moreover, that very afternoon a Seabee liaison officer assigned to Task Force 58, Lieutenant Clifford Smith, had convinced the staff that it would require construction teams to repair and maintain the dirt runway at Rhino.[110] On 18 November, General Mattis briefed Admiral Moore regarding changes to his continually evolving concept of operations, and a liaison team from the British SAS joined his staff.[111]

By that time, the *Peleliu* ready group had returned from Qatar, allowing Harriers from the 15th MEU to resume their close air support of Coalition forces in Afghanistan. They conducted three bombing missions during the third week in



Photo by PO Greg Messier USN. Defense Imagery,VIRIN: 011202-N-6520M-025

Seabees from Naval Mobile Constuction Battalion 133, homeported in Gulfport, Mississippi, help the Marines install a portable helicopter landing pad system on desert landing strip Rhino, a forward base of operations strategically located outside Kandahar, 2 December 2001.This pad will help keep the helicopter pilots from being temporarily blinded by the dust storm created by the rotor wash while landing.

November, attacking enemy troop concentrations and vehicle convoys near Lashkar Gah and Kandahar.[112] At the same time, other Marines from the MEU provided an on-call tactical recovery force for Task Force Sword, and BLT 1/1 retrieved its remaining security forces from Jacobabad, Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the *Bataan* ready group had ceased operations in the Mediterranean, after being ordered to Central Command's area of responsibility. While transiting the Suez Canal, it received its Operation Enduring Freedom orientation brief and a draft order to conduct raids in Afghanistan, and it formally attached to the Fifth Fleet on 15 November.[113] Captain Rome subsequently became the commander of Task Group 58.3 and Colonel Frick the commander of Task Group 58.4.[114] Five days later, the 26th MEU assumed the on-call tactical recovery mission from the 15th MEU.[115] During an interview, Colonel Frick commented on this rapid change in venue:

> The biggest success was our ability to transition from a rear MEU focus… a Sixth Fleet focus—to sit down, do our mission analysis, and prepare… for the Fifth Fleet AOR [area of responsibility]. So that when we showed up… we were able to say what we needed and why we needed it, so that we could properly support our Marines.[116]



Chapter 7
Operation Swift Freedom

The Campaign Continues

After routing the enemy's northern forces, Task Force Dagger expanded its scope of operations to include developing the emerging alliance of southern resistance fighters and pursuing the Taliban as they collapsed toward their capital in Kandahar. On 14 November, Operational Detachment Alpha 574 inserted near Tarin Kowt, a rural mountain settlement situated roughly 70 miles northwest of Kandahar.[1] Led by Captain Jason L. Amerine, USA, the special forces team quickly linked up with Hamid Karzai and his small band of approximately 200 soldiers. Karzai, a former deputy foreign minister, one-time mujahideen diplomat, and stalwart opponent of the Taliban, had recently returned to Afghanistan, and the Central Intelligence Agency considered him "the most promising leader in the south."[2]

Karzai considered Tarin Kowt, home to Mullah Omar and several subordinate Taliban leaders, to be the "heart" of the movement and believed that capturing the town would motivate the local Pashtuns to align with him. As a result, when the town's residents revolted against the Taliban on 16 November, he told Captain Amerine that they needed to occupy the city immediately. When they arrived that evening, the townspeople informed them that a large convoy carrying 500 to 1,000 Taliban fighters was heading their way to recapture the city. Approximately a quarter of the combined force of American and Afghan soldiers quickly established defensive positions along a ridgeline south of the city, which overlooked the main road from Kandahar, and a mountain pass guarding entry into the valley.[3]



Courtesy of U.S. Army Center of Military History

Future Afghan president Hamid Karzai (second row, third from left) poses with Army Special Forces supporting his small band of anti-Taliban militia north of Kandahar.



Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Disposition of anti-Taliban militia moving against Taliban forces in Kandahar, Afghanistan, during early December 2001.

Shortly after dawn the following day, the lead vehicles of the Taliban convoy began to clear the pass. Although the special forces successfully directed close air support against the first truck, the resistance fighters broke and ran toward Tarin Kowt. After urging Karzai to rally his troops, Captain Amerine's team occupied supplementary positions and resumed directing the air attack. This time, when dismounted Taliban attempted to flank the Americans, the resistance drove them off. The battle

ended around 1030; the Taliban force retreated to Kandahar, leaving the remains of 30 vehicles and approximately 300 dead behind.[4]

On 18 November, a day after the success at Tarin Kowt, Captain Smith and two other members of Operational Detachment Alpha 583 inserted into the Shin Narai Valley, southeast of Kandahar near the Pakistani border. After linking up with Gul Agha Sharzai and assessing the effectiveness of 650 to 800 resistance fighters, the remainder of the team joined them three days later. The combined force began its westward trek the following day, traveling in a mismatched convoy of 100 vehicles.[5]

After sustaining heavy fire from AC-130 Specter gunships during a running night battle on 23 November, Taliban forces quietly abandoned their garrison at Tahk-te-pol and retreated north. Sharzai subsequently established defensive positions along a ridge north of the town the next day, effectively blocking Highway 4, the main supply route between Pakistan and Kandahar. From this location, the Coalition force could see Kandahar airport in the distance and the special forces team directed devastating close air support against Taliban tanks, trucks, troops, and artillery throughout the next week. Although Taliban troops responded with volleys of shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles and antiaircraft artillery, they were unable to bring down any of the attacking American aircraft.[6]

The decisive victory at Tarin Kowt, which Karzai later called "the turning point" in the war, raised his credibility among regional leaders, the Northern Alliance, and the U.S. government.[7] As if to emphasize that point, on 24 November (also reported as 29 November) one of 5th Special Forces Group's battalion commanders and two other members of Special Operations Command and Control Team 52 joined Operational Detachment Alpha 574 to help advise the rising Pashtun commander.[8] Army Lieutenant Colonel David Fox, Karzai, and Amerine "then began to plan the advance on Kandahar in conjunction with Sharzai from the south."[9]

Staging for the Fight

Meanwhile, Task Force 58 maintained its hectic pace during the fourth week of November, as subordinate elements converged along the Pakistani coast, established the logistical network necessary to support operations ashore, and refined their assault plan. Members of the command element and reporters from the international press pool shipped out from Bahrain, traveling first to Pasni, Pakistan, by Marine KC-130 transport aircraft and then transferring to helicopters for the flight out to the USS *Peleliu*. Although they had begun to coordinate for workspace and billeting on board ship through Navy and Marine logistics officers during the previous week, an advance party had not gone forward to set up shop before their arrival. Once again, the staff immersed itself in locating individual berthing, reestablishing connectivity, and co-locating with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) staff in the joint intelligence center; as the operation progressed, the task force staff eventually established its operations center within the landing force operations center, where Lieutenant Commander Lafferty served as the senior watch officer.[10] Although the bulk of the task force staff, 19 personnel in all, would eventually join the amphibious forces afloat, some members of the administrative, intelligence, and logistics sections remained in Bahrain to provide a reach-back capability to the forward deployed forces.

On the same day that General Mattis and his staff arrived, Marines and sailors of the *Peleliu* ready group celebrated Thanksgiving two days early with a traditional holiday meal. That evening in the ship's wardroom, the 15th MEU presented its formal confirmation brief to the commander of Task Force 58. The meeting lasted more than three hours and provided a comprehensive overview of the plan to seize Objective Rhino and establish a forward operating base. According to Colonel Waldhauser, his aviation combat element commander, Lieutenant Colonel James K. LaVine, "was directly responsible for the detailed planning of the initial helo movement."[11] Although the two staffs tentatively



Photo by PO John Taucher, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011221-N-6610T-538

On board the USS Bataan*, Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate Steve Guarjardo, USN, signals for the rolling launch of an AV-8B Harrier from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 on 21 December 2001.*

established H-Hour at 2130 on 23 November 2001, it was clear that they needed additional planning to organize the ship-to-shore movement and staging of forces ashore.[12]

Below decks, now in a reversed sleep cycle to prepare for the all-night mission, the Marines readied themselves for the upcoming operation. They gathered around terrain models and attended mission briefs. They painted vehicles, weapons, and equipment with desert camouflage, adding the date 9/11 and black silhouettes of the Twin Towers in memory of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. They also loaded their packs onto pallets for follow-on transport to the objective, thereby reducing weight during the initial assault.[13]

By then, the USS *Bataan* had positioned itself off the coast of Pakistan to support the impending ship-to-shore operations, while the USS *Shreveport* (LPD 12) and USS *Whidbey Island* (LSD 41) proceeded to Masirah, Oman, to secure 104 pallets of bottled water in preparation for future operations ashore.[14] Key personnel from Amphibious Squadron 8 and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (26th MEU) cross-decked to the *Peleliu* the day after arriving to enhance integration within the task force and facilitate coordination among the various organizations. After General Mattis issued his guidance to the assembled commands, they split by task group and continued to refine their portion of the plan. Meanwhile, Mattis conducted a separate visit with Navy and Marine officers on board the *Bataan*.

On Thanksgiving Day, three AV-8B Harriers from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (HMM-365) flew the 26th MEU's first combat mission over Afghanistan,* attacking an enemy convoy with laser-guided bombs and destroying four vehicles.[15] Lieutenant Colonel Kevin M. DeVore, the squadron's commander, later commented, "This group of aviators and mechanics were absolutely

*According to the 26th MEU's command chronology, Harrier pilots from HMM-365 flew the squadron's first bombing missions on 20 November, while in support of joint special operating forces. (26th MEU Command Chronology [ComdC], 31May02, Part 2, pp. 15–18)



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011222-N-2383B-501
Marines from MEU Service Support Group 26 unload a landing craft (air cushioned) from Assault Craft Unit Four in Pasni, Pakistan, on 22 December 2001.

phenomenal…. Their ability to surge and fly routinely for over three months with near perfect fidelity demonstrated the ability and effectiveness of maintaining an inherent light attack ability with the MEUs."[16]

Earlier, members of the 15th MEU and Task Force K-Bar had conducted a reconnaissance and hydrographic survey of Chur Beach near Pasni, Pakistan.[17] After assessing the beach area and road network leading to the airfield, they established two beach landing sites: Blue One was used for air-cushioned landing craft, while Blue Two was used for utility landing craft. With nine air-cushioned and four utility landing craft at its disposal, the task force was now able to stage the assault forces and their supplies ashore.[18] To help track the ship-to-shore and subsequent inland movement of its forces, Task Force 58 developed a tactical logistics center. Although the 15th MEU initially served as the executive agent responsible for consolidating, coordinating, and reporting the movement of Marine forces ashore, the 26th MEU would pick up that responsibility once the forward operating base had been established.[19]

Due to Pakistani security concerns, all ship-to-shore movement in Pasni occurred at night. After reaching the beach, the Marines and sailors had to make an hour-long cross-country trip over improvised dirt roads to reach the airfield. Personnel arriving early often encountered a long stay on the beach while waiting for the convoys to assemble and for permission to move inland. Only one or two convoys ran per night, coordinated with approximately 300 Pakistani Marines who provided security during the offload, transport, and staging



Photo by TSgt Efrain Gonzalez, USAF
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011129-F-2352G-002
Members of Task Force 58 relax outside a hangar in Pasni on 29 November 2001 while waiting to board an aircraft bound for Forward Operating Base Rhino in southwestern Afghanistan.

operations. Because of its desire to maintain a low profile, the Pakistani government limited the amount of equipment allowed ashore at any given time, and many of the task force's personnel were initially confined to hangers at the airfield during the day. Additional security at the beach and airport sites was provided by provisional infantry drawn from Battalion Landing Team 3/6's (BLT 3/6's) tank platoon, commanded by First Lieutenant Cornelius D. Hickey, and amphibious assault platoon, commanded by First Lieutenant J. P. Smith.[20]

Lead elements of the 15th MEU began to deploy forward into Pakistan on 20 November. After going ashore in air-cushioned landing craft at Pasni, Captain Putman and Marines from Company A flew on to the covert special operations base at Shamsi in KC-130 aircraft, where they staged for the assault on Objective Rhino. Although they had trained as the battalion's amphibious assault company, their tracked assault vehicles would remain on ship for the duration of the operation.[21] A detachment from Marine Air Control Group 38 (MACG-38) also received the mission to establish and operate a forward arming and refueling point in Shamsi to support both the impending assault and any subsequent combat operations in Afghanistan.[22]

Around the same time, Major Robert J. Smullen, the operations officer for Battalion Landing Team 1/1 (BLT 1/1), and Marines from Weapons, Headquarters and Service, and B Companies staged at Jacobabad for movement to Rhino by KC-130.[23] To support this stage of the operation, the 26th MEU shifted its KC-130 detachment—Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 234 (VMGR-234)—from Souda Bay, Greece, to Jacobabad, Pakistan.[24]

Ship-to-Objective Maneuver

The first phase of the actual assault into Afghanistan began on 21 November, when a detachment of approximately 20 SEALs from Task Force K-Bar inserted into Objective Rhino.[25] Although Colonel Waldhauser would have preferred to use the 15th MEU's own force reconnaissance platoon to provide surveillance over the airfield and collect intelligence, General Mattis decided to use the sailors instead.[26] He later explained that this was a logistical decision, influenced by the requirement to provide a primary, secondary, and tertiary extraction capability in case of an emergency. While using Marines would have tied up several CH-53 helicopters that he needed to conduct the assault, by using the special operating forces to provide surveillance, he was able to use aircraft from Task Force Sword to meet the extraction requirement.[27] Captain Philip J. Treglia, the reconnaissance platoon commander, later acknowledged that he understood the rationale behind Mattis's decision, although it did little to relieve his frustration over not receiving the assignment himself.[28]

General Mattis chose to postpone D-Day for 24 hours on 22 November while waiting to receive an order to execute the assault.[29] After delaying for another 24 hours the following day, he released his own execute order on 24 November, directing that the assault on Objective Rhino occur the next day at 2000.[30] Although minimal conditions had been set for the Marines to launch as originally planned, members of the Central Command staff and even some senior critics within the Marine Corps questioned whether Task Force 58 possessed sufficient fuel stocks at Jacobabad to sustain combat operations in Afghanistan. At Mattis's direction, Lieutenant Colonel John Broadmeadow diligently rechecked his supply and consumption estimates down to the last gallon. He assured the general that (when considering multifuel vehicles) they possessed the necessary reserves to proceed.[31] Still, the extra time did provide an opportunity for Task Force 58 to stockpile additional equipment and supplies ashore. It obtained additional fuel bladders* from the Air Force, enabling it to increase the storage capacity at Jacobabad airfield before the operation and at Objective Rhino following the assault.[32]

*MajGen Waldhauser recalled that the extra fuel was initially for aviation, rather than ground, operations. (Waldhauser comments)

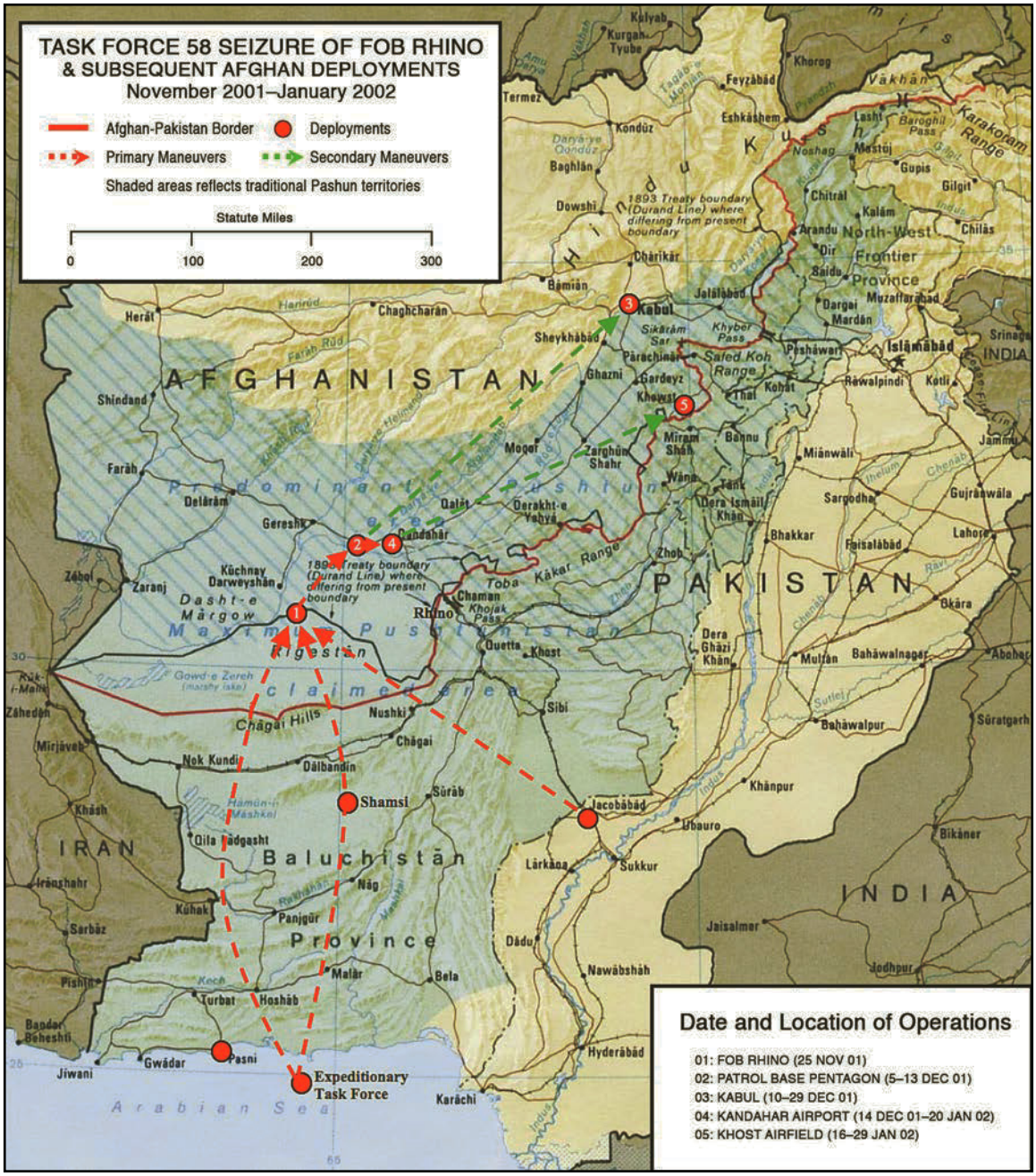


Diagram by Col Nathan S. Lowrey

Map depicting the seizure of Forward Operating Base Rhino and subsequent TF-58 deployments in Afghanistan.

Operation Swift Freedom began late in the afternoon on 25 November 2001. Task Force 58 had assumed control of the Shamsi facility at 1200, confirmed H-Hour at 1400, and readied to begin the assault at 1600.[33] As launch time approached, Marines on the hanger deck of the *Peleliu* test fired their weapons through the elevator well into sea, then hauled their packs, weapons, and equipment—often weighing in excess of 100 pounds—toward awaiting transport helicopters on the flight deck. As

the straining troops boarded the aircraft with their faces beaded with sweat, chaplain Lieutenant Commander Donald P. Troast, USN, touched some on the shoulder and "asked God to bless every one of them," regardless of their religion.[34]

The first flight of aircraft lifted from the *Peleliu* around 1615 and headed inland. Led by Major William T. Bufkin II,* the escort force included four AH-1W Super Cobra and three Bell UH-1N Iroquois (nicknamed the "Huey") helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163). As Task Force 58 assumed control over its designated area of operations in Afghanistan 45 minutes later, Captain Jay M. Holtermann led the first half of the assault force north from the *Peleliu*. Composed of three CH-53s, this wave carried Captain James Fallon and Marines from Company C, BLT 1/1.[35] As the sun began to set, a third and final flight of three CH-53s from HMM-365 touched down briefly on the *Peleliu*, embarked the remainder of Company C, and headed toward Afghanistan around 1745.

To help coordinate the operation, Captain Eric J. Ropella flew overhead in a P-3 Orion from Task Force 57, serving as the overall air mission commander and providing an airborne relay among the three flights and Task Force 58's various command elements.[36] Four Harriers from each of the two expeditionary units and numerous fixed-wing Coalition aircraft were also on hand, ready to provide close air support should the situation become tenuous. If the plan went according to schedule, the lead elements of the assault force would descend upon the desert airfield precisely at 2100.[37]

The three aircraft flights flew north in series, while unit commanders, staff personnel, and members of the media anxiously monitored events from on board the *Peleliu*. Colonel Waldhauser later recalled the serenity of the unfolding situation in the landing force operations center: "It was really… awesome… one of those days where things go well and you just have to savor it." Although the operation encountered minor glitches, the expeditionary unit's "detailed planning had paid off" and "it just went like clockwork."[38] Back at the joint operations center in Tampa, General Franks also watched as the Marines "reoccupied Objective Rhino," noting that this was the "beginning of the end."[39]

The escort force headed toward Shamsi, Pakistan, where they halted briefly to refuel and then continued toward the objective area. The assault force headed toward a 57-mile-long helicopter aerial refueling track established just south of the Afghan border. Each of these two divisions had 45 minutes to link up with a KC-130 tanker from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (VMGR-352) and refuel. While the first group from HMM-163 received fuel from Major Brian Magnuson's tanker with little difficulty, two aircraft in the second group from HMM-365 were hindered by mechanical problems with one of the two hoses on Major Wayne M. Bunker's KC-130; the pilots also discovered that the "basket" at the end of the hose flew at a different altitude than normal when the aircraft was fully loaded with both fuel and troops.[40] Fortunately, air planners had anticipated this contingency, and the two helicopters carried enough fuel to reach Objective Rhino, where they could shut down until follow-on-forces established an anticipated forward arming and refueling point.[41]

As the first assault division was exiting the refueling track, just five miles south of the border, the escort force began to cross into Afghanistan. They flew in staggered waves—two Super Cobras, three Hueys, and then two more Cobras clearing the remaining 92-mile path into Objective Rhino. As the assault force crossed the border behind them, the moonlit terrain shifted from low mountains to flat desert, and the speeding aircraft rose from 75 to 200 feet above sea level to compensate for the decrease in visual contrast. The crews also conducted

*The escort element flew in two staggered divisions. Because Maj Bufkin, in the lead AH-1W division, was completing his flight leader qualification during the mission, Capt John B. Barranco technically served as the overall escort flight leader. The second UH-1N division was led by Capt Scott P. Suckow.



Photo by CWO-2 William D. Crow. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020310-M-1499F-372

A Marine CH-53 Sea Stallion is refueled in the air by a KC-130 Hercules in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan on 15 November 2001. Given the extreme distances and altitudes encountered by Marines in Afghanistan, the Sea Stallion's range (540 miles), ceiling (16,750 feet), and payload (42,000 pounds) made the aircraft critical to Task Force 58.

penetration checks, switching off unnecessary devices that produced illumination or emitted an electronic signature, to decrease the likelihood of premature detection during the final leg of their journey.[42]

By this time, the SEALs had been providing ground surveillance and reconnaissance over the objective area for four days, sending intelligence updates to personnel on board the *Peleliu*. During the raid, the Orion from Task Force 57 watched from the air, transmitting "real-time" images of the developing situation to the *Peleliu* throughout the night. The Orion proved to be such an effective asset on this occasion that the Marines asked them to continue providing overhead observation and an early warning capability for the remainder of their stay in Afghanistan.*

Before departing, the raid force had received word that Objective Rhino was clear of enemy.[43] Now, as the assault element approached the abandoned airfield, visible two miles in the distance, the escort flight leader relayed confirmation that the runway remained clear of hostile forces by passing the radio code word "Winter." After more than four hours in the air, the first flight of CH-53 helicopters and their Cobra escorts began to descend toward the landing zone at 10-minute intervals, guided toward their destination by flashing infrared strobe lights that the SEALs had placed in the middle of the dirt runway. Due to severe brownout conditions—thick, towering dust clouds stirred up by the aircraft's spinning rotor blades—several of the pilots were forced to approach the runway several times before successfully landing.[44]

*Capt David Hanley, an AH-1 Cobra pilot from HMM-365, was one of the Task Force 58 liaison officers who flew on board the P-3 during Operation Enduring Freedom. (DeVore comments)

The assault force reached Rhino just 30 seconds after its designated L-Hour, employing a configuration similar to the one used so successfully when occupying the airfield at Jacobabad seven weeks earlier. The first wave carried 66 passengers and 2 interim fast-attack vehicles armed with heavy machine guns and man-portable Javelin antitank missiles. Included among the passengers were Captain Fallon and Company C's headquarters staff, a reinforced rifle platoon, and a SEAL liaison team to coordinate with the surveillance and reconnaissance detachment.[45]

Fallon and his Marines had four intermediary objectives, consecutively labeled A through D. The first two prominent terrain features, situated 1,600 and 1,900 meters north of the runway, were oriented toward likely avenues of approach. They were to occupy these prior to the arrival of the second flight of CH-53s, resulting in a "grueling cross-country march under sustainment loads in excess of 130 pounds."[46] The intent was to get the Marines into position as quickly as possible so they could delay any approaching Taliban forces long enough for the attack helicopters to engage. Even though the assault force had received word that the objectives were clear of Taliban, Fallon later acknowledged his concern that they might encounter unanticipated opposition during the forced march—either some troops that the SEALs had overlooked or others who had entered the objective area just prior to the insert.[47]

At the same time, a flurry of activity was occurring on the airfield. The SEAL liaison team had linked up with the surveillance and reconnaissance detachment, initiating the handover with Task Force K-Bar. The desert patrol vehicles were providing transportation to the Marine air traffic control squadron's mobile team, covering them as they hurried to set up runway lights for the introduction of follow-on forces. The Huey and Cobra helicopters began to land, taking up positions along the airfield where they remained on a 15-minute strip alert. In a classic case of understatement, Captain Fallon later remarked, "It was a fairly busy 30, 40 minutes until the second wave hit the deck."[48]

Forty-five minutes after the assault began, as the first wave announced "clear" and exited the objective area to the west, the second flight arrived.[49] This flight carried 95 passengers, including Lieutenant Colonel Bourne and BLT 1/1's small jump command post, Lieutenant Colonel Spillers and a forward team from the 15th MEU staff, detachments from MACG-38 and the Air Force's 21st Special Tactics Squadron, and additional Marines from Company C.[50] Because they would be physically isolated in the desert, the battalion staff brought a suite of satellite, high-frequency, and ultrahigh-frequency communications equipment ashore, enabling them to talk directly to the fighter cover as well as to orbiting Navy P-3 and Air Force Boeing E-8C Joint Stars surveillance aircraft.[51]

Once Air Force Captain Michael J. Flatten and personnel from his special tactics detachment had declared the dirt runway KC-130 capable, the buildup of combat forces at Forward Operating Base Rhino (FOB Rhino) began in earnest. Marines from MACG-38 managed the airspace over southwestern Afghanistan and orchestrated the flow of aircraft arriving and departing FOB Rhino. The first KC-130, arriving from Shamsi, Pakistan, landed only 90 minutes after the assault had begun. The crew completed a combat offload of troops and cargo in minimum time,* deplaning Captain Eric A. Putman and Company A.[52] By the end of the evening, VMGR-352 had flown eight sorties into FOB Rhino. Arriving at 20- to 30-minute intervals, the C-130s enabled Task Force 58 to insert 403 troops, 4 fast-attack vehicles, and a variety of supporting equipment into southern Afghanistan.[53]

Marines from BLT 1/1's weapons company and scout sniper platoon, the expeditionary unit's force reconnaissance platoon, and Marine Wing Support Squadron 373 (MWSS-373) were among those units

*Capt Fallon recalled that the first C-130 landed 15 minutes after the second wave arrived, carrying the last Marines from Company C, and that Company A began to arrive on the second C-130. (Fallon interview, 7)



Photo by Sgt Joseph R. Chenelly

Under the weight of a full combat load and a machine gun, a Marine from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit moves to a security position at Forward Operating Base Rhino, Afghanistan, on 25 November 2001. An AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopter is visible in the background.

arriving during the first night of Operation Swift Freedom. As the battalion reinforced its hasty defense around the airfield with Company A situated to the east and Company C to the west, the squadron established a forward arming and refueling point to support the stream of incoming aircraft and future aviation operations at FOB Rhino.[54] Inside the perimeter, each of the forward elements set up temporary command posts.[55] At the same time, the force reconnaissance team launched a long-range mobile patrol to reconnoiter the surrounding area.[56] Colonel Bourne, who had realized that there were no hostile forces in the immediate area, later commented that after completing the long-range insert, he had believed that the riskiest part of the operation was over. He recalled that he thought as long as they got there and didn't have a mishap along the way—because of the sheer complexity of the operation, refueling, and the distances that were covered—they would be okay.[57]

As dawn approached, the increased threat from man-portable air defense systems like the Soviet SA-7 Grail and U.S. FIM-92 Stinger, as well as outlying antiaircraft artillery, temporarily halted aviation operations. Although rotary-wing aircraft would eventually operate around the clock at FOB Rhino, fixed-wing aircraft, with few exceptions, remained restricted to night operations through the end of December.[58] This proscription was initially due to the antiaircraft threat but later reflected the continuance of previously established aircrew and aircraft maintenance cycles, as well as the increasing amount of time required to repair the degrading dirt runway.[59]

Establishing Forward Operating Base Rhino

"One of the first platoons on the ground raised an American flag high into the new dawn sky on a makeshift pole proudly marking the Marines' successful landing," wrote Sergeant Joseph R.



Photo by Sgt. Joseph R. Chenelly

Marines with Company C, Battalion Landing Team 1/1, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) raise the first American flag in Afghanistan on 26 November 2001, as Operation Enduring Freedom begins.To the dismay of Task Force 58 sailors and Marines, Central Command would later order the flag removed.

Chenelly, a combat photographer assigned to 15th MEU.[60] Staff Sergeant Norris, a platoon sergeant with Company C and a native of Brooklyn, New York, captured the spirit and significance of the event, commenting, "This is for our great country, the United States, and the great city of New York. Marines take pride in raising the flag, and pride doesn't begin to describe the feelings today. I hope these colors can be seen all the way across Afghanistan."[61]

The Marines' pride was only equaled by their subsequent dismay when Central Command ordered them to take the flag down several days later. The rationale behind the order was a topic of widespread speculation among Task Force 58 personnel, as well as one of the most common and difficult questions that General Mattis encountered while walking the lines and speaking with junior Marines each day.[62] Perhaps senior officials in Tampa, Florida, or Washington, DC, worried that the Afghan people would interpret the American flag as a symbol of imperialism, undercutting the administration's desire that the Coalition be viewed as liberators rather than conquerors.

Adding to the Marines' disappointment, within a week of their arrival in southern Afghanistan, General Franks banned the name Swift Freedom as a means to distinguish the assault from other actions occurring during Operation Enduring Freedom and the overall Global War on Terrorism.[63] A plausible explanation for this action comes from a press conference held at the Pentagon on 26 November when reporters asked General Myers if the name indicated that the operation would soon be over. The general responded,

> The operation… will not be over soon…. We've said this many times from right here that this operation, on a worldwide basis, will go on probably for years—in Afghanistan, for a substantial amount of time. We do not think that it's going to be over anytime soon, no matter what we name the operation.[64]



Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

U.S. Marines established Forward Operating Base Rhino southwest of Kandahar in November 2001.

Back at FOB Rhino, Colonel Bourne described the installation as a dirt runway, dirt apron, and compound set in a "very flat, very shallow depression… with a couple of key pieces of… microterrain."[65] An elevated plateau paralleled the airfield approximately two miles to the north, gradually transitioning to a series of hills and ridgelines six miles out.[66] The two rifle companies received indirect fire support from a section of BLT 1/1's 81mm mortar platoon, while Marines from BLT 1/1's scout-sniper platoon established observation posts outside the defensive perimeter. The force reconnaissance team, led by Gunnery Sergeant Blake L. Smith, traveled several hundred miles during the next day, observing local villages, planting seismic sensors, monitoring highway traffic, and generally screening the task force's western flank.[67]

First Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick, who commanded Company B's weapons platoon, described the airfield facilities in his memoir:

> Rhino was a short dirt runway and a complex of buildings enclosed within a white block wall. Guard towers studded the four corners. Inside the wall stood a high-ceilinged warehouse, a water tower, half a dozen smaller buildings, and a mosque. All were impressively constructed, with marble floors, granite countertops, new



Photo courtesy of Maj Michael P. Mahaney

Buildings occupied by Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163, left, and Battalion Landing Team 1/1 at Forward Operating Base Rhino.

> lighting fixtures, and white plaster walls. Paved roads flanked by brick drainage ditches connected the buildings.[68]

Although the assault force initially intended to secure the compound the first night, reconnaissance revealed signs that someone had entered the compound following the rangers' earlier raid, burying enemy dead and scavenging surviving materials.[69] Aware of the mine and booby trap threat that this presented, the Marines decided to isolate the area and clear the buildings the following morning when it could be accomplished with adequate light and in conjunction with the combat engineers and explosive ordnance disposal technicians.[70] Although the assault force did not encounter mines, they did find ordnance from the previous raid.[71]

Marines from the expeditionary unit's service support group focused on infrastructure and sustainment concerns. Support personnel followed closely behind the ordnance disposal technicians, partitioning buildings and identifying spaces for the command post, hospital, maintenance activity, supply warehouse, sustainment storage, antenna farm, and latrines. Major Henry M. Hymes III, executive officer of MEU Service Support Group 15 (MSSG 15), also drew samples from the water reservoir and tower that personnel on board ship could test for potablility. Although the well system was disconnected, the reservoir held approximately 30,000 gallons of stagnant water that the Marines could purify and use to sustain forces ashore for approximately 10 to 15 days.[72]

Meanwhile, in the hangar deck of the *Peleliu*, other Marines from the 15th MEU prepared to go ashore at Pasni for an evening flight into FOB Rhino. Correspondents who witnessed the Marines loading ammunition into their weapons, their faces masked with camouflage paint, inquired about the status of the continuing operation. Despite reservations regarding the presence of media representatives on board ship, General Mattis explained that Task Force 58 had established a foothold ashore and was "going to support the Afghan people's effort to free themselves of the terrorists and the people who support terrorists."[73]

Failing to note his intention to withdraw following the operation, at least two reporters chose to focus on the general's assertion that "the Marines have landed and we now own a piece of Afghanistan."[74]

General Mattis obviously intended to play upon the traditional and oft-quoted 19th-century news report usually attributed to Richard Harding Davis: "The Marines have landed and the situation is well in hand." Yet his ad-libbed claim worried senior leaders who were already apprehensive about the growing number of conventional forces ashore and the potential for negative reactions from the Afghan people. Just days prior to the Marines' assault on Rhino, a report in the *Wall Street Journal* noted, "There also are serious questions about how the U.S.'s allies in the Northern Alliance would respond to a larger U.S. presence on the ground. Rebel leaders already have complained about the stationing of 100 British troops at an air base near Kabul."[75]

A day following the Marine landing, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Victoria C. Clarke stated that 1,000 Marines would participate in establishing the initial forward operating base, and officials expected the number to rise in the future.[76] Yet during a press briefing with General Myers later that day, Secretary Rumsfeld presented a slightly different view. During his initial remarks, without prompting, he emphasized that the Marines were "not an occupying force. Their purpose is to establish a forward base of operations to help pressure the Taliban forces in Afghanistan to prevent Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists from moving freely about the country."[77] When questioned as to whether he envisioned the Marines fulfilling a support role or serving as the vanguard in the battle against terrorism in Afghanistan, he responded, "We think of them as a—establishing a forward operating base. And we don't discuss future plans or developments, so there's really nothing one would say beyond that, except that that's what the—these are hundreds, not thousands, of Marines." When again questioned about the Marines' intent during a press briefing with General Franks at Central Command headquarters the next

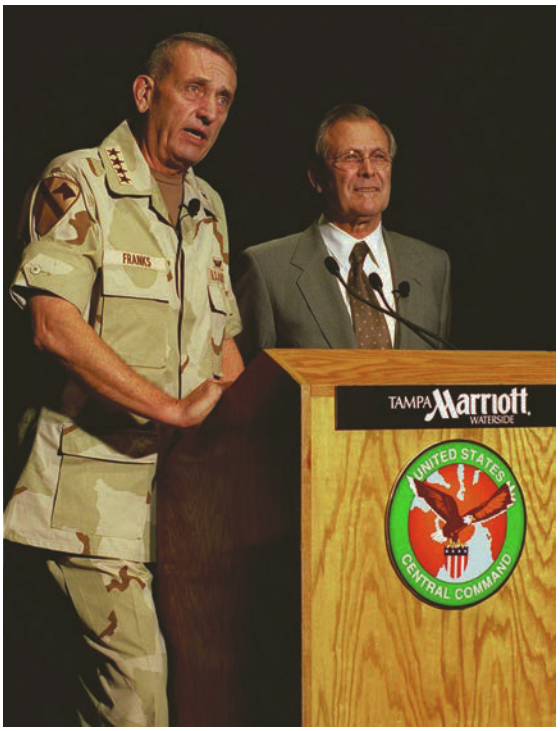


Photo by Robert D. Ward, courtesy of the Department of Defense. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011127-d-9880w-084

Gen Tommy R. Franks, USA, commander of U.S. Central Command, and Donald H. Rumsfeld, U.S. secretary of defense, brief reporters in Tampa, Florida, on 27 Nov 2001.

day, Rumsfeld reiterated that he had pointed out on a number of occasions that the United States coveted no one else's land, and certainly not Afghanistan. He said the United States was there to do a job—to root out terrorists and terrorist networks and ensure that the Taliban government that invited them and had been harboring them was gone. Also, although he did not mention him by name, Rumsfeld stated that General Mattis was a "very fine officer," was "clearly exuberant," and was "speaking figuratively, not literally."[78]

Ironically, three weeks later, Hamid Karzai confided that he had welcomed the Marine claim as a clear indication of victory and enthusiastically shared the information with his militiamen.[79]

Early on the moonlit evening of 26 November, an E-8C monitoring enemy lines of communications detected an eastward moving convoy of 15

vehicles, including two Soviet-era BRDM-2 armored personnel carriers.* The column was operating approximately 50 miles northwest of FOB Rhino near Lashkar Gah.[80] Because it did not present an immediate threat to the Marine outpost and it was possible that the vehicles were transporting humanitarian aid recently dropped by Coalition aircraft, Central Command observed the convoy for three and a half hours to verify its identity and intent. Eventually, patrolling Grumman F-14B Tomcats from Fighter Squadron 102 (VF-102) on board the USS *Carl Vinson* spotted the column and attacked the two personnel carriers with a laser-guided GBU-12 bomb.[81]

At the same time, a section of two AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters from HMM-163 were conducting an armed reconnaissance flight forward of FOB Rhino and heard the F-14 pilots over their radios. The Marine aircrews included Captains John B. Barranco and David M. Steele piloting the first aircraft call sign "Evil Eye 34" and Captains Kristian D. Pfeiffer and Richard B. Lawson piloting the second "Evil Eye 35."[82] The Cobras headed toward the convoy and—at the Joint Star's request—helped coordinate the attack and watched as the Tomcats engaged the armored personnel carriers. After the Navy fighters had completed their bombing run, striking just in front of the lead armored personnel carrier and disabling it, the Marines took their turn.[83]

Emerging from behind a nearby ridge, the Cobras used their 20mm cannon and rockets to engage the two armored vehicles and eight to ten dismounted personnel. Captain Barranco later described the attack:

> At least some of the Taliban were out of the vehicles. I'm guessing they thought they hit a mine since the F-14s were so high. They heard us and some of them started firing wildly in the air toward the sound of the Cobras—the rest started running. We made several passes destroying the vehicles and killing the squad.[84]

Passing back over the convoy, the pilots used their night-vision goggles and infrared sensors to assess the battle damage but determined that nothing of military value was left.[85] Back at FOB Rhino, Task Force 58 believed that this early encounter with armored personnel vehicles could foreshadow the appearance of enemy tanks, emphasizing an immediate need for its own light armored vehicles, as well as Air Force C-17 aircraft, to transport support into Afghanistan.[86]

After reopening the airfield for operations following the convoy attack, Task Force 58 resumed the buildup of combat forces at Rhino. Arriving units quickly took up residence in the commandeered buildings of the former Taliban compound, while some of the Marines sheltered in the warehouse.[87] General Mattis accompanied the second day's flow of forces into Afghanistan, arriving at 1910 with a small jump command post consisting of his aide, Lieutenant Cook; his communications officer, Major Stebbins; and two enlisted communicators.[88] Lieutenant Smith, the Seabee liaison officer, joined them the following day.[89] They established communications with Task Force 58's forward elements on board the *Peleliu*, also poised to go ashore when called on by their commander, who in turn maintained communication with the rear elements in Bahrain.[90]

Colonel Waldhauser also arrived during the second night of the airlift with members of his staff and the three subordinate units. They quickly established their joint task force enabler communications suite, providing for the reception of long-range visual communications at the base. In addition to bringing another 170 troops forward, the evening's airlift also increased the force's mobility and firepower by adding 14 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs, referred to hereafter as *humvees*) into the mix.[91] Many of these belonged to the battalion's weapons company and were armed with either M2 .50-caliber

*Barranco recalled that the convoy consisted of only two BRDM-2 armored personnel vehicles, and he is unaware of any concern that they might have been distributing humanitarian aid. (LtCol John B. Barranco, TF 58 History, Taliban Convoy Attack, e-mail to author, 30May10)

heavy machine guns; MK19 40-mm automatic grenade launchers; or tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided antitank missiles.[92] Other vehicles sent to bolster the airfield defense belonged to the 26th MEU's low-altitude air defense detachment.[93]

On 27 November, Captain Treglia sent out Task Force 58's second long-range deep reconnaissance patrol. Operating under the command of Gunnery Sergeant Smith, Team 2 headed approximately 50 miles north of FOB Rhino, within 5 miles of the convoy that naval aviation had destroyed the previous evening. At this time, small groups of enemy occupied a series of villages along Highway 1, the east-west thoroughfare between Kandahar and Lashkar Gah. Intelligence sources detected movement near the latter location and suggested that opposition might be encountered in that area. The patrol remained in the field for approximately a week before returning to FOB Rhino around 1 December. Although they had requested air reconnaissance several times, the situation remained calm and the Marines did not encounter any opposition. In one case, however, several intimidated civilians did surrender to a circling Cobra gunship, but they presented no threat to the Marines and were allowed, if not encouraged, to return to the desert.[94]

Company B arrived by KC-130 from Pasni on 27 November, comprising most of the 168 troops and nine additional humvees inserted into Rhino that evening.[95] Although Captain Whitmer expected to serve as the battalion's reserve, he was assigned responsibility the following morning for the southeast corner of the J-shaped, 7,500-meter defensive perimeter that would eventually enclose the airfield, ammunition supply point, fuel dump, helicopter park, and headquarters compound.[96] Lieutenant Fick attached his M249G machine gun and M136 AT4 antiarmor weapon assault teams to the rifle platoons to put more fire forward, while Staff Sergeant Keith A. Marine centered the 60mm mortar section behind the company's position. First Sergeant O'Neil O. Weilbacher reflected that the company was stretched as thin as he had ever experienced, covering almost two miles of frontage; it could take two hours to walk the line at a casual pace, checking on the Marines and their fighting positions. Fortunately, they were able to establish wire lines between the platoon command posts, and radio communications were solid over the flat terrain. Company C, situated to the left of Company B, was oriented toward the northwest, while Company A, situated to the right, was oriented toward the northeast.[97]

Captain Putman recalled that his Marines spent the first few days ashore acclimating to the austere desert environment, familiarizing themselves with the local terrain, and establishing their defensive positions.[98] Temperatures varied greatly, rising to 80 degrees during the day and then plummeting to 30 degrees at night. As Sergeant Anthony A. Anguiano,



Associated Press

Cpl Jamyn Williams, an automatic rifleman with Company A, Battalion Landing Team 1/1, cleans his squad automatic weapon at Forward Operating Base Rhino, Afghanistan, on 30 November 2001. In the background, another Marine improves his fighting position along the airfield's defensive perimeter.



Associated Press

Marines from Company C, Battalion Landing Team 1/1, attempt to stay warm while manning fighting positions along the defensive perimeter at Forward Operating Base Rhino on 5 December 2001.

one of his squad leaders, commented, "There is ice in our canteens in the morning, and the parkas we have practically save our lives."[99] Vegetation was sparse, surrendering the ground cover to a mixture of loose sand, scattered rocks, and intermittent patches of protruding sticks. The sand, similar in consistency to talcum powder, was a problem: when disturbed, billowing dust clouds arose to linger in the air for 15 minutes before dissipating, requiring the Marines to continually brush the debris from their weapons, equipment, and workspaces. Beneath the sand, the Marines soon discovered a layer of underlying limestone bedrock, which made digging more than a simple chore.[100]

Establishing the defensive perimeter invariably required entrenchment: "digging in, setting up the machine guns, sinking the mortar base plates."[101] The latter task involved test firing the mortars to calibrate the crew-served weapons, resulting in "earthshaking blasts" and "plumes of dust" a mile and a half into the desert.[102] Once the defense was established, the companies settled into a day-night operations cycle. At 0500, about an hour before sunrise, the Marines would "stand to" in their fighting positions, raising the battalion's security posture to 100 percent alert. An hour after sunrise they would "stand down," dropping to 25 percent alert (one man in four armed and ready for action). Most days remained relatively quiet, allowing the Marines to complete a host of "continuing actions" necessary to maintain their combat effectiveness. As Captain Putman remarked, "The Marines were not suffering from boredom; we kept them focused."[103]

The Marines cared for their weapons; improved their fighting positions; slept on thin, foam ground mats; and subsisted on two liters of bottled water and two (later three) prepackaged field rations, otherwise known as meals-ready-to-eat (MREs), per day.[104] They also attended to personal matters such as washing, shaving, brushing their teeth, and

establishing field-expedient latrines.[105] Knowledge that 89 percent of the soldiers hospitalized during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan suffered from contagious diseases like hepatitis, cholera, and typhoid—avoidable through basic hygiene practices—drove home the need for cleanliness.[106]

The Marines also practiced reaction drills designed to counter enemy offensive actions and conducted foot-mobile local security patrols. During the daytime, longer-range patrols usually deployed by humvee, scouted the area two to three miles north of the airfield. Sometimes the squads received rides back to the perimeter following their patrol, while other times they walked. Although the Marines did not identify any hostile forces during these patrols, they did occasionally encounter camel-mounted Afghans, excavated positions, digging equipment, and caves.[107] Captain Whitmer reflected, "There were things going on out there."[108]

As darkness approached, the line companies increased their security posture to 50 percent alert and established night observation and listening posts. Although dust storms, fog, or periods of low illumination could seriously limit visibility, the Marines were able to employ the night sights from various missile systems to observe the perimeter.[109] A reporter from *Newsweek* captured the mundane existence along the frontlines in this way: "At night the grunts did virtually anything to keep themselves awake and entertained. Shivering in the 30-degree cold, they sang lewd songs, talked about how ready they were to kill, and pondered the discos and clubs they would head out to when they returned home as heroes."[110]

The Marines also sent out short-range security patrols to scout the area extending 3 miles north of their positions. These patrols departed and returned through friendly lines and could last 8 to 10 hours. They investigated the area around assigned checkpoints; set up temporary en route "ambush" sites; and generally tried to disrupt enemy attempts to probe their lines, observe airfield operations, or shoot down approaching aircraft.[111] Although both types of patrols were coordinated with the observation and listening posts, line of sight communications could be disrupted by the increasingly rough terrain farther afield. Expedient solutions involved establishing temporary retransmission sites or simply relaying messages through adjacent patrols.[112]

Aviation Operations and Airfield Maintenance

During the initial 48 hours of the operation, Task Force 58's air officers used radio, secure telephone, e-mail, and Internet chat to maintain a running dialogue with the liaison officers stationed at the combined air operations center in Saudi Arabia. The liaison officers provided an essential link to Central Command's air component, becoming partners in procuring the aviation assets necessary to support the Marines' buildup of combat power ashore.

The Marines from VMGR-252 and VMGR-352 continued to operate from Jacobabad, Pakistan, and Sheikh Isa Air Base in Bahrain. While fulfilling the majority of Task Force 58's intratheater lift requirements, they would eventually fly more than 1,400 sorties and accumulate more than 2,500 flight hours. In addition to validating the squadrons' presence by carrying 8,400 passengers, delivering 9 million pounds of cargo and fuel, and completing numerous refueling and casualty evacuation missions, they also earned the respect and admiration of the grateful forces they were supporting.

A series of obstacles faced by the aircrews and mechanics made their accomplishments all the more impressive. First, their aircraft frames ranged from 25 to 42 years in age; the oldest in VMGR-352 dated back to 1960.[113] Second, the aircrews flew the majority of their tactical missions at night because only three of the KC-130s possessed aircraft survivability equipment, such as the infrared missile countermeasure system. Third, pilots conducted tactical approaches, landings, and departures without the aid of night-vision goggles because the cockpits

were not night-vision compatible.[114] Finally, given the aircrafts' age, the squadrons' high tempo of operations, and the austere operating environment, mechanics had to perform continuous aggressive maintenance to keep the Marines flying.[115]

Despite the effectiveness of the Marine transport squadrons, Task Force 58's previously defined need for additional airlift remained critical to the timely buildup of sustainable combat forces at FOB Rhino. Although Captain Flatten had already assessed the dirt runway as C-17 capable, Air Force officials were still reluctant to expose their larger transport aircraft to airfield operations in southern Afghanistan. After security patrols and observation posts were established in the landing and take-off zones, the antiaircraft threat assessment was updated, and a phone call was made to Air Force Major General Michael W. Wooley, then commander of the Tanker Airlift Control Center at Air Mobility Command, C-17s were finally authorized for nighttime operations at Rhino. Thereafter, planners routinely programmed two C-17 flights per day into the air tasking order to fly sustainment into Rhino, adjusting the loads to meet daily requirements.[116]

The first C-17 flight carried lead elements of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133's air detachment, formally designated as Task Force 58.5. Led by Lieutenant Commander Leonard W. Cooke and Lieutenant Joel K. Sensenig—the unit's operations officer and his assistant—this advance party had flown from Guam to Diego Garcia on board Lockheed C-5 Galaxy transports before boarding C-17s for the final leg of their journey into southern Afghanistan.

Although Colonel Lethin wanted to continue the buildup of combat forces unabated, Colonel Broadmeadow and Lieutenant Smith had argued persuasively that three nights of continuous aviation operations had taken a heavy toll on the desert airstrip and that it required repair if the buildup were to continue.[117] In addition to pulverizing the top 6 inches of the runway into dust, ruts up to 12 inches deep had begun to appear where the C-130s were



Photo by TSgt Efrain Gonzalez, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011129-f-2352g-013

A Marine rough terrain forklift unloads an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III aircraft at Pasni, Pakistan, on 29 November 2001. Given the airbase's close proximity to the coast, it served as an important transload site and intermediate support base to Task Force 58 forces ashore in Afghanistan and afloat in the Arabian Sea.

landing and taking off.[118] As Lieutenant Smith later explained, the camp's original owners had designed the airfield to support occasional use by light, single-engine airplanes, not continual use by heavily laden military transport aircraft.[119]

Given the limited number of aircraft at their disposal, Task Force 58 decided to fly only a third of the full complement of Seabees in at this time. In the staff's view, this would provide the necessary personnel, equipment, and materials to address the immediate airfield maintenance issues at FOB Rhino, leaving the remainder of the force to deploy forward after completing the insertion of combat forces and then seizing Kandahar airport. This plan, reached with the input of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NavCent) engineers, reduced the initial number of Seabee personnel from 89 to 27, and the subsequent airlift requirement for transporting their equipment from 25 to 8 C-130 loads.[120]

The Seabee detachment arrived at FOB Rhino ready to work. Although the initial complement was primarily composed of construction mechanics and heavy-equipment operators, it also included several electricians, plumbers, steel workers, and carpenters to complete rudimentary contingency construction at

the base. In addition to bringing the equipment necessary to complete small construction projects, the sailors also brought a grader, roller, bulldozer, water distribution truck, two humvees, and a generator. While not necessarily part of the Seabee's standard deployment package, the water truck proved crucial to maintaining the earthen runway. Grading the ruts and rolling the dirt was not enough to keep it in place, Lieutenant Smith explained, it was doing so while spraying with water that enabled the soil to bond. The Seabees began work the morning after their arrival, and 12 hours later had the runway ready to receive additional flights on the evening of 29 November.[121]

An Unanticipated Operational Pause

In addition to changing the status quo in southern Afghanistan, the arrival of Task Force 58 at FOB Rhino may have also raised questions among senior leaders about how best to employ the Marines. Although initially assigned three sequential objectives—to establish a forward operating base, seize Kandahar airfield, and interdict enemy movement—comments made by various officials during news briefings foreshadowed a narrowing of the Marines' mission. On 26 November, Secretary Rumsfeld had stated that the Marines' "purpose is to establish a forward base of operations to help pressure the Taliban forces in Afghanistan, to prevent Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists from moving freely about the country."[122] When reporters asked how a base would contribute to that end, he explained that "you could use it for humanitarian purposes, you could use it for special operations, you could use it… for the inflow of additional troops."[123] During the following day's news briefing at Central Command, General Franks provided a more detailed rationale for establishing the forward operating base:

> This is, in fact, a forward base of operations. I think there have been several descriptions of what that means…. I would anticipate that at the end of the day, this installation, if you will, this forward operating base… will have a number between 800 and perhaps 1,100 people. I mean, I think that's what it will be.
>
> The purpose of the forward operating base is to give us a capability to be an awful lot closer to the core objectives we seek. Now, we all know what those are. We're interested in the destruction of the al-Qaeda network, and we're interested in the destruction of an illegitimate Taliban government, which has abused people in this country for a long, long time—the leadership of the Taliban.
>
> Now we can either do that… by making seven-, eight-, and nine-hour trips, or we can provide ourselves a forward operating base. And so we have provided a forward operating base to do precisely what I just described. We may well use assets from that to interdict the roads, to continue the interdiction of the roads, to be sure that elements in which we have an interest are not permitted to go places where we don't want them to go.
>
> And I will also be telling you the truth if I say I don't know how long that base will be there. It is not an invasion of Afghanistan. As soon as our work is finished, it certainly will be removed. And yes, we may well use it to bring humanitarian assistance in to the people in Afghanistan.[124]

On 26 November, when asked whether the Marines would go after the Taliban or hunt down Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda lieutenants, Secretary Rumsfeld responded that the Marines were in to do what he'd said, and that was to establish a forward operating base.[125] When reporters tried another tack, asking why the Marines had been committed to the Kandahar region, Rumsfeld conceded,

> The highways that connect the north and the south and the east-west in the southern part, going toward Iran, exits or entrances from Iran and Pakistan, can be interdicted from those locations. And it was decided… by the combatant commander, Tommy Franks, that it would be helpful to have a base there from which a variety of things could be done, rather than simply using people in and out of a special operations nature.[126]

On the same day, despite the potential for urban combat in Kandahar, General Myers did not mention the Marines when commenting on the Taliban's disposition and future Coalition military operations. Instead, he stated that

> Omar seems to be trying to organize the fighting of the Taliban, and bin Laden, on the other hand, seems to be concentrating on hiding…. Again, in Kandahar it's sort of the last bastion, we think, of Taliban resistance. You get mixed reports on whether they're about ready to leave and give up or not. I will go with the secretary on this, in that, from Omar's standpoint, we think… they'll dig in and fight, and perhaps to the end.[127]

When asked similar questions on 27 November, General Franks stated,

> The Marines will be used exactly as the secretary said yesterday and I said today. They're within about 70 or 80 miles of Kandahar. Their very presence does in fact provide pressure, but I will not characterize the intent of them being there as a force to attack Kandahar. That simply is not the case. That's not why we put them there.[128]

By 28 November, as 15th MEU was nearing completion of its insertion into FOB Rhino, Task Force 58 had begun its shift toward the second phase of Operation Swift Freedom. Based on coordination meetings that had taken place between MSSG 15 and MSSG 26 personnel on board the *Peleliu* on 21 November, the 26th MEU formed a landing force support party and assumed control of beach and airfield operations in Pasni, Pakistan. From this point forward, they supported nightly ship-to-shore movements and conducted through-put operations from both the *Peleliu* and *Bataan* ready groups. A transportation support detachment from the 15th MEU continued to operate from the airfield until mid-December and assisted these efforts.[129] Captain B. J. O'Rothman, the detachment's commander, had developed a particularly effective working relationship with the Pakistani military, who requested that he remain at Pasni.[130]



Photo by Sgt Marshall Paull

LCpl David Reed of MEU Service Support Group 26 from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, scans the horizon as he guards materials and personnel during Operation Swift Freedom.

On the same day, NavCent notified Task Force 58 that Central Command was limiting the number of Marines and sailors serving at FOB Rhino to 1,000.[131] At this time, however, a planeload of Marines exceeding the new restriction was en route from Pakistan.[132] After Task Force 58 responded that there were already 1,078 personnel on deck, Central Command relaxed the threshold to reflect the number currently ashore and then gradually raised the limit to 1,100 personnel on 29 November and 1,400 on 1 December.[133]

The unexpected restriction caught General Mattis by surprise. He later reflected that Central Command "knew thoroughly that I wasn't asking for 4,500 Marines with the idea of using only 1,000 of them" and that the decision to scale back the number of troops was "managerially incompetent."[134] Not only did the new constraint contrast

sharply with his original concept of operations by precluding the insertion of a second expeditionary unit to conduct offensive operations, it also impeded ongoing operations at the forward operating base by forcing commanders to evaluate force composition against competing sustainment and protection requirements.[135] Colonel Waldhauser, also mystified by the decision to levy a force cap, speculated that the rapid buildup at FOB Rhino had surprised some officials unfamiliar with the size and speed of a Marine expeditionary unit.[136]

From the force protection perspective, it was important to have sufficient forces to defend the base against potential threats because the closest ground reinforcements would now be located approximately 400 miles to the south and be unable to respond to an attack in a timely fashion. Moreover, the number of forces required to maintain the defensive perimeter around the airfield limited the Marines' ability to counter offensively. From a force sustainment perspective, Task Force 58 required sufficient support personnel to conduct airfield operations, maintain the dirt runway, and process the inflow of supplies and equipment. In this regard, although the force cap did not directly apply to the special operating forces co-located at FOB Rhino, it did limit the number of Coalition troops that the Marines could support at any given time. Similarly, although the force cap did not directly apply to naval forces situated in Pakistan, it did require that Colonel Frick halt the flow of 26th MEU forces into Pasni, develop an impromptu retrograde plan, and return most of his personnel and equipment to the *Bataan*.

An unanticipated operational pause resulted as the buildup of forces suddenly ground to a halt and commanders chose which personnel to keep in country, in some cases swapping those sent back to the ships for others possessing more urgently required skills. The 15th MEU eventually returned 102 of its members to the *Peleliu*, including the engineer platoon attached to BLT 1/1.[137] This enabled General Mattis to bring in additional Seabee support, as well as Company B, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. Commanded by Major Thomas J. Impellitteri, Company B had initially staged 2 humvees and 16 light armored vehicles (LAV-25s) in Pasni, Pakistan, but there was uncertainty if there would be sufficient airlift to get them into Afghanistan. With the incorporation of Air Force C-17 aircraft, which could carry up to six vehicles at a time, they were able to deploy to FOB Rhino on the evenings of 29 and 30 November.

General Newbold, a friend of General Mattis, learned of the force cap through e-mail exchanges with the commander of Task Force 58. Dismayed by the development, he later explained, "The only way that [Task Force] 58 or any other operation in the south could have had an effect is if it threatened the Taliban materially—if it were able to strike and distract or defeat. And ultimately, it had to encircle al-Qaeda and the Taliban in a way that could result in their destruction."[138] He continued,

> The hope from the original intent is that they would have been able to strike at Kandahar, and in subsequent buildup of additional ground forces, would have been able to extend operations to the east to try to cut off escape avenues into Pakistan. Now we were all deeply, acutely aware that you could not seal off the border. But what you can do is you can catch a lot of these people, and your opportunity or your chances of destroying them go up enormously. The better view of the situation is do you do nothing or do you try to get as many as you can? And our answer was you try to get as many as you can, therefore, you need boots on the ground. That was not possible because of the constraints that General Franks personally put on the introduction of forces there, and it was only much, much later that we moved other ground forces in there, as you know, the 10th Mountain Division.[139]

Concerned by the force cap's potential negative effect on offensive operations in southern Afghanistan, General Newbold queried the Central Command staff about the constraint. Unable to clarify the issue at that level, he asked General Myers if the chairman was aware of the cap, arguing that

the Coalition was missing a limited opportunity to put additional pressure on al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Myers replied that he knew of no one who had imposed a restriction and contacted General Franks at Central Command, who denied the cap's existence. Undeterred, Newbold reconfirmed the force cap's authenticity with General Mattis and other Central Command personnel and approached the chairman a second time. This time, Myers brought the issue to the attention of Secretary Rumsfeld, who not only denied that his office had levied such a restriction but also indicated that he was opposed to the notion of having one imposed. Rumsfeld subsequently contacted Franks and reiterated to him that Central Command could have whatever resources and latitude it needed to conduct the required operations.[140]

From a different perspective, Colonel Michael D. Fitzgerald, Central Command's chief of future operations, explained that they had always been aware of the eventual need to enter southern Afghanistan to defeat al-Qaeda and undermine the Taliban government.[141] General Franks, he said, had never lost sight of the fact that, once initial inroads had been made, they would "have to go in with our own forces who are trained in winter combat and are a lot more capable on the ground and willing to do what we need them to do."[142] However, despite Franks's desire to eventually "introduce a force into the south to expand a base of operations," it was only after the Northern Alliance had begun its advance toward Kabul in mid-November that he could realistically ask what was next and how soon they could get in.[143] At that point, Central Command planners who had initially assessed regional airfields in support of the ranger raid began to look for suitable locations to establish a forward operating base, eventually choosing Kandahar.[144] The Marines were a logical choice for the mission because they already had an expeditionary force in theater and were ready to go ashore, whereas employing an Army unit would have entailed submitting a request for forces, waiting for them to arrive in theater, and then arranging for an intermediate staging base before they could enter Afghanistan. Moreover, inserting a regular Army force would be more noticeable than deploying Marine forces already afloat off the coast of Pakistan.[145]

According to Colonel Fitzgerald, there were always discussions at Central Command about force levels in Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Host nations drove some of the restrictions, trying to limit the U.S. footprint over time, while the Office of the Secretary of Defense drove others, trying to limit the size of the force needed to execute the mission. He explained, "Commanders will be naturally risk adverse."[146] They "try to introduce slack into the system" so they will have the resources necessary to handle any contingency they might encounter once they are on the ground.[147] On the other hand, Secretary Rumsfeld desired to keep commitment levels down and take a bit more risk.[148] As Colonel Fitzgerald explained,

> There was a level at which you had to come and [ask for additional forces], and it included General Franks doing the "Mother may I" routine…. It wasn't that the SecDef [secretary of defense] ever said no, but sometimes the level of justification was so high that I think some people balked along the way… until they had all the information—absolutely airtight reasons—and even then they knew it was going to be a tough sell.[149]

Colonel Fitzgerald also noted that if General Franks had already initiated plans to introduce Army forces into southern Afghanistan, he might not have wanted to deploy the 26th MEU only to have it leave after a short period ashore. This would have been particularly true if he had intended to retain it as a mobile reserve, as there were a number of other significant events occurring in theater at that time, including rising tensions between India and Pakistan in the Kashmir region.[150]



Chapter 8

Concurrent and Distributed Operations at Forward Operating Base Rhino

Changing Command Relationships

Two days after going ashore with his small jump command post, General Mattis designated Captain William Jezierski, USN, as deputy commander of Task Force 58. A combination of tactical and operational concerns likely influenced this midcourse decision to delegate control over his seaborne forces to the commander of Amphibious Squadron 1, which again ruffled some feathers within the naval community.[1] The new division of labor ensured that a seasoned subordinate commander was in place to oversee the continued flow of supplies, equipment, and personnel across the beach at Pasni, Pakistan. Also, placing a senior naval officer in charge of the task force's maritime operations undercut the argument for subsuming the two amphibious squadrons under the regional combined warfare capability.[2]

As if to emphasize the later point, Task Force 50, the principal offensive arm of Fifth Fleet, provided Task Force 58 with escort support during the operation. The genesis of Task Force 50 had occurred on 11 September 2001, when Admiral Moore directed Rear Admiral Thomas E. Zelibor, USN, then commanding the USS *Carl Vinson* battle group in the Indian Ocean, to form a multicarrier battle force. As Operation Enduring Freedom matured, Task Force 50 eventually grew to encompass 59 ships from 7 nations, organized around 6 aircraft carriers from 3 nations: the United States' *Carl Vinson*, *Enterprise*, and *Theodore Roosevelt*; the Italian *Giuseppe Garibaldi* (C551); and the British *Illustrious* (R06).[3] Three of Task Force 50's support vessels served under Captain Jezierski's tactical control and arguably established a forerunner of the current expeditionary strike group. Although initially composed solely of U.S. ships, including an Aegis guided missile cruiser or destroyer, Canadian and Italian vessels joined the escort force during December 2001 and January 2002.[4]



Photo by Susan Norvick. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 010210-a-2682n-034

LtGen Paul T. Mikolashek, USA, commander of Third Army and Central Command's Combined Forces Land Component, addresses officers at a conference on 10 February 2001.

As originally planned, on 30 November, tactical control of all Task Force 58 elements in Afghanistan transferred from Admiral Moore to Army Lieutenant General Paul T. Mikolashek, the new combined forces land component commander.

Mikolashek, also head of Third Army and U.S Army Forces Central Command (ArCent), had redeployed his command to Camp Doha, Kuwait, following the conclusion of Exercise Bright Star. After assuming the duties of land component commander in mid-November, he began to "direct and synchronize land operations to destroy al-Qaeda and prevent the reemergence of international terrorist activities in Combined Joint Area-Afghanistan."[5] Meanwhile, Moore and his staff at U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NavCent) retained operational control of Task Force 58's forces ashore and both operational and tactical control* of its forces afloat.

Tactical control allowed General Mikolashek and the ArCent staff to focus primarily on campaign-level land combat operations, while Admiral Moore and the NavCent staff addressed a wider range of theater-level force requirements. These included issues such as organizational structure, force sustainment, asset realignment to address concurrent missions, and the tactical employment of his sea forces. Given the underdeveloped state of both theater- and campaign-level logistics in the region, the maritime link between Task Force 58 and Fifth Fleet was critical to operations ashore or afloat and undoubtedly influenced the decision to maintain the autonomy of Task Force 58's naval forces under the direction of Captain Jezierski.

As its mission evolved rapidly toward sustained and more widely distributed operations ashore, Task Force 58 now had to report to two adjacent commands. The small planning staff soon discovered the downside to going light—mainly, having fewer resources to direct toward monitoring current operations and fulfilling what General Mattis referred to as the "insatiable need for information from higher headquarters."[6] Nor was this frustration limited to the command staff. Speaking from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit's (26th MEU's) perspective, Colonel Frick described higher headquarters' appetite for information as his "biggest problem":

> I think we're in an era of warfare where, since I have lightning-speed capability in the communication [realm], there is a thirst for knowledge all the way up the chain-of-command…. Somebody on the next level says they want to know "this, this, and this." They ask you a few questions and then they ask you a question that you don't know, so then you get some more questions asked…. That is always going to be a headache, and until somebody can look over my shoulder inside the Pentagon to see what I'm doing, they want to see real time video…. Our mindset is like, "Let me do my job and let me go."… There is a dichotomy between the mindset of the warrior and the information age we live in.[7]

Admiral Moore and the NavCent staff had tended to issue mission-type orders, providing General Mattis with commander's intent and allowing him to develop the preferred course of action. Although this was similar to the initial relationship between Task Force 58 and General Mikolashek, as the ArCent staff began to establish itself in theater and assert control over ground forces in Afghanistan, they requested more detailed information on a broadening range of topics with increasing frequency.[8] The issue was not necessarily one of micromanagement at the theater level. Rather, the larger ArCent staff tended to rely more heavily upon doctrine and formal planning processes than the Marines. Moreover, as it grew in size, the functional sections became increasingly compartmentalized. As Lieutenant Colonel Broadmeadow explained, "The same guy that yesterday used to do a range of things for you was now doing one thing and one thing only. So, all of a sudden, that one phone call that you could make to get things to happen now became three or four and you had to talk to different guys."[9]

*Tactical control involves directing combat and combat service support assets within the parameters of an assigned mission, while operational control entails organizing commands and deploying forces to accomplish the assigned mission.

This change in procedures did not sit well with some members of the staff, who saw themselves as the point of main effort and resisted attempts to rein them in, administratively or operationally. Each morning, for example, Lieutenant Colonel Lethin participated in a theaterwide briefing session, during which the operating forces would report their daily status to the land component's operations section. On one occasion, after higher headquarters had denied a particular request, he declined to contribute until he could talk privately with the operations officer.[10] In another example, the land component required that Task Force 58 submit concept of operations briefs in advance of even small-scale operations conducted within their own area of responsibility, at least once questioning General Mattis when his staff failed to clear their plans through higher headquarters. In this instance, Mattis recalled, "I explained I didn't generally ask permission to wipe my nose and that my intentions messages laid out clearly what operations I had coming up."[11]

Given time, a solid working relationship developed between the geographically separated Task Force 58 and land component staffs. They reached the collaborative arrangement through a combination of adaptation and comprise, facilitated by the efforts of two Marine liaison officers assigned to the higher headquarters. Colonel Lethin experienced a particularly meaningful exchange with the land component's operations officer addressing the combined operations officers' incessant bombardment of Task Force 58 with e-mail demands in which Colonel Lethin reminded him that he was in the middle of combat and could not respond to every one of them.[12] He said,

> Look, Sir, there is one of me and there are 800 of you. I'll talk to you, your deputy, and your current ops, but you guys really need to choose your questions wisely, because I'm [working] 22, 23 hours a day, and I can't answer all of your action officer's, all of your watch officer's questions. I can answer your questions, but I can't answer everyone else on your staff…. He said, "Got it."[13]

As the tempo and scope of operations ashore increased, the Task Force 58 staff faced a series of shrinking timelines, abbreviated planning processes, additional reporting requirements, and an emerging labor shortage. One solution to these problems was for the Task Force 58 staff to focus on directing current operations, while the two expeditionary unit staffs conducted most of the detailed mission planning for future operations. Another solution was to increase staff representation. On some occasions, Task Force 58 would commandeer functional area experts from the expeditionary units, which could raise the anxiety level for individuals who suddenly found themselves working directly for the commanding general. On other occasions, they obtained personnel externally.[14] One U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MarCent) officer commented during January 2002 that, although augmentation requests to date would raise the table of organization to 52, the desired staffing level was 65.[15] The latter figure would represent a 116 percent increase over the original staff estimate made in Bahrain at the beginning of November.

Force Sustainment

As the operation progressed, Task Force 58's logistics section shifted its focus from planning for future material and movement needs to performing tasks normally assigned to the Marine logistics command and force movement control center. Colonel Broadmeadow summarized the experience and their key to success:

> It wasn't like your normal logistics system, where you drop a requisition and things start to flow to you magically because of some supply system. It was guys on the phone, people on e-mail, working with their counterparts [in] the other agencies and making things happen on a personal level, as opposed to a systems perspective. So that became a big work-around right there—very, very dependent on personal relations as opposed to systems.[16]

Although the logistics section had begun the operation with only two officers, by mid-December

it would grow to six officers supporting an operating force spread among eight locations throughout Central Command's theater: Forward Operating Base Rhino (FOB Rhino), Kandahar airfield, and the American embassy in Kabul in Afghanistan; Jacobabad, Shamsi, and Pasni in Pakistan; and two amphibious ready groups in the North Arabian Sea and Bahrain. By Christmas, the forces serving ashore in Afghanistan and Pakistan alone would total more than 4,500 Marines, soldiers, sailors, and Coalition personnel.

By doctrine, each military Service component is responsible for providing its own logistics support, even if its forces are supporting a joint or Coalition commander. For Task Force 58, that meant the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) and 26th MEU would each maintain existing supply chains extending from the amphibious ready groups back to their parent Marine expeditionary forces on the East and West Coasts. These supply lines were critical, for although each of the expeditionary units maintained control over its own combat service support element and accompanying landing force operational reserve (ammunition, rations, fuel, and engineer materials), each could sustain only 15 days of continuous operations ashore without replenishment. At the same time, as directed by the Combined Forces Land Component commander, Task Force 58 would provide common-item logistics support for all special operating forces co-located at FOB Rhino. The absence of a theater support command to manage in-theater stocks of common-item support materials and capabilities made this latter task more difficult during the early days of Operation Swift Freedom.[17]

Bahrain served as the principal hub for Task Force 58's logistic support. Working out of a borrowed tent, Captain Samson P. Avenetti, the strategic mobility officer, developed and maintained a complex logistics network that linked the forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan to support organizations located throughout the theater and in the United States. He developed working relationships with NavCent, the Seabees, and commercial vendors and spent countless hours locating, negotiating, and organizing logistical support for the forces ashore. Undeterred by the urgency required by a dynamic combat environment, he pushed supplies forward to feed, fix, and arm the combat force, locating items ranging from forklifts to offload pallets at FOB Rhino to barrier materials with which to construct a short-term holding facility at Kandahar.

Task Force 53, MarCent's subordinate logistics command, was responsible for the receipt, warehousing, and throughput of cargo to all naval forces operating throughout Central Command's theater of operations. In an effort to manage the increase in cargo resulting from the arrival of the amphibious ready groups and carrier battle groups operating in the North Arabian Sea, it diverted much of the incoming cargo for Operation Enduring Freedom to an alternate cargo hub for trans-shipment to locations throughout the region. Although this strategy helped to avert congestion at the primary cargo hub, it also decreased handling, tracking, and transportation efficiency.[18]

When distributing supplies throughout the theater, Task Force 53 routinely employed fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, as well as U.S. naval ships and vessels contracted by Military Sealift Command to provide at-sea replenishment.[19] During such routine missions, it would eventually deliver more than 18 million gallons of ships' fuel, 2 million gallons of aviation fuel, and 10,000 pallets of supplies to forces attached to Task Force 58.[20] When size, volume, or distance precluded shipment using organic assets, Task Force 53 submitted requests to the Joint Movement Center, which coordinated additional aircraft through Transportation Command and the Air Mobility Division at Central Command's Air Component Command.[21]

The two amphibious ready groups maintained an aggressive wet well (amphibious) and flight deck (aviation) cycle to support the initial assault and subsequent operations on the objective as well. The *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group debarked more than 1,700 personnel, 180 vehicles, and 267 short tons of cargo, while the USS *Bataan* Amphibious Ready Group (*Bataan* ARG) contributed over 1,800



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011217-N-2383B-509

Sailors from Helicopter Combat Support Squadron 6 conduct a vertical replenishment at sea on 17 December 2001. They are using CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters to ferry supplies from the USNS John Ericsson *(T-AO 194) to the USS* Whidbey Island *(LSD 41) and USS* Bataan *(LHD 5).*

personnel, 70 vehicles, and 400 short tons of cargo. Vessels assigned to the ready groups also picked up and delivered four CH-53Es and an AH-1W helicopter that arrived from the United States to augment or replace aircraft damaged during operations in Afghanistan.[22]

The logistics section at I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) was one of several reach-back sources available to Task Force 58. It maintained a 24-hour watch and required little amplifying information to process requests. The Navy regional contracting center in Bahrain also played a crucial role in the procurement of items through open sources. It provided information on local vendors and procedures, registered the task force's requirements, evaluated available resources, and purchased the necessary items.

Once Captain Avenetti located the necessary equipment and supplies, he worked multiple channels to fly the resources from origin to destination. For example, he coordinated with Danish C-130s to fly fresh fruit, vegetables, and holiday packages from Bahrain to Shamsi; Marine KC-130s to fly repair parts from Pasni to FOB Rhino; and Air Force C-17s to fly construction supplies and detainee handling equipment from Bahrain to Kandahar.[23] This was not a simple process, but required the entry of time-phased force and deployment data in the joint planning and execution system as well as the preparation of advance aircraft load plans and hazardous cargo certification documents.[24] To facilitate such movements, Avenetti maintained constant contact with Air Force Captain Ericka L. DeVos, officer-in-charge of the Joint Movement Center. Located at the Coalition Air Operations Center in Saudi Arabia, she ran the central headquarters for movement requests throughout the theater and helped Avenetti request, schedule, and track aircraft flights. Committed to meeting the Marines' sustainment needs, DeVos and her staff reprioritized cargo loads on a regular basis to support the forward units in Afghanistan.[25]

Although Task Force 58 successfully exploited routine military transport flights to avoid constraints imposed by commercial carriers, reliance on the "channel flights" proved to be a mixed blessing and often delayed the shipment of cargo beyond Task Force 58's requested delivery date. In some cases, passengers experienced lengthened travel time due to numerous en route stops. In others, shipping priorities or transport limitations required that consolidated loads from the United States be spread among several aircraft before reaching their destination by alternate routes.[26] Adding yet another degree of difficulty, although the joint planning and execution system provided a means for Transportation and Air Mobility Commands to orchestrate strategic intertheater airlift operations, its use to manage intratheater airlift assets had not been specified by joint doctrine.[27] Furthermore, the Air Force and Navy–Marine Corps tracking systems, often reflecting unique Service-specific logistics terminology, made it difficult to follow the flow of personnel, equipment, and supplies into theater.[28] Shortcuts occasionally used to circumvent the joint planning and execution system, resulting in the loss of in-transit visibility and subsequent shipping delays, actually increased the requirement for intratheater lift.[29]

In one instance, I MEF logisticians shipped cold-weather equipment to Germany on board Air Force C-5 transports, expecting that it would be transferred to C-17 aircraft for follow-on movement into theater. Once the cargo was broken down into separate loads, however, some continued on to FOB Rhino through various aerial ports of departure, some were delayed to make way for a rifle company heading to Kabul, and some remained behind in Germany. During the following weeks, the combined effort of Task Force 58, I MEF, and the Joint Movement Center finally located the stray shipments for eventual transport into Afghanistan.[30]

To help alleviate this problem, Task Force 58 situated "expediters" sourced from the expeditionary unit logistics sections at each of the major theater entry points. While most of these Marines possessed a background in supply, others who did not had to develop the embarkation and traffic management skills necessary to correct problems on the spot and keep the material support flowing forward to the operating forces. They oversaw the arrival of incoming cargo at their respective hubs, accounted for the equipment and supplies received, and then tracked them until they were loaded onto aircraft for follow-on transportation. The logistics section at I MEF also helped to solve the accountability issue by instituting an informal system and posting status updates on requested items on its web page.[31]

Airfield Maintenance and Camp Construction

Airmen from the 21st Special Tactics Squadron evaluated the runway's condition each day, while sailors from Navy Mobile Construction Battalion 133 continued to carry out necessary repairs. At first, the Seabees operated in 12-hour shifts during daylight hours; however, as the runway continued to deteriorate, it became necessary to maintain a stand-by night crew to service the airfield between C-17 flights. Lieutenant Clifford Smith recalled that occasionally only two aircraft would come in and the extra work would not be required. On at least half the evenings, however, the Air Force Combat Control Team would receive a report of poor conditions from the pilots and then radio "the Seabees to… run their graders down the runway and… knock down the ruts and do what they could to stabilize the runway for the next C-17 coming in."[32] To facilitate their airfield maintenance effort and because some of their equipment was experiencing problems burning the JP4 fuel, the Seabees had two additional graders flown into FOB Rhino during early December.[33]

Procuring enough bulk water to spray down the runway on a regular basis proved to be the most critical aspect of maintaining the airfield. Although the cistern at FOB Rhino contained approximately 30,000 gallons, the Seabees estimated that they



Associated Press

Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 run graders over the dirt runway at Forward Operating Base Rhino on 4 December 2001. They are redistributing dirt and filling ruts caused by the steady flow of heavy transport aircraft landing at the base.

needed around 5,000 gallons per day to keep the airfield operating. With approximately a six-day supply on hand, the Seabees developed two strategies for conserving water: first, they focused their efforts on four soft spots that encompassed approximately 1,600 feet of runway, rotating coverage from one area to another on a four-day cycle. Second, they excavated clay-bearing soils from a trench located approximately 65 feet from the runway to reinforce the roughest spots.[34]

Around 3 December, the Marines realized that they had to locate an additional water source and considered the prospect of employing a Seabee well-drilling team. Although practical, this required three C-17 flights and approximately two weeks to coordinate strategic airlift, assemble the drilling apparatus, and then drill down 200 feet to hit water (600 feet to reach potable water). These constraints limited pumping operations to only 10 days before the task force intended to close the desert base at the end of the month.[35]

The 15th MEU's logistics officer suggested that the task force fly water into Rhino in 500-gallon blivets (collapsible rubber storage systems). General Mattis liked the timeliness of this option and directed the expeditionary unit to coordinate the first shipment to arrive the following day. Thereafter, water resupply flights arrived almost every night from Jacobabad on board C-17 transports. On average, the Air Force flew in about 2,000 gallons of water per day, but on several occasions the Marines received up to 4,200 gallons.[36]

The Seabees also addressed the problem of billowing dust clouds created by helicopter landings and takeoffs. Referred to as "brownouts," these dense screens obscured the pilot's observation and raised the danger of aircraft accidents. Although



Associated Press

A dust cloud billows beneath a Marine CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter as it lands at Forward Operating Base Rhino on 8 December 2001. Five-hundred-gallon blivets, used to transport bulk fuel and water, are shown in the foreground.

Task Force 58 discussed the possibility of using AM-2 aluminum matting to surface the helicopter pads, the airlift required to fly in a sufficient quantity of the 2-foot by 12-foot sheets—each weighing 144 pounds—precluded its employment.[37] As an expedient solution, the Seabees and aircrews recovered a number of metal forms and rebar that the previous occupants had left behind and staked these over the landing pads. The sheets—3 feet by 5 feet or smaller and weighing 80 to 120 pounds—helped to reduce the dust but did not eliminate it.[38]

Several aviators trained by Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1 (MAWTS-1) suggested another solution to the dust problem. They recommended Envirotac II dust palliative, an environmentally safe product nicknamed "gorilla snot," that Marines used at airfields in Twentynine Palms, California, and Yuma, Arizona. Unfortunately, after procuring the product in the United States, they encountered coordination problems and a three-week shipping delay when attempting to send the material into theater by Federal Express and other commercial transportation providers.[39]

When the palliative finally arrived and Seabees were able to apply the first treatment on 11 December, the Marines at Rhino were already encountering a serious water shortage. This presented two serious dilemmas. First, employment of the concentrated substance, renamed "rhino snot," required that the Marines mix it with three times the same amount of water. Second, the glue-like mixture continuously clogged the water truck's pump and lines, threatening to damage the distribution system. The Seabees had no other



Photo by LCpl Derek Meitzer.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 080421-m-0252m-007
Members of the heavy equipment platoon from Marine Wing Support Squadron 172 use "rhino snot" to harden the earth at a construction site in al-Anbar Province, Iraq, on 21 April 2008. Marines from Task Force 58 coined the moniker seven years earlier when employing the chemical spray to dissipate dust clouds at Forward Operating Base Rhino in southwestern Afghanistan.

option but to balance their use of available water between airfield maintenance and dust reduction and keep a close watch on the water pump.[40]

The Seabees also assisted in numerous construction projects around FOB Rhino. Although their bulldozer was not necessarily meant for airfield maintenance, Task Force 58 realized that this piece of heavy earthmoving equipment would be advantageous for numerous tasks. Running it from dawn to dusk each day, they created earthen berms around the refueling and ammunition supply points, excavated trash pits, and built vehicle obstacles for the Marines. Scrounging for materials around camp, carpenters also built map and surgical tables and even gun racks for the Australians.[41]

One of the Seabees' most appreciated contributions was the construction of an expedient outhouse, affectionately known as a "4-hole burnout." The Marines and sailors had initially relieved themselves in a series of shallow, 30-foot-long slit trenches that they had excavated behind the camp with a backhoe; some personnel would simply lean over the opening, while others would climb into the trench and lean back against the 3-foot-high wall. The Seabees built a small shack with four holes covered by toilet seats and separated by vertical dividers. Then they placed cutoff 55-gallon drums underneath the holes—made accessible by a small door placed at the base of the shack—to collect the waste. Periodically, the Marines would pull the drums out, mix the contents with diesel fuel and gasoline, and then burn it. The burnout precluded the need to dig additional slit trenches, provided a degree of comfort and privacy, and significantly enhanced the sanitary conditions at Rhino.[42]

Ongoing Events

Forward Operating Base Impala

On 30 November, the same day its forward control element and maritime special purpose force began to return from Exercise Noble Shirley, the 26th MEU began planning for the assumption of continued operations at the forward refueling point and transload site at Forward Operating Base Impala (FOB Impala) in Shamsi, Pakistan. A small site survey team went forward the next day to identify personnel and equipment requirements at the airfield, followed on 4 December by the main body. Composed of personnel from each of the MEU's four major subordinate elements, this delegation raised the total number of Marines and sailors at the base to 98.[43]

The largest contingent was provided by a provisional rifle platoon from Battery K, 10th Marines, Battalion Landing Team 3/6's (BLT 3/6's) artillery attachment. Led by First Lieutenant Steven M. Grimm, the battery's executive officer, the artillerymen were responsible for securing the

refueling facility and billeting area while the Pakistani military manned two outer cordons around the airfield itself. Within hours of arriving, the Marines relieved the Army's initial security force, began improving their fortified fighting positions, and settled into a four-phase daily routine: six hours standing post, six hours on the reaction force, six hours improving positions, and six hours of rest. The same day, Marines from MEU Service Support Group 26 (MSSG 26) began running throughput operations into southern Afghanistan. With such a hectic schedule, there was little time to enjoy the cots, climate-controlled tents, exercise equipment, and morale tent with television that the other Services had imported.[44] On 5 December, the remaining Marines from Exercise Noble Shirley rejoined the *Bataan* ARG at sea.

Australian Special Air Service

The advance party of the Australian Special Air Service (ASAS) detachment (call sign "Task Force 64") arrived at FOB Rhino in late November, followed by its main body on 4 December.[45] Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Peter Gilmore, the Australians served under the tactical control of Task Force 58 and enabled the Marines to bolster their combat power while remaining within the confines of Central Command's force cap. One small but significant advantage—particularly during the early days of the operation—was that they brought an initial supply of rations, ammunition, and fuel for their 13 long-range patrol vehicles (Land Rovers with extended beds).

When Colonel Gilmore met with General Mattis the morning following his arrival, the Marine commander provided a broad overview of what was going on in southern Afghanistan and explained how he intended to employ the Australians as a long-range screening and reconnaissance force. Their first task would be to conduct a patrol covering a 15-mile swath around the forward operating base that would help map and clear the Marines' immediate operating area.[46] As described by author Ian McPhedran, who chronicled the ASAS experience in Afghanistan, once the Australians had proved themselves to General Mattis and the Coalition forces,

> The [A]SAS patrols began fanning out from Rhino in search of Taliban and al-Qaeda strongholds and training camps, weapons caches, supply routes, and a myriad of other tasks, which included getting to know the local tribal people. They patrolled extensively around Kandahar, which still lay in Taliban hands, and across into the Helmand Valley close to the Iranian border. The patrols were mostly covert, and troops would establish a "hide" (another name for an OP) and spend several days observing and reporting.[47]

These missions were likely similar to those conducted by the force reconnaissance Marines toward the Helmand River to the northwest and the British Special Air Service to the south. Lieutenant Colonel Bourne described them as "small teams moving around… looking for targets, watching the general flow of the population, trying to sort out who's who." The hardest part of the whole mission, he said, was determining who were "the good guys, the bad guys, or anything in between."[48]

AH-1W Helicopter Mishap

Extreme operating conditions continued to challenge the aircrews and aircraft operating in Afghanistan, resulting in a series of aircraft mishaps beginning in early December. During a 5 December dawn patrol around 0620, an AH-1W Super Cobra from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (HMM-365) experienced a hard landing in a dry lake bed approximately 6 miles south of FOB Rhino.[49] The aircraft remained in the field overnight, surrounded by security forces from BLT 3/6's combined antiarmor platoon,* while mechanics waited for spare parts to arrive. The next day, pilots

*The combined antiarmor platoon is part of the weapons company of a Marine infantry battalion. It consists of humvees variously armed with M2 .50-caliber heavy machine guns, MK19 40mm automatic grenade launchers, M240G 7.62mm medium machine guns, and tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) missiles. The vehicles deploy as combined antiarmor teams and sections to provide security and combat armored vehicles.

flew the damaged helicopter back to the forward operating base and then on to the *Bataan* for more substantial repairs.[50]

Special Operating Forces Medical Evacuation

Around 0930 on 5 December,[51] as members of Operational Detachment Alpha 574 (code name Texas 12) and Hamid Karzai's small band of southern Pashtun fighters were battling Taliban forces approximately five miles north of Kandahar, the attached tactical air control party requested support from a circling Boeing B-52 Stratofortress bomber as part of an ongoing air attack against several Taliban seen outside a nearby cave complex. Tragically, after an airman replaced the failed batteries in his portable lightweight global positioning system (GPS) receiver, the device initialized to transmit its current location, rather than the location of the designated target, and the Air Force combat controller inadvertently directed a 2,000-pound GBU-31 bomb to the Coalition forces' own position.[52] Although Karzai was only slightly injured by glass shards from a shattered window, the errant bomb killed 3 American and 5 Afghan soldiers and wounded another 20 Americans and 18 Afghans.[53] Later, another American and at least one additional Afghan soldier would die while receiving medical treatment.[54] This unfortunate friendly fire incident produced the first American military fatalities of the war.*

Army Lieutenant Colonel David Fox, with Special Operations Command and Control Team 52 near Kandahar, and Army Colonel John Mulholland, at Task Force Dagger's headquarters in Uzbekistan, each requested aerial medical evacuation support for their injured soldiers.[55] Task Force 58 was the closest Coalition force with suitable aircraft in Afghanistan, but conflicting initial reports indicated that the special forces had received hostile mortar fire and suffered between 4 and 40 casualties. Although sensitive to the team's plight, Marines were hesitant to rush helicopters headlong into an ongoing firefight occurring during daylight hours and located approximately 100 miles from their forward operating base without a confirmed report of the tactical situation.[56] "The delay in casualty evacuation," summarized several medical officers in an unofficial after-action report, "was the result of the loss of communications with the ground personnel, the lack of security in the area, and aircraft mechanical delays."[57]

Two Navy MH-53J rescue helicopters attached to the Joint Special Operations Task Force eventually responded to the request from Pakistan, filled their aircraft with dead and wounded soldiers, and headed toward FOB Rhino. After taking on fuel from an airborne Air Force Lockheed HC-130P/N combat rescue tanker, the flight reached the Marine base around 1400.[58]

Meanwhile, as more information became available, it gradually became apparent that the explosion had involved errant air support. Colonel Waldhauser later remarked that there was initially a great deal of confusion regarding the state of friendly forces north of Kandahar. In order to find out what had really happened, he spoke personally with Colonel Mulholland on the telephone. After learning of the casualties and augmentation requirements around 1217, he consulted with Lieutenant Colonel James LaVine, his air combat element commander, and made the decision to land a recovery force. He recalled, "This was difficult, but we had to do something. We just could not say no to this request."[59]

Around 1315, Colonel LaVine launched two of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163's (HMM-163's) Super Stallions, escorted by a section of Super Cobras.[60] These Marine helicopters carried doctors, Air Force pararescue medics, special forces reinforcements from Operational Detachments 570 and 525, and Command and Control Element 540.[61]

*Soldiers killed during the incident included MSgt Jefferson D. Davis, SFC Daniel H. Petithory, and SSgt Brian C. Prosser, all members of 3d Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group.

After arriving at helicopter landing zone Pelican around 1445, aircraft crews evacuated seven wounded Afghans to FOB Rhino, returning to the base at approximately 1611 hours.[62]

Medical facilities at FOB Rhino were located in an abandoned warehouse within the walled compound at the south end of the runway. The Health and Service Support Detachment from 15th MEU operated the traditional battalion aid station, manned by a medical officer, a medical service corps officer, and 14 corpsmen. They were augmented by the Shock Trauma Platoon from 1st Medical Battalion, which provided resuscitation and stabilization capabilities as well as an operating room section. The operating room, situated in a floored tent immediately adjacent to the warehouse, contained tables for two 12-men surgical teams.[63] Although the trauma platoon had just arrived the preceding evening, they had already conducted a mass casualty drill in preparation for the emergency they were about to face.[64]

At the end of the day, Navy and Marine helicopter crews had evacuated 41 patients to FOB Rhino for triage and treatment.[65] Shortly after their arrival around 1430, members of the Joint Medical Evacuation Aviation Unit immediately transferred 17 of the Americans to Air Force C-130s and flew them to the Air Force hospital in Seeb, Oman, which provided the theater's major surgical capability.[66] Due to the current political situation, theater commanders decided that U.S. personnel would be transported to Seeb and that Camp Rhino medical personnel would treat the Afghan nationals. Marines subsequently transported the remaining two Americans—one killed in action and the other mortally wounded—as well as the 20 Afghans to the medical area for initial attention.[67]

Although reporters were eager to learn details of the unfolding tragedy, Marines at FOB Rhino kept an increasingly frustrated media contingent at bay.[68] This apparently resulted in complaints that reached the highest echelons at the Pentagon, for Secretary Rumsfeld addressed the issue at the beginning of the following day's news briefing:

> I understand there is concern about the access that was afforded journalists in the vicinity of the incident. We are mindful of the sensitivities of families back home who may not know that an incident has occurred, and we prefer that they not learn about something like that until they have been advised by the department. We do remain committed to the principle that the media should have access to both the good and the bad in this effort. The people on the ground, in the Marine Corps, have acknowledged… that they have not handled the matter perfectly, and they're in the process of reviewing their procedures.[69]

After medical personnel had stabilized the patients, around 2115, Marine aircrews from HMM-163 flew the Afghan fighters to amphibious ships off the Pakistani coast for follow-on care.[70] The transfer took approximately five hours because the CH-53 helicopters needed to refuel en route and one of the aircraft experienced mechanical problems.[71] In the latter case, quick-thinking pilots narrowly averted another tragedy when one of the helicopters sucked debris into its air intake shortly after takeoff. The aircraft steadily lost engine power while hovering over the airfield, compelling the pilots to jettison full drop tanks before conducting an emergency landing. Once safely back on the ground, the Marines quickly loaded the patients on board another CH-53 that departed immediately for the ships.[72]

Ground crews at FOB Rhino hastily cleaned up the crash site, preparing for the evening's continuing airlift of supplies and equipment. Adding to the confusion, at around 2124, an Air Force C-130 transport departing the apron at the Marine base struck the rotor blade of a CH-53 helicopter parked nearby.[73] After inspecting their slightly damaged wing, the C-130 crew determined that the aircraft was still flyable and continued with their mission. Unfortunately, the Marine helicopter sustained more extensive damage and was grounded for several days while mechanics completed the necessary repairs to bring it back on line.[74]



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera. USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011206-N-2383B-521

Navy medical personnel treat anti-Taliban casualties on board the USS **Bataan** ***(LHD 5) on 6 December 2001. Marine aircrews from Task Force 58 had evacuated the fighters earlier in the day after a misguided bomb struck their position north of Kandahar.***

The USS *Peleliu* and *Bataan* each received 10 Afghan casualties. Both vessels functioned as casualty and treatment ships, maintaining two functional operating rooms augmented by a fleet surgical team.[75] Within 60 hours of the patients' arrival, medical personnel logged more than 100 hours in the four operating rooms; surgeons on board the *Peleliu* performed 36 limb-saving and lifesaving procedures, while another group on board the *Bataan* performed 29. After witnessing the medical teams in action, Captain Jezierski remarked that this was the "the best medical evolution I have ever seen."[76] On 11 December, six of the Afghan fighters were apparently transferred from the *Bataan* to the hospital in Seeb, Oman, for continued medical treatment, although other sources indicate that three remained aboard the ship and five were evacuated to Landstuhl, Germany.[77]

One unexpected issue developed due to cross-cultural misunderstanding on the first night of the evacuation. After one of the Afghan fighters died while being treated at FOB Rhino, Colonel Waldhauser made a pragmatic decision to transfer his body to the morgue on board the *Peleliu* until he could inquire how the Afghans wanted to handle the remains. Only later that evening, after updating General Mattis on the day's events, did he realize that the deceased were not supposed to leave Afghan soil.[78] At Mattis's direction, Marines returned the body to FOB Rhino on 8 December, interred the soldier with military honors, and marked his grave with an appropriate headstone. Special operating forces subsequently informed the Afghan forces of the grave's location. On 1 February 2002, authorities exhumed the fighter's remains, which they flew to Kandahar and returned to his family.[79] Later,

Colonel Waldhauser remarked that evacuating the wounded Afghan was probably the right decision because medical facilities at the forward operating base were already strained.[80]

Two of three linguists attached only days earlier to Task Force 58 served as interpreters for medical staff and their patients on board the *Peleliu*. Corporal Kristapor Boodaghian, originally a rifleman serving with the 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, was of Armenian descent and spoke Dari. He had taken the language test prior to the Global War on Terrorism to qualify for extra monthly pay.[81] Lance Corporal Athar Zulfiqar, originally a rifleman serving with the 5th Marines, was of Pakistani descent and spoke Urdu. He was partially motivated to volunteer for the language program by the backlash of anti-Muslim sentiment he experienced following the terrorist attacks on 11 September.[82] Neither of the young Marines was ready for the shock he received when the wounded were brought on board the ship, and both vividly described the disturbing scene. Here is how Corporal Zulfiqar remembered it:

> We were waiting in the emergency room and I was looking at… about 30 medical staff—just standing around…. I was imagining one guy walking in through the door or… maybe somebody [with his hand] messed up…. The next thing, the doors open and these 11 people were brought in with amputated arms or legs. I mean, a 16-year-old boy didn't even have an arm no more. And an old guy, he was missing a piece of the side of his head, there was [no] skin…. And another old person who was brought in, he was about 40 something, and he had shrapnel toward his face, like when it blew up. And he had no teeth; he had no teeth in his mouth…. I mean, it was a shock. I didn't expect that much. But [I told] myself, [to be] strong and try to do the best I could.[83]

And here is Corporal Boodaghian's account:

> That was my first time seeing that kind of stuff. I mean, the guy had a piece of bone on his head, his ear was like falling down. Saw a lot of flesh and blood and just people peeing on themselves and sh——ing on their racks and stuff like that. It smelled pretty bad. I just wanted to help, so I didn't really care.[84]

Although most of the Afghan fighters spoke Pashto, several understood Dari, and there was enough overlap with Urdu for Corporal Boodaghian and Lance Corporal Zulfiqar to communicate with them.[85] They assisted the medical personnel by reassuring the patients, asking questions, and conveying requests: "Hey, you're safe here," "How do you feel," or "He wants to see your hand."[86] The interpreters continued to visit with the Afghans while they were recovering, striking up friendships, and even praying with them on occasion. Zulfiqar explained that the tribesmen had never seen a large body of water before and constantly asked, "Why does this house keep rocking?" They were both amazed and intimidated when the Marines took them up to the ship's hanger bay and showed them the ocean a week later.[87] Although the fighters enjoyed their experience on board ship, as they recovered, each expressed a desire to return to Afghanistan. On 20 December, nine of the soldiers were repatriated at Kandahar airport during a ceremony presided over by Commander Sharzai.[88]

Night of the Camel

On 5 December, the same night as the medical evacuation and C-130 mishap, Marines at FOB Rhino received an unwelcome caller. As Company B staged its equipment and prepared to join a task force then heading north toward Highway 1, Captain Whitmer heard the sound of an M16 rifle being fired at a lone camel that had wandered into their perimeter. Although the animal presented no threat on its own, the Marines had learned that Afghan rebels had occasionally strapped explosives to donkeys or camels during the Soviet-Afghan War and sent them toward the Russian lines before detonation. Frightened by the gunfire, the camel ran toward Company C's sector and received fire from that unit before returning to Company B's position.

The entire base was on full alert by this time, with many trying to identify the source and nature

of the threat. As the animal ran down the battalions' frontage, the number of Marines firing at the beast increased, raising the unwelcome possibility of a friendly fire incident. Fortunately, the camel eventually walked off into the desert and the firing ceased. Several Marines watching the animal depart through night-vision goggles and thermal sights detected a heat signature and speculated that the animal was lying wounded forward of the frontlines. However, patrols conducted the following day failed to discover anything but the animal's tracks.[89]

Maritime Interdiction Operations

On 4 December, Admiral Moore issued his planning guidance for operations designed to interdict the movement of Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders then believed to be operating in the north Arabian Sea. On the same day, the commander of Task Group 50.6 published his concept of operations for a visit, board, search, and seizure operation directed against the maritime vessel *Kota Sejarah*, suspected of transporting al-Qaeda terrorists and illegal weapons. The next day, Task Group 50.6 assumed operational control of Navy and Marine Corps personnel on board the USS *Shreveport*, including members of BLT 3/6 (Companies L and Headquarters), MSSG 26, and SEAL Team 8. The raid force seized the ship, which was steaming off the coast of Karachi, Pakistan, the following day, but subsequent searches failed to locate the suspected fighters or weapons.[90]

A Night to Remember

Around 1925* on 6 December, the 81mm mortar forward observer attached to Company C approached Captain Fallon, who was then walking the frontlines and checking on his Marines.[91] He informed the commander that he had seen lights flashing west of the company's position and north of the forward operating base. Fallon turned in that direction and saw the intermittent flashes, which looked to him like someone using a white lens flashlight to send signals every couple of minutes. Company B noticed lights in their sector around the same time that appeared to be communicating with those seen in Company C's area.[92]

After ordering his Marines to stand to, Captain Fallon headed down to the company command post and radioed a report of the sighting to battalion headquarters, providing an approximate grid coordinate for the potential enemy location. Because Lieutenant Colonel Bourne was in the light armored reconnaissance and combined antiarmor teams' sectors at the time, Fallon spoke with Major James R. Parrington, Battalion Landing Team 1/1's executive officer, who had control of the combat operations center.[93] Parrington put the battalion on full alert while they attempted to determine the scope and nature of the unfolding events.[94]

Although no lights had been seen in Company A's sector, the radio watch woke Captain Putman, who listened intently to the dialogue between Captain Fallon and Major Parrington. After ordering his own unit to stand to and then waiting for the platoons to inform him when all their Marines were at 100 percent alert, he passed on what information he had gleaned from the conversation. "Here's the situation. We got [a] fire team–size force in front of Charlie Company potentially scouting their lines or scouting some sort of passage to get to the aircraft that are parked at Camp Rhino." Then he pulled in his observation posts and had the 60mm mortar section prepare to fire on targets in front of 3d platoon's position, which abutted Company C's left flank.[95]

Captain Fallon was now in radio contact with 15th MEU headquarters, which asked what he wanted to do. After explaining that he had designated several preplanned targets over the enemy's positions, they gave him permission to fire. Fallon then explained his intentions to the fire

*Task Force 58's command chronology indicates that Marines observed the flashing lights around 1945.

support team leader, who replied, "No problem, here's the target." The forward observer subsequently placed the call for fire* with the 81mm mortar platoon, situated behind 3d Platoon, Company A, and followed that with a request for additional support from the company's organic 60mm mortar section.[96]

Adding to the confusion, at around 2330 a UH-1N Huey helicopter then launching to support interdiction operations to the north along Highway 1 crashed along the runway and burst into flames.[97] By this time in the operation, Cobra and Huey crews from both the 15th and 26th MEUs were flying daily reconnaissance missions in support of FOB Rhino, to include predawn and postdusk perimeter patrols.[98] A combination of dust and darkness apparently disoriented the pilots while pulling away from the helipad.[99] The accident was understandably disconcerting to those at FOB Rhino, who simultaneously worried about the safety of the aircrew and wondered if hostile forces had succeeded in downing one of their aircraft.[100] Flames quickly engulfed the helicopter and ammunition began to explode as the hulk "burned down to a lump of molten metal."[101] Fortunately, all four of the crewmembers survived with only minor injuries.[102] This was due in no small part to the efforts of quick-thinking support personnel, who braved the fire to rescue their comrades and move a parked fuel truck away from the crash site.

Back on the frontlines where the rifle companies were facing a potential attack, Captain Putman was concerned that the fire would distract his Marines and ruin their night vision. He recalled that he was constantly on the hook with his platoon commanders, telling them to get their platoons up and to make sure they were facing outboard. Once they received word that the aircrew was safe, the Marines' curiosity passed.[103]

Forward of the perimeter, the night remained pitch black. Although Captain Fallon was initially concerned that the darkness would impede the mortarmen's accuracy, the illumination and high explosive rounds** hit their target.[104] Before long, an orbiting Navy P-3 confirmed the enemy's presence. It provided a live video feed that enabled staff in the 15th MEU's combat operations center to watch as approximately 10 individuals dismounted from a truck and began moving down a wash leading toward the south end of the runway.[105] Fallon again spoke with Major Parrington, who said, "Hey, we're sending a section of CAAT [combined antiarmor] up to you."[106] After breaking radio contact, Fallon called for a second fire mission, directing the 81mm mortars to fire on a grid coordinate provided by the P-3's crew.

The section showed up at Company C's position shortly thereafter, led by First Lieutenant Gary K. Koon, the combined antiarmor platoon commander from Weapons Company, BLT 3/6. Captain Fallon directed the vehicles to a position along his perimeter and told the crews to observe the target area with their antitank missile sights; meanwhile, he had the Javelin gunners observing the area with their weapons' thermal sites from another target reference point. With the antiarmor gunners now in position, Fallon called for a third illumination mission from the 81mm mortar platoon, this time asking that they adjust their last shot. "Then," he said, "we launched the CAAT to go reconnoiter what was out there."[107] First Lieutenant William M. Lennon and BLT 3/6's light armored reconnaissance platoon, then refueling after returning from a 30-hour patrol to retrieve several disabled vehicles operating along Highway 1 to the north, also sent three light armored vehicles (carrying a 25mm cannon and both pintle- and coaxially mounted 7.62mm machine guns) forward that night to reconnoiter the area in front of the battalion's lines.[108]

*During his interview, Capt Fallon recalled that the 81mm mortar forward observer had coordinated the high explosive fires. Task Force 58's command chronology indicates that the P-3 Orion aircraft had confirmed the presence of hostile forces before permission to fire was granted.

**In his interview, Capt Putman indicates that the combined antiarmor teams and 81mm mortars began firing at the same time.



Photo by Sgt Joseph R. Chenelly. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011207-M-4912C-003

Members of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit conduct a patrol southwest of Kandahar on 7 December 2001. They are riding in an M1043 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle armed with an M220 TOW (Tube-Launched, Optically Tracked, Wire-Guided) missile system.

Once the antiarmor teams were forward of the frontlines with "eyes" on the area, Captain Fallon asked Lieutenant Koon if he wanted additional illumination from the company's 60mm mortars. The lieutenant responded affirmatively and radioed back a grid coordinate to target. Fallon passed the location to the 60mm crews and told them to fire for effect; meanwhile, Company B requested 81mm mortar fire to illuminate movement they were observing in their sector. Koon called in two sequential adjust fire missions, each time correcting to the right in an effort to illuminate the opposing forces.[109]

At this point, Captain Fallon recalled, "I decided that things weren't working out; 'let's skip the mortars and go with the direct fire weapons.'"[110] The antiarmor section subsequently drove down range and engaged the hostile forces, located approximately 1,500 meters outside friendly lines, with their MK19 automatic grenade launcher.[111] At this time, Fallon moved forward to the antiarmor platoon's position himself. Lieutenant Koon was now in radio contact with Weapons Company headquarters, who advised him to pull back because the Marines could no longer see anyone moving in the target area, and they were unable to continue firing under that status level. Captain Fallon requested that they check out the area one more time before departing, which they did, going as far forward as they felt comfortable before turning around and returning to friendly lines.[112]

Task Force 58 remained at a heightened state of alert throughout the night and cancelled all flights scheduled into FOB Rhino.[113] Events returned to normal between 0400 and 0500 the next morning, with the command standing down as the sun began to rise over the horizon. It had been a long, cold night for the Marines; some got into their sleeping bags to catch up on sleep, while others attended an after-action debrief at battalion headquarters.[114] The 15th MEU responded to the probing by developing a more coordinated "saturation" patrol plan, which increased both the scope and intensity of coverage within a 12-mile radius of the forward operating

base. Beginning at 1400 that afternoon, they raised the number of foot and mobile patrols at both ends of the runway, pushed other patrols farther out for longer periods, and forced the local inhabitants to skirt the forward operating base by approximately 15–18 miles when traveling through the area.[115]

Patrols went out to search the area the next morning. Although there was no physical sign of the enemy other than footprints, sandals, a water bottle, and an old blanket, days later the engineers discovered a hidden AK-47 assault rifle while assessing the area and emplacing obstacles.[116] In the aftermath of the evening's events, Lieutenant Colonel Olson recalled that the most remarkable thing was the matter-of-fact manner in which the Marines carried out their duties, as if these were common everyday occurrences.[117]

The First Detainee

As one of their many subordinate missions, both land and maritime component commands had told the Marines to be prepared to provide temporary holding facilities and receive prisoners while they arranged for the detainees' transfer to more permanent facilities. On 6 December, Admiral Moore issued his formal planning guidance for detainee handling. John Walker Lindh, the "American Taliban," arrived at FOB Rhino a day later, earning the notorious distinction of being the first of many detainees eventually held by Task Force 58.[118]

Northern Alliance forces had captured the 19-year-old Californian at Kunduz with other al-Qaeda and Taliban troops following the negotiated surrender of the enemy's last major stronghold in northern Afghanistan on 23 November.[119] After a long convoy trip to Mazar-e Sharif the following day, Northern Alliance soldiers confined Lindh and other prisoners in the old fortress of Qala-e-Jangi, situated seven miles west of the city.[120] On 25 November, approximately 300 of the prisoners revolted, seizing a large arsenal of weapons and ammunition that included mortars and rocket-propelled grenade launchers.[121] During the takeover, they killed a Central Intelligence Agency officer and former Marine named Johnny Michael Spann, who had been interrogating the detainees, and a shot hit Lindh in the upper right thigh.

Over the next four days, a Coalition force composed of an infantry platoon from the 10th Mountain Division,* British and American special operating forces, and Afghan militia gradually recaptured the fortress. The last holdouts, including Lindh, surrendered on 29 November, after their basement sanctuary was flooded with freezing water.[122]

The Afghans trucked Lindh and the other wounded prisoners to Sheberghan, where hospital and prison facilities were located. Robert Y. Pelton, a correspondent for Cable News Network (CNN), was the first to learn of Lindh's presence and informed the special forces of his discovery on 1 December.[123] When they encountered the young terrorist, he "was shoeless, covered in dirt, and lying in a hospital bed where he was recovering from wounds received in the prison battle."[124] Concerned by his poor condition, 5th Special Forces Group personnel provided immediate medical attention. The next day, they drove him to the Turkish School House in Mazar-e Sharif, which served as the headquarters for Forward Operating Base 53. On 7 December, after several days of interrogation, a handcuffed Lindh, his eyes covered with a blindfold, was flown to FOB Rhino.[125]

By this time, General Mattis had tasked his communications officer, Major Scott Stebbins, with overseeing Lindh's confinement, including conducting the initial transfer, providing necessary medical attention, and satisfying the prisoner's daily requirements. A detachment from the force reconnaissance platoon rehearsed what to do when the prisoner arrived on 7 December, and later that

*The infantry platoon had deployed from Karshi Khanabad, with another sent to Bagram. They were to serve as a quick reaction force for the special operating forces and represented the first employment of conventional Army units in Afghanistan. (Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror*, 141)

evening, Stebbins, his driver, and the reconnaissance Marines drove their humvee to a predesignated transfer point under blackout conditions, where they waited for the arrival of a special operation forces' C-130. Once the aircraft had landed, they quickly assumed control of Lindh, further immobilized their prisoner by taping him to a stretcher, and then returned to the forward operating base.[126]

Upon reaching FOB Rhino, Task Force 58 personnel stripped Lindh of his clothes; searched him for dangerous items that he could use to harm himself or others; and then provided medical treatment for the gunshot wound to his thigh, shrapnel wound to his shoulder, and general dehydration. Thereafter, Marines confined Lindh to a metal shipping container located next to Task Force K-Bar's headquarters, where they placed him under a 24-hour guard.[127] Military policeman from the 15th MEU provided the prisoner with two meals-ready-to eat per day (later raised to three) and all the water he wanted, and looked after his personal sanitation needs. Medical personnel also continued to evaluate his condition twice each day. With the exception of his guards and physicians, Lindh's visitors were limited to General Mattis; Colonel Waldhauser; personnel from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, who were brought in to collect photographs and fingerprints; and personnel from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who conducted several interviews. Although these conditions might seem harsh by some standards, Major Stebbins later emphasized that not only did they provide Lindh with all the rights and privileges due a prisoner of war, but in some regards, his living conditions exceeded those encountered by Marines in the field.[128]

On 11 December, after NavCent directed them to develop a concept for handling the detainees at sea, members of the Task Force 58 staff on board the *Peleliu* prioritized the ability of Fifth Fleet's amphibious ships and aircraft carriers to house high-value prisoners. The next day, the land component commander issued a fragmentary order directing Task Force 58 to transfer Lindh from FOB Rhino to a U.S. Navy vessel.[129] On 14 December, after binding the prisoner to a stretcher for the second time, the Marines first flew him to Pasni, Pakistan, on board a C-130 and then on to the *Peleliu* on board a CH-46 helicopter.[130] A day after he arrived, Navy surgeons operated on Lindh's wounds, recovering a bullet from his leg.[131] They relocated him to the *Bataan* on 31 December, then to the American military base at Kandahar Airport on 22 January, and he finally left for the United States on 23 January.[132] At his trial, Lindh pleaded guilty to supplying services to the Taliban and carrying weapons while fighting against the Northern Alliance on 15 July 2002. A federal judge sentenced him to 20 years without parole.[133]



Chapter 9
Interdiction Operations

The Campaign Continues into Southern Afghanistan

After the earlier victory at Tarin Kowt, Hamid Karzai and Lieutenant Colonel David Fox led their combined Afghan-American force south. Following a three-day engagement with the Taliban, they succeeded in capturing the town of Sayd-Alim-Kalay on 4 December and occupying the north side of Arghandab Bridge.[1] Captain Clint C. Harris, an F/A-18 Hornet pilot from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 (VMFA-251), provided Operational Detachment Alpha 574 with close air support during the battle. The special forces did not want the bridge damaged by bombs, so he strafed the enemy forces sheltered under the structure with his 20mm cannon. He later recalled the satisfaction he received when noting the blackened nose cowling after returning to the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*.[2]

Now within 15 miles of Kandahar, Karzai learned that delegates meeting at a United Nations–sponsored conference in Bonn, Germany, would soon name him interim leader of the Afghan government. On 5 December, he began to negotiate the surrender of the Taliban's stronghold over his cellular phone.[3] These efforts eventually resulted in a meeting between the southern Pashtuns (referred to as the *Southern Alliance*) and Taliban leaders on 7 December. Afterward, Karzai announced to journalists that "the Taliban have decided to surrender Kandahar, Helmand, and Zabul [Provinces] to me, and in exchange, we have offered them amnesty and they can go home to their homes without trouble."[4] This arrangement was not acceptable to the Bush administration, which wanted to dismantle the Taliban regime.

At the same time to the south, Gul Agha Sharzai was also within striking distance of Kandahar. Although Captain Smith and his special forces team had favored enveloping the city from the west, Task Force Dagger advised them not to go in that direction because it would spread their forces too thin. When Smith responded, "Well, let's get the Marines into the fight," headquarters replied that the Marines were not at Objective Rhino for "direct combat."[5] Expressing concerns about the wisdom of entering Kandahar at that time, it advised that a better course of action would be to surround the city and continue to develop the tactical situation. During a press briefing that same day, Secretary Rumsfeld and General Myers made similar comments suggesting that the Marines were to play only a subsidiary role in any forthcoming battle. They explained to reporters that while the Marines had begun to interdict lines of communication around Kandahar, there were no plans for U.S. forces to join in the final assault, and the job of seizing the city would fall to the southern Pashtun forces then encircling the stronghold.[6] Two days later, as the campaign to bring down the Taliban neared its climax, Admiral Moore issued a planning order for reconstitution of the *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group, indicating that Marine participation would not only be limited in scope, but also in duration.[7]

On 7 December, the same day that Karzai announced his surrender agreement with the Taliban, Sharzai's younger brother called from inside the city to say that Taliban forces had withdrawn from Kandahar. The Afghan commander quickly gathered 500 of his men, boarded trucks, and drove to his former residence at the governor's palace. Although Colonel Mulholland had told Captain Smith to remain outside the city limits, explaining that there were reports of looting and intramural fighting, the young team leader thought it best to accept Sharzai's invitation to join in the liberation of Kandahar.[8] Instead of encountering violence, as the

special forces "drove its vehicles along dusty streets crowded with thousands of Afghans, the people cheered, waved, and threw flowers."[9]

Back in Washington, General Franks told media representatives that although the Taliban forces were surrendering inside Kandahar, U.S. forces continued to engage them as they attempted to flee the city, and added that additional troops might soon be required in Afghanistan.[10] Furthermore, Secretary Rumsfeld "declared that the war effort had now entered a new phase, with a principal focus on finding bin Laden and his top lieutenants, stabilizing post-Taliban Afghanistan, and addressing humanitarian concerns in the war-ravaged country."[11] The following day, Army General Paul Mikolashek congratulated Task Force 58 for a job well done and announced his intent to replace the two Marine expeditionary units with an Army brigade combat team.[12]

In Kandahar, Karzai was furious when he learned that Sharzai had entered the city and reoccupied his former residence in the governor's mansion. In exchange for surrendering the Taliban military forces, Karzai had agreed to let Mullah Naqibullah become the governor of Kandahar. As a form of compromise, Naqibullah retained both the title of "mullah" and his city home, while Sharzai reclaimed his former position as the provincial governor. Several days later, Karzai left for Kabul to be sworn in as the interim president of Afghanistan.[13]

Highway Interdiction

Before returning to sea in mid-November, General Mattis had warned his subordinate commanders that they might be called on to interdict Taliban and al-Qaeda troops moving along Asian Highway Route 1, the principal two-lane paved road linking the major cities in southern Afghanistan. Roughly a week later, just after Task Force 58 seized Objective Rhino, Secretary Rumsfeld confirmed to press representatives that one of the Marines' primary missions was to "prevent Taliban and al-Qaeda forces from moving freely about the country."[14] As the end of the month approached, the possibility of such operations taking place finally began to solidify when Central Command told its land component to begin planning for the isolation of Kandahar.[15]

On 30 November, the same day that Admiral Moore transferred operational control of Task Force 58 to General Mikolashek, the Marines received planning and fragmentary orders from both the land and maritime components, directing them to plan for and be prepared to interdict enemy lines of communication west of Kandahar.[16] If answering to two component commands were not difficult enough, the Marines were issued contrary guidance from Central Command: on the same day Task Force 58 received a fragmentary order to raid Route 1, it was also informed that its sole mission was to seize a forward operating base (Forward Operating Base Rhino [FOB Rhino]).[17] General Mattis later commented on the situation:

> It just showed the inability of a displaced… higher headquarters to coordinate mutually supporting ops. Essential misunderstandings reflected their lack of first-hand familiarity with the ground and with the Pakistanis and with the anti-Taliban force relationship. Had they understood those things, they could have done much better. There was a breakdown in the intelligence operations interface; there was very little awareness in Tampa that the enemy was escaping every day because of their… operational view.[18]

Although General Mattis and the members of Task Force 58 wanted nothing more than an opportunity to engage the enemy, the force limit—levied two days earlier by Central Command—seriously undercut their ability to simultaneously defend the forward operating base and launch a sizable ground combat force to the north. Since the cap's inception, Mattis and his staff had continued to argue against the restriction as best they could, forwarding requests for relief up both the maritime and land component chains-of-command.[19] On 1 December, with Army Major General Warren C. Edwards, deputy commander of

the land component, advocating on the task force's behalf, Central Command eventually conceded to raising the ceiling from 1,100 to 1,400 Marines and sailors in Afghanistan.[20]

This new figure allowed the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit to reinforce the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) already at FOB Rhino. The aviation combat element, Lieutenant Colonel Kevin DeVore's Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (HMM-365), deployed nine additional helicopters (two UH1-Ns, three AH-1Ws, and four CH-46Es) on 1 December, while the ground combat element, Lieutenant Colonel Jerome M. Lynes's Battalion Landing Team 3/6 (BLT 3/6), inserted its light armored reconnaissance and combined antiarmor platoons the following day. The two platoons, led by First Lieutenants William Lennon and Gary Koon, respectively, had worked extensively together during their predeployment training and now combined to form Task Force Sledgehammer,* with Lennon in command. Once ashore, both the air and ground elements conducted security patrols around the forward operating base through 6 December.[21]

The 15th MEU's crisis action team began to plan for the operation by considering the feasibility of sending a mobile raid force north to attack opposing positions along Highway 1. Over the next 12 to 24 hours, however, the mission evolved into interdicting enemy lines of communication between Kandahar and Lashkar Gah for three to five days.[22] Lieutenant Colonel Olson explained that their job was to "stop traffic, investigate who was there, seize weapons or other contraband, take prisoners, and if they resisted, kill them."[23]

To retain the element of surprise and minimize unnecessary risk, the interdiction force planned to travel cross-country, covering over 80 miles of desert, interspersed with sand dunes, streams, and mountains. The condition of the vehicles added another degree of difficulty: many of the battalion's humvees were more than a decade old and destined for salvage following the unit's return to Camp Pendleton. Colonel Waldhauser later recalled talking to one of his young Marines after he returned from this mission. When the MEU commander asked how it went, the Marine replied, "I wasn't concerned about getting shot at by the enemy—I was more concerned whether my vehicle would start once we had to exit the area."[24]

On 2 December, both Central Command and its land component headquarters issued execute orders to interdict enemy lines of communication and isolate the city of Kandahar.[25] Although General Mikolashek's original intent had been merely to block Taliban and al-Qaeda forces traveling along Route 1, his refined guidance was to "prevent/deny the escape" of the Taliban and al-Qaeda from Afghanistan.[26] General Mattis subsequently issued Fragmentary Order 002 the following day, directing elements of the 15th MEU to isolate Kandahar and deny the Taliban forces a westward avenue of escape.[27] At this time, he later recalled, there were approximately 6,000 enemy soldiers in Lashkar Gah and another 20,000 in Kandahar.[28]

After speaking with the 15th MEU's intelligence officer on the same day that General Mattis released his fragmentary order, an embedded reporter wrote, "With Pashtun tribal militias intensifying pressure on Taliban forces, Major [James B.] Higgins Jr. said the war 'seems to be reaching a culmination point of some type'."[29] This prompted questions at a press briefing in Washington, DC, later that day, when another reporter asked Rear Admiral John D. Stufflebeem if Pentagon officials "shared the view" of "one of the Marine commanders at Forward Operations Base Rhino… quoted as saying that it appears that the U.S. military operation is reaching a culmination."[30] Revealing the administration's full scope of operations and perhaps an impending change in focus from Central Asia toward the Middle East, Stufflebeem replied,

*Task Force Sledgehammer was composed of seven light armored vehicles (one logistics and six light assault variants) and fourteen humvees (six heavy machine gun and eight TOW missile variants). (BLT 3/6 History, 3)

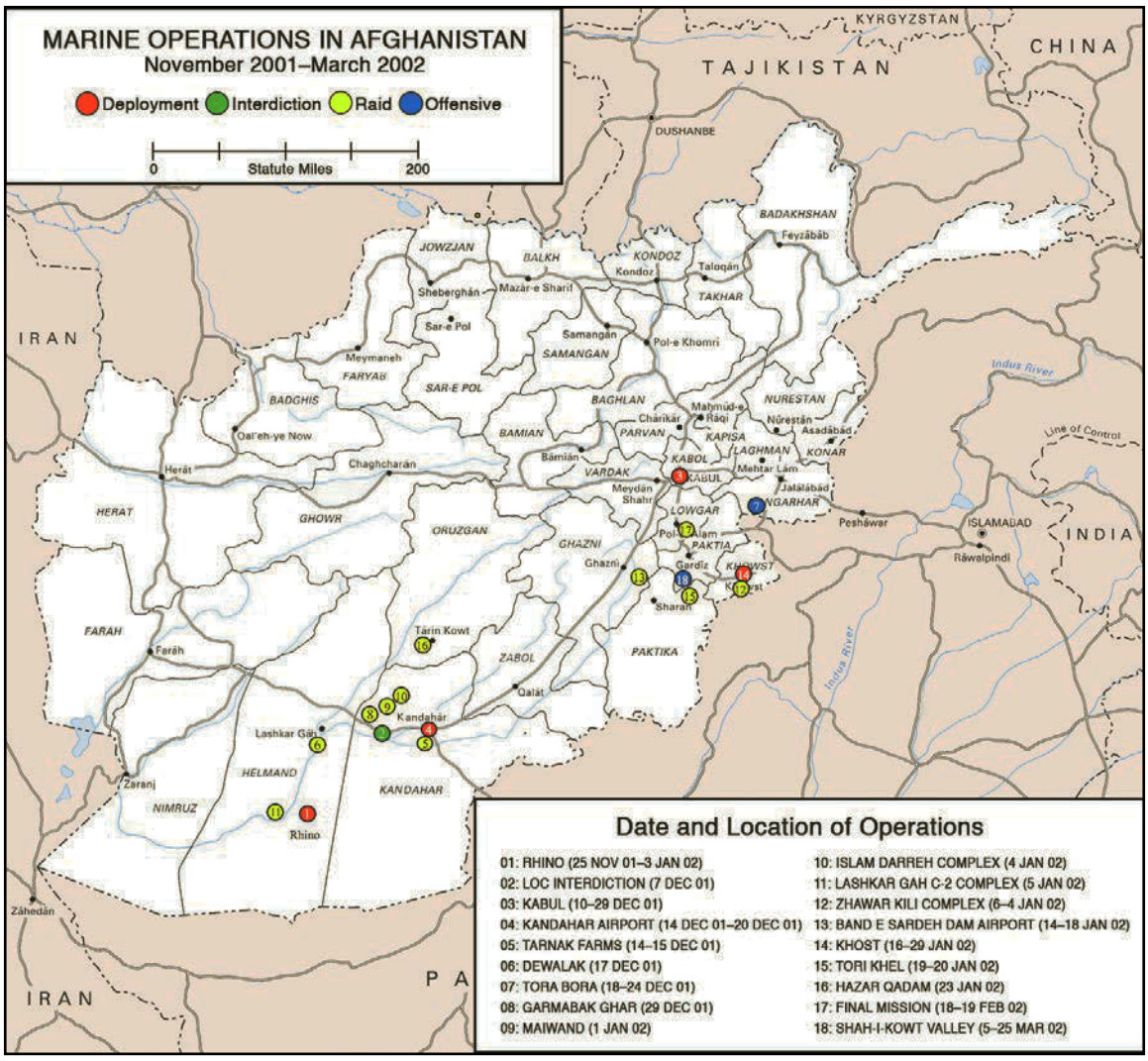


Diagram by Vincent J. Martinez

Map depicting the location of Marine operations in Afghanistan.

I think you have to sort of put yourself in the position of an individual who sees the world from a different perspective. If I were a Marine at… the forward operating base, surrounded by a thousand of my red-blooded American fighters, I probably would feel that I'm pretty close to getting this thing to a conclusion. However, from a perspective above that altitude, and maybe even outside of Afghanistan, the Central Command, and certainly the National Command Authorities, are prepared for… a longer duration. I'm not sure that any of us have a sense or a feel for how soon before we will know that we have the senior leadership of the Taliban controlled or suppressed or killed or in possession, or the same for al-Qaeda. And so we're prepared to stay for as long as we have to to do that, and don't have a sense of time on that.[31]

North to the Arghandab River

Early on 3 December, Captain Treglia and his force reconnaissance platoon departed friendly lines and headed north toward the Arghandab River, which parallels Highway 1. Composed of 11

Marines and one Navy corpsman, the platoon rode in two of their own interim fast-attack vehicles and two hard-backed humvees that they had borrowed from the infantry battalion and service support group. One of the humvees carried a .50-caliber machine gun, the other, a mounted MK19 automatic grenade launcher.[32] The patrol traveled throughout the night, conducting route reconnaissance and serving as an advance guard for the main force. Unfortunately, several of their vehicles (one fast-attack vehicle and one humvee) broke down during the trip, forcing the group to split in the middle of the desert. While Treglia and half the Marines stayed behind to provide security for the vehicles, Gunnery Sergeant John A. Dailey forged ahead with the remainder of the platoon in search of a suitable patrol base and possible fording sites for the interdiction force.[33]

A day after the reconnaissance element had headed into the desert, Lieutenant Colonel Bourne (call sign "Shaka") led the main body of the interdiction force northward in column. With a call sign of "Grim Reaper," the force numbered approximately 45 vehicles and included Bourne's jump command post, the combined antiarmor platoon, and the light armored reconnaissance company.[34] While Major Impellitteri and First Lieutenant Donald M. Faul had conducted a visual reconnaissance flight in one of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163's (HMM-163's) UH-1N helicopters over the area before departing, the convoy leaders' only charts were aerial photographs, satellite imagery, and 1:100,000-scale maps that the 15th MEU's topographic platoon had produced. The photographs and imagery, however, were difficult to interpret, while the maps were not always accurate.[35] Planners had divided the tactical area of operations along Highway 1 into three east-west zones, labeled Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie, and two north-south zones, labeled One and Two. This enabled the Marines to coordinate operations quickly.[36]

Movement over the rough terrain was more difficult and time consuming than originally anticipated. One particularly frustrating obstacle was an east-west sand belt running across the convoy's route. Although the Marines had tentatively identified what appeared to be a six-mile-wide stretch of hardpack suitable for traversing the barrier, a number of crews had to winch each other's mired vehicles from the sand. Then, after regrouping on the north side of the sand belt, they learned that only one of several trails shown on the map still existed; they located it only after sunrise. Making matters worse, they also contended with mechanical



Associated Press

An armored patrol from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit's Task Force Sledgehammer returns to Forward Operating Base Rhino during a period of heightened alert on 7 December 2001.

problems and had to tow several disabled vehicles during the advance.[37]

After laboring through the desert for approximately 19 hours, the column finally linked up with the reconnaissance team early on 5 December. Their first patrol base, codenamed Pentagon, was situated on a rocky rise cut by small draws, located approximately 4 miles south of the Arghandab River and 25 miles west of Kandahar.[38] Lieutenant Colonel James LaVine, commanding officer of HMM-163, led six CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters into Pentagon later that morning.[39] In addition to bringing supplies for the interdiction force, they also carried Captain Whitmer and elements of Company B (3d Platoon reinforced by mortar and machine gun sections) to increase security around the patrol base.

Anxiety among the Marines on board rose sharply when the helicopters descended toward the landing zone, located approximately a mile from the patrol base. Hearing the battalion's unexpected test firing of .50-caliber machine guns below, they thought the aircraft were receiving hostile fire. Once firmly on the ground, the infantry hiked to the patrol base, positioned themselves among the vehicles, and began to establish a standard 360-degree defensive perimeter by digging fighting positions, developing target lists, preparing fire plan sketches, and drafting patrol overlays.[40]

Although the plan had initially called for the Marines to establish their first roadblock along Highway 1 that evening, winding their way through the rugged terrain during the previous night had used far more fuel than originally estimated. While they had already halved the normal range of an LAV-25 traveling on an unimproved road from 400 to 200 miles per tank, after accounting for multiple vehicle recoveries, numerous route reversals, decreasing tire pressure to increase traction, and burning high-octane aviation fuel to simplify logistical requirements, their effective range was limited to around 140 miles. After arranging for a fuel resupply, Colonel Bourne sent several vehicular patrols out to reconnoiter the area.[41]

The same evening, one of Gunnery Sergeant Dailey's two reconnaissance teams moved down to the river and evaluated tentative fording sites shown on the aerial photographs and satellite imagery, while the other investigated a possible Taliban radar site that surveillance aircraft had reported.[42] The site apparently turned out to be a tree, while a multiple launch rocket system also inspected proved unserviceable.[43] At the same time, armored vehicle patrols scouted the area, locating roads, villages, and the river and identifying potential helicopter landing zones and future patrol bases. Although the Marines attempted to send out a small mobile force to block the highway and gain situational awareness later that night, they quickly ended the mission when several of the armored vehicles ran low on fuel within 4 kilometers of leaving the patrol base.[44]

The interdiction force pulled into a temporary forward arming and refueling point early the next morning to receive supplies and take on fuel from 500-gallon bladders flown in by HMM-163.[45] Later in the day, they shifted their patrol base to the reverse slope of a ridge located slightly toward the northwest, decreasing the length of the round trip from patrol base Pentagon to Highway 1.[46] By this time, however, higher headquarters was growing frustrated by the operational delays and more than a little anxious to strike the enemy. Colonel Waldhauser and several others flew north to meet with Colonel Bourne and his commanders, and the two groups confirmed the "game plan" for the evening's interdiction operation.[47] The idea was to go with a large force on the first mission and then scale back subsequent operations. As Bourne explained, "I wanted them to win the first time. I wanted to be smoking—'We won this one!'—and to build their confidence."[48]

Lieutenant Lennon and Task Force Sledgehammer returned to Rhino that evening after linking up with the interdiction force 80 miles north of the forward operating base and recovering all but one of their disabled vehicles.[49] While the Marines had predicted a 10-hour trip, the round-trip, cross-country journey to patrol base Pentagon actually



Photo by Sgt Joseph R. Chenelly

Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit extend a winch from a light armored vehicle to pull another vehicle out of soft sand during a patrol east of Kandahar, Afghanistan, on 10 December 2001.

took 30 hours to complete. Staff Sergeant Schneider, the detachment's platoon sergeant, later commented that the patrol was one of the toughest in his career. In addition to retrieving three humvees and a fast-attack vehicle, the 16-man force also had to tow one of its own LAV-25s back across the desert after it blew an engine while traversing the rugged landscape.[50] Although a helicopter flew the remaining humvee back to Rhino, Task Force 58 eventually abandoned the dilapidated vehicle in a shallow trench after mechanics determined that it was beyond repair.

Checkpoint

Approximately two hours before sundown, Gunnery Sergeant Dailey learned that his Marines were to fulfill both reconnaissance and direct action roles in the upcoming operation.[51] Although Major Thomas J. Impellitteri's light armored reconnaissance company would establish a wire obstacle along the highway and provide mobile security and support for the checkpoint, Colonel Bourne decided that the force reconnaissance Marines' specialized training better prepared them to halt traffic and search vehicles. The detachment's corpsman, Petty Officer Second Class Rodney C. Talsma, had suggested the basic strategy for engaging vehicles along the highway before departing at FOB Rhino by asking lightheartedly, "Hey, why don't we just drop [in] and put a wire behind them, and block them in, and just carjack them?"[52]

As Gunnery Sergeant Dailey later explained, while the concept may have sounded simple, ambiguous rules of engagement made execution a bit more complex.

> The [rules of engagement] were clear, but how we were going to apply them was rather unclear. We could not shoot someone [possessing] a



Photo courtesy of Maj Thomas J. Impellitteri

Members of Company B, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, pose in front of the terminal at Kandahar International Airport, Afghanistan. From left to right are Capt Brian R. Griffing, executive officer; MSgt Michael L. Holguin, operations chief; and Maj Thomas J. Impellitteri, company commander. While serving with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, Company B played a significant role in interdicting enemy movement along Highway 1, occupying Kandahar International Airport, and raiding the enemy garrison in Maiwand.

> weapon unless they were threatening us. Supposedly everyone here has weapons, so we were basically required to wait until they were getting ready to shoot at us before you shoot back. We were also sort of led to believe that the bulk of the traffic… traveling out of Kandahar would be people fleeing. There's obviously issues with checking the women; they're not allowed to be touched. So, a man dressed like a woman, who would know?[53]

Shortly after dusk, around 1900, two reconnaissance teams of five Marines (call sign "Centurion") departed patrol base Pentagon for the Arghandab River.[54] Traveling in their one remaining fast-attack vehicle and a borrowed humvee, Staff Sergeant Jack A. Kelly led Team 1 and Staff Sergeant Matthew A. Cole led Team 3 in search of suitable fording sites. Progress slowed when their vehicles became stuck and they encountered an unexpected encampment of Afghan pastoralists on the south side of the river. Meanwhile, Gunnery Sergeant Dailey, who had remained behind, ironed out the final details of the impending operation with Major Impellitteri.[55]

The main body of the interdiction force (call sign "Cossack") departed around 2130, shortly after moonrise.[56] It consisted of eight light armored vehicles, including one command and control and one logistics variant, and four gun-mounted humvees. The armored reconnaissance company quickly caught up with the force reconnaissance teams and had little difficulty crossing the ankle-deep water.[57] When they emerged on the north side of the river, however, they found themselves in the midst of a small village surrounded by irrigation ditches, dikes, and soggy paddies. Although the



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

Marines from Company A, 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, conduct a mounted patrol near Kandahar, on 17 January 2002. Attached to Battalion Landing Team 3/6, they are riding in a Light Armored Vehicle-25 (LAV-25), armed with a 25mm chain gun and a 7.62mm machine gun.

humvees were capable of crossing the irrigation ditches that measured approximately six feet deep and eight feet wide, the armored vehicles could not negotiate the obstacles.[58]

The convoy crept slowly forward, observing the area through their night-vision sights and receiving constant updates from an overhead surveillance aircraft. Captain Michael D. Bryan, the force's forward air controller (call sign "Neck") later listed the various resources at his disposal to maintain the Marines' situational awareness. These included Navy P-3 Orion and Air Force E8-C Joint Star surveillance aircraft and a pair of Air Force General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon fighters with forward-looking infrared devices.[59]

Despite the late hour, the Marines occasionally encountered unsuspecting civilians, although most of these were so surprised that they ran away in fright. Colonel Bourne recounted one humorous radio exchange that he overheard, in which the vehicle crewmen described an Afghan man who had literally run out of his shoes: "That guy looked like he was on the Olympic track team."[60] At the same time, anxieties were running high among the Marines, who realized that any one of the civilians could turn out to be a Taliban soldier with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher.[61]

For 30 minutes, the Marines searched unsuccessfully for a route through town. Turning in his seat, Major Impellitteri declared with determination, "I am not going back; we are doing this tonight!" He then asked a Central Intelligence Agency liaison officer* riding in the vehicle, "What do you think about dismounting the interpreter with

*A liaison officer from the Central Intelligence Agency joined Task Force 58 on 28 November to assist them in planning operations in southern Afghanistan. A former Marine officer, he was anxious for action and had volunteered to accompany the interdiction mission along Highway 1. He later participated in the occupation of Kandahar International Airport and served as a link between the local Afghans and Marines. (TF 58 ComdC, 53)

some security and just start knocking on doors and ask for help?" The intelligence officer responded that it sounded like a good idea.[62] Lance Corporal Ajmal Achekzai, although a cook by military occupational specialty, had been born in Afghanistan, spoke both Pashto and Farsi, and was now pressed into service.[63]

Just then, the surveillance aircraft warned Captain Bryan that a civilian vehicle was approaching the village. While the Marines waited patiently (parked alongside a small house for cover and concealment) for the situation to develop, the truck continued moving toward them and eventually halted on the opposite side of the building. Three Afghan men climbed from their vehicle with AK-47 assault rifles in hand, rounded the structure, and abruptly came face to face with the LAV-25's heavy armament. Captain Bryan recalled with some humor, "As soon as they looked up and actually saw us there—they hadn't even realized we were in the town until that point—they took off running, and I don't think they quit until they were four or five miles away."[64] Comments from excited Marines quickly filled the company's tactical communications net, but Major Impellitteri reassured his troops. "We're fine. We're going to dismount the interpreter, we're going to find a way through here, and we're going to go up there and do this thing." "Miraculously," he reflected, "everybody was quiet on the net and… kind of calmed down."[65]

Lance Corporal Achekzai climbed down from his vehicle and started moving through town, accompanied by Major Impellitteri, the intelligence agency officer, and several Marines who provided security. After knocking on several doors, they arrived at the house of the village elder. The small patrol explained that they were Americans hunting al-Qaeda and Taliban soldiers, inquired if there were any of those in the village, and asked how to cross the man's irrigation ditch. After learning how to maneuver past the obstacle, Impellitteri asked what the elder had said. Achekzai replied, "He said that there weren't any Taliban and al-Qaeda in their town, that they were very poor people and hated the Taliban. They have no food." The company commander then inquired if the villagers needed anything, to which the interpreter responded, "They could use some water, if we could spare some."[66] Thereafter, when each of the vehicles passed the elder's house, Marines tossed out two bottles of water and, because they didn't want to offend the Muslims, several non-pork meals-ready-to eat.[67]

Before moving on, Major Impellitteri asked the elder to point out the quickest route to Highway 1. The old man reportedly "hated the Taliban so much that he volunteered to… guide [the patrol] to Kandahar to kill Omar himself" and enthusiastically directed the Marines to an unimproved road that the locals used. The convoy was behind schedule by this time, and imparting his order to proceed with a sense of urgency, Impellitteri radioed, "Hey, we're moving, let's go… we've got to fly out there!"[68]

Moving relatively quickly, the interdiction force covered the few remaining kilometers along the unimproved dirt road to Highway 1 and established an objective rally point approximately 1,000 meters south of the highway.[69] Gunnery Sergeant Dailey, who had been riding in the company commander's LAV, now linked up with his two reconnaissance teams.[70] The Marines quickly ran through the plan one more time, and Major Impellitteri asked, "Does everyone know what they need to do? Does anybody have any last minute questions before we go and kick this thing off?" After the Marines responded, "No sir, we're all good to go," he replied, "Roger, execute."[71]

The paved two-lane highway, extending westward across the featureless desert floor, sat on a six-foot-high earthen berm with steep banks. Although the elevated aspect surprised the Marines, who had used one-dimensional aerial photographs to plan the operation, it actually contributed to their goal by confining the flow of traffic to a main avenue of approach. Major Impellitteri positioned his two security teams along the eastern and western flanks of Highway 1, approximately 500 meters from the roadblock and adjacent to a small village to the east.

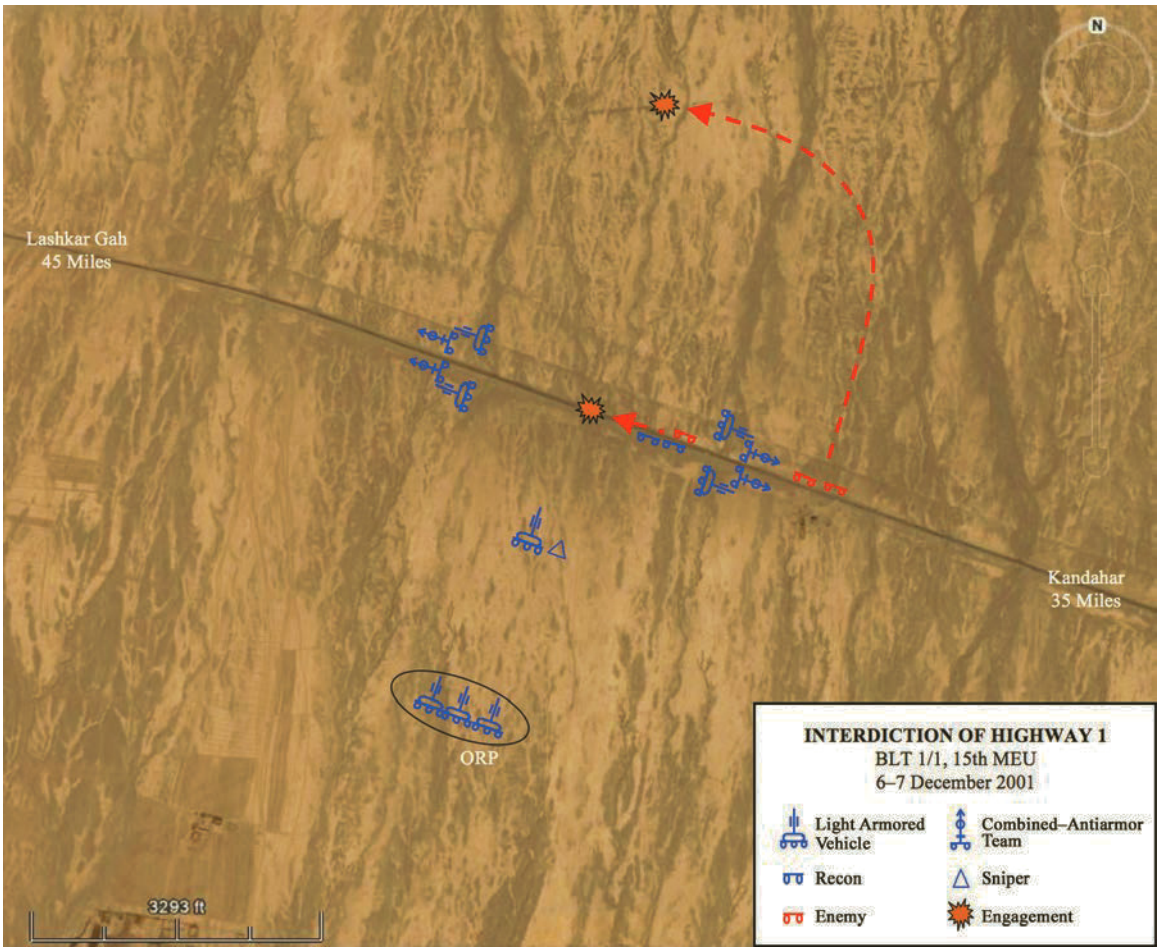


Diagram by Col Nathan S. Lowrey

Map depicting the interdiction of a Taliban convoy on Highway 1 on 6–7 December 2001.

Each of the teams consisted of two light armored vehicles and two humvees, one commanded by First Lieutenant Donald M. Faul from the armored reconnaissance company's 1st Platoon, the other by Gunnery Sergeant Robert J. Sundstrom from the weapons company's antiarmor platoon.[72]

Once the security teams were in place and surveillance aircraft had confirmed that the highway was temporarily clear of traffic, Master Sergeant Michael L. Holguin, the company's operations chief, led the support element forward from the rally point to establish a roadblock. Traveling in a logistical variant of the light armored vehicle, the 13-man detachment included scout snipers to provide covering fire, as well as combat cameramen to record the event. Staking double-stranded concertina wire to the macadam roadbed, they designed the obstacle to funnel westward-traveling traffic toward a single decision point. They also hung chemical lights from the wire to ensure that approaching drivers would spot the barrier and stop. Once they had constructed the obstacle, which took all of about five minutes to complete, Holguin pulled the support element 500 meters back to a position that allowed the snipers to observe the objective area and engage targets.[73]

Gunnery Sergeant Dailey and the force reconnaissance section, serving as the assault element for the ambush, had also moved forward in their two vehicles. The humvee carried seven

members of the section. Staff Sergeant Steven B. Pope drove with Dailey in the assistant driver's seat. Behind them, Staff Sergeants David K. Lind and Roman C. Nowicki occupied the left and right passenger seats, followed by Staff Sergeants Kelly and Travis Clark, and Petty Officer Talsma, who rode in the cargo area. In addition to the Marines' individual M4 carbines, the driver carried an M79 grenade launcher, and the vehicle had a mounted M240G machine gun. The fast-attack vehicle carried the remaining four members of the team: Staff Sergeant Matthew A. Cole and Sergeants Clayton J. Bell, Brian M. Lambert, and Glenn S. Cederholm. In addition to their individual M4s, the driver's M79, and a .50-caliber sniper rifle, the vehicle had a mounted MK19 automatic grenade launcher.[74]

Although the assault element experienced some initial anxiety, wondering if their humvee could climb the steep bank when required, they conducted a quick test and the vehicle proved up to the challenge. They then withdrew to a position approximately 200 meters east of the obstacle and just south of the highway and began the waiting game. As Dailey explained, "We assumed that 90 percent of the people that we stopped were going to be friendlies that we'd search, take a look at, send them on their way…. We were going to approach it… like a policeman at a speed trap, let them drive past us… and give them a little lead-in time." Given the small size of the assault element, the Marines had decided to allow only one vehicle into the objective area at any given time, even if the security element had to move forward and block the highway to do it.[75] According to the rules of engagement, although personnel in voluntarily halted vehicles would need to commit some type of hostile act against the Marines before they could open fire, drivers attempting to crash through the barrier would be considered to have displayed hostile intent.[76] In the latter case, the small assault element would allow hostile vehicles to pass unmolested, allowing the security element to engage them with their enhanced firepower.[77]

By this time, the interdiction force had been away from patrol base Pentagon for more than six hours. Waiting patiently in their assigned positions, they relied on Major Timothy J. Oliver, Task Force 58's assistant intelligence officer, in an orbiting P-3 to inform them of approaching traffic. They first received reports of several vehicles traveling approximately 15 miles down the highway in either direction, but these turned off the road well before reaching the Marines' position.[78]

Around 0420 in the morning on 7 December, the interdiction force finally learned that several vehicles were heading toward their position from both directions: one group was located 20 miles east near Kandahar, the other, 12 miles west near Lashkar Gah.[79] This raised the troublesome questions of which vehicles would arrive first and whether or not the Marines should just open the barricade and let the traffic pass. As the Marines prepared to turn around and reorient the direction of their roadblock, they received a subsequent update indicating that still others were now approaching from the east. The situation was fortunately resolved when the vehicles from the west exited the highway, leaving a single approaching target.[80]

Situated near the center of the objective where he could observe the operation from his command variant of the LAV-25, Major Impellitteri radioed, "All right, this is what we're going to take down, everybody get set."[81] Before long, the vehicle passed the flank security team, who radioed that they had spotted a dual cab pickup with people in the back. As the pickup sped past the assault element's position, Gunnery Sergeant Dailey told Staff Sergeant Pope to "go ahead and punch it!" The humvee quickly climbed the steep bank onto the road, with the fast-attack vehicle following to the side to provide fire support. The Marines observed three individuals wrapped in blankets in the truck bed. Although the middle passenger was clearly carrying an AK-47 assault rifle, none of the Afghans made any threatening gestures.[82]

The driver of the pickup—sitting on the right side of the truck—apparently saw the chemical

lights and began to slow his vehicle but then attempted to accelerate through the roadblock. After dragging the obstacle for 20 to 25 feet (and in the process wrapping wire around the axel and body), the tangled vehicle halted. As Staff Sergeant Pope pulled to within 5 feet of the pickup's tailgate, Gunnery Sergeant Dailey leapt from the humvee. Running as close as he could to the concertina wire, perhaps 10 feet from the pickup, he shone his flashlight on the Afghans and shouted in English for them to "put your weapons down" and "put your hands on your head." Almost simultaneously, Staff Sergeants Kelly and Nowicki moved to Dailey's right, while Staff Sergeants Lind and Clark moved to his left. At this point, the Marines were still unsure if they were dealing with friendly or hostile forces. Although the man sitting in the middle of the truck bed had his firing hand on his rifle, which was pointed in the general direction of the team, his second hand remained free and he did not appear overly aggressive.[83]

A man suddenly jumped from the left rear side door of the cab and began to raise his weapon at the Marines. Staff Sergeants Clark and Lind immediately opened fire on him, while Gunnery Sergeant Dailey and Staff Sergeant Kelly engaged the three Afghans riding in the bed of the truck, who had also begun to raise their weapons menacingly. The men had apparently covered themselves with blankets to ward off the evening cold, and now those seated on the left and right sides of the bed struggled to extricate their rifles from beneath the covering. Because the men were propped up against supplies and equipment in the rear of the truck, they appeared to remain active and the Marines continued to fire at them; these rounds likely penetrated into the rear of the cab and killed any passengers seeking cover there. A fifth man had also emerged from the left side of the cab, and one of the scout snipers assigned to the support element had fired into the vehicle's windshield and side passenger door, killing the driver and other occupants.[84] One individual was shot a second time as he attempted to flee.[85]

The brief engagement had lasted only 6 to 10 seconds, with each Marine firing 13 to 20 rounds.[86] The assault element confirmed seven dead without taking any casualties themselves.[87] By this time, fuel in the truck had started to burn and Gunnery Sergeant Dailey ordered his team to pull back from the rapidly spreading flames. Major Impellitteri began to pull the interdiction force back to its objective rally point by echelon: first assault, then support, and finally the security element when everyone else was safe.[88] After stopping briefly to change magazines, take a quick head count, and check their equipment, the assault element continued its withdrawal. As the Marines bounded backward to cover each other and the team's humvee, AK-47 rounds began to cook off with increasing rapidity, followed by several rocket-propelled grenades—one flying toward a flank security team—and eventually larger explosions believed to be mortar rounds.[89]

While the roadblock was taking place, the orbiting P-3 aircraft and eastern security teams each reported the approach of several more vehicles* from the direction of Kandahar: a minibus and truck followed by approximately four other vehicles at a greater distance.[90] Initially, only the lead vehicle was running with headlights, but as they approached the roadblock, the second driver turned his on as well. While they likely intended to illuminate the objective area to see what was taking place at the site, they also revealed their position to the Marines.[91] The drivers then turned off their lights, stopped short of the objective area, and dismounted between 15–30 troops along both shoulders of the road.** These actions led the Marines to conclude that they had hit the advance guard of a Taliban column

*In his autobiography, 1stLt Fick says the message was first reported to patrol base Pentagon and then relayed to assault force Cossack. He also gives the number of vehicles as two, including a minibus and dump truck. (Fick, *One Bullet Away*, 127)

**The estimated number of dismounted troops varies significantly among several sources: MSSG 15's command chronology says 15–20, Task Force 58's command chronology states 30, GySgt Dailey remembers 50–80, and Maj Impellitteri recalls 60–80.

moving west toward Lashkar Gah because the drivers appeared to be in communication with each other and shared standard operating procedures.[92] As Colonel Bourne explained, "Their tactics were very, very loose. They'd extend intervals for their convoys so it would look like six single vehicles spread out for 20 miles."[93]

As the one-sided firefight ensued, the Afghan convoy attempted to maneuver around the roadblock, reinforcing the Marines' suspicions that they were facing the Taliban. While observing through thermal sights and other night-vision devices, they watched as the troops reboarded their vehicles (now apparently joined by the four other trucks), headed approximately a kilometer north through the desert to a dirt road that paralleled the highway, and dismounted a second time.[94] Overhead in the P-3, Major Oliver observed approximately 40 individuals form a skirmisher's line and begin to move slowly westward alongside their vehicles toward the roadblock point.[95] He later commented, "They were maneuvering like infantry that was reasonably well disciplined and drilled, and he at first thought they might be another Marine element.[96] Major Impellitteri continued to discretely pull his force back from the highway while this was occurring because the night's limited objective had been to stop and search one or two isolated vehicles rather than attack an enemy convoy.[97]

As the returning interdiction forces regrouped at their objective rally point, Captain Bryan asked Major Impellitteri what he wanted to do. After the company commander responded, "Let's run some air on them," the forward air controller informed him that it would take about 15 minutes to initiate the attack. Sensitive to the fact that the burning vehicle and exploding ammunition would have drawn the attention of any other forces in the area, Impellitteri responded, "Wait for what? I'm not sitting here, out in the open, for 15 minutes!" Bryan explained, "I've got to get approval [from higher headquarters]. Before we can engage targets… with close air support, they need to be identified as hostile." Until this time, the company commander was unaware that the combined air operations center in Saudi Arabia had to approve all requests for the employment of fixed-wing aviation assets in Afghanistan, raising the Marines' level of frustration.[98]

Major Impellitteri acknowledged the requirement but commented, "Look, these guys all have weapons [and] they're acting like any kind of military would…. These guys are definitely hostile; there's no way they're not."[99] Bryan understood Impellitteri's frustration but later added that the Marines had not yet completed their withdrawal and explained, "I can't start dropping bombs until I know my people are clear."[100] Colonel Bourne later described the complexity of the problem:

> You can't tell these guys apart. It's a truckload of guys with guns. Good guys, bad guys, don't know. Yet it could have been a convoy. It could have been that we screwed up and hit friendlies this time. It's really tough to sort them out. They couldn't just drop bombs on them at that point.[101]

As a Marine forward air controller, Captain Bryan coordinated air operations over the immediate area. Orbiting aircraft checked in with him on arrival, reporting what type of ordnance they were carrying and how long they could remain overhead. He, in turn, "stacked" the aircraft according to which pilots had the shortest time on station and assigned targets as they became available.[102] On this particular occasion, the stack included two Navy F-14s, two Air Force F-16s, and two Marine Corps F/A-18s.[103] Captains Michael J. Coletta and Clint Harris piloted the Hornet flights from VMFA-251 on board the *Theodore Roosevelt*.

With the burning pickup truck serving as a reference point, the pilots' attention quickly focused on the convoy moving toward the interdiction force.[104] Captain Coletta described radioing the forward air controller, "Hey, I have vehicles moving north here, do you have them?" When Captain Bryan responded that he did, Coletta asked "Am I clear to engage these guys?" According to Coletta,

although Bryan wanted to give a verbal "thumbs-up" to go ahead with the attack, he replied, "Just to get further clarification, let's try to get it from one more agency." Coletta subsequently changed his radio frequency and contacted "Boss Man," the Air Force airborne warning and control system. Boss Man then relayed the request to "K-Mart," the combined air operations center in Saudi Arabia, over the Air Control-1 network.[105] Bryan, conversely, says that he submitted the request to the air operations center through the orbiting E-8 JSTARs (Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System) aircraft.[106]

After higher headquarters checked with the local Afghan militia to confirm that there were no friendly vehicles traveling along that portion of Highway 1, Captain Bryan received permission for Captain Coletta and his wingman, Captain Clint Harris, to begin the attack: "He's cleared to engage." By this time, the interdicting force had consolidated approximately a kilometer south of the objective area, and while some Marines provided local security around the rally point, others prepared to tow a disabled LAV-25 that had limped back from the roadblock. North of the highway, having walked half a kilometer or more alongside their trucks, the Taliban remounted their vehicles.[107]

Bryan released the aircraft after he obtained a headcount from the ground forces and knew that the Marines were safe.[108] The first four fighters descended from approximately 22,000 feet and dropped six bombs at 30-second intervals, shattering whatever sense of security the Taliban might have gleaned from the surrounding darkness.[109] Captain Bryan later remembered that the F-14s came in first, dropping two 1,000-pound laser guided bombs on the two lead vehicles, each of which carried 20 to 30 personnel. Then the F-16s came in, dropping four 500-pound laser guided bombs.[110] Major Impellitteri reflected, "I literally sat back… just watching the light show because those guys… didn't have to rely upon us specifically to mark targets for them."[111] Colonel Bourne recalled, "They struck all five or six of [the vehicles] in a row—boom, boom, boom and took them all out."[112]

After a brief pause, during which the P-3C surveyed the wreckage, the F-18s dropped two more 500-pound laser guided bombs on the burning pickup truck.[113] The last attack was intended to disguise the roadblock as a random bombing so the interdiction force could repeat the tactic the following night.[114] Conservative battle damage estimates suggested that as many as 50 Taliban were killed in the attack, although local Afghans later claimed that they had recovered between 120–150 bodies from the wreckage for immediate burial as is the Muslim custom.[115]

Captain Coletta thought that the forward air controller's voice sounded familiar—like that of a fellow F/A-18 pilot he had met while attending a Service school on the West Coast—as he was listening to the sequence of radio exchanges occurring that evening. Following the air attack, he asked, "Is this Neck from the Red Devils?" Bryan replied, "Sure is. Who's this?" Coletta responded, "Joey from the T-Bolts!" Coletta later recalled, "It was almost like, 'Hey, how's it going?' Just in that quick five, six seconds: 'I can't believe it's you' [and] 'I can't believe it's you down there.' And we kind of did our hellos."[116]

As dawn approached, the interdiction force headed south toward patrol base Pentagon. Although they returned by the same route they had taken the previous evening, crossing back over the irrigation ditch proved more difficult this time around as they were towing a disabled vehicle. After positioning security around the village, it took approximately 30–45 minutes to develop a workable plan for passing the agricultural obstruction. By this time, the sun had risen and the villagers had begun to emerge from their homes to view the spectacle, piquing both curiosity and concern for force protection among the Marines. Major Impellitteri later described the scene:

> The chieftain came out and the people started to come out. Kids are everywhere. People were kind of nervous, but they were… curious. They wanted to know what was going on. Kids

> were running all around the vehicles, people coming out to say hello. "Americans are here!" They were happy, they were waving [and] we gave them more food, more water. Marines were throwing candy out, articles of clothing. It literally broke your heart to look at these people walking around. It was freezing…. I'm wearing warm gloves, got a hat on, and you look at these kids, they're walking around in bare feet, and it just breaks your heart. People were throwing articles of clothing. I had just gotten a brand-new pair of warm wool socks, like the dive socks. I gave those to… the old guy that was there…. We like to think that we're all big, tough, unemotional individuals, but they're looking at these kids, and they're like, "This is [incredible]. How can they not have… shoes?"[117]

Several nights later, to show their appreciation for the villagers' help, Task Force 58 arranged for approximately 17,000 humanitarian assistance rations to be air dropped in the area.[118]

After returning to the patrol base, the Marines debriefed the previous night's mission. Although everyone wanted to go out again that evening, they all agreed that it was not necessary to get into close-quarter gunfights on the roadway. Major Impellitteri reasoned that if they were going to travel in convoys, they should set up observation posts or forward air control teams about 1,000 meters from the road so that they could safely identify everyone that was hostile and run close air support.[119] This idea fit with Colonel Bourne's original notion of scaling back the size of the force after the first mission. That evening, the battalion's reconnaissance platoon commander, Captain Eric C. Dill, a forward air control team, and a platoon of four light armored vehicles established two observation posts approximately 1,000 meters south of Highway 1.[120]

To the Marines' surprise, perhaps even disappointment, not one vehicle passed their position. It appeared that they had succeeded in halting the flow of traffic between Kandahar and Lashkar Gah with just one air-ground interdiction. As Major Impellitteri succinctly phrased it, the word had somehow spread through the local population that the Americans were there, and if you moved on Highway 1, you were going to die.[121] Meanwhile, back at patrol base Pentagon, the remainder of the force packed up their equipment and supplies and relocated several miles away. Two Afghan shepherds had stumbled upon the patrol base earlier in the day, and they did not want to expose themselves to unnecessary potshots from enemy rocket-propelled grenades.[122]

Another patrol went forward on the evening of 8–9 December, while a platoon from the armored reconnaissance company identified additional fording sites and potential locations for future patrol bases. Setting up near the previous roadblock, they used the same force configuration that they had successfully employed just two nights earlier. Orbiting aircraft identified several vehicles traveling farther down the highway, but these turned off the road long before reaching the Marines' location.[123]

Although their usual tactic was to head back across the river before dawn, the patrol remained in position until well after sunrise, hoping to engage Mullah Omar and senior Taliban leaders reportedly fleeing west following the surrender of Kandahar. When the targets failed to materialize, Major Impellitteri recommended that they pack up and move, and the patrol headed south through a different village with another disabled humvee in tow. Not wanting to give the patrol base's location away, they first moved to a resupply point and then made their way back to patrol base Pentagon.[124]

Meanwhile, back at FOB Rhino, Task Force 58 directed BLT 3/6's light armored reconnaissance platoon and elements of the Australian Special Air Service detachment to conduct additional interdiction patrols along the Helmand River, while Lieutenant Koon's combined antiarmor platoon remained at the forward operating base to run local security patrols.[125] Lieutenant Lennon recalled that when he received the assignment from General Mattis, he and an Australian officer were sitting in the office. Mattis looked at them



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

1stLt William A. Lennon, right, and Cpl David Easter watch for the blast of unexploded munitions about to be destroyed near Kandahar International Airport on 17 January 2002. Both were members of Company A, 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, attached to the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit. Lennon led Task Force Sledgehammer, a composite unit comprising light armored vehicles from his own platoon and antiarmor vehicles from Battalion Landing Team 3/6.

and said, "I want to link you two gents up, send you west. Go kill bad guys." They responded, "Roger." He pointed at a spot on the map where he wanted them to go, and that was the only guidance they received.[126] After linking up 40 miles west of Rhino the following day, Lennon's platoon and Task Force 64 continued to screen the Marine operating base from hostile forces in the area until 12 December. They stopped seven civilian vehicles during this period and, on 11 December, Task Force 64 destroyed a refueling site located northwest of Rhino. On the same day, other Special Air Service elements destroyed a weapons cache discovered northeast of the forward operating base.[127]

Shifting Priorities

A day prior to the surrender of Kandahar, Task Force 58 had told the 15th MEU to plan to shift its interdiction force closer to the Taliban spiritual center. By increasing pressure against the Taliban, Coalition leaders hoped to improve the patrol's chances for contact, demonstrate America's willingness to employ conventional ground forces, and encourage the anti-Taliban militias to continue their advance.[128] By 9 December, as control of Kandahar passed from Taliban to the Southern Alliance, the interdiction force's mission began to move in that direction. Rather than continue to operate discretely from isolated patrol bases south of the Arghandab River, the new scheme was to maintain a full-time presence along the highway and engage opposing forces attempting to flee west from the capital city.[129] As they were preparing to send out yet another patrol later that evening, they learned that plans had changed once again and they were no longer required to interdict the remote section of highway, midway between Kandahar and Lashkar Gah.[130]

Colonel Bourne assembled his subordinate commanders around 0530 the next morning. Major Parrington, the battalion's executive officer, explained that Task Force 58 was going to conduct a movement-to-contact toward the outskirts of Kandahar where it would establish a blocking position, interdict Taliban forces fleeing west, and stand by to link up with anti-Taliban forces. Departing just prior to sunrise, the vehicular portion of the force crossed the river, passed through the now familiar villages to reach Highway 1, and then headed east toward Kandahar.[131]

Traffic packed the roadway, with some drivers trying to pass the armed convoy. On several occasions, the Marines fired their 25mm cannons harmlessly into the desert as a warning for the civilians to clear the road. On others, they directed their Cobra helicopter escorts to chase down and inspect several vehicles that fled when they spotted the approaching convoy.[132] While traveling through two successive built-up areas near Maiwand Garrison, they received a mixture of friendly waves, indifferent glances, and hostile glares from the Afghan villagers.[133]

Several miles east of the second town, the convoy pulled off to the north side of the road and occupied a small scree-covered hill that Major Impellitteri had selected. The terrain was defensible, with eastern and western flanks protected by Soviet-era minefields, and had several suitable landing zones nearby.[134] As the Marines received critically needed food, water, and fuel that the squadron had flown in, Captain Whitmer and Company B arrived on two CH-53 helicopters. Lieutenant Fick later wrote that this spot was much more exposed than their previous sites—it was in plain view of the highway and dominated by a mountain towering above them several miles to the north.[135]

The interdiction force positioned its vehicles and infantry to overlook the highway, directing the Marines to shoot everything driving by their position.[136] While conducting the resupply, however, Colonel Bourne received word that they were no longer required to block the highway.* The Marines now watched passively as a variety of vehicles streamed past their location without stopping. First Sergeant Weilbacher described the scene, looking down from trenches set along the hillside: it "wasn't



Photo by Sgt Joseph R. Chenelly

Watched closely by curious Afghan villagers, light armored vehicles from Battalion Landing Team 1/1 travel east along Route 1 on 9 December 2001. They are part of a task force deployed by the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit to block the escape of Taliban and al-Qaeda forces from Kandahar.

*Maj Impellitteri recalled that he had received word of the mission change while en route to the blocking position, prior to occupying the hill. (Impellitteri comments)

just one vehicle every ten minutes, it was like [one] vehicle [every] five seconds. Vehicle after vehicle just kept running [by our position]. Large trucks, small trucks, oil rigs, farm trucks, pickup trucks."[137] A recently arrived reporter informed Major Impellitteri that Kandahar had just fallen, and it now appeared that Highway 1 was open to a wide range of "civilian" traffic.[138]

Despite the turn of events, the interdiction force was well aware that it remained in the midst of hostile territory. Intelligence sources reported Taliban in a town to the southeast and al-Qaeda hiding to the northeast. The Marines also suspected that there were hostile forces in the town they had passed to west, which they dubbed "the evil village." In addition to the presence of an old Soviet ZSU-23 antiaircraft gun, many of the men carried AK-47 rifles and wore black turbans characteristic of the Taliban, and some possessed new Motorola radios. Not only were the locals coming out to investigate, the signals intelligence detachment could hear them conversing about the Marines' arrival over their radios: "Hey, we see them. They're at the base of the mountains." At the same time, the Marines could not respond offensively because the Afghans had not threatened them in any way. It was possible that they were merely curious, that the weapons were for local defense, and the turbans represented seniority among the clan membership. In one case, villagers had waved a homemade American flag (albeit with too few stars and stripes) from a ridge as the convoy passed, and their intent certainly did not appear threatening.[139]

Approximately two hours after sundown, Colonel Bourne decided to displace the patrol base to a location around five miles away on the other side of the highway.[140] Although the Marines experienced no overt signs of an impending attack, Bourne realized that Taliban were mostly likely in the area, the villagers knew where the convoy had stopped, and they were now intercepting more aggressive radio traffic.[141] He also figured that any Taliban attack would likely come from the direction of what appeared to be a large refugee encampment that was situated between the Marines and the village. If they returned fire, he reasoned, the Marines could endanger noncombatant civilians.[142] While preparing for the move, Major Impellitteri explained to several Marines that radio traffic indicated "at least two groups of fighters know where we are and are moving into position to ambush us with [rocket-propelled grenades]."[143] That was fine with the Marines; a small security force would remain to counter any would-be attackers.[144]

After a three-hour march, the force reestablished its 360-degree defensive perimeter on flat ground where they could easily observe any approaching enemy through their various night-vision devices. The move had been more than an inconvenience, particularly for the foot-mobile rifle company (some weapons crews labored beneath 200-pound packs) who struggled in the dark to keep pace with the vehicles, but the night passed without further incident.[145] Adding to their discomfort, once the sweating Marines halted, they encountered winds blowing down from the northern mountains and one of the coldest nights they experienced in Afghanistan.[146]

The Marines waited for further orders for the next two days, cleaning, zeroing, and test firing their weapons in preparation for the possibility of entering Kandahar. When word finally arrived on 12 December, Major Impellitteri and his light armored reconnaissance company were told to remain in place to execute the movement into the city, augmented by Lieutenant Lennon and Task Force Sledgehammer from BLT 3/6. Captain Whitmer and Company B subsequently flew back to FOB Rhino that same day, riding on board CH-53s. Departing before sunrise the following day, Colonel Bourne led the small command element, force reconnaissance detachment, and antiarmor platoon back to the forward operating base. This time, rather than conduct another cross-country trip, they took the highway west through Lashkar Gah, then south toward Saffar Kalay, and finally east across 30 miles of desert to reach FOB Rhino just after sunset on 13 December.



Chapter 10
Occupation and Exploitation Operations

Securing the Kabul Embassy

The American embassy in Kabul had closed on 30 January 1989 due to growing security concerns following the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Confronted by the imminent fall of Kandahar, demise of the Taliban, and establishment of a democracy in Afghanistan 12 years later, State Department officials began hasty plans for reopening the diplomatic compound and normalizing relations with Hamid Karzai's fledgling administration. On 6 December, Army Lieutenant General Paul Mikolashek, the theater's land component commander, warned Task Force 58 to prepare to assist that effort.* A day later, General Franks issued Fragmentary Order 02-027, formally directing the Marines to support the State Department's mission to Kabul.[1] While U.S. Marine Forces Central Command immediately requested support from the resurrected 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Anti-Terrorism), Task Force 58 prepared to deploy an interim force to secure the embassy compound and reinforce a survey team then heading to Kabul. Meanwhile, Colonel John F. Mulholland, USA, commander of Task Force Dagger, had entered Afghanistan following the surrender of Kandahar. One of his first missions was to assist Department of State personnel in evaluating conditions at the U.S. embassy and estimating when they could reopen the facility. Two special forces teams, Operational Detachments Alpha 550 and 575, escorted the survey team.[2]

On board the USS *Bataan*, the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (26th MEU) convened a crisis action team around 0800 on 8 December after receiving a fragmentary order** to reinforce the American embassy.[3] They quickly decided to send Captain James P. McDonough III with a reinforced platoon from Battery K, 10th Marines, to secure the compound and explosive ordinance personnel from MEU Service Support Group 26 (MSSG 26) to sweep the buildings of mines and ordnance.[4] On one hand, this plan made sense because the battery had worked with Department of State personnel during the embassy reinforcement portion of their predeployment training (the special operations capable qualification exercise), and the Marines had received instruction in the use of nonlethal force. On the other hand, however, First Lieutenant Stephen Grimm, the battery's executive officer, and half the Marines were already serving as provisional infantry in Shamsi, Pakistan, where they had assumed responsibility for guarding the airfield at Forward Operating Base Impala on 4 December. Adding a second mission would eliminate the battery's ability to provide artillery support to the forces ashore at Forward Operating Base Rhino (FOB Rhino).[5]

On board the USS *Whidbey Island* later that morning, a page over the ship's loudspeaker called Captain McDonough to the tactical logistics center where the expeditionary unit's staff informed him by radio of the impending mission. Approximately 15 minutes later, he summoned the battery's officers and staff noncommissioned officers to the center and told them to begin preparations for their immediate departure for Kabul. Two hours later, while Lieutenant Charles J. Blume, the acting

*VAdm Moore had consented to allow the land component command to employ maritime forces ashore to secure the U.S. embassy in Kabul on 7Nov01. (TF 58 Informal Chronology, 2)

**The *Twenty-Sixth MEU Kabul Embassy Reinforcement History* indicates that a fragmentary order for the mission was received on 7Dec01, but it does not identify the sender or recipient.

executive officer, and senior enlisted personnel continued to ready the battery for movement, McDonough and First Lieutenant Eric V. Orient, his fire direction officer, headed to the *Bataan* on board a small boat for the confirmation brief. Although McDonough remained behind to continue planning, Orient returned to the *Whidbey Island* three hours later with 22 members of the battery. By the time McDonough rejoined his battery at around 2200 that evening, his Marines were ready to go.[6]

Arriving by air-cushioned landing craft from three different vessels, the Marine security force assembled in Pasni, Pakistan, late that evening.[7] McDonough had identified specific force requirements—based on lessons learned during the predeployment training exercise at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina—but these were limited by another externally imposed force cap.[8] He planned to bring 20 others in addition to the battery's approximately 67 personnel, including six explosive ordnance disposal technicians, four scout snipers, three signals intelligence specialists, two human intelligence exploitation specialists, two radio operators, one public affairs specialist, one linguist, and one corpsman. Major Ray White, the senior Marine on the expedition, served as 26th MEU's liaison officer and forward air controller. Although McDonough left 15 Marines behind to service equipment, they joined the rest of the battery ashore approximately a week later to reinforce the security detachment in preparation for the opening ceremony at the embassy.[9]

Once ashore, Battery K drove to Pasni airfield in five-ton trucks and then caught some well-deserved sleep on the floor of a concrete hangar. After the staff noncommissioned officers sounded reveille on the morning of 9 December, the battery's sergeants got to work building a detailed terrain model of the American embassy in Kabul. When they were finished, Captain McDonough and Lieutenant Orient briefed the plan, focusing on the elements that they expected to remain unchanged. Orient emphasized, "No matter what happens, EOD [explosive ordinance disposal] sweeps the building, snipers get on the roof, and the squads set up 360 degree security."[10] An hour later, after receiving the operations order, the Marines ran machine gun drills, conducted squad attacks, and practiced room-clearing procedures. At that time, the expeditionary unit recalled four of the six explosive ordnance disposal technicians back to the ship to support an impending occupation of Kandahar airport.[11]

That afternoon, Battery K boarded three Air Force C-130 transports and headed toward Bagram Air Base.[12] American and British special operations forces and a small contingent of soldiers from the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division were working in the area, and Air Force personnel had recently opened the airfield to Coalition aircraft.[13] After arriving around 1800 that evening, the Marines were introduced to a U.S. Army brigadier general in charge of Task Force Bagram and then passed an uneventful evening in a vacant hanger.[14]

Waking early the morning of 10 December, Captain McDonough and the first two of three squads loaded their gear onto a small truck and boarded three "colorful, old Mercedes-Benz busses with the curtains drawn for security."[15] Around 0600, after Lieutenant Orient and Marines traveling on one of the "Muppet vans" repaired an inopportune flat tire and then push-started their vehicle, the convoy began the 20-mile trip to Kabul. Although Task Force Bagram considered the environment permissive, Captain McDonough cautiously delivered a convoy order that contained immediate action drills in case they were attacked. His apprehension was not eased when the special forces escorts decided to take an alternate route not shown on his map.[16]

The first load of Marines reached the embassy around 0730, while the second, led by Lieutenant Blume, arrived that afternoon.[17] Although the local Afghans initially showed little interest in their arrival, Captain McDonough commented that the press had known they were coming: the *Chicago Tribune* had published a story about the Marines' mission before they went ashore, and *Stars and Stripes* reporters had



Photo by Sgt Andrew D. Pomykal

From within a sandbagged position atop the U.S. embassy building in Kabul, Afghanistan, Marine sniper Sgt John R. Crandall observes the surrounding area for hostile activity and provides security for State Department personnel.

preceded them at the embassy.[18] The Marines quickly established perimeter security around the compound, emplacing automatic weapons and positioning snipers on the four corners of the embassy building, hardening defensive positions, laying concertina wire, and linking the posts with phone lines.[19]

Master Sergeant Kelly and Staff Sergeant Cline, the explosive ordnance disposal technicians from MSSG 26, also began to sweep the 34-year-old concrete, brick, and marble structure for booby traps and unexploded ordnance.[20] They inspected all of the rooms, buildings, and even the sewer system beneath the embassy; destroyed weapons; and disposed of 750 ordnance items and 8,000 rounds of ammunition.[21] Frustratingly, the unexpected recall of the four other technicians back in Pasni had reduced manpower and extended the clearing operations from 12 to 96 hours.[22]

Most of the battery took up residence inside the embassy, the exception being four snipers who lived on the roof but slept inside during the day. The effects of time were evident:[23] thick black dust covered the buildings, water and electricity were nonexistent, and anti-American protestors had vandalized the premises. Vandals had removed the national seal from the embassy entrance, burned the guardhouse, shattered windows and doors, and fired weapons indiscriminately through the buildings.[24] Fortunately, the battery brought its own generators and floodlights and was able to rewire the building from 220 to 100 volts. Living without water in a confined urban setting was more of a problem, and the Marines had to establish heads in the compound and do their own washing.[25]

In other ways, the offices remained untouched and the passage of time seemed almost immaterial. Although the State Department had vacated the facility in 1989, approximately 45 foreign nationals continued to work full time to secure the compound during the Americans' absence. "A State Department flag was left standing in the ambassador's office [and] official papers and correspondence lie scattered on

his desktop,"[26] wrote Marine combat correspondent Sergeant Andrew D. Pomykal. The special forces soldiers noticed a "Super Bowl 1979" poster tacked to the wall, copies of the old embassy phone directory in desk drawers, and a fleet of well-preserved 1979 Volkswagen Jettas in the basement garage.[27] Captain McDonough recalled the standard Marine uniform prints on the walls, old *Sports Illustrated* magazines on the tables, and comments written on the Marine security guard detachment's desktop day planners.[28] An entry for 30 January 1989, the day the security detachment had planned to leave the embassy, read, "History is made. We leave now. O.K. Ta ta." On 31 January, the day the Marines actually departed, someone had penned, "One more time"[29] and "Hello new detachment! From the old detachment."[30] Even more sobering, they found a flag and letter that Gunnery Sergeant James M. Blake had left for his successor. Dated 31 January 1989, it read,

> Marines: This was the last flag that flew over the Charges d'Affaires' residence prior to the evacuation on 31 Jan 1989. It was taken down and brought to the chancery by Cpl Johnny P. Smith on 30 Jan 1989. Take care of it. For those of us that were here it means a lot; for those of you yet to enter Kabul it could mean a lot to you to. Semper Fi. We Kabul Marines (12 July 88–31 Jan 89) endured as I'm sure you will. Think of us as often as needed.[31]

By 12 December, the Marines had established a sound defense and posted an interior guard. The squad leaders—Sergeants Brenton T. Conover, Grady L. Richardson, and Norman Perkins—organized a three-phase watch rotation based on a six-hour tour of duty. While one squad stood watch, a second served as a quick reaction force, and the third took care of personal needs or slept. When the shifts changed, the new squad leader reported to the watch officer in the battery's combat operations center and then proceeded to carry out his duties as sergeant of the guard. The battery also maintained a one-man logistics liaison cell in Bagram, alternately filled by First Sergeant James L. Dalgarn and Staff Sergeants William H. Kelly and William P. Gehrean III.[32]

The Marines remained armed and alert, wearing helmets and flak jackets while on post. Corporal Boodaghian, one of three interpreters who had been helping to provide medical treatment to wounded Afghans on board the *Bataan* and *Peleliu* only days earlier, now bridged the gap between Battery K and the residents of Kabul.[33] Although the guards were never targeted, the night of 15 December was particularly nerve wracking, as local Afghans shot a variety of different sized weapons into the air to celebrate the end of Ramadan.[34] Captain McDonough reflected that the guards sometimes felt like "animals in a zoo"—the Marines watching the Afghans, and the Afghans watching the Marines. They enjoyed working with the ever-helpful Northern Alliance, however, as well as with the foreign national guards, once they learned to trust each other. They also got along with the diplomatic security forces, who were often former Marines themselves. The Marines' relationship with the Foreign Service personnel was less predictable, however. Some of the embassy staff made an effort to be gracious and polite, while others simply ignored the Marines' presence. Regardless of the social climate, the Marines endeavored to persevere. As Sergeant David J. Wood remarked, "I think that this war, the war on terrorism, is the first war since World War II that truly is America's War. I am very proud to be here, to represent my country, and to represent the people in New York who paid so very much. We all share their pain, and we're here for them."[35]

The media remained a constant distraction and were the biggest problem faced by the Marines. They approached the guards repeatedly throughout the day, asking for additional information, until the Marines established a set time for releasing daily updates to the press. Although a public affairs sergeant and State Department media representative helped McDonough handle the media, he added that they were part of the establishment themselves and had their own agendas to pursue. He recalled the State Department representative occasionally granting access to guests without notifying the Marines in advance, and he reflected that a definitive media plan would have been a big help.[36]

State Department personnel held a ceremonial reopening of the American embassy in Kabul on 17 December. James F. Dobbins, the U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan, presided over the brief event that was attended by more than 400 guests and media representatives.[37] In support of the event, Master Sergeant Kelly and Staff Sergeant Kline screened approximately 200 media personnel.[38] A number of government and military dignitaries were on hand, including Karzai and his cabinet; General Fahim, commander of the Northern Alliance; Colonel Mulholland, head of Task Force Dagger; and several German, British, and Spanish diplomats.[39]

Speaking to 26th MEU's public affairs officer prior to the event, Colonel Andrew Frick explained the significance of the flag raising to Marines:

> Unfortunately, when an embassy shuts down, the Marine security guards and the U.S. ambassador are always among the last to leave because they have the responsibility to lower the American flag from sovereign U.S. soil before the ambassador leaves. I think that it's only fitting that the Marines, "America's 9-1-1 force," who arrived in this theater poised and ready to support not only the assembled task force, but also the U.S. Central Command and the will of America, be the ones to stand with the new U.S. ambassador as he raises the flag over sovereign American soil. It is a fitting and poignant moment and we're happy to be a part of it.[40]

As "first call" sounded, Lieutenant Orient assumed the adjutant's traditional post and called the command to attention. Staff Sergeant Jon C. Eatmon, bearing the Marine Corps colors, then marched the four-man color guard down the front steps of the embassy building, where they rested the old American flag and Gunnery Sergeant Blake's letter on an easel for viewers to see. Members of the color guard included Sergeant Vernon H. Pitts, Corporal Christopher P. Broussard, and Lance Corporals Daniel T. Dalin and David Vega.[41] With "The Star Spangled Banner" playing in the background, the artillerymen then raised a new American flag that Orient had carried to Kabul in his pack.[42] Dobbins read a portion of Blake's letter and remarked to the crowd, "The U.S. returns as part of an international coalition committed to rooting out terrorism and those who support it and assisting in the reconstruction of Afghanistan."[43] At the end of the ceremony, Mulholland, as the senior American military officer present, remarked on the honor it had been to fight alongside his Afghan comrades.



Photo by LtCol Jerome M. Lynes
A Marine color guard from Battery K, Battalion Landing Team 3/6, raises the American flag during a ceremonial reopening of the U.S. embassy in Kabul on 17 December 2001.

Yet the flag raised by the Marines during the ceremony was not the first to fly over the embassy since 1989. A week earlier, on 10 December 2001, Colonel Mulholland had "assembled the survey group and the A-teams in the crisp predawn air in front of the embassy for a brief ceremony before the U.S. Marines arrived to assume their traditional mission."[44] Standing at attention, the soldiers saluted as the 5th Special Forces Group's battle pennant was raised over the embassy grounds. Then they observed a moment of silence for fallen comrades, listened to a heartfelt eulogy delivered by the leader of Task Force Dagger, and observed a final moment

of silence for fallen comrades.[45] Mulholland spoke once again and then the flag was lowered so the Marines could later raise the official embassy flag.[46]

The Marines continued to provide security at the American embassy until the end of the month, breaking up the monotony of guard duty as best they could. Within days of arriving, they had learned of an inbound advance party from 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, which was tentatively scheduled to take over the security mission by mid-December. This fit well with other rumors suggesting that Battery K might support ongoing operations in the nearby mountains of Tora Bora. Yet the advance party's arrival was delayed several weeks and the possibility of combat action began to wane as the Christmas holiday approached.[47]

Inauguration of the new Afghan government on 22 December was also cause for excitement. Before the ceremony, General Franks's pilot had dodged a rocket-propelled grenade fired at the aircraft as he descended toward a helicopter landing zone adjacent to the embassy grounds. Following the historic ceremony, which one of the Marine officers characterized as "three hours of people talking in a language I didn't understand," the head of Central Command spoke to the Marines. He assured them that they were making a difference and that America would win its war against terrorism. In return, the Marines gave Franks a flag that had flown over the embassy.[48]

Occupying Kandahar Airport

Task Force 58 had been considering the feasibility of seizing Kandahar International Airport since mid-November. As early as 10 December, staff planners had been busy finalizing the concept of operations, and by 11 December, Central Command had issued a warning order directing them to coordinate with local anti-Taliban forces and secure the facility to prepare for the introduction of follow-on forces and humanitarian assets into southern Afghanistan.[49] Although Colonel Frick and the 26th MEU would occupy the airport as originally planned, the situation had evolved so rapidly that General Mattis directed Colonel Waldhauser and the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) to execute the initial seizure instead.[50]

While Battalion Landing Team 1/1's (BLT 1/1's) interdiction force awaited further orders at patrol base Pentagon on 12 December, Major Impellitteri learned of the evolving plan to seize Kandahar airfield and was ordered to FOB Rhino. After arriving by helicopter, he headed to the 15th MEU's combat operations center, where Lieutenant Colonel Gregg Olson, the unit's operations officer, and others briefed him on the developing situation. They explained that although Lieutenant Colonel Bourne would be returning to Rhino with the remainder of the interdiction force, Impellitteri was going to lead a mobile assault convoy to secure the airfield for follow-on forces. In addition to his own light armored reconnaissance company, he would link up with a special forces detachment and Task Force Sledgehammer, which contributed 6 additional light armored and 14 antiarmor vehicles from the 26th MEU, to the convoy.[51] Lieutenant Lennon learned of the mission the same day, while engaged in interdiction operations west of FOB Rhino with Task Force 64.[52]

Planners had identified two ways to reach the airport, approximately 12 miles southeast of Kandahar. The main route passed east through the built-up area on Highway 1 before turning south onto Highway 4 toward the border city of Spin Boldak. Because the tactical situation in Kandahar remained uncertain, however, they decided it would be safer to take a longer, less prominent secondary road that skirted the city. After delivery of the confirmation brief, Major Impellitteri flew back to the patrol base to ready his Marines for the movement.[53]

He returned to Pentagon with a 12-man detachment from Task Force Dagger (call sign "Python"). The soldiers who had recently replaced the Texas 12 team following the errant bomb strike outside Kandahar a week earlier (see chapter 8) were now working with Hamid Karzai and would facilitate coordination between the Marine and Afghan forces.[54] Gunnery Sergeant Edgar L. Marts, an explosive

ordnance technician from MSSG 26, also accompanied Impellitteri on the return flight. Arriving at Highway 1, Marts immediately linked up with technicians from the 15th MEU, and they began discussing plans for clearing Kandahar airport of munitions.[55]

Meanwhile, preceded by the deployment of his forward control element, Colonel Frick arrived with 26th MEU's tactical command post on 12 December and began flowing the remainder of his forces into FOB Rhino to support the occupation of Kandahar airfield and establishment of a second forward operating base.[56] Although the force cap had precluded the wholesale deployment of Frick's unit into Afghanistan, he was able to facilitate the rapid expansion of Task Force 58's combat power by staging as many forces ashore in Pakistan as possible once the restriction diminished.

Later that evening, General Mattis flew to Kandahar to coordinate the impending operation with opposition leaders Hamid Karzai and Gul Agha Sharzai and their special forces counterparts. Traveling on board three Air Force special operations MH-53J helicopters, he was accompanied by Colonel Olson, 15th MEU's operations officer; Lieutenant Colonel Garry R. Oles, 26th MEU's executive officer; Captain Robert Harward, USN, commander of Task Force K-Bar; and an assortment of other interested parties. The aircraft descended into a compound on the outskirts of the city, unfortunately injuring a British soldier when mistakenly landing atop a Land Rover. While the soldier was immediately evacuated for medical treatment, the travelers boarded vehicles and drove quietly through darkened city streets to Mullah Omar's former residence. Colonel Olson likened the compound to a motel with many small rooms surrounding a courtyard.[57]

For approximately an hour before the meeting began, General Mattis and his staff conversed with Task Force Dagger personnel who had worked with Karzai and Sharzai. After the Afghan commanders arrived around 2230, the principal leaders discussed



Photo by MSgt Arturo A. Prioletta
Gul Agha Shirzai, left, the governor of Kandahar, and his interpreter at Kandahar airport.

the operation beneath the white light of a Coleman lantern. The remainder of the special forces and Marine staff officers stood on the veranda and listened to the exchange through a window.*

Mattis later had the following thoughts on the meeting:

> There were tough hombres in that room…. I still remember one guy talking about being tortured and hearing the screams of the women being tortured in the prison in Kandahar where he'd been held for a year. The old man looked to be about 90; I was told he was 40. We found that even though we didn't speak the same language… we had… very much a common cause, and that was to see how many Taliban and Afghan al-Qaeda we could hunt down and kill.[58]

Watching the exchange as an observer, Colonel Olson added his perspective of the meeting:

> Karzai's English was exceptional. He was a tall guy, really bore himself quite well, although he dressed in the same thing that everybody else was in, a kind of Afghan blanket around his

*According to LtCol Olson, the principals included BGen Mattis, Karzai and Sharzai, two colonels, a special forces lieutenant colonel, and an interpreter. (Olson intvw, 34)

> shoulders. Significantly, he was not armed; most of the folks traveling with him were. Sharzai was shorter, [spoke] hardly any English. Karzai would translate for Sharzai, and Sharzai would nod in assent of pretty much everything that Karzai said…. [Karzai] was extremely gentlemanly, very decisive…. He was polite, but very direct about what would pose the least threat to U.S. forces and how to best accomplish [the mission] with the least likelihood of bumping into somebody by accident and having a fight that we didn't need to have…. Sharzai, on the other hand, seemed to be more military… oriented… a lot less polished on the exterior than Karzai.[59]

This was General Mattis's first encounter with the new Afghan president, and Karzai was happy to meet with the delegation from FOB Rhino. The main issue was when and where the convoy would pass through Kandahar. As Mattis later recalled,

> The basic points were Karzai wanted to come in during daytime, make a triumphant entry through the city; we wanted to go at night and go around the city and seize the airfield. And once we built up combat power, about 10 miles outside of town, then move against Kandahar itself and the environs around it. Karzai agreed with me and we had a very good talk.[60]

The Americans coordinated the routes, timelines, link-up points, recognition signals, and convoy procedures that they would use during the movement and subsequent occupation of Kandahar airport. The Afghans described where minefields were located around the city, what infrastructure was available at the airfield, and which buildings were booby trapped. Those present agreed that the Afghans would team up with the Marines. When the Americans inquired about the number of Marines that the Afghans would allow to operate from the airport—because this seemed to be a constant concern at higher headquarters—the local leaders encouraged a large Coalition presence in the region.[61]

Before leaving Kandahar, General Mattis spoke privately with Karzai in the remains of Mullah Omar's garden. When the general apologized for any problems that his earlier statement to the media about Marines owning a piece of Afghanistan might have caused the future president, Karzai replied, "Oh no, when I read that in my electronic version of the *New York Times…* I went out and told my people, 'We won, the Marines own southern Afghanistan.'"[62] Karzai also confided, "Twice my country has needed you—first against the Soviets and now against the terrorists; both times you were there."[63]

The Marines boarded the MH-53J helicopters and returned to FOB Rhino late that evening.[64] After landing, they conducted a debrief and finalized their plan. Senior leaders warned their subordinates of possible dangers in Kandahar, including snipers and suicide bombers. Colonel Frick advised that since it was near the end of Ramadan, the Marines should expect fireworks and to make sure the fire was directed at them before returning it.[65] General Mattis explained that although half the men on the streets of Kandahar may be armed, that did not necessarily make them enemies: "A person on the road with a weapon is not hostile. A person on the road with a weapon who is shooting at you is hostile…. If it's just some young Taliban, take his gun, send him home, and tell him the war's over."[66] Afterward, the staff transmitted highlights from the meetings and a fragmentary order for the following day to Major Impellitteri, then situated 90 miles north at patrol base Pentagon. It described the link-up plan, specified which special forces team he would meet west of the city, and provided the recognition signals necessary to pass through the opposition force's roadblocks.[67]

The assault force gradually assembled near patrol base Pentagon, located approximately 800 meters south of Highway 1 and 40 miles west of Kandahar, on 13 December.[68] Task Force Sledgehammer was the first to arrive after executing an en route resupply and completing a 160-mile movement through Lashkar Gah.[69] General Mattis flew in shortly thereafter by helicopter, accompanied by his aide, Lieutenant Warren Cook. As evening approached, the Marines linked up with soldiers from Texas 17, the special forces detachment that had been working with Sharzai's opposition forces south of the city.[70]



Associated Press

On 12 December 2001, Col Thomas D. Waldhauser, commander of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (center, left), and LtCol Gregg P. Olson, his operations officer, brief members of Task Force 58 on the plan to occupy Kandahar International Airport.

The Python team leader approached Major Impellitteri with bad news. Texas 17 had reconnoitered the planned route and discovered that it was littered with Soviet-era mines and unsafe to travel. Impellitteri hastily reassembled his subordinate leaders and told them during a 45-minute briefing (only hours before departing) that they would now be traveling directly through the city.[71] After briefing the new plan, he added a note of caution: "Look guys, the only thing you can do to stop Johnny Taliban that comes from around the corner with a [rocket-propelled grenade] is to be vigilant, see him first, and pull the trigger before he does."[72]

Around 0300 in the morning, after Task Force K-Bar had completed its reconnaissance of the proposed route, 44 vehicles comprising the mobile raid force pulled onto Highway 1 and began their three-hour, 25-mile trip to the airport.[73] Overhead, surveillance aircraft monitored the route and provided the convoy with advance warning of potential danger areas, confirming the identity of possible threats through the Afghan authorities.[74] Several AH-1W Cobras and AV-8B Harriers from the *Bataan* and other Coalition aircraft were also on hand to provide immediate close air support if the situation turned sour.[75] Back at FOB Rhino, Major James B. Higgins, 15th MEU's intelligence officer, explained the basic tactical concept to anxious reporters: "Keep the convoy moving. We have mobility on our side. We have firepower on our side. We've got to keep the momentum going."[76] In Kuwait, General Mikolashek and his land component staff watched the operation unfold by a real-time video feed from an unmanned Predator aircraft.[77]

The convoy slowed once it reached the city's limits. Guided by the Afghan fighters and special forces, the Marines maneuvered around bomb craters, over rubble, among burned out cars, and through checkpoints. Sergeant Joseph Chenelly, a combat correspondent accompanying the convoy, later described the night passage:

> A distinct aroma of Afghan cooking drifted past the vigilant Marines who sat atop the vehicles

> carefully watching for any sign of trouble. Flashing neon signs lit their stern faces. A frigid wind nipped at any exposed skin, swelling bare fingers wrapped around their M16s…. The Kandaharis who bothered to look up from the fires in their yards and alongside the roads waved their guns in the most cordial way possible. Shouts of "welcome Americans" were heard from crowds gathering on the corners…. Anti-Taliban forces manned intersections waving the Marines through. The American service members exchanged salutes with the militias that flushed out the terrorist organizations just days earlier.[78]

Noting that it was "the most eerie movement" he had ever conducted, Major Impellitteri later recalled that

> it was zero illumination that night, Kandahar was not very well lit, and everywhere you looked on every side of the street, everybody was armed… AK-47, AK-74, RPG [rocket-propelled grenade], RPK [soviet light machine gun]…. Not once did anybody ever raise a rifle or point it at us… they were Sharzai and Karzai's guys. They had established a curfew and nobody was allowed to be carrying a weapon that was not part of the "local police force." But, how do you tell the difference between these guys [and the Taliban]? You can't, so you're pretty much on your toes the whole time.[79]

The Marines eventually exited from the eastern side of the city and headed south. Even after their arrival at the airfield, the situation remained tenuous—there was no illumination, the facility contained numerous buildings, and Soviet-era mines blanketed the surrounding countryside. Major Impellitteri quickly linked up with the other half of Texas 17 and began coordinating with the team's leader. He provided a rough sketch map of the area, identifying known minefields, and advised which locations the Marines should avoid. Impellitteri adjusted his plan according to the mine threat, deciding that although he would retain the same basic configuration, he would not push his forces as far forward as he had initially intended.[80]



Associated Press

A U.S. Marine infantryman sits atop a humvee (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle) at the American military compound at Kandahar International Airport.Note the call sign "Texas 17" adorning the air control tower.



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011230-N-2383B-503

At a forward operating base in Kandahar, a U.S. Marine Corps CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (HMM-365) is "hot fueled," the act of refueling a helicopter while the engine is still running.

After Major Impellitteri briefed the new scheme to his subordinate leaders, they occupied their assigned positions, forming a defensive perimeter around the airfield. As the sun began to rise, Impellitteri passed the radio codeword indicating that the Marines had secured Kandahar airport.[81] Before departing, members of the special forces detachment had painted "Texas 17" in bold letters on the airport's control tower so that subsequent media images of the Marine base would discreetly reveal the radio call sign of the Green Berets who had fought their way north into Kandahar alongside Sharzai's anti-Taliban militia.

Major Wesley L. Feight and Marines from Company I, Battalion Landing Team 3/6 (BLT 3/6), landed on the eastern portion of the airfield around 0600, accompanied by First Lieutenant Kraig M. Rauen and a squad of combat engineers from MSSG 26.[82] They arrived on three CH-53s, escorted by two AH-1Ws, all from Lieutenant Colonel Kevin DeVore's "Blue Knights" (Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 [HMM-365]).[83] Although the helicopters had drawn ineffective small arms fire while passing over their ingress point, the reinforcements reached Kandahar unscathed.[84] When Feight emerged from the aircraft and approached Major Impellitteri, the men recognized each other, as they had attended The Basic School and Infantry Officer's Course in Quantico, Virginia, together as young second lieutenants.[85]

Lieutenant Colonel Jerome Lynes soon arrived with BLT 3/6's foot mobile jump command post, flying on two CH-53s, escorted by two AH-1Ws, all from Lieutenant Colonel James LaVine's "Ridge Runners" (Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 [HMM-163]).[86] Once on the ground, he assumed tactical command of the airfield occupation, including operational control over Major Impellitteri's light armored reconnaissance company and Task Force Sledgehammer. Lynes



Official Marine Corps photo

LtCol Jerome M. Lynes, left, commander of Battalion Landing Team 3/6, and Capt Daniel Q. Greenwood, his operations officer, discuss the placement of forces while establishing a defensive perimeter around Kandahar International Airport.

quickly arranged the initial defensive posture at Kandahar by integrating the air and ground maneuver elements in a perimeter around the runway, receiving and positioning follow-on forces and establishing communications between all U.S. forces at the airfield and with higher headquarters at FOB Rhino.[87]

Reinforcements arriving on the first waves of aircraft into Kandahar also included a variety of service support personnel: emergency medicine physicians, an arrival-departure control group, and four additional explosive ordnance disposal teams from MSSG 26. Around 0730, the technicians began operations to clear the main terminal building and a narrow, 100-meter-wide strip of runway of explosive hazards, preparing the way for the arrival of follow-on forces from the 26th MEU.[88] Back at FOB Rhino, Major Christopher W. Hughes, Task Force 58's public affairs officer, made a point of emphasizing to anxious media representatives that they were there to return the country to the Afghan people and were not a conquering army.[89]

On the same day Marines secured the airfield, Steven L. Meyers, a reporter for the *New York Times*, cited anonymous Pentagon officials who claimed to have already begun plans for the deployment of Army troops to guard FOB Rhino as the Marines relocated most of their combat forces to Kandahar. He summarized the subtle change in the Marine's mission:

> The largest American ground force has now shifted its focus from pressuring the Taliban's last political and military stronghold to continuing the search for the Taliban's leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, and helping to restore civil order with the fledgling government there. Every Marine unit on patrol now carries photographs of the most wanted.[90]

Meanwhile, the maritime special purpose force from BLT 3/6 had deployed to the USS *Shreveport*. Led by First Lieutenant Serge P. Morosoff, the "Mike Platoon" was composed of fire teams drawn from each of the battalion's nine organic rifle platoons, augmented by more experienced Marines to fill leadership billets at the squad and platoon

levels, and assigned to Headquarters and Service Company. On 14 December, the same day Task Force 58 seized Kandahar International Airport, the special purpose force provided security for SEAL Team 8 during a maritime interdiction operation, where they were likely searching for fleeing Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. After being relieved of this mission near the end of the month, the platoon would rejoin its battalion in Kandahar.[91]

Sensitive Site Exploitation: Tarnak Farms and Dewalak

In anticipation of the Taliban's impending defeat at Kandahar, some special operations forces began to shift their focus toward the identification and elimination of future terrorist threats. General Franks issued Fragmentary Order 02-023 on 2 December, alerting his component commands to the need for gathering human intelligence and assessing the potential for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction. General Mikolashek subsequently issued a directive for the planning of human intelligence gathering operations the following day. A week later, on 10 December, Franks issued another planning order for the exploitation of information from abandoned al-Qaeda and Taliban camps. Mikolashek again followed this the next day with Fragmentary Order 02-006 to Operations Order 02-12, directing Coalition forces to begin conducting special reconnaissance against sensitive sites in the operations area. For its part, Task Force 58 was to support the exploitation of suspected chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear targets near Kandahar.[92]

On 13 December, General Mikolashek directed Task Force 58 to coordinate the assessment near Dewalak, one of eight farming hamlets located southwest of Lashkar Gah along a tributary of the Helmand River.[93] Intelligence analysts suspected that



Photo by Spec Patrick Tharpe, USA. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 040319-A-6414T-020

Soldiers from the Romanian Army's 280th Infantry Battalion conduct a live fire exercise at Tarnak Farms Range near Kandahar airport, Afghanistan. These soldiers trained at this range to familiarize themselves with their weapons in preparation for future operations for Operation Enduring Freedom.

terrorists might have cached weapons of mass destruction or chemical and biological research materials in the area. This belief was likely strengthened by the presence of a uranium mine located approximately 20 miles south of the village cluster. Given the potential presence of chemical and biological materials, Central Command flew a chemical biological intelligence support team into FOB Rhino to assist with the search.[94]

On the night of the team's arrival, Task Force 58 learned of another large site located only four miles south of Kandahar airport.[95] Engineers had created this agricultural area—known as Tarnak Farms—around 1960 by diverting water from the Tarnak River to irrigate surrounding fields. Following the Soviets' arrival in 1979, the area was turned into a military training base successively occupied by the Afghan National Army, mujahideen, Taliban and al-Qaeda, and now Coalition forces.[96] The location was already familiar to some American military and intelligence organizations, as President William J. Clinton had launched cruise missiles at the site in 1998 and Osama bin Laden had taped portions of his notorious recruitment video at the camp in 2001.[97]

Elements of the inspection support team immediately left FOB Rhino and spent the next several days exploring the camp, which contained approximately 75 small buildings surrounded by a 10-foot wall constructed of mud brick and heavily damaged by more than two decades of fighting.[98] Weapons and information discovered on the day Task Force 58 occupied the airport included 89 Aphid missiles, a Stinger missile tube, training documents, and personal computers containing e-mails.[99] Two days later, while traveling to meet with American troops in Bagram, Secretary Rumsfeld acknowledged that Tarnak Farms was one of 25 or 30 sensitive sites that the Coalition had "been systematically reviewing" and told reporters that searchers had "gathered up a good deal of material and documentation and items to be tested for chemical, biological, and radiation."[100]

While the inspection team focused on Tarnak Farms, Marines at FOB Rhino continued to plan for their impending mission to Dewalak. Acknowledging the force reconnaissance platoon's advance training and experience in close quarters battle, 15th MEU built the task force around its maritime special purpose force, which included additional snipers and security forces from BLT 1/1.[101] Captain Philip J. Treglia, the force reconnaissance platoon commander, later recalled the satisfaction he felt when Colonel Waldhauser pulled him aside and said, "Phil, you've got this mission… whatever you [need], you have it; you're the focus."[102]

Soldiers from Lieutenant Colonel Gilmore's Australian Special Air Service detachment also played an important role in this mission. On 14 December, after the Australians had spent several days familiarizing themselves with the expeditionary unit's standard operating procedures and coordinating mission requirements, pilots from HMM-163 inserted Task Force 64, its vehicles, and its equipment into the Dewalak region.[103] The following day, as the chemical and biological intelligence support team concluded operations at Tarnak Farms, 15th MEU confirmed its plan to exploit sites near Dewalak and began to consider follow-on search missions in the region. After receiving intelligence updates from Task Force 64 on 16 December, the expeditionary unit modified its plan one final time and prepared to execute the operation the next day.[104]

Shortly after sunrise on the morning of 17 December, pilots from HMM-163 inserted the assault force into a landing zone located near one of several villages in the objective area.[105] It arrived in four CH-53s, escorted by two AH-1Ws and two UH-1Ns.[106] Fixed-wing aircraft were also on station overhead in case close air support was required during the operation. The search force contained most of the force reconnaissance platoon, several members of the chemical and biological intelligence support team, and two interpreters. One of the interpreters was Lieutenant Colonel Asad A. Kahn, a member of Central Command's liaison cell at the

American embassy in Pakistan, with whom Task Force 58 had already worked on several occasions.[107]

Captain Treglia brought four fast attack vehicles to Dewalak, providing enough transportation for the force to ride between the villages, which were scattered along a two-mile by five-mile objective area.[108] Although Gunnery Sergeant John Dailey anticipated that they would be "kicking down doors and throwing people out on the lawn," Lieutenant Colonel Olson described the situation as "uncertain, but not likely to be unfriendly."[109] He explained, "We'd had surveillance on the villages. There were children playing. There were animals being [fed]. There were armed men, but of course there are armed men everywhere in southern Afghanistan." He also added the caveat that although Dewalak may have gone from "being a very uncertain threat to being more of a benign environment… that didn't mean that we weren't going to go in there with the kind of force posture that indicated that we were there for business."[110]

Under the cover of ground security forces, including fast attack vehicles and helicopter gunships, Marine and Afghan forces approached the village compound in a nonthreatening manner and requested to speak to the village elder. While conversing with the elder and handing out cigarettes, candy, pens, pencils, and paper, the Marines requested permission to conduct an escorted walk-through of the village compound.[111] Regardless of any preconceived apprehensions, Gunnery Sergeant Dailey noted that "the bulk of them were friendly as can be."[112] Throughout the day, crowds of curious onlookers followed the Marines and watched.[113] As Dailey recalled, "We ended up with… probably 200 to 300… kids, males, and then young men following us as we trekked probably 8 kilometers through these villages and stopped to check each one."[114]

The children were so interested in the writing materials that were being handed out that the patrol ran short and had to request an emergency resupply from FOB Rhino. Colonel Olson laughed as he remembered that they rounded up ballpoint pens, other writing instruments, pads of paper, yellow sticky notes, bags of rubber bands—all kinds of office and administrative supplies—and sent them out in a helicopter-borne resupply. The Marines distributed the items to the elders, who distributed them to their people, and they then took a less aggressive posture. People were happy and waving, and it certainly diffused tensions.[115]

Although the Marines methodically inspected every village, they failed to uncover any contraband weapons or significant information and finished the patrol earlier than originally expected.[116] Still followed by a throng of Afghan villagers, they had to direct the rotor wash of the escort aircraft at the crowd and encourage them to move back from the landing zone before they could land the CH-53s and board them for the return trip to FOB Rhino.[117] Colonel Olson later remarked that their biggest problem was exiting the landing zone without accidentally landing a helicopter on top of an eight-year-old Afghan who simply wanted to see what was going on.[118] The following day, pilots from HMM-163 returned to Dewalak and extracted Task Force 64.[119]


TEXAS 17

Chapter 11
Concurrent and Distributed Operations at Kandahar

Establishing a Second Forward Operating Base

On the evening of 14 December, less than 24 hours following Task Force 58's initial seizure of Kandahar International Airport, elements of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit's (26th MEU's) tactical command post and MEU Service Support Group 26's (MSSG 26's) quartering party arrived at the airfield.[1] After falling in on Battalion Land Team 3/6's (BLT 3/6's) jump command post, located in the terminal building, they commenced a two-week build-up of combat forces at the forward operating base.[2] Meanwhile, back at Forward Operating Base Rhino (FOB Rhino), Captain Todd S. Tomko and Company K had arrived to augment security at the base and provide a temporary quick reaction force.[3]

Before the Marines could occupy the airport facilities in Kandahar or expand outward from the airfield, they first had to clear the area of myriad hazardous explosive materials. This was a difficult and dangerous task, requiring that explosive ordnance personnel from MSSG 26 search more than 50 buildings consisting of hundreds of individual rooms as well as all open ground within the battalion's security perimeter. They recovered approximately 5,800 ordnance items during the next two and a half weeks, including landmines; hand grenades; a variety of shoulder-fired, barrage-type, and aircraft-launched rockets; and a wide range of ammunition for rifles, machine guns, antiaircraft cannons, mortars, and artillery pieces.[4] The technicians continued to clear the area as the operation progressed, in one case destroying landmines laid along a road used by Coalition forces, and eventually removed more than 12,000 ordnance items.[5]

Although Central Command assigned yet another force cap to Task Force 58, tentatively



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

SSgt William A. Scott, a member of MEU Service Support Group 26's Explosive Ordnance Disposal section, prepares to destroy a Soviet surface-to-air missile at Kandahar International Airport on 17 January 2002.

limiting the number of Marines and sailors that General Mattis could send north, he needed all of the combat forces at his disposal and eventually chose to ignore the limitation. While the cap was never formally rescinded, higher headquarters refrained from mentioning it again, and the 26th MEU began flowing forces into Kandahar.[6] As a widening range of joint, Coalition, and Marine forces began to arrive at the airport, the population quickly rose to 2,700 personnel by the end of December 2001.[7] Each of the organizations occupied assigned administrative space in the terminal, securing their respective areas with a variety of integrated rooftop observation posts, blocked passageways, sandbagged positions, and concrete roadblocks. Outside the terminal, the infantry maintained positions along the battalion's oval-shaped defensive perimeter that surrounded the airfield. Vaguely marked Soviet minefields, located southwest of the terminal and airfield, augmented the defenses but also presented additional dangers to the Marines.[8]

The remainder of the forward command element as well as the Marine air traffic control

squadron mobile team, members of the Air Force special tactics squadron, two squads of combat engineers, and a detachment of military police arrived on 15 December.[9] This enhanced the expeditionary unit's ability to orchestrate sustained aviation operations at the airport, clear the area of hazardous materials, and begin construction of a short-term detainment facility. The first Marine KC-130 aircraft landed later that day, after Marines and sailors from the 26th MEU had completed the onerous task of clearing the runway of debris. Although small arms fire had temporarily delayed the aircraft's arrival, operations quickly resumed once the Marines realized the gunfire merely marked the end of Ramadan.[10]

The 26th MEU's subordinate commands began to arrive in earnest on 16 December. Reinforced by the tail end of Company I and lead elements of Company K, Lieutenant Colonel Lynes begin expanding BLT 3/6's perimeter beyond several concealed avenues of approach that came alarmingly near the airport facilities.[11] During the next two weeks, the battalion's perimeter would eventually grow to measure 2 kilometers in length, vary from 300 to 800 meters in width, and contain three distinct battle positions.

The northern position was manned by two provisional rifle platoons from Captain Jeffrey S. McCormack's Headquarters and Service Company, and a third from Captain Lloyd D. Freeman's Company L. Interspersed sections of fast attack and combined antiarmor vehicles armed with heavy machine guns from Captain Brian M. Howlett's Weapons Company supported them, and a provisional rifle platoon from Battery K was situated to their southeast. Major Wesley Feight and Company I manned the southern battle position, with a section of 81mm mortars and the combat engineer platoon occupying the space between it and Battery K to the east. Captain Tomko and Company K manned the southwestern battle position, with a second section of 81mm mortars on its western flank.[12]

The majority of MSSG 26 personnel reached Kandahar on 16 December after spending the previous night transiting through Jacobabad, Pakistan.[13] They brought a variety of equipment including an MRC-130 radio; expeditionary refueling system; forward area water purification system; reverse osmosis water purification unit; and two floodlights, four pieces of heavy equipment, five generators, and seven trucks.[14] After linking up with his quartering party, Lieutenant Colonel William M. Faulkner quickly established a combat service support operations center, and within 24 hours MSSG 26 was supporting an increasing number of Coalition forces at Kandahar. It provided a wide range of services from its combat service support area, which was divided into several sections according to function. These included a water purification and storage point; bulk fuel storage and distribution point; supply storage and distribution point; ammunition holding area; shower facilities; and workspace for the engineers, medical shock trauma platoon, and arrival and departure control group. The engineers also constructed 55 heads and 52 urinals, each with a hand-washing station, which improved hygiene and morale.[15]

Task Force 58 suffered its first three casualties on 16 December, attesting to the fact that securing the airport and expanding the perimeter was dangerous business. As Captain Michael D. Bryan remarked, "The whole place was a huge weapons cache… there were just tons of munitions everywhere. Had to be really careful where you step."[16] He happened to be accompanying a small detachment of MSSG 26 engineers on that fateful day as they cleared a building near the end of the runway, located approximately two miles from the airport terminal. Although the engineers had visited the site earlier in the day, they returned briefly to headquarters to get Bryan's help in identifying some surface-to-air munitions they had discovered. Eight Marines from Battalion Landing Team 1/1's (BLT 1/1's) armored reconnaissance company provided security for the patrol as well, because they had previously observed unidentified personnel moving about the area.

The Marines proceeded down a dirt road that led to the airport building, traveling carefully in a



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

A member of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit uses a forklift to move a 500-gallon fuel pod to the forward aerial refueling point at Kandahar International Airport on 19 January 2002.

column of twos. It appeared that a vehicle had recently driven down the road, so they made an effort to walk within the visible tire tracks. Captain Bryan remembered that he was on the right hand side of the path, with Sergeant Feltcher walking ahead of him and Sergeant Adrian Aranda, Corporal Christopher T. Chandler, and Lance Corporal Nicholas J. Sovereign behind him.[17] Although Feltcher and Bryan apparently stepped over the aging explosive device, Chandler detonated a landmine at around 1145.[18]

Captain Bryan recalled that Sergeant Aranda was the first person they saw after the explosion, lying on the ground with his left hand bleeding. Approximately 30 seconds after that, they noticed Chandler, lying silently under some nearby barbed wire where he had been blown by the explosion. Bryan remembered that he was neither talking nor moving and did not respond to questions until they had moved to his side—his hearing had been impaired by the blast. Upon examination, they realized that Chandler had lost his left foot from the ankle down and received shrapnel wounds to his other foot, both thighs, and left hand. Nearby, Lance Corporal Sovereign was able to function but had suffered a ruptured eardrum.[19]

Corporal Chandler remembered that the world had moved in slow motion. He had first noticed a puff of black smoke and then his ankle buckled beneath him. Although he tried to crawl to Sergeant Aranda, who was then lying face down in the dirt, Chandler could not get up. Realizing that he had injured his hand and lost a foot, he then rolled over and called to the rest of his fire team.[20]

Uncertain of where the mines were located, the Marines began to probe the ground and clear a path to Corporal Chandler's position, first using pocket knives and then their K-Bar fighting knives.[21] It was a tedious procedure, taking almost an hour, but they



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

A CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 sits at the end of the runway at Kandahar International Airport on 18 January 2002. Three AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopters are visible in the background, while a UH-1N Iroquois flies overhead.

eventually reached the wounded Marine and hastily dragged him and his equipment to safety. They radioed for a casualty evacuation and, after nearly another hour, the three casualties flew to FOB Rhino on board a Huey helicopter from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (HMM-365) for triage and medical care.[22] Chandler was immediately flown to the Air Force hospital in Oman, then to Germany, and finally to Walter Reed hospital in Washington, DC, for treatment, while Lance Corporal Sovereign and Sergeant Aranda were treated in Afghanistan before continuing on to Oman. When the two less seriously injured Marines reached FOB Rhino—Sovereign with a bandage on his hand and Aranda with an intravenous bottle attached to his arm—they "were met by dozens of their comrades who stood shoulder to shoulder, forming a cordon to the warehouse where the doctors treated the two."[23] After the 26th MEU opened a small arms range at the southern end of the runway on New Year's Day, Colonel Frick dedicated it to Corporal Chandler during a small ceremony on 3 January.[24] Approximately a year later, Sergeant Chandler not only became the first active-duty Service member to graduate from the U.S. Army Basic Airborne Course with a prosthetic limb, but the class also chose him as their noncommissioned officer honor graduate.[25]

As the 26th MEU staff transformed their tactical command post into the organization's main headquarters, the remainder of Company K, 2d and 3d Platoon, respectively, reached Kandahar on 17 and 18 December. A squad-sized detachment of Seabees also arrived on the 17th, while the expeditionary unit's maritime special purpose force and a section of BLT 3/6's 81mm mortar platoon arrived on the 18th.[26] Like the ground forces, HMM-365 gradually increased its presence in Afghanistan during the Marines' first week at Kandahar,



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011228-N-2383B-523

A Marine from Battalion Landing Team 3/6 stands beside his fighting position at Kandahar International Airport on 28 December 2001. Three disposable Javelin antitank missiles are stacked to the left rear, while a reusable SMAW (shoulder-fired, multipurpose assault weapon) rocket launcher and extra missiles are shown on the right.

eventually reestablishing their headquarters at the airport and bringing 1 Huey, 3 Super Cobras, 4 Super Stallions, and 10 Sea Knights.[27]

A clear sign of the steady progress made by Task Force 58 and other Coalition forces in Afghanistan occurred at 1200 on 18 December, when General Mattis and Colonel Frick presided over the raising of an American flag* at the airport.[28] The brief ceremony, intended to honor the country and pay tribute to the victims of the 9/11 attacks, was particularly meaningful to the Marines and sailors: New York firefighters had previously flown the ensign over the devastated landscape where the former World Trade Center had once stood.[29] Moreover, family and friends of the victims, as well as rescue workers at the site, had signed the flag.[30]

On 23 December, while explosive ordnance technicians continued to dispose of hazardous materials around the airfield, Companies I and K worked to harden their defensive positions. Captain Tomko remembered the diversity of Company K's frontage, noting that 1st Platoon faced an urban environment ("Alamo"), 2d Platoon faced an open expanse of desert ("CAX"), and 3d Platoon faced a stand of trees ("Belleau Wood").[31] Meanwhile, Task Force Sledgehammer began to conduct mounted combat patrols outside the base. Major Impellitteri recalled that once BLT 3/6 had established the perimeter, General Mattis decided that they could leave the confines of the airfield and that they would start running local security patrols.[32] He also remembered running daily,

*Marines from BLT 3/6 had already raised two flags over Kandahar International Airport the previous afternoon. In addition to the American flag, they had flown a yellow ensign bearing a coiled rattlesnake and the words "Don't Tread on Me" that CWO-5 Timothy Hoffmann's son had sent to him. (This yellow ensign is often referred to as the Gadsden flag.) (BLT 3/6 History, 9)

platoon-sized patrols in each cardinal direction, working to develop an intelligence picture for the area in and around the airfield.

Captain Lloyd D. Freeman arrived in Kandahar with Company L on the 24th, following a five-day stop at FOB Rhino where they had temporarily served as a quick reaction force and facilitated the 15th MEU's impending retrograde to the *Peleliu* ready group off the Pakistani coast. On Christmas Day, having familiarized themselves with the area, they assumed their position in the southeastern portion of the perimeter. Company I and Task Force Sledgehammer assumed external quick reaction force duties the next day, while the remainder of the joint, Coalition, and Marine units conducted base defensive drills at Kandahar airport.[33]

Sustainment at Kandahar

As Task Force 58 expanded its scope of operations, Marines from MSSG 26 continued to maintain the critical flow of supplies and equipment from southern Pakistan to the forward deployed units in Afghanistan. This was no small task, requiring near-continuous logistics operations, often conducted under blackout conditions due to the ongoing surface-to-air threat. A typical daily resupply began at sundown, with ground transportation, shore party, and security personnel moving from the Pasni, Pakistan, airfield to Chur Beach. After meeting landing craft from the amphibious ships, Navy and Marine Corps personnel unloaded the cargo onto trucks and convoyed back to the airfield. Here the supplies were put on pallets and transferred to waiting KC-130s for flights into Kandahar and several intermediate support bases. After landing, other MSSG 26 Marines would unload the aircraft and distribute the supplies and equipment to Task Force 58 and Coalition forces.[34]



Photo by CWO-2 William D. Crow

In Jacobabad, Pakistan, on 12 February 2002, Marines from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 and MEU Service Support Group 26 load a KC-130 Hercules bound for Kandahar. As SSgt Craig Ramirez, left, climbs into the aircraft, Sgt Jessica Lujick directs the forklift operator. Inside, Cpl Matthew Rider uses a T-bar to align the pallet.

Food, water, and fuel were the three top sustainment priorities at Kandahar. The 26th MEU initially pulled meals-ready-to-eat (MREs) from their landing force operational reserve material on board the *Bataan* Amphibious Ready Group, as well as from exercise stocks staged in Sigonella, Italy, to support the wide range of joint, Coalition, and Marine Corps forces operating from the airfield. After depleting their on-hand stores, the expeditionary unit found it difficult to acquire additional MREs because U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NavCent) was not structured to replenish forces operating ashore. Moreover, Marine Forces Pacific affirmed that business-as-usual procedures remained in effect, and none of the four component commands had initiated plans for pushing additional meals forward. Left to their own devices, the Marines subsisted on two meals per day and the 26th MEU requisitioned additional supplies from the United States.[35]

Although the land component began to push combat rations toward Kandahar, its intent was to stockpile a 15-day supply of meals to support Task Force Rakkasan, the U.S. Army force scheduled to relieve Task Force 58 in Afghanistan. Since the Marines were not supposed to violate these supplies unless absolutely necessary, Majors Daniel B. Conley and Terry M. Dresbach from the Task Force 58 and NavCent logistics staffs resolved the problem by coordinating a loan through the air component for supplies from the Air Force's war reserve stocks.[36]



Photo by TSgt Efrain Gonzalez, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011231-F-2352G-008/df-sd-03-18042

Members of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit conduct a foreign object debris walk along the runway at Kandahar International Airport on 31 December 2001. They are collecting debris that could be harmful to aircraft engines.

Regarding fuel supplies, despite being able to use JP-4 jet propellant as a short-term multipurpose fuel source, Task Force 58 soon realized that, over the long term, the propellant would damage the engines of most of the ground equipment it had brought to Afghanistan. Although continuous KC-130 flights provided enough diesel fuel to sustain joint and Coalition forces at FOB Rhino and Kandahar, transportation in 500-gallon blivets precluded the buildup of fuel stocks beyond those required to meet immediate operational needs. Reliance on six Marine KC-130 transports as the sole means for delivering fuel to the two forward operating bases was cause for concern and required the aviation and logistics planners to continuously monitor fuel status and closely integrate airlift schedules to support operational priorities.[37] The 26th MEU's logistics officer, Major Andrew N. Killion, "coordinated daily air delivery of ground and aviation fuel from Jacobabad Air Base, and in the case of diesel fuel, from local civilian sources through a U.S. Army contingency contractor."[38]

Although arrival of the Army relief force in Kandahar threatened to destabilize the tenuous balance between operational requirements and logistical resources, Task Force 58 convinced the air component to draw from theater stocks to establish a 100,000-gallon storage capability at Jacobabad, facilitating the delivery of JP-4 fuel to Coalition forces at Rhino, Kandahar, and Bagram. It also coordinated with Central Command and the Defense Logistics Agency for the ground delivery of multipurpose fuel from Pakistan. By working together, Task Force 58 and the other commands established an increased supply in sufficient time to support Task Force Rakkasan without maintaining a KC-130 presence in Jacobabad.[39]

Airfield Maintenance at Kandahar

Now responsible for maintaining separate airfields, Seabees from Navy Mobile Construction Battalion 133 divided their detachment into two sections. On 17 December, while Navy Lieutenants Joel K. Sensenig and Clifford A. Smith remained behind to continue operations at FOB Rhino, Lieutenant Commander Cooke went north with 10 Seabees to evaluate and organize repair and maintenance efforts at Kandahar International Airport.[40] Over the years, fighting had left 18 craters, ranging from 6 to 18 feet in diameter and 6 to 8 feet



Photo by CWO-2 William D. Crow

A U.S. Marine KC-130 assigned to the "Raiders" of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (VMGR-352) prepares for its next mission, while another aircraft assigned to VMGR-252 takes off on a mission to transport Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit back to Kandahar airport.

in depth, scattered along the 10,000-foot runway and taxiway. Although the Marine KC-130 detachments were able to fly in and out of Kandahar, a particularly troublesome crater at the 4,000-foot mark reduced the amount of usable runway and precluded the use of larger intratheater aircraft.[41]

Rubble, trash, and wreckage fragments also littered the runway and impeded aviation operations at Kandahar. If sucked into a jet engine's intake, debris could seriously damage the whirling turbine blades, subsequently grounding the aircraft or even worse, causing an accident during takeoff. At the behest of Task Force 58, which had submitted its request shortly after occupying the airfield, the Air Force was pursuing a sweeper truck in Oman to eliminate this danger.[42] Unfortunately, contracting difficulties and airlift constraints delayed the vehicle's arrival for almost two weeks. In the meantime, Marines walked the runway each day picking up the potentially deadly debris. The Seabees soon alleviated this tedious requirement when, after finding an abandoned Russian sweeper truck in the airfield junkyard and cannibalizing parts from junk vehicles and making field-expedient repairs to the truck, their mechanics were able to get it running.[43]

According to an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, "The Seabees' first priority [was] to restore the water system, both for sanitation and to mix concrete to patch the runway."[44] Task Force 58 planned to hire local contractors to help repair the airfield, both as a means to reduce its own labor requirements and to build rapport within the community by contributing to its struggling economy.[45] With Major Killion serving as the executive agent, Army Master Sergeant Parry A. Toomer, the contingency contractor assigned to the 26th MEU, was the point man in this portion of the civil affairs campaign.[46] His first purchase was two Honda water pumps obtained from Commander Gulay, a member of the anti-Taliban militia who led the Seabees on a guided tour of the airport's wells and water distribution system. The Afghans installed the pump in a rose garden in front of the airport terminal the following day, where the Marines had pragmatically established an open-air urinal.[47]



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011227-N-2383B-508

Seabees of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 fill bomb craters along the runway at Kandahar International Airport on 27 December 2001. The craters were created by Coalition forces during the initial phase of Operation Enduring Freedom.

By the third week in December, Master Sergeant Toomer had begun hiring Afghan laborers, paying each $6.50 a day plus transportation to and from Kandahar and the cost of lunch.[48] Although General Mattis acknowledged that "they're hard-working people if given the opportunity," Lieutenant Commander Cooke had already realized that local contractors lacked the equipment needed to meet Task Force 58's fast-paced operational requirements.[49] He now switched his attention to identifying the types of equipment and numbers of Seabees needed to affect expedient solutions and then more permanent repairs. General Mattis contacted Lieutenant Smith at Rhino, expressing the need for additional Seabee support at Kandahar.[50] Since the heavy equipment currently in Afghanistan was necessary for maintaining the deteriorating airfield at FOB Rhino, Smith coordinated with the Navy Mobile Construction Battalion 133 detachment in Bahrain to procure an additional grader, roller, and front-end loader for Task Force 58.[51]

The Seabees began repairs as soon as they hit the deck at Kandahar, dumping fill into the craters and then rolling a top layer of soil to provide stability. They repaired the problem crater within six hours of arriving and extended the usable runway space by 2,000 feet. One of five Air Force survey teams visiting the airport observed the construction crews as they completed the work and reportedly assessed the airfield as being ready for C-17 aircraft. Task Force 58's command chronology indicates that the first Globemaster arrived in Kandahar on the evening of 18 December, although other sources indicate that the air component command had not declared the airfield C-17 capable until a day or so later.[52] After the 26th MEU expanded the range and frequency of its air and ground patrols around the airfield, the first daylight C-17 landing* occurred around 1015 on 30 December.[53]

The Seabees continued to make permanent repairs to the airfield during the following three weeks. Special Type III cement received early in

*The Task Force 58 command chronology says daylight operations began on 6 January. (TF 58 ComdC, 60)



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020108-N-2383B-516
Working through the night, Seabees of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 smooth cement while repairing damage to the runway at Kandahar International Airport.

January greatly facilitated this effort. After capping the craters with the new composite mixture, the Air Force declared the runway capable of supporting Lockheed C-141 Starlifters on 10 January, and the first C-141 arrived the following day.[54]

Detention Operations

Concurrent with establishing a second forward operating base at Kandahar, Task Force 58 also constructed a detainment facility at the airport to hold prisoners. This facility was urgently needed to handle not only those captured during previous operations but also future prisoners of an anticipated Coalition victory over Taliban and al-Qaeda forces who had withdrawn to the mountains of northeastern Afghanistan. On 9 December, General Franks had issued Fragmentary Order 02-029, providing guidance on detainment handling requirements in the joint operations area. Admiral Moore followed with his own guidance to the maritime component the same day, addressing detainee-handling procedures and the use of brig space on board Fifth Fleet ships, while General Mikolashek issued Fragmentary Order 6 to Operations Order 02-006 on 10 December, providing his guidance to the land component on detainee-handling procedures and holding facilities.[55]

Task Force 58's mission was to establish a facility capable of temporarily holding up to 500 individuals. Although the 15th MEU had already established a short-term detainment facility at FOB Rhino using shipping containers and canvas tents, the remote desert outpost ultimately proved too austere for housing Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners.[56] Higher headquarters' concern for the detainees' welfare was a source of both amusement and pride for the Marines, who huddled against the cold in shallow fighting holes and continued to subsist on bottled water and reduced combat rations.

As Task Force Sledgehammer prepared to move on Kandahar around 12 December, General Mattis issued a draft order transferring responsibility for detainee security from the 15th to the 26th MEU and directed Colonel Frick to establish a short-term detainment facility once his Marines had occupied the airport.[57] While officials at the highest levels debated the detainees' legal status, General Mattis

directed that the Marines would treat them in accordance with the Geneva Convention's rules for the treatment of prisoners of war. He emphasized at the same time that Task Force 58 would not provide its prisoners with an opportunity to revolt and that guards were to shoot those attempting to escape.[58]

While this order might seem harsh to some, it was justified by two violent jailbreaks that had recently taken place—one occurring in the prison outside Mazar-e Sharif during late November and another involving a four-bus convoy in Pakistan in mid-December. In each case, Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners had overpowered their guards and initiated deadly gun battles before Coalition forces killed or recaptured the escapees.[59] Events occurring in Kandahar on 22 December would later justify General Mattis's caution, when the arrival of a particular al-Qaeda detainee at the airport "sparked a rebellion among wounded prisoners being treated at a nearby hospital." After a bloody firefight five days later, "eight al-Qaeda members remained holed up in the hospital… loaded with munitions, vowing not to be taken alive or surrender to U.S. forces."[60]

Anticipating the eventual arrival of up to 300 prisoners, engineers and infantry who had arrived during BLT 3/6's initial assault quickly got to work and within 15 hours had established a rudimentary 100-person detention facility near the airport terminal.[61] They chose a junk-littered dirt yard measuring 200 meters by 250 meters as the site. Enclosed by a 6-foot adobe wall, the location contained two dilapidated metal buildings near the center of the compound and two smaller buildings standing off in one corner. The engineers selected one of the larger buildings, which measured 20 meters by 50 meters and retained its metal siding, to house the detainees.[62]

After clearing the floor of debris, they divided the shed into two sections by driving a line of metal stakes across the middle and attaching metal sheeting. One side would house the ordinary Taliban prisoners, while the other could be used to confine "hard cases" and members of al-Qaeda. Concertina wire was then placed atop the divider and along the inside walls to prevent climbing, while the outside was reinforced with wire, steel beams, concrete blocks, and more metal siding to prevent digging. As a final measure, they placed mobile stairways for deplaning aircraft at each end of the building, enabling the guards to observe the detainees. They also cleared the two smaller buildings for medical screening or detainee interrogation, discovering several booby-trapped grenades in the process, and constructed a short-term holding pen of concertina wire in the compound.[63]

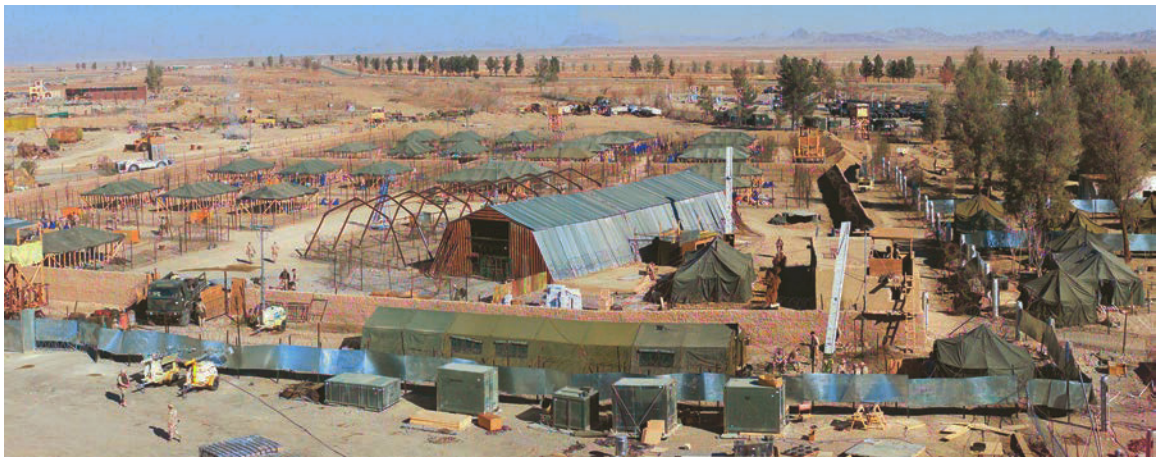


Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

A west-facing view of the south side of the detention facility at Kandahar International Airport. This facility, built by the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, was used to temporarily house al-Qaeda and Taliban forces captured during Operation Enduring Freedom.

Additional combat engineers and military police from MSSG 26 arrived at the airfield on 15 December, the same day Admiral Moore issued an execute order for the transfer of prisoners captured at Tora Bora to Kandahar.[64] Although the police detachment had not received orders to build a short-term detention facility until the previous day, Sergeants D. E. Jones and J. T. Green had anticipated the mission while on board ship and presented the command with plans for establishing a light (100 person), medium (250 person), or heavy (500 person) capability. The expeditionary unit chose to begin with the first option and, given the space constraints presented by Soviet-era minefields and potentially booby-trapped buildings, decided to continue using the compound for detention purposes.[65]

Sergeant Teeter and a squad of engineers began establishing a more permanent facility on 18 December, assisted by members of the Seabee detachment who were now beginning to arrive in Kandahar.[66] Lacking published manuals or practical experience in building detention facilities, the engineers questioned several intelligence organizations about basic structural requirements and took a commonsense approach toward the project design.[67] They decided to improve the facility in sections, thus enabling the military police to receive detainees within the existing structure at the same time the engineers worked to expand it, gradually increasing the capacity from 120 to 400 persons.[68]

They accomplished this by enclosing the frame of the second large building, which locals had previously stripped of its siding, with concertina wire and then constructing compartments that limited detainee interaction to groups of 20.[69] The initial building now became the maximum-security area for holding suspected al-Qaeda members, while the compound area housed the common Taliban prisoners. The engineers compensated for material shortages by scavenging items from around the airport. In an impressive display of ingenuity, they used an iron gate from a nearby storage lot to secure the compound entrance, turned old Soviet rotor blades into light poles, and even cut their own logs to build guard towers.[70]

On 16 December, the land component commander issued Operations Order 02-25, which provided guidance concerning the transfer of custody and transportation of detainees from Sheberghan prison near Mazar-e Sharif to Kandahar. The airport detainment facility was ready for sustained operations the following day, and the first 24 detainees arrived on 18 December.* However, the main influx of prisoners did not begin until a week later, after senior leaders and their staffs



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011227-N-2383B-505
Marines guide a suspected member of al-Qaeda down the ramp of an Air Force C-130 Hercules at Kandahar International Airport on 27 December 2001. Suspects were held in a temporary detention facility run by the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

*Alternatively, military police from MSSG 26, augmented by Marines from Company K, BLT 3/6, reportedly processed the first 15 detainees on 16 Dec 01. (MSSG 26 ComdC, Part. 2, p. 37)

ironed out movement and handling procedures.[71] On 22 December, Central Command directed its land component to begin the transfer of detainees from Pakistan to Kandahar.

A steady flow of prisoners into the airport thus began, with an average of 15 detainees arriving each day until the prisoner population eventually swelled to 351 individuals by 9 January 2002.[72] While most of the detainees residing at Kandahar were low-level Taliban fighters from locations throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan, Task Force 58 kept several suspected Taliban leaders and/or potential al-Qaeda terrorists on board ship for safekeeping.[73] The Marines initially confined eight "high-value" detainees on board the USS *Peleliu*—they were eventually transferred to the USS *Bataan* as the 15th MEU conducted its retrograde from Afghanistan to Kuwait during January 2002.[74]

Augmented by infantry from Company K, military police from the 15th and 26th MEUs worked together to operate the detention facility. Sergeant Jones was in charge of flight line operations, where he received the detainees after their arrival on C-130 military transport aircraft.[75] After ensuring their ankle and wrist restraints were in place and blindfolding them, he directed the new prisoners, lashed together, across the runway apron to a large green receiving tent. The prisoners were processed two at a time, and as part of the process, guards removed the prisoners' clothes with surgical scissors; searched them for weapons; and then took fingerprints, photographs, and blood and hair samples before affixing an identification bracelet with a tracking number to each detainee's right wrist. Medical personnel evaluated the prisoners' physical condition and provided immediate treatment for any injury or illness.[76] The Marines provided each detainee with a blue jumpsuit and laceless shoes as well as a space blanket and heavy comforter that Master Sergeant Toomer had purchased off the local market.[77]

After accessioning the prisoners, guards placed sandbags over their heads and marched them in circles on the way to the detainment facility to ensure their disorientation should they attempt to escape. Concertina wire, green engineer stakes, and locks separated the holding cells from one another. Inside, hygiene and restroom amenities were located on opposite sides of the cell, with a space blanket covering the floor. Marines fed the prisoners bottled water and MREs three times a day (providing vegetarian meals for those prohibited from eating certain types of meat), emptied their waste containers (buckets) regularly, and allowed them to pray uninterrupted.[78]



Photo by Sgt Thomas Michael Corcoran
The first battlefield prisoners arriving at Kandahar airport.

Overhead floodlights illuminated the detainment facility 24 hours a day. While two guards stood watch in each of the five towers situated around the compound's adobe walls, other Marines ran frequent roving patrols throughout the area. For security purposes, the detainees were not allowed to gather in groups larger than two or afforded privacy while relieving themselves. Enhanced security measures for a handful of high-value detainees involved housing them in a shed placed in the center of the compound. In case unrest did break out, each guard shift conducted drills to maintain their readiness, military police practiced riot control procedures daily, and a quick reaction force stood by at all times.[79]

Task Force 58 invited Mr. Roland Nobs, who was leading a delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross, to inspect the short-

term holding facility and ensure that the Marines were in full compliance with Geneva Convention guidelines. Thereafter, Red Cross representatives met routinely with General Mattis and visited the prisoners frequently, providing additional blankets and facilitating the delivery of mail.[80] While the conditions in Kandahar may have been primitive, they were contrasted favorably with the prison at Sheberghan by reporters from the *New York Times*:

> The conditions at Sheberghan are harsh. Prisoners are crammed 50 to a room, with only room to sit. At night many have to sleep in the cold, damp corridors, which are barred at the end where they open on to a central outdoor courtyard. Prisoners complained that they only received one meal a day of bread and rice. Some are without shoes and dressed in clothes inadequate for winter…. The conditions at the Marines' prison camp are austere but evidently an improvement on those at Sheberghan.[81]

General Mattis provided access to a variety of U.S. government and Coalition agencies who were interested in speaking with prisoners. Some of these included Marine interrogation and translation teams, personnel from the Army's 202d Military Intelligence Battalion, teams from the Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation, and even members of the British secret service.[82] In return, he demanded that they immediately share any actionable intelligence that they might uncover regarding the enemy's intent toward Task Force 58, threatening to expel anyone who chose to withhold such information.[83]

The interrogators continuously questioned the detainees for information up to 10 times a day.[84] Colonel Faulkner explained to reporters, "We have experts here who want to know anything they can about the affiliations of these individuals, who they're tied in with, what other information they may know about training facilities—anything." Lieutenant Colonel Mike Saxton, commander of the 202d Military Intelligence Battalion, explained that the information the battalion collected could be used as evidence in a court trial.[85] He continued,

> We've had 300 major reports generated out here. We've had over 400 detainees and the stuff that we have captured will raise the hair on any American—on the back of his neck—because this place is full of bad guys. One day the story will come out, who was here, who was interviewed by a young specialist or a young sergeant who sat in front of a Taliban or al-Qaeda guy, face-to-face, and got him to talk about what it was that they did here and what they did to the Americans. And a lot of things didn't happen and a lot of things aren't going to happen because of the efforts that are going on with this task force.[86]

Following a foiled al-Qaeda prison break in Pakistan during mid-December, a member of Central Command's Pakistan liaison team informed the Land Component Commander's provost marshal that a secure holding facility needed to be established for detainees. This was likely the impetus behind a flurry of message traffic in mid-December discussing the movement of prisoners from Pakistan to Kandahar. At a Pentagon briefing on 27 December, after the flow of prisoners into the Marine's short-term facility had begun, Secretary Rumsfeld announced that captured Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters would be transferred to Camp X-Ray, a long-term holding facility established at the U.S. Navy base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.[87]

Approximately a week later, the Pentagon directed Coalition forces to begin the transfer of prisoners to Cuba. Central Command and its land component relayed this order to Task Force 58, which transferred the first 30 prisoners on 10 January. Ten of these were high-value detainees who traveled from the *Bataan*, while another 20 boarded a C-17 aircraft in Kandahar. Despite a temporary interruption of the flights to permit Guantanamo to better prepare for the detainees' arrival, the transfer would continue during the next week and a half, during which time Task Force 58 also repatriated some 60 detainees to Pakistan.[88]

Task Force 58 struggled with balancing a myriad of mission requirements other than just operating



Photo by Helen C. Stikkel. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020127-d-2987s-158/dd-sd-07-17536
Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld checks on the condition of al-Qaeda and Taliban detainees held at Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on 27 January 2002.

the detainment facility, including supporting special operations forces and providing airfield security. Fortunately, back on 22 December, Central Command had issued Deployment Order 98, which provided additional forces to help administer the short-term holding facility. Thirty-six soldiers from the U.S Army's 65th Military Police Company arrived in Kandahar on New Year's Day, followed by the advance echelon of the 108th Military Police Company the next day.[89]

Although Marines remained on hand to help the Army for several weeks, by mid-January they had turned the facility over to Lieutenant Colonel Paul K. Warman and soldiers from the Army's 519th Military Police Battalion. Major Alvez Alveretti, the battalion operations officer, praised the Marines, noting that their "ability to maintain and deliver [security] with the techniques and procedures that they are trained in… was one of the keys of success in the operation early on." He also explained that "the Army military police… brought with them the sufficient numbers to pick up… where the Marines had left off" and he thought that the "Marines did a very good job going from the role of superior to subordinate in that function."[90] Sergeant Green agreed that the Army and Marine military police had quickly established a good working relationship but acknowledged minor difficulties during the initial turnover, adding that he believed the soldiers sacrificed control over the prisoners to meet the detainees' needs.[91]

Visitors, Holiday Celebrations, and Continued Conflict

As combat operations subsided and the holiday season approached, a number of personalities began cycling their way through Task Force 58's area of operations. General James Jones, Commandant of the Marines Corps, and Sergeant Major Alford McMichael, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, visited with Marines and sailors at FOB Rhino and



Photo by Sgt Marshall Paull

Gen James L. Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps (center left, holding flag); SgtMaj Alford L. McMichael, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps; Lt. Gen. Michael L. Hagee, Commanding General I Marine Expeditionary Force; and the sailors and Marines of the USS Bataan *(LHD 5), while afloat in the Arabian Sea during Operation Enduring Freedom, display a flag found in the rubble of the World Trade Center.*

Kandahar Airport on 19 December, accompanied by General Hagee.[92] Ignoring the cold and wind, the Commandant and Sergeant Major toured both the 15th and 26th MEUs' defensive perimeters, "surprising Marines on watch with their unexpected presence."[93] Jones said that he wanted a firsthand account of the Marines' condition and morale before speaking with their families at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, during the next few days. He also remarked, "This is very impressive…. We spend a lot of time in Washington banging our heads off the wall saying 'We can do this.' We are doing it."[94] Before departing the windswept field at Rhino, Jones pulled a black fleece jacket from his bag and handed it to Colonel Waldhauser, adding, "It looks like you could use this."[95] The next day, the trio visited the *Peleliu* and *Bataan* amphibious ready groups.[96]

On 21 December, after visiting with troops in Jacobabad, General Franks arrived at FOB Rhino on board an Air Force C-17. To Task Force 58's delight, he brought along a contingent from the United Service Organization (USO). The Marines and sailors gathered in the abandoned warehouse that served as their billeting area, where Wayne Newton, Drew Carey, Neil McCoy, and two Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders regaled them for an hour. The Marines and sailors were thrilled to see all the celebrities, although the cheerleaders were most popular. One Seabee gave his camouflage blouse with the nametape "McCoy" on it to country singer Neil McCoy. Mr. McCoy put the blouse on and wore it throughout the evening. Franks and the entertainers next traveled to Kandahar, Pasni, and finally the amphibious ready groups on 22 December, repeating their performance and raising spirits.[97]

Marines at Kandahar enthusiastically received their first bulk mail delivery on Christmas Eve, bringing a cornucopia of letters, cards, and gift



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011225-N-2383B-504

Navy hospital corpsmen Steven Weston and Jeremy Heveron happily share care packages from home at Kandahar International Airport on Christmas Day 2001. In addition to breaking up the monotony of field duty, packages like these reassured members of Task Force 58 that they hadn't been forgotten and that their service was appreciated.

boxes from home. Marines were afforded an opportunity to send e-mail messages or make phone calls to friends and family, and BLT 3/6 produced its own holiday greeting card, modeled after an original designed by the 6th Marines while stationed in Reykjavik, Iceland, during 1941. Depicting a Marine standing his post during inclement weather, it was a thoroughly appropriate representation for those now manning the perimeter at Kandahar.[98]

Rear Admiral Louis V. Iasiello, USN, Chaplain of the Marine Corps, also spent time with Task Force 58 over the holidays. He visited the *Peleliu* ready group on 22 December, FOB Rhino on the 24th, and Kandahar International Airport on the 25th of December.[99] Navy chaplains from the 26th MEU and BLT 3/6 led observations of Christmas Eve at Kandahar, with Commander Joseph A. Scordo, USN, holding Catholic services and Lieutenant Chuck Hodges, USN, holding Protestant services. Not all celebrations were that formal: Major Feight jokingly remarked that on Christmas Day his Marines had "erected an aluminum pole for a tree, opened gifts sent from home, aired grievances, and demonstrated feats of strength."[100] This referred to the mock holiday of "Festivus" made famous by the popular television comedy *Seinfeld*.

Although Central Command "reemphasized the necessity for vigilance to all its forces on Christmas Day" and Marines in Afghanistan raised their level of security, the holiday proved relatively uneventful for Task Force 58.[101] Thanks to Admiral Moore's initiative, Navy Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) in Bahrain prepared holiday care packages for his forces ashore and afloat in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the North Arabian Sea. Although distance prevented the delivery of hot meals, the ready groups



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 011224-N-2383B-517

Carolers from Task Force 58 make their rounds at Kandahar International Airport, on Christmas Eve 2001. By celebrating the holiday with traditional activities they would have performed at home, the sailors and Marines were reminded of what they were fighting for.

prepared nonperishable food and treats, which the joint and Coalition forces received with enthusiasm.[102] Lieutenant Colonel Lynes also recalled a surprise visit from Lieutenant Colonel Drew Watson: Watson was an old friend, then serving as a liaison officer with the special forces, who arrived with a pack full of chewing tobacco and snuff to hand out to the Marines positioned along the perimeter.[103]

Major Robert Charette Jr., Task Force 58's air officer, coordinated an air show for the Marines to celebrate Christmas Day. Two F/A-18 Hornets and two F-14 Tomcats from the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* spent 20 minutes in the sky over FOB Rhino, performing complex and impressive aerial maneuvers. When the show was over, the aircraft proceeded to their refueling rendezvous point and then continued to their assigned target in northern Afghanistan. Additionally, President Bush called Marines and sailors serving in Afghanistan,* and Sergeant Arturo E. Romero, from the 15th MEU, was one of the lucky Marines to speak with the commander in chief.[104] The following day, General Mikolashek visited Kandahar.[105]

In Kabul, the Marines of Battery K also celebrated Christmas. They had a tree cut from the embassy grounds that was topped with an angel crafted from a toilet paper roll. Christopher J. Chivers, a *New York Times* reporter who had previously served as a Marine infantry officer, brought local food to the embassy on Christmas Eve and sponsored a brief party. Staff Sergeant John C. Eatmon contributed to the event by mixing mashed

*Task Force 58's command chronology indicates that President Bush spoke with Cpl Arellano at Kandahar. (TF 58 ComdC Part 3, p. 92)

banana, powered milk, water, and spice into a poor substitute for eggnog. With 1980s-era rock music blaring in the background, they reflected on their experiences in Afghanistan and remembered better times back home. After finishing the hot meal—the first in three days—they returned to their posts.[106]

Battery K personnel in Shamsi also experienced a Christmas to remember. As a sign of friendship, the Pakistani military forces brought them three live goats to roast in honor of the holiday. This required that Captain Fred C. Galvin, as senior Marine, slaughter one of the animals. Afterward, the Pakistanis skinned and cooked the goats. Although the roasting meat smelled good to the hungry Marines, who had been subsisting solely on prepackaged combat rations since their arrival, they remained wary of the local fare. On New Year's Day, the Pakistanis returned with chicken, which the Marines found more appealing.[107]

By this time, Captain Farrell J. Sullivan had arrived in Kabul with an advance party from Company L, 8th Marines. After the rest of his Marines arrived, the two units conducted a brief turnover and the rifle company assumed responsibility for guarding the embassy on 29 and 30 December.[108] Battery K subsequently flew from Bagram to Kandahar on board an Air Force C-17 transport on New Year's Eve, and within several hours of landing, they incorporated themselves within BLT 3/6's defensive perimeter around the airfield.[109]

Although the media's thirst for information may have occasionally aggravated Task Force 58 personnel, they were aware that the presence of reporters was also beneficial. On one hand, media coverage provided them with a means to inform the public about the conditions they were facing, the operations they were conducting, and the fact that they were winning. Equally important, the individual sailors and Marines interpreted the media's presence as an indication of America's continued interest in the campaign, that their efforts to fight terrorism and liberate Afghanistan were important and appreciated, and that they had not been forgotten.[110]

A crew from Cable News Network (CNN) arrived in Kandahar on Christmas Eve. They provided continuous coverage from the airport for almost a month, extending their stay for several weeks because broadcasts from Kandahar were achieving such high ratings. CNN reporter William G. Hemmer was particularly popular with the command. He made a conscious effort to interview individual service personnel about their experiences and allowed many of them to use his equipment to send greetings to their families and friends. A crowd of 50 or more Marines, soldiers, sailors, and airmen often gathered near the inner courtyard of the airport at night, waiting anxiously to send a message to loved ones at home with CNN's help.[111]



Chapter 12
Tora Bora

As the Northern Alliance continued to push south in mid-November, senior U.S. officials acknowledged that they suspected Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda followers were hiding in one of three areas: "the mountainous central Afghan province of Uruzgan, a cave-riddled region east of Kandahar near Pakistan, or caves in the Tora Bora region."[1] A week later, intelligence reports indicated that the terrorist leader had probably fled with as many as 1,200 followers into the White Mountains near the town of Tora Bora.[2] Located 35 miles southwest of Jalalabad in the Spin Ghar mountain range of Nangarhar Province, the extensive complex was reported to encompass more than 200 caves, some allegedly containing deep, wide tunnels that were ventilated, heated, and electrified.[3] In addition to being heavily fortified and situated on excellent defensive terrain, the location offered numerous escape routes across the porous border into Pakistan. While speaking with *Washington Post* reporter Pamela Constable in Jalalabad at the end of November, General Hazrat Ali, the security chief in northeastern Afghanistan, commented on al-Qaeda and Taliban morale: "They are armed, experienced, disciplined, and suicidal…. If they wanted to leave or give up fighting, they would have gone by now. But they have one slogan: to keep Tora Bora or be killed."[4]

As the fall of Kandahar became increasingly imminent, "it was apparent to commanders at all levels that the Tora Bora region was the next logical military search objective."[5] According to Pamela Constable, "Officials of the new Afghan regional government, an alliance of three anti-Taliban militia groups, say their men are experienced enough in mountain warfare to attack Tora Bora but that they need far more firepower to make a successful assault against the desperate and dedicated Arab fighters."[6] General DeLong, the deputy commander in chief at Central Command, later explained that the type and quantity of such support proved highly controversial:

> There was never any question that Tora Bora would see combat; the only question was if we would put troops on the ground or rely on an extensive bombing campaign and the Northern Alliance troops. We chose the latter—and have since been criticized for that decision by many pundits. But the simple fact is, we couldn't put a large number of our troops on the ground. The mountains of Tora Bora are situated deep in territory controlled by tribes hostile to the United States and any outsiders. The reality was, if we put our troops in there, we would inevitably end up fighting the Afghan villagers—creating bad will at a sensitive time—which was the last thing we wanted to do. So, instead, using the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], our special forces, and friendly Pashtun generals, we created "Eastern Alliance" forces. The plan was to force al-Qaeda and the Taliban from the high ground of the mountains and into the caves, and then bomb the hell out of the caves.[7]

When the producers of PBS's *Frontline* questioned General Franks about the same matter, he gave the following reply:

> The Afghans themselves wanted to get into Tora Bora. They wanted to do it very quickly. At that time, our special forces troopers were not yet in large numbers…. I made… a pretty good determination to provide support to that operation and to work with the Pakistanis along the Pakistani border to bring it to conclusion."[8]

A View from the Front

Gary Berntsen, the CIA's regional operational commander, played the opening gambit in the battle for Tora Bora by deploying an eight-man Jawbreaker team to Jalalabad on 18 November. Consisting of

four agency officers, three joint special operations soldiers, and a special forces medic, the team's job was to support and encourage General Hazrat Ali and his followers to pursue Osama bin Laden.[9] Commanders Haji Zaman and Haji Zahir also contributed their militias to the fight, raising the total number of participating southern Pashtun opposition group fighters to around 1,500.[10] Although opposition groups to the north and south had been eager to drive the Taliban and al-Qaeda from their cities and take control, the eastern militia groups' interests clearly diverged from those of the United States. As Pamela Constable reported, "Most regional officials are opposed to having Western troops enter the area and wish the Arabs would simply leave."[11]

The Jawbreaker team redeployed to the base of the White Mountains around the 26th of November after the nonstop bombing of cave-related targets at Tora Bora had begun.[12] After splitting the team in two, half went forward to "pin the enemy with their backs against the mountains to the south."[13] Setting up on a promontory overlooking an al-Qaeda camp in Milawa three days later, the forward element began directing repetitive air strikes against the encampment. With bin Laden and his men retreating further into the White Mountains, Berntsen asked Colonel Mulholland for permission to employ special forces—who were then in Kabul—at Tora Bora.[14]

On 3 December, Berntsen also asked General Dell L. Dailey, USA, for a battalion of Army Rangers to seal off the border and prevent the enemy's escape into Pakistan.[15] Despite repeated inquiries about the status of his request, the rangers never arrived, although Dailey did send a six-man joint special operations advance team to Tora Bora. Later, according to Berntsen, "General Dailey said that he was against introducing U.S. troops for fear of alienating our Afghan allies."[16]

While the request for a ranger battalion was not acted on, there was no denying that "the Jawbreaker element… was very small and the operatives needed assistance."[17] Although Task Force Dagger had already committed most of its forces elsewhere in Afghanistan, and Colonel Mulholland had misgivings about sending a lightly armed force against a strongly defended stronghold, he ordered Operational Detachment Alpha 572 (ODA 572) to Tora Bora on 2 December. The team linked up with General Ali two days later, and shortly afterward, the Afghan leader surprised American advisors by announcing his intent to begin the attack. Intending to recycle the plan that had worked so well in northern Afghanistan and was now achieving similar results in the south, ODA 572 offered to provide tactical advice and air support from the safety of observation posts while the Eastern Alliance advanced up a mountain canyon and assaulted the fortified tunnel complex. General Ali did not favor this idea, arguing that the close air support teams should accompany his forward troops during the attack.[18]

Returning from a brief coordination trip to Jalalabad, ODA 572 rejoined General Ali's forces near Pachir Wa Agam on 6 December and established observation post Cobra 25A on the eastern side of the canyon the following day.[19] Now supported by the special forces, the Afghan militiamen began to work their way into the mountains. However, the fighting halted unexpectedly for eight hours as al-Qaeda representatives attempted to negotiate with their Afghan brethren. Although those efforts apparently proved fruitless, the delay further convinced Berntsen that soldiers were needed on the ground to do the fighting and to block a possible al-Qaeda escape into Pakistan.[20] Adding to his frustration, an Afghan delivering food and water to the al-Qaeda forces had possibly spotted Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri.

ODA 572 pushed forward on 8 December, establishing observation post Cobra 25B on the northwestern side of the canyon, while on the same day,* Central Command deployed a 50-man detachment from Task Force Sword to Tora Bora, which assumed command and took control of the

*According to Gary Berntsen, the 40-man main body of the Task Force Sword detachment arrived on the morning of 10 December. (Berntsen, *Jawbreaker*, 298)

A Plan from the Past

During the first week in December, around the time Hamid Karzai was negotiating the surrender of Kandahar and Hazarat Ali was beginning his assault into the White Mountains, General Mattis proposed deploying Marines along the Afghan border to prevent the escape of Taliban and al-Qaeda forces into Pakistan.[21] He later explained that they were obviously tracking Osama bin Laden and that as they focused more and more on Tora Bora, he believed they could pursue and capture bin Laden. He didn't think the Northern Alliance would fight well in what was basically a foreign area for them.[22]

Although reticent to deploy forces directly from Forward Operating Base Rhino (FOB Rhino) while the Taliban still controlled Kandahar, General Mattis believed that once the stronghold was secure, seaborne elements from Task Force 58 could fly to Kandahar in KC-130 transports and then continue on to Tora Bora in CH-53 helicopters, reaching their objective within two to four days.[23]

Inspired by the U.S. Army's use of heliographs (devices that use mirrors to communicate over distances by reflecting light from the sun in code) during its 1886 campaign to capture the renegade Apache leader Geronimo, General Mattis wanted to airlift reinforced fire support teams onto ridge-top landing zones overlooking the mountain passes leading from Tora Bora into Pakistan that had been identified by the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity in Quantico, Virginia. "And on each of these positions," he later explained, "would be a platoon with a sniper team, a 60 or 81mm mortar, a forward air controller, an artillery forward observer, an independent corpsman, and five days of supplies."[24] Situated within sight of one another, "somewhat like the Crusader ports in Syria," he added, these positions would serve as the "anvil." Then, using the Australian Special Air Service and SEALs, the Marines from down below would bring in artillery from the two Marine expeditionary units and start pushing up into the mountains. The forward observers, snipers, and mortar teams—calling in close air and artillery support—would flush the enemy toward the Pakistan border.[25]

Ultimately, someone in Task Force 58's chain-of-command dismissed the idea. Although General Mattis did not know who rejected the plan or why, he lamented the enemy's escape at Tora Bora several months after the operation:

> We missed a lot of fleeting opportunities. In defense of CentCom [U.S. Central Command], it may have been they were willing to let a hundred enemy get away so that one innocent person was not killed, because if we lost the morale or the strategic high ground… that might have been more costly than allowing some of these people to get away. I had to look at it through a narrower prism while respecting that, because I knew we could have killed a lot more enemy…. That's not to be a criticism of them; it was based on where I was at [and] what I saw.[26]



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

BGen James N. Mattis, commander of Task Force 58, drafts correspondence in his office at Kandahar International Airport on 14 January 2002. During early December 2001, he lobbied for a Marine role in preventing the escape of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters into Pakistan.

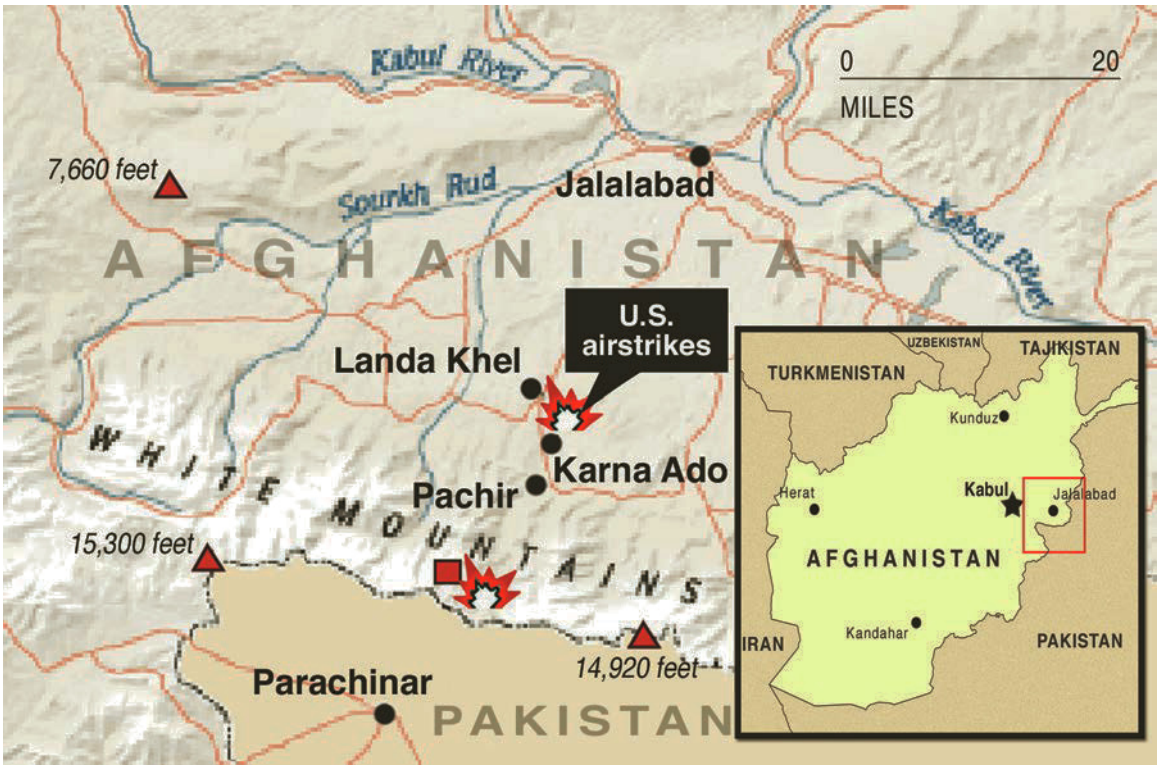


Diagram by Vincent J. Martinez

U.S. airstrikes on the Tora Bora and Milawa cave complexes in early December 2001 reportedly killed several senior al-Qaeda lieutenants and forced their troops to withdraw from the area.

battle. Able to operate with greater freedom than the Army Special Forces, the American and British joint special operating forces intended to maintain a quick reaction force at the Afghan headquarters, augment the A-team's two forward observation posts, and then maneuver additional observation posts forward in concert with Ali's advancing frontlines. Yet during his initial reconnaissance of the area, the task force commander realized that the Afghans had split into clusters of troops scattered randomly throughout the Panjchir Wa Agam Valley.[27] The next day, the Air Force dropped a 15,000-pound BLU-52 "daisy cutter" bomb—followed by several B-52 bomber strikes—on the fortifications where bin Laden had supposedly been spotted, hitting the target and achieving effect.[28]

The day of 10 December almost proved to be a serendipitous turning point in the battle for Tora Bora. Around 1600, while Task Force Sword prepared to deploy additional observation posts farther forward, the Afghans reported that they had surrounded Osama bin Laden and requested immediate support. When the special operating forces moved forward 90 minutes later, however, General Ali's forces were withdrawing to the rear for the evening, empty-handed. Meanwhile, opposing forces had engaged several soldiers who had initially gone forward with Ali and now blocked their egress routes. Special operating forces at Cobra 25A had, fortunately, closely monitored the events and identified several of the enemy's crew-served weapons positions, which the Air Force bombed for 11 hours that evening.

As the Eastern Alliance forces closed in on bin Laden's location, less positive news began to surface at the Pentagon. During a press conference, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul D. Wolfowitz admitted that the enemy was already withdrawing to the

south. He added that Pakistan's government was working to catch forces attempting to cross its borders, and Coalition naval vessels were ready to search ships for fugitives who might have made it past the soldiers to the coast.[29] Secretary Rumsfeld was even less optimistic during a news briefing the following day. While reiterating that Pakistani military forces were attempting to close the border and thwart the enemy's escape, he explained, "This is a very difficult thing to do. It is a porous border. It is a long border. It's a very complicated area to try to seal, and there's just simply no way you can put a perfect cork in the bottle."[30] At yet another press briefing less than two hours later, Marine General Peter Pace, deputy chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, provided additional clarification:

> We do not know who is escaping and who is not. It is reasonable to expect that some could get out of the mountain complex. I don't know if you've seen the relief maps of the area, but it's a very mountainous area. There are multiple routes of ingress and egress, so it's certainly conceivable that groups of 2, 3, 15, 20 could, walking out of there, in fact, get out.[31]

Although the prolonged bombing of their positions had forced the al-Qaeda elements to withdraw from the canyon, enabling the Afghan militia to move forward and occupy key terrain around bin Laden's suspected location on 11 December, Commander Haji Mohammed Zaman unexpectedly halted the advance that afternoon and began to negotiate for the enemy's conditional surrender[32] During a Pentagon briefing around the same time, reporters asked Secretary Rumsfeld what outcome he was working toward in Tora Bora and if he was interested in reaching a negotiated settlement of some kind. Rumsfeld responded,

> As you understand, we're not in control of every aspect of this because the larger number of forces are the Afghan forces themselves. Our interest remains exactly the same. It is to capture or kill all the al-Qaeda and prevent them from escaping into other countries or other locations in Afghanistan where they can continue their terrorist activities. It is to capture or kill the senior Taliban leadership. It is to disarm—have the opposition forces disarm—the remaining Taliban, and then they will decide what will happen with the lower-level Taliban Afghan forces who live in that country and undoubtedly will stay.[33]

During anther press briefing two days later, reporters again asked Secretary Rumsfeld if "in your mind, perhaps the administration's, that killing al-Qaeda is preferable to their surrender," and "did the United States in any way veto or nix some sort of surrender arrangement?"[34] Rumsfeld replied,

> The first choice is clearly surrender. It ends faster. It's less expensive. And we can encourage people to surrender. Now, there's a lot of misinformation floating around about somebody that, "Gee, they'll surrender if we'll let them turn themselves into the United Nations, or if you'll let us keep our weapons, of if you'll let us go back and become governor of Kandahar or something." I mean, this is not a drill where we're making deals. This is a—the purpose of this activity, the reason we're doing this is to defend the United States of America and our friends and allies. And that means you have to go after the terrorists. And we want to get the terrorists. Without question, we want to. And the fastest way to do that is if they all surrender, come in with a white flag, turn themselves in, and we could just deal with them. That would be wonderful…. To my knowledge, the United States did not nix or stop or put the kibosh on anything. I do not even know if anything was really offered.[35]

During the same briefing, General Myers clarified, "There has been no surrender by al-Qaeda, offered or accepted. Nor has there been any cease-fire in this effort. Our mission to eliminate the al-Qaeda, its network, and the Taliban in Afghanistan remains the same as it has from the beginning."[36]

Following the unintended operational pause on 11 December, Task Force Sword's commander decided to bring more of his forces forward, partly to motivate the Afghans to continue the offensive

and partly to compensate for the quick reaction force's inability to advance rapidly enough over the rugged terrain to be useful during an emergency, such as another sighting of Osama bin Laden. They directed effective fire against the enemy's positions for three days, gradually moving two forward observation posts up both sides of the canyon, each backed up by a mission support site that followed behind. The Afghan forces also continued to advance slowly up the canyons, although they stopped occasionally during the day to observe Ramadan and then withdrew at night for food and shelter. Task Force Sword maintained pressure on the opposing forces during the militiamen's absence by observing their campfires through thermal imaging devices and calling in additional close air support.[37]

Encouraged onward by the special operating forces, the Afghan militias began to remain in the field overnight and gradually reduce the remaining pockets of resistance. Back in Tampa, General Franks told reporters that Coalition forces were in the "midst of pitched battle" against 300 to 1,000 enemy fighters.[38] He described the terrain as two north-south running valleys south of Jalalabad and explained that while some opposition forces occupied the eastern and western sides, others were moving north and south in "a hammer and anvil" formation.[39] While speaking in Ireland on 14 December, Secretary Rumsfeld remarked optimistically that Coalition forces had advanced more than a mile closer to the cave complex and 50 al-Qaeda fighters had surrendered.[40]

Meanwhile, seven Pakistani battalions (approximately 4,000 soldiers) blocked al-Qaeda and Taliban routes of escape at the southern ends of the valleys.[41] Although Central Command would have preferred to use army forces along the border, restless tribes occupying this remote portion of Pakistan were sympathetic to bin Laden's cause and would only abide the presence of local frontier forces that were already stationed there.[42] General Franks nevertheless told reporters that the opposition leaders believed they had the majority of al-Qaeda contained.

On 15 December, members of the Jawbreaker team who were listening to a captured al-Qaeda radio apparently overheard Osama bin Laden's farewell speech, during which he apologized for leading his men into a trap.[43] Speaking to reporters while en route to Afghanistan the next day, Secretary Rumsfeld confirmed that fighting in the Tora Bora region had subsided. He said that Coalition forces had captured 11 and killed 200 al-Qaeda fighters, while 2,000 others continued to flee the area.[44] Although General Ali declared victory a day after that, back in Washington Admiral John Stufflebeem cautioned that there were still isolated pockets of al-Qaeda fighting in the area, and that many of them were on the run. He had reports of them leaving the area and some reports—none of which had been confirmed—that they had left the area.[45] On 19 December, after reaching a "general consensus that the surviving al-Qaeda forces had either fled to Pakistan or melted into the local population," Task Force Sword withdrew from the battlefield.[46] During a news briefing that afternoon, Secretary Rumsfeld told reporters,

> The Pakistani army is doing a good job along the border of Afghanistan. They have captured a very large number—hundreds—of people who were fleeing over the border. And we have people that are communicating with them and doing everything humanly possible to avoid having the people that we're pressing in Afghanistan from moving into neighboring countries, where they could cause damage and terrorist acts there. Our goal is to stop them, not to simply move the problem from one nation to another.[47]

At the same time, other news sources reported that General Franks had "proposed that United States Marines or Army troops be deployed to comb the wild terrain of Tora Bora to try to determine the fate of al-Qaeda leaders."[48] Secretary Rumsfeld's summary of the current state of affairs in that region helps to put Franks's request into context:

> The battle, the pitched battle that was going on for some period of time, is not taking place at the moment. That does not mean it will not start up again. A good many of the caves and the

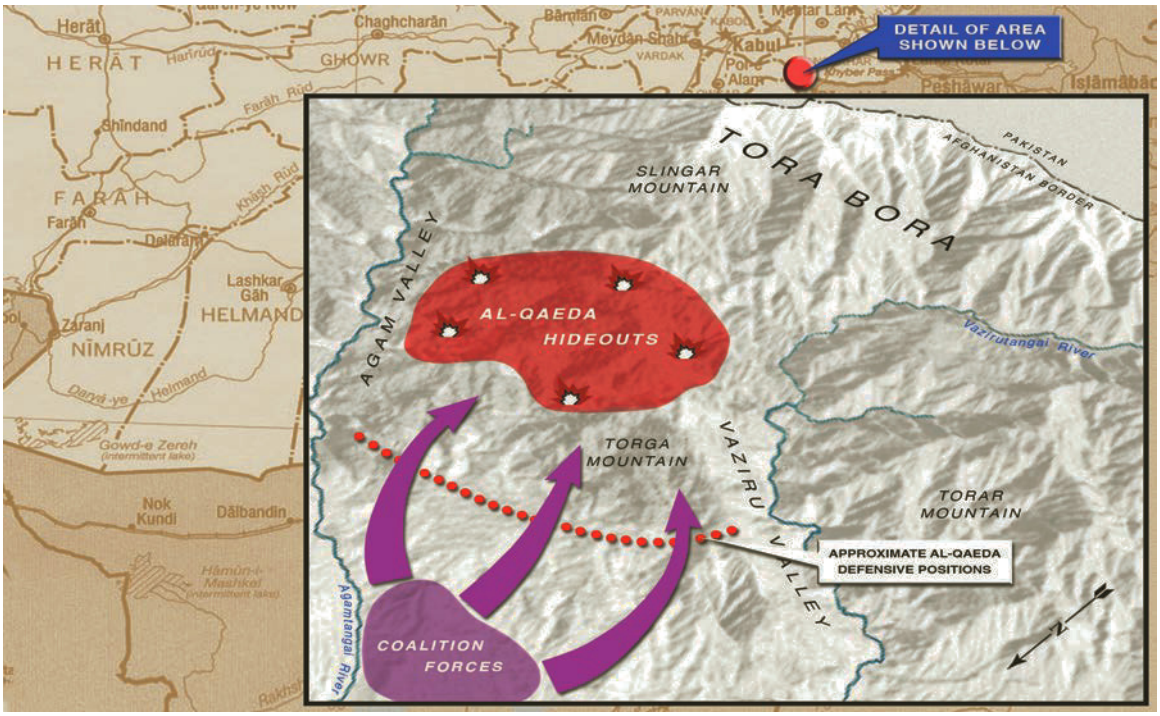


Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Coalition forces continued their southerly advance into the Tora Bora mountains of northeastern Afghanistan, forcing resistant al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters to retreat toward the Pakistan border on 17 December 2001.

> tunnels have been closed, bombed, damaged, blown up; a good many have not been. There are an enormous number of caves and tunnels. So what's taking place is, since there is no longer a large physical resistance, the people that are there are moving into the open—still-open tunnels and caves—and looking around, gathering intelligence information, seeing who's there and proceeding kind of systematically with that.
>
> There are still anti-Taliban forces in the area. There are still U.S. forces in the area. There are still airplanes that are available to do whatever they are called upon to do. And at the moment, it's in just a slightly different phase than it had been.[49]

On 20 December, Task Force Dagger deployed Operational Detachment Alpha 561 (ODA 561) to Tora Bora "to assist ODA 572 as it searched caves and tunnels for intelligence documents, any indication of bin Laden's presence, and to take DNA samples from dead enemy bodies."[50]

A Base Too Far

While General Mattis's suggestion of employing Marines at Tora Bora may have been initially rejected, as the battle neared conclusion, Task Force 58 found itself serving in a quasi-reserve status to support continued operations in the region. Mattis first learned around 14 December that General Franks was considering the possibility of using Marines to "encourage" the opposition groups to continue fighting, as special operating forces urged the Eastern Alliance to complete its attack against the cave complex. Three days later, as General Ali proclaimed victory over al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Task Force 58 began to modify its three-part plan for collapsing the Marine footprint in Afghanistan to a main operating base. The 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (26th MEU) would close the intermediate operating base at Shamsi while retaining forces at Pasni, FOB Rhino, and Kandahar. Meanwhile, the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) would shift to Kandahar, while Company L subsequently closed FOB Rhino and

eventually rejoined Battalion Landing Team 3/6 at the airport. At the same time, Task Forces 64 (Australian Special Air Service) and K-Bar (Navy SEALs) would link up with the 15th MEU and establish a small, temporary operating base near Tora Bora.[51]

That General Mattis issued Fragmentary Order 004 on 18 December—directing reconstitution of the amphibious forces in time for the 15th MEU to depart Fifth Fleet's area of responsibility one month later—is evidence of the tentative nature of the reinforcement mission. However, General Mikolashek issued both warning and operations orders (OpOrd 02-26) to Task Force 58 that same day, directing Mattis to begin planning for an on-order attack to clear Tora Bora of hostile forces.[52] During an 18 December news brief at the Pentagon, General Pace explained the deliberate nature of that mission:

> This really is very, very difficult. First of all, you have several valleys in the Tora Bora complex. Each of them is several miles long. In each of those valleys, you have several hundred caves. And you want to go through very methodically, one by one, and if it's been closed by bombs, determine whether or not you want to open it up to see what's in there. And if it's not been closed by bombs, you have to determine whether or not it's worth going in. So it's going to be step-by-step, cave-by-cave, and to put a time limit on that would be imprudent right now.[53]

Placing the issue of redeployment on hold, General Mattis and his staff began to consider their options in earnest. While the Marines would close FOB Rhino as planned, 15th MEU would become Task Force 58's point of main effort,* deploying two rifle companies and two artillery batteries to Jalalabad by C-130.[54] The advance party would go forward no earlier than the evening of 20 December with the intention of establishing a third forward operating base at Jalalabad within five days of receiving an execute order and conducting combat operations in Tora Bora within six days.[55] This would be no small task. Although anti-Taliban forces held the airfield, the Soviets had heavily mined the surrounding area, and the runway was in poor condition. Moreover, winter was rapidly closing in and flying conditions at 7,000 feet were hazardous at best.[56]

On 19 December, as Task Force Sword departed Tora Bora, General Franks issued an execute order** for operations in Tora Bora.[57] General Mattis subsequently issued a supplement to the previous day's redeployment order, directing the 15th MEU to begin planning for a movement into northeastern Afghanistan.[58] Reflecting several years later on receipt of the mission, Colonel Waldhauser explained,

> After a while… we [were] almost like victims of our [own] success: "You guys can do anything." Then they start talking about going to Tora Bora, which was another 400 miles from [FOB Rhino]. You go, "Wow." I mean… at what point do we kind of say, "Even we can't do this."[59]

Around this time, stories describing the impending operation began to surface in the press. An article appearing in the *New York Times* reported that General Franks had proposed that the United States deploy several hundred conventional forces "to comb the wild terrain of Tora Bora to try to determine the fate of al-Qaeda leaders." It was less clear, however, who would carry out the mission. The article suggested that, in addition to the Marines at Kandahar, troops might be drawn from the 10th Mountain Division in Uzbekistan or even the 101st Airborne Division back in the United States.[60]

Between 19 and 24 December, the 15th MEU staff shifted slightly from planning for "combat ops in the vicinity of Tora Bora" to planning for a "movement to Jalalabad and combat operations in the vicinity of Tora Bora."[61] Lieutenant Colonel Olson, the expeditionary unit's operations officer, described the sequence from his perspective:

*The 26th MEU came close to pulling Battery K from the U.S. embassy security mission in Kabul to provide fire support for the expedition. (McDonough intvw)

**For some unknown reason, VAdm Charles Moore chose to readdress this order. (TF 58 Chronology, 11)

> The initial taskers were to support the special forces' efforts up there with up to two rifle companies to go and actually take cave complexes that we thought were still occupied by as many as 1,000 al-Qaeda, Chechen, Arab, and hard-core Taliban fighters. Over the course of three nights of planning, as we watched the campfires move closer to the Pakistan border, it was [clear] that people were leaving these cave complexes and moving across these 12–14,000-foot mountain passes in the dead of winter…. [General Mikolashek] decided it was time to put boots on the ground and go exploit these other sites…. So we made plans to move… enough combat power to hold Jalalabad airfield… and actually conduct movements to contact up these valleys into this cave area.[62]

As Task Force 58's planners began to identify their logistical requirements, it became apparent that while the Marines might be able to endure cold nights at FOB Rhino wearing lightweight utilities and desert boots, they were ill-equipped for winter warfare in the mountains.[63] Lieutenant Colonel Broadmeadow and the logistics section developed an extensive list of cold weather gear that they would need to fight in Tora Bora. Some of these items included polypropylene underwear, fleece undergarments, socks, and vapor-barrier boots with thinsulate inserts, gators, balaclavas, squad stoves, and cold-weather lubricant for their weapons. They also considered the possibility of locating mountain warfare instructors* to help conduct cold-weather training.[64]

The 15th MEU had similar concerns. Colonel Waldhauser and his staff emphasized the need to build a logistics capability prior to establishing the combat force, highlighting such issues as force sustainment, fuel, cold-weather gear, aircraft and airfield maintenance, and base security. Beyond that, they envisioned being operational by 25 December, with Battalion Landing Team 1/1 providing 800 Marines who could form 6 to10 interdiction teams of 15 or 30 personnel. To this, the 26th MEU would also contribute additional force reconnaissance assets, mortars, artillery, forward air controllers, and a tactical air control party.[65]

Rather than conducting an arduous road march from FOB Rhino or Kandahar, Task Force 58 intended to fly its assault force to Bagram on four C-130s (two Marine and two special operations aircraft) and then move on Jalalabad. Cognizant that the rough terrain would influence their tactics, once on the ground they planned to form one aviation combat element, fold Task Force 64 under the 15th MEU, maintain multiple quick reaction forces, and conduct "mutually supporting… combat patrols and observation patrols."[66]

Around 20 December, as potential courses of action were starting to solidify into a concrete plan, Task Force 58 received what must have been disappointing insight into higher headquarters' intent.** From Central Command's perspective, the main purposes of the operation were to motivate General Ali and the Afghan forces to continue fighting and to check the caves for al-Qaeda and intelligence. Moreover, General Franks did not want to employ the Marines, but instead preferred to use Ali or deploy additional special forces detachments to Tora Bora. Yet just in case those options did not work, the Marines needed to be ready to deploy a command group and two rifle companies north to Bagram within 48 hours.[67]

Central Command also emphasized that it never intended for Task Force 58 to operate independently and there would be no blocking-force mission for the Marines. While they could bring their mortars to Bagram, the artillery batteries would have to remain

*On 3 December 2001, the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory sponsored a tabletop seminar in Quantico, Virginia. While addressing the possibility of employing a winter warfare capability in northeastern Afghanistan, they estimated that the Marine Corps' Mountain Warfare Training Center could develop a cadre of 150 personnel trained in fire support and cold-weather mountaineering by mid-January 2002.

**LtCol Lethin listed the following 12 points in his personal notebook under the heading "CinC Guidance": no blocking force mission; two companies with command group; no artillery, mortars are okay; helicopter supporting gun—difficult; use Air Force for fire support; advance echelon in Bagram; purpose is to push Ali (check caves for al-Qaeda and intelligence); never intended to work independently; on-order mission only (no earlier than 25 December); commander in chief does not want to do; only if other options don't work (money to Ali, more ODA); must be ready to execute within 48 hours. (Lethin Notebook)

behind, and the Air Force would provide necessary fire support. General DeLong's priorities were reiterated as the destruction of al-Qaeda and the Taliban and the exploitation of cave sites near Khost.[68]

Adapting to the new guidance, Task Force 58 modified its original plan to reflect the scaled-back mission. The abbreviated advance party would now be limited to seven personnel: General Mattis and his aide, the CIA liaison, two radio operators, and two "shooters." They would be followed by the main assault force: an infantry battalion-minus, composed of two rifle companies supported by 81mm mortars and Cobra gunships.[69] After analyzing the commander's intent, General Mattis concluded that the force composition was poorly suited for the mission at hand and that the Marines were intended as a "demonstration force only."[70]

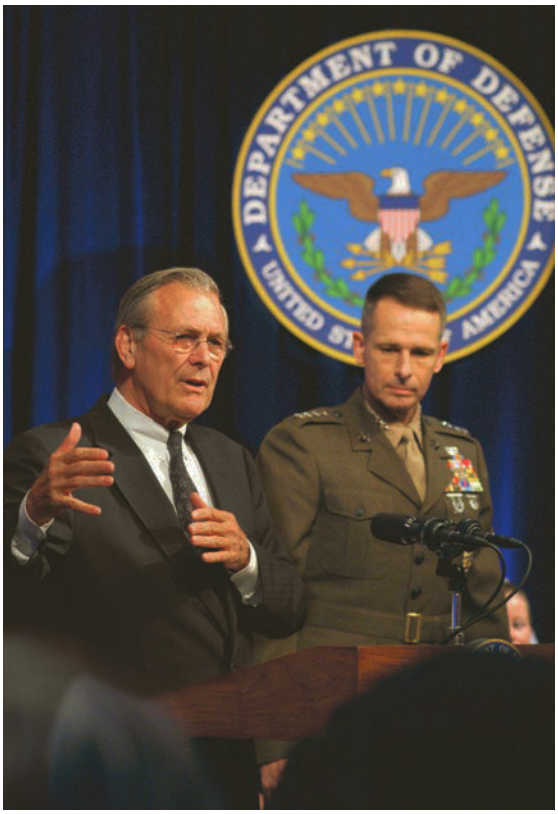
Newspapers contained more stories about the Tora Bora mission on 21 December, most reporting on a news briefing that Secretary Rumsfeld and General Pace had held at the Pentagon. While denying that constrained rules of engagement had allowed the enemy to escape, Rumsfeld emphasized,

> The campaign to deal with the terrorist problems in Afghanistan continues. It continues without pause, although in a somewhat different phase. There's still much to do. There are still pockets of resistance throughout the country. The president intends to see the campaign through until the al-Qaeda and the Taliban forces have been rooted out and dealt with.[71]

Later he added,

> What you have is a bunch of caves. They're being triaged and put in priority order. Then the Afghan forces and coalition forces are going into those caves and looking for information and evidence and people and weapons and… trying to determine what we can do to deal with terrorists all across the globe.[72]

When one reporter inquired if the troops that were being sent were U.S. Marines, Rumsfeld responded, "We're not going to get into it."[73]



Official Department of Defense photo
Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen Peter Pace respond to questions during a briefing at the Pentagon.

Another newspaper reported that Rumsfeld had said that scores of American troops and British special forces were already operating in the region, and he had "approved the deployment of a substantial number of American troops to search the caves of Tora Bora for die-hard terrorists."[74] Perhaps most telling, one account said that, although military officials were leaning toward the use of Marines already acclimated to operations in Afghanistan, they were concerned about the effect the operation might have on security at the Kandahar airfield and the detainment center. The other option they were considering was the use of soldiers trained in cold-weather combat already stationed in Uzbekistan.[75]

General Mikolashek issued Fragmentary Order 01 to Operations Order 02-026, which addressed

operations to "attack [and] clear Tora Bora," on the same day as this latest flurry of newspaper accounts.[76] While there is little indication what the order specifically meant to the Marines, it apparently remained unclear whether higher headquarters intended to actually deploy the battalion landing team or merely have it ready to go north on short notice. Revealing his frustration over the abbreviated time line, Lieutenant Colonel Lethin wrote in his notebook, "CFACC [Combined Forces Air Component Command] must deploy forces to Jalalabad… it's time to step up to the plate. Marines need help now!"[77] This likely referred to the fact that the Marines, in the course of their planning, determined that C-17 support for force movement would require an air base far from the actual fight and that in order to move all of the forces, KC-130 support would require a week.[78]

This was not the only source of frustration for the Marines. Captain Treglia, who had recently returned to FOB Rhino following a long-range reconnaissance patrol, remembered hearing Colonel Waldhauser state, "I'm not going to send someone up to do something that doesn't make sense. When we get the gear, we'll go."[79] Treglia observed that General Mattis felt much the same way and had told Waldhauser, "We don't half jump into something…. If you want to go push through valleys in Afghanistan, yeah we'll go, but first we'll make sure that we have everything that we need to do it." These and other issues may have contributed to a dispute reported to have occurred around this time, which apparently lead to a memorandum of understanding* stipulating that Central Command would only employ Marine Corps forces in their traditional air-ground task force configuration.[80]

As Task Force 58 continued to stand by for orders, a sense of resolution was reached on 23 December. As Central Command granted conditional approval for Lieutenant General Mikolashek's concept of operations in Tora Bora and issued Fragmentary order 02-045 to Lieutenant General T. Michael Moseley, USAF, regarding airfield survey operations at Jalalabad, it also issued an execute order for reconstitution of both the 15th and 26th MEUs.[81] General Mikolashek subsequently issued Operations Order 02-032 the following day. Although it authorized the 15th MEU to begin reconstituting itself on board vessels of the *Peleliu* ready group, it also required that Task Force 58 remain ready to deploy a portion of its remaining forces to Tora Bora if that became necessary.[82] General Mattis thus ordered Colonel Waldhauser to begin his retrograde as originally planned, and the subordinate commands started their gradual withdrawal to Pasni, Kuwait, and then the West Coast of the United States.[83]

Before long, newspapers started carrying stories that were increasingly pessimistic about the Tora Bora campaign and bin Laden's fate. One report on Christmas Day quoted General Franks as stating that there were really only three possibilities: he could be dead in the area of Tora Bora, he could still be alive somewhere else in Afghanistan, or he may have gotten into Pakistan. He added, "Right now we don't know which of these three categories he's in."[84] At a news briefing the following day, Secretary Rumsfeld explained that even if the United States did capture bin Laden, the problem of global terrorism would not go away because someone else in the organization would take over.[85] The same day, reporting from Jalalabad, other journalists wrote that the United States was now offering incentives to the Afghan forces to search for Osama bin Laden and foreign al-Qaeda fighters, and if that option did not work, they would resort to employing additional special operating forces rather than conventional Army and Marine troops.[86]

When questioned about the development during a Department of Defense news briefing on 27 December, General Myers responded,

*The memorandum may have also provided Marines with enough leverage to extricate themselves from Operation Anaconda during March 2002, which some perceived to be poorly planned. (Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 135–36)



Official Department of Defense photo

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (right) responds to a reporter's question. Rumsfeld and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Richard B. Myers, USAF, conducted the joint press briefing in the Pentagon.

> We are using Afghan opposition groups to assist us in the Tora Bora region. We also have U.S. Special Forces with them. So, both those factions are working. Obviously, there are many ways to incentivize the opposition groups, and it may be that cold-weather clothing is more important than money and so forth. But, all that is being worked to solicit their cooperation in this endeavor.
>
> As to the Marines… we reserve the right to use any part of our military force as we see fit. And right now they are not in the Tora Bora region. That does not mean in the future they couldn't be.[87]

When asked if he and the secretary considered it too dangerous for U.S. forces to go into the caves in numbers, Secretary Rumsfeld interrupted,

> Absolutely not…. Look, from the very beginning, we said that we were going to have the Afghan forces that were in that region work the problem. To the extent they needed additional help, we would try to get Afghan forces from other regions of the country. And to the extent they needed additional help, we would use U.S. forces. There are U.S. forces currently with the Afghan forces doing that job. That is exactly the way it's always been. The stuff you're reading about in the paper, that there was a decision to send in 500 Marines and a decision to not send in 400 Marines—that's all newspaper talk—just flat out. We have been consistent from the very beginning that we would have the number of people doing that job that we felt was appropriate. And that is exactly what we've been doing in the priority order that I indicated.[88]

Wrapping Up

By the end of the offensive portion of the operation, Afghan and special operations forces had killed roughly 250 al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in and around Tora Bora, while Pakistani military forces captured another 90 or so on the opposite side of the border.[89] Osama bin Laden was likely present between 9 and 14 December, but the small contingent of special operating forces proved insufficient to block southern routes into Pakistan, and the Eastern Alliance proved more interested in looting abandoned caves or accepting bribes to let al-Qaeda escape than in capturing them.[90] According to Gary Berntsen, "Bin Laden split his force in two. One group, numbering 135 men, headed east into Pakistan…. A number of al-Qaeda detainees later confirmed that bin Laden escaped with another group of two hundred Saudis and Yemenis by a more difficult eastern route over difficult, snow-covered passes into the Pashtun tribal area of Parachinar, Pakistan."[91]

Following the battle, ODAs 561 and 572 began searching the area for information. Although they found ammunition, weapons, paper and electronic documents, and videotapes, they soon realized that local Afghans had already pillaged many of the caves and that the likelihood of discovering intact intelligence was limited.[92] With the need to reinforce search operations in the eastern mountains now greatly diminished, Central Command finally released the Marines from their on-call mission on 9 January.[93] This action appears as almost an afterthought, for by this time Colonel Waldhauser and the 15th MEU had already left the country, and Colonel Frick and the 26th MEU had become heavily engaged in a series of exploitation missions elsewhere. Back at Tora Bora, after policing the battlefield, Operational Detachment Alpha 527 departed on 17 January, followed by ODA 561 on 22 January.

In retrospect, there appear to be a number of contributing factors that limited Marine participation in the Tora Bora campaign to operational planning. General Franks and Secretary Rumsfeld may have preferred to use indigenous or special operating forces, and the mission faded once the Afghan militias returned to the battlefield. The lack of airlift necessary to transport the Marines to Jalalabad in a timely fashion, the absence of cold-weather equipment necessary to outfit the infantry, or the realization that Osama bin Laden was either dead or hiding elsewhere could have played roles as well. It is also possible that Central Command always intended to use the threat of Marine involvement as a tool to motivate the Eastern Alliance. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel D. Yoo, 26th MEU's operations officer, later reflected that an information campaign was going on—putting in conventional ground forces, especially Marines, would be enough to change a lot of people's thinking or cause them to react.[94]


CONDORS
16

Chapter 13
Sensitive Site Exploitation and Security Missions

Central Command established a list of sensitive locations that required assessment by Coalition forces in Afghanistan, directing Task Force 58 to conduct or support exploitation missions in the Kandahar region. Often working in conjunction with Task Force K-Bar, the Marines and sailors developed an aggressive schedule in which the supporting and supported relationship changed according to site location, asset availability, and information sensitivity. During many of the operations, Task Force 58 provided helicopter assault support or served as a quick reaction force while exploitation teams inspected the site. In addition to Army Special Forces and Navy SEALs, these teams involved Canadian, Dutch, German, and New Zealand special operating forces who did not possess their own aviation assets. Captain Robert Harward, USN, Task Force K-Bar's commander, acknowledged his reliance on the flexibility and responsiveness provided by Task Force 58's helicopter crews, commenting in his situation report, "By all accounts, this Navy–Marine Corps team swiftly jelled into a potent fighting force and distinguished itself on the battlefield."[1]

Garmabak Ghar Training Camp

One of the first exploitation missions conducted by the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (26th MEU)—and one of the last to involve elements of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU)—took place in Garmabak Ghar. Situated in mountainous terrain approximately 50 miles northwest of Kandahar, the site was rumored to be a former Taliban training base and cave complex. Task Force 58 had planned the operation in conjunction with local anti-Taliban forces, interagency assets, and special operating forces.[2]

On 28 December, a flight of four aircraft from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (HMM-365) flew members of Task Force 64, the Australian Special Air Service (ASAS) unit attached to Task Force 58, into the mountains north of Garmabak Ghar to establish surveillance and reconnaissance over the target area. The flight included a Super Cobra, a Huey, and two Sea Knight helicopters. Due to the rough terrain, the Australians fast-roped onto a pinnacle landing zone, "the first insert of its kind for Marine aviation in Afghanistan."[3] The following evening, another flight of 13 aircraft, including one Huey, three Super Cobra, three Sea Stallion, and six Sea Knight helicopters, airlifted Task Force 64's assault force and associated patrol vehicles onto the objective.



Official Department of Defense photo.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: SR476510
Prestrike image of a terrorist training camp in Garmabak Ghar, Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, one of the CH-53 Sea Stallions experienced a hard landing during the insert, damaging its front landing gear.[4] Although no personnel were hurt in the crash, the aircraft's nose gear was driven back into the cockpit and it was no longer airworthy.[5] While Lieutenant William Lennon and a platoon of light armored vehicles (LAV-25s) originally assigned to support Task Force 64 secured the crash site, the chemical-biological intelligence support team and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

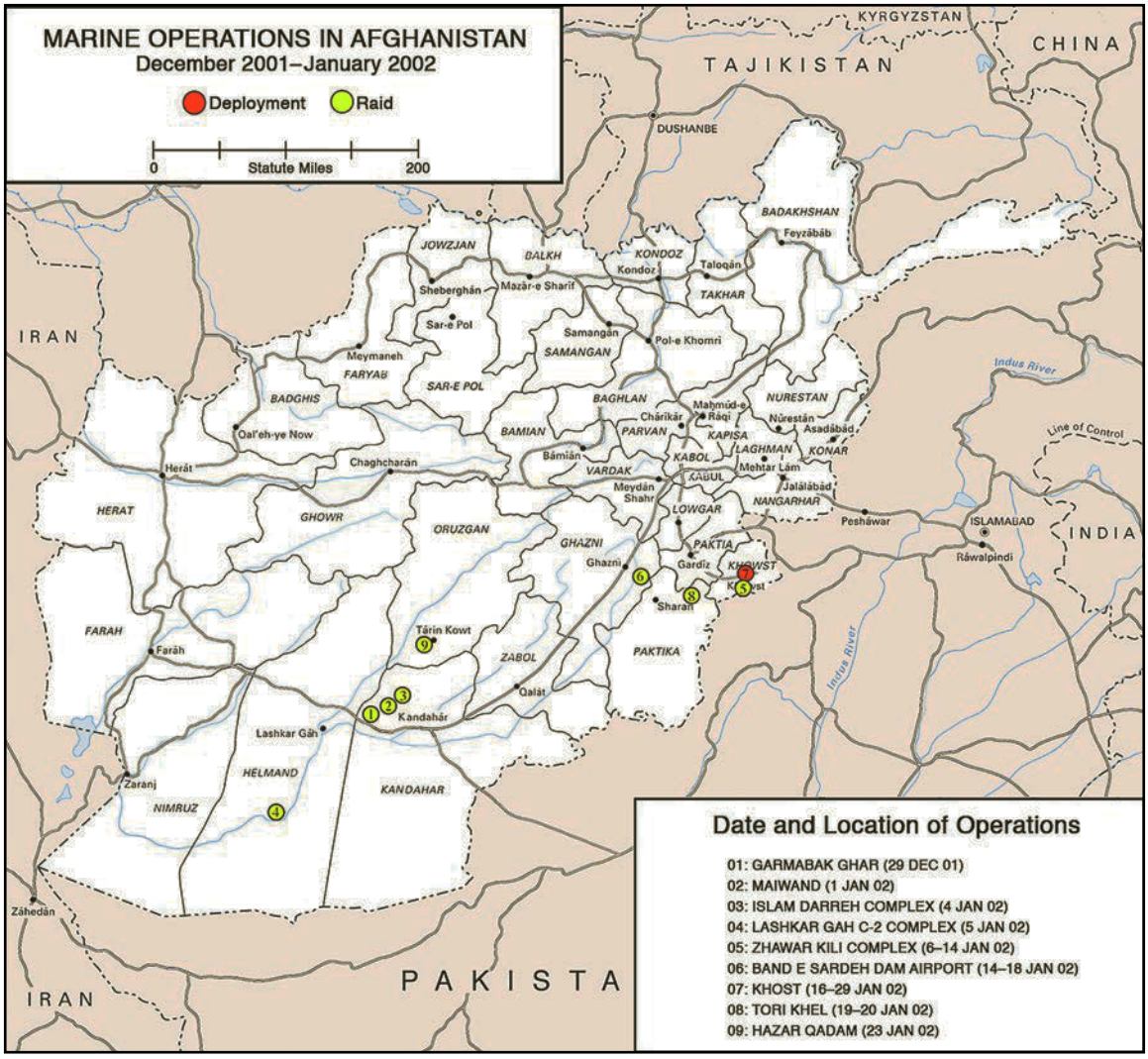


Diagram by Vincent J. Martinez

Marine Operations in Afghanistan December 2001-January 2002.

officers conducted a thorough search of the area.[6] "There was no resistance," Lennon recalled, "but there was a lot of information."[7]

Tactical recovery operations commenced that same evening. First Lieutenant John S. DeForest arrived with a squad of Marines from Battalion Landing Team 3/6's (BLT 3/6's) 81mm mortar platoon and five mechanics from HMM-365, while First Lieutenant Michael J. Hendrickson brought four vehicles from Battalion Landing Team 1/1's (BLT 1/1's) light armored reconnaissance company.[8] The next morning, the Marines discovered that the helicopter pilots had landed their aircraft on top of a finger with an 11-degree pitch. Working under the supervision of Master Sergeant Michael L. Holguin, they pivoted the fuselage to face down the long axis of the slope and then used their retriever vehicle (LAV-R) to tow the aircraft to flat ground at the base of the hill.[9]

At this point, Second Lieutenant Jason D. Roach arrived with a squad from 2d Platoon, Company I, to relieve BLT 3/6's mortarmen; the

following day, they were augmented by a second squad from 2d Platoon. The mechanics from HMM-365 used a jack to raise the front fuselage and replace the aircraft's nose wheel, enabling it to be flown back to Kandahar under its own power. After the helicopter reached the airfield on 2 January, mechanics then disassembled it for shipment to the United States and further repair.[10]

Maiwand Garrison

At 2330 on the evening of 31 December, a second raid force assembled near the tarmac at Kandahar International Airport.[11] Its target for the following morning was an enemy military facility (AQ-024) in the village of Maiwand, located approximately 40 miles northwest of the airport and 3 miles north of Highway 1.[12] The base had been a training camp for Taliban and al-Qaeda forces before the war, and intelligence sources now indicated that 50 to 75 of their troops were still operating near the objective.[13] Some of the Marines were familiar with the area since it was situated just north of "the evil village" that BLT 1/1's interdiction force had passed through while moving toward Kandahar three weeks earlier.[14]

Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jerome Lynes, the raid force consisted of BLT 3/6's tactical command group; 26th MEU's force reconnaissance platoon, led by First Lieutenant Waheed U. Khan; BLT 1/1's light armored reconnaissance company and BLT 3/6's light armored reconnaissance platoon, led by Major Impellitteri; and elements of Company K, led by Captain Todd S. Tomko.[15] While operating under tactical control of BLT 3/6 at the time, Impellitteri was responsible for navigation during the movement, and his company served as the raid force's security element. Due to the distances involved in the operation, the raid force relied on



Photo by LtCol Jerome M. Lynes

LtCol Jerome M. Lynes, commander of Battalion Landing Team 3/6, uses a terrain model to explain the scheme of maneuver to be employed while raiding a suspected al-Qaeda garrison in Maiwand. The rehearsal of concepts drill occurred at Kandahar International Airport on 31 December 2001.



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020101-N-2383B-502

Members of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit raid a suspected al-Qaeda garrison in Maiwand, Afghanistan, on 1 January 2002. They were searching for weapons, ammunition, and intelligence sources to exploit.

tactical satellite radios to maintain communication with higher headquarters; Colonel Lynes later learned that personnel as far away as the U.S. European Command Center had monitored his progress.[16]

The Marines departed at 0030 on 1 January 2002, heading north on Highway 4 in a column of 8 humvees and 15 light armored vehicles. Upon reaching the southern entrance to Kandahar, they stopped at an Afghan military checkpoint and linked up with 15 of Sharzai's militiamen who would accompany them on the raid. They also linked up with a CIA officer and several special forces soldiers from Operational Detachment Alpha 583.[17]

Major Impellitteri had met Siddiqullah, the Afghan leader, earlier, remembering that he had fought as a member of the mujahideen as a teenager and "had the eyes of a stone-cold professional soldier."[18] He also noted that the Afghans, lacking tactical vehicles, rode in yellow Datsun station wagon taxies. After tucking the civilian vehicles into the military convoy, the Marines headed west on Highway 1 for approximately an hour, toward an objective rally point located approximately six miles from the target.[19] Meanwhile, Impellitteri contacted the two armored reconnaissance platoon commanders in Garmabak Ghar by radio, briefly explained the concept of operations, and directed them to join the raid force as it proceeded west. He later recalled,

> I told them the positions that I wanted them to operate in, but by this time, you don't have to give a five-paragraph order anymore. It's actually a waste of time because everybody knows what they need to do. They just need to be given a specific task.[20]

The raid force reached its rally point and linked up with the seven LAV-25s from Garmabak Ghar early that morning. While maintaining blackout

conditions and remaining alert to any threat, the Marines made final preparations for the assault. Working under the low illumination of chemical lights with maps and aerial photographs spread across the front of his humvee, Colonel Lynes explained the scheme of maneuver to an interpreter, who then translated the information for Siddiqullah. One last minute change was to have the militiamen form the "assault element" rather than the force reconnaissance platoon, as originally planned. The advantage of having the Afghan fighters participate in the search was that they could quickly differentiate innocent civilians from the Taliban.[21]

The raid force stepped off at 0400, after completing its back briefs, rehearsals, and weapons checks. During its movement toward the objective, it received reports from a Navy P-3 Orion flying overhead that personnel were moving about the complex. After coming within a kilometer of the garrison, Major Impellitteri split off with his light armored reconnaissance company to secure an outer cordon around the garrison. As the armored vehicles were pulling into position, the dismounted troops approached the first of 14 separate walled compounds.[22] Flying overhead, a Huey and two Cobra helicopters and two Harrier jets* stood ready to provide close air support.[23]

By 0530, Captain Tomko and Company K had established a second inner cordon, and the assault force was poised to enter the compound at its predesignated location. In the predawn light, as part of a coordinated diversion, a Cobra helicopter flew over the 14-foot adobe walls and confirmed activity within the enclosure. Marines would later learn that their raid had coincided with the villagers' call to prayer, perhaps contributing to their ability to approach the objective undetected.[24]



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN

Smiling children wave at members of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit following a raid on a suspected al-Qaeda military garrison in Maiwand on 1 January 2002.Although prepared to engage hardened enemy fighters, the Marines attracted the interest of curious Afghan villagers after their search was complete.

*The Harriers had been flown into Kandahar the previous evening and represented the first fixed-wing tactical aircraft to land and take off from Afghanistan. (HMM-365 ComdC 2001, 8)

Colonel Lynes gave the command to begin the assault, and the Coalition force quickly entered the gated compound with their weapons raised. A loud verbal exchange ensued between the Afghan militiamen and village elders, although after several minutes, the locals signaled their willingness to cooperate. Assisted by an interpreter, Marines from Company K escorted the male Afghans into a temporary holding area outside the compound, while a guarded elder sequestered the women and children in an "enclosed location in order to adhere to sensitivities of local customs."[25] Augmented by explosive ordnance personnel, the raid force then swept the compound, clearing each room.

During the next six hours, the combined American-Afghan force repeated the process at each of the remaining compounds. Major Impellitteri recalled,

> For a while, the main compound itself had been empty, and then all of a sudden there were 30 people, then there were 40 people, then there were 50 or 60 people…. What it turned out to be was that the locals had taken control [of]… the garrison because it was nice for them to own, because they lived there…. And when the Taliban were gone, they scavenged everything that they possibly could, and they took possession of whatever was there.[26]

After searching the last compound, the raid force collapsed the outer cordon and retired to their objective rally point, shifting its location several kilometers to avoid revealing their position. The Marines waited patiently until 2300 before starting back to Kandahar, hoping to decrease the chance of an inadvertent incident by passing through the city late at night. They finally returned to the airport at 0500 on 2 January, just 36 hours after departing the Marine base. Reports of the results varied from one account that stated, "The mission was a total success with a large weapons cache and countless intelligence documents recovered" to another that said, "The site was unmanned and no significant numbers of weapons or communications equipment were found."[27]

For Central Command and Pentagon officials, the mission was likely the source of unexpected controversy. During a news briefing on 2 January, for example, one reporter asked why the Marines had required 200 personnel to accomplish the mission. Although Admiral Stufflebeem was admittedly unaware of the "specifics and numbers," he replied that doctrinally, Marines train to be self-contained; they take a relatively heavy force for perimeter security when they do a survey evaluation or security operation, and they secure the facility inside as well. This, he said, is the doctrinal difference between how the Marines and how other special operating forces train and do their work, which may be lighter and with fewer forces.[28]

Even more problematic, while Hamid Karzai implied that the Marines were involved in a massive manhunt for the Taliban's leader,[29] Central Command reportedly "stuck to its position that… no Marines left the Kandahar base on Monday on a mission related to the hunt for Mullah Omar, saying that movements at the time may have been misinterpreted by people who saw them."[30] Interestingly, Lieutenant Lennon, who had participated in the raid, later recalled that Omar had been rumored to have used the Maiwand facility as a hideout in the past. Perhaps the fugitive's absence during the raid influenced his opinion regarding the outcome of the operation: "Nothing significant came of it. Just a good opportunity to get out there and go through the planning steps and actually execute."[31]

In addition to asking about the size and purpose of the raid force, on 3 January members of the media questioned General Myers during a news briefing about the motive behind Central Command's apparent difference of opinion regarding Marine involvement during the New Year's Day operation:

> Can you clarify then what it was that the Marine helicopters that were seen taking off from Kandahar on Monday, fully loaded in combat gear—were those Marines part of that New Year's Day operation?… The reason that I ask is because when photographers saw those pictures, they then asked U.S. Central

> Command if in fact something—some operation was underway. Central Command very clearly said "No, there is nothing underway, there is nothing planned." And then it seemed like just 12 or 14 hours later, that in fact an operation was being talked about by Central Command, and I'm just wondering how that comports with the secretary's statement early on in this war that the Pentagon would never lie, because that was the impression that some people might have been left with.[32]

General Myers replied awkwardly, "I don't know the details…. I'm sure there is some confusion over the details." Secretary Rumsfeld then responded, "I was on vacation… but my recollection was that at one point there were some evidence gatherers from the Army, and someone may have gone to provide force protection for them. But does anyone know the facts? I don't." Next, Assistant Defense Secretary Victoria Clarke confirmed, "There's some confusion," while Rumsfeld sarcastically asked, "Is there?" and Myers added, "There still may be confusion." Rumsfeld finally ended the embarrassing exchange, which challenged the military's integrity, by clarifying that "any suggestion that it's intentional, I think, would be improper."[33]

Marines may have come to mind—as a possible ramification of the debate over the details of the Maiwand mission—when, at a news briefing on 14 January, Admiral Stufflebeem cautiously replied to reporters' questions regarding U.S. forces conducting searches on their own or with Afghan assistance:

> I'll be careful to say that I just haven't seen that we have had forces that just go out on their own, looking for caves, which is not to say that there haven't been. You've seen the Marines mount up in their armored vehicles and go off and do a surveillance and evaluation mission. I don't know that they had anti-Taliban forces with them in every case that they did that. So I'll suspect that in the majority, we're following the leads and being assisted by anti-Taliban forces to show us. And in cases where we may develop intelligence that leads us to an area where there aren't anti-Taliban forces to take us there, then I'm sure we've gone or will go.[34]

Islam Darreh Cave Complex

On 4 January, a flight of seven helicopters (an AH-1W, a UH-1N, and six CH-46s) from HMM-365 inserted elements of Task Force 64 and the 26th MEU into Islam Darreh, a cave complex located 37 miles northwest of Kandahar. The raid force inspected the former al-Qaeda facility for evidence of chemical and biological weapons and destroyed a cache of land mines before being extracted five hours after landing.[35]

Lashkar Gah Command and Control Center

After monitoring a suspected enemy command and control facility southwest of Lashkar Gah for more than a week, Task Force 58 decided to exploit the target by conducting a combined ground and air assault.[36] At Kandahar on 4 January, senior leaders and staff from each of the 26th MEU's major commands began to organize a company-sized raid for the following day. As the planners worked out the details of the operation, radio and force reconnaissance detachments headed to FOB Rhino, now abandoned, and began conducting directional finding and signal intelligence operations against suspected opposing forces in the objective area.[37]

Major Wesley Feight would serve as the raid force commander. First Lieutenant William L. Lombardo would lead the support element, including 1st Platoon, Company I, reinforced by assault and machine gun squads from the company's weapons platoon. Captain Khan would lead the assault element, composed of 26th MEU's force reconnaissance platoon, an explosive ordnance team from MEU Service Support Group 26 (MSSG 26), and five Afghan militiamen.[38] Members of Task Force 64, who had already been operating in the area for several days, would also lend a hand. The combined forces' target was a cluster of structures located approximately 50 miles southwest of Kandahar. Objective 1, a large compound with 17-foot walls, contained one building; Objective 2, situated along to the northwest side of the compound, was a large one-story complex



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020105-N-2383B-521

Three CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 prepare to take off from Kandahar International Airport on 5 January 2002. They are transporting members of the of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit during a raid against a suspected al-Qaeda command and control facility in Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan.

consisting of many small rooms; and Objective 3, an isolated building, was located to the southeast and separated from the compound.[39]

The heliborne assault force departed Kandahar around 1600 on 5 January, flying in two waves escorted by one Huey and three Cobras from HMM-365. An hour later, a detachment from the New Zealand Special Air Service (NZSAS) initiated the attack by isolating the objective area. It established two blocking positions along the main road, situated several kilometers to the north and south of the target.[40]

Following a quick aerial reconnaissance by one of the Cobras, the first division of four Sea Knights descended into Landing Zone Finch around 1700, located 200 meters west of the central compound.[41] This wave carried the raid force's command and support elements. Once on the ground, Lieutenant Lombardo's platoon established positions covering the southern and western approaches to the compound. The Marines spotted 4 Afghan men standing near the gated entrance to Objective 1 and 15 to 20 Afghans running from Objective 3; many in the latter group dropped to their knees and began to pray.[42]

The second division of four Sea Knights landed two minutes later. Captain Khan's assault element moved quickly past the infantry positions to Objective 1 and made contact with the compound's inhabitants. The anti-Taliban forces advised the local Afghans to disarm and cooperate, which they immediately did. Although the men claimed to support Governor Sharzai, Major Feight decided to detain them as a precaution until he could verify their identity. After the assault element had cleared the building associated with Objective 1, searching carefully from room to room, 1st Platoon assumed responsibility for guarding the structure and detainees. The reconnaissance platoon then cleared Objectives 2 and 3. During a general search of the

main compound, they recovered a radio, a machine gun, a rocket-propelled grenade launcher with six projectiles, four assault rifles, a large quantity of small arms ammunition, and documents believed to be of intelligence value. The Marines also recovered quantities of Afghan and Pakistani cash and "a powdery substance believed to be drugs."[43]

As the inspection occurred, large numbers of civilians approached the security forces on foot and in vehicles. The Marines adjusted their positions around the complex to better address the threat, while the NZSAS trailed a car that had circumvented their roadblock. Fortunately, neither of these advances turned hostile, and the raid force was able to complete its mission without incident.[44]

Extraction from the objective area involved two waves of four CH-46 helicopters, which arrived shortly after sunset. Unfortunately, one of the aircraft in the first wave damaged its landing gear while setting down.[45] After shuffling manifests to maintain accountability, Marines scheduled to travel on the damaged helicopter redistributed themselves among the remaining aircraft and the extraction proceeded as planned.[46] The Marines eventually returned the damaged aircraft to Kandahar, where they dismantled it and put it on a C-17 transport for shipment back to the United States.[47]

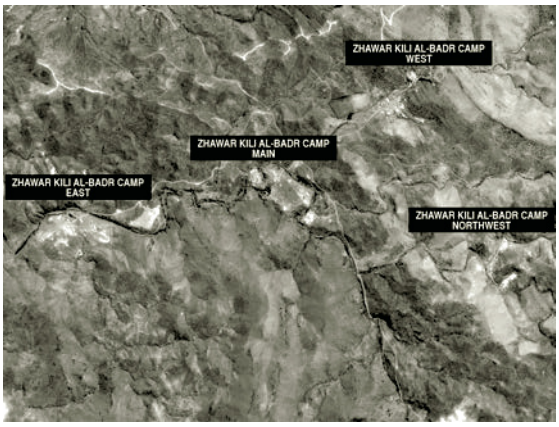
Because the Marines had not yet verified the identity of the four Afghan men seized at Objective 1, Major Feight decided to bring them back to Kandahar for temporary detainment in the short-term holding facility—it was later determined that the detainees were drug runners rather than al-Qaeda or Taliban fighters. Colonel Frick reflected, "Overall, the raid executed on the Lashkar Gah C2 node was a complete success with a large quantity of weapons, ammunition, and radios recovered."[48] Ironically, although Task Force 58 had been informing higher headquarters of its progress in developing the target during daily intention messages, the speed with which the Marines had planned and conducted the operation* apparently surprised Central Command.[49]

Zhawar Kili Cave Complex

While mopping-up operations progressed at Tora Bora, Central Command shifted its efforts toward other sites in the mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan—potential havens where some Pentagon officials indicated the Taliban were attempting to regroup.[50] As Admiral Stufflebeem later summarized during a news briefing,

> There is evidence that individuals who were likely dispersed and ran away from whatever uncomfortable circumstance they were previously in are trying to find security. Finding security, of course, in this part of the country traditionally is with numbers. So we are… actively looking for and being very attentive to any collection of al-Qaeda fighters or pro-Taliban people, whether singly or together. We'll go wherever they are to find them and to root them out.
>
> This entire part of the country is riddled with hillsides and valleys of caves and above-ground structures. And so, as we have been doing, we'll continue to look for where al-Qaeda forces are, where pro-Taliban forces are, and the facilities that they have used in the past. And when we find them, we'll search them. We'll continue to build intelligence. And then, if appropriate, we'll destroy them.
>
> The Khost province, the Paktia province, have been known to be recent havens where al-Qaeda last was. There are indicators there are elements and pockets that are still in this area, and therefore, our special operating forces and the anti-Taliban forces are working systematically to find these caves, take them away, and, if they encounter anybody, to go ahead and engage them.[51]

*This may have been the incident mentioned by BGen Mattis and Col Lethin, in which the Marines' decision to conduct an operation without higher headquarters-specific approval had irritated a watch officer on the land component. If so, it is interesting to speculate whether previous confusion over the Maiwand raid had tainted Central Command's enthusiasm to the Marines' initiative.



Official Department of Defense photo.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 980820-O-0000X-002
A Department of Defense photo used to illustrate missile strikes against the Zhawar Kili al-Badr Camp on 20 August 1998. Three and a half years later, the vast cave complex was found to have served as a sanctuary for retreating al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, and it produced large amounts of weapons, ammunition, and intelligence materials when cleared by Marines and Navy SEALs.

One of these locations was Zhawar Kili, located 30 miles southwest of Khost and only 2.5 miles from the Pakistani border. Encompassing a 3- by 3-mile area, the massive cave complex was oriented along a large canyon facing to the southwest.[52] It contained one surface facility with more than 60 structures and two separate subterranean facilities with more than 50 caves. The site also possessed a long history: mujahideen had first used it as a support base during the Soviet-Afghan War, and the United States had targeted the facility in retaliation for terrorist attacks conducted against the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.[53] Most recently, Taliban and al-Qaeda forces had been using the site as a headquarters, logistics base, and training camp.[54]

Coalition forces had already bombed the complex in November and December 2001 and then hit it again on the morning of 3 January 2002 after observing al-Qaeda forces attempting to regroup.[55] The third attack had included multiple strikes by four sea-based F-18 fighters as well as four land-based Rockwell B-1 Lancer bombers and an AC-130 gunship.[56] Following the third bombing, Marines and sailors from Task Force K-Bar and the 26th MEU would inspect the facility, which turned out to be the largest of all exploited al-Qaeda cave sites and resulted in the destruction of hundreds of tons of ordnance.[57] Because higher headquarters had not realized the full extent of the tunnel complex until the ground forces had examined it, the search mission gradually extended from 12-hours to 8-days duration.[58] The Marines subsequently dubbed their expedition "Gilligan's Patrol" after the popular 1960s-era television program.[59]

Task Force 58 began planning for the Zhawar Kili exploitation mission on 4 January, preparing to provide security—as well as quick reaction and tactical recovery forces—to Task Force K-Bar.[60] Around 0100 on 5 January, Captain Lloyd D. Freeman received word that Company L, BLT 3/6, was going to support Echo Platoon, SEAL Team 3, which was organizing to inspect the al-Qaeda cave complex. After discussing the mission with Lieutenant Commander Todd J. Seniff, USN, and Lieutenant Christopher J. Cassidy, USN, Freeman and 50 Marines from 1st and 2d Platoons conducted raid rehearsals with the 25 SEALs at around 1400. They received a mission briefing, went over the load plan, test-fired weapons, and were even issued 250 pounds of Composition 4 plastic explosives to destroy the caves.[61]



Official Department of Defense photo.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020114-n-8242c-010/dn-sd-04-127700
Sailors of SEAL Team 3 inspect the entrance to an enemy cave complex in Zhawar Kili, Afghanistan, on 14 January 2002. This was only one of 70 caves discovered by sailors and Marines during their two week search-and-destroy mission.



Official Department of Defense photo. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020114-n-8242c-004/dn-sd-04-127768

Sailors from SEAL Team 3 inspect a munitions cache discovered in an enemy cave complex in Zhawar Kili on 14 January 2002. After intelligence materials were recovered from sites such as this, Coalition aircraft were called in to destroy the facilities.

The raid force launched from Kandahar at 0430 on 6 January. Heading north on board four CH-53 aircraft from HMM-365, with Major Peter S. Gadd serving as the air mission commander, they reached Helicopter Landing Zone Rattler at 0625.[62] The insert was unopposed, although an overhead P-3 warned of activity in a village situated 500 meters north of the landing zone.[63]

The raid force headed west, up the main wadi (a dry desert riverbed that fills up during the rainy season), bypassing an apparently unoccupied village to the north and eventually reached the cave complex around 0900. The Marines and sailors discovered a Soviet T-54 tank, three armored personnel carriers, and a variety of artillery and antiaircraft cannon abandoned in front of the facility's entrance. With Lieutenant Ford and 1st Platoon securing the area to the northeast, and Lieutenant Solomon and 3d Platoon securing the area to the southwest, the SEALs began inspecting the first 15 caves, discovering ammunition, explosives, and nine new AN/PRC-117 tactical radios. At the same time, a Marine security patrol from 3d Platoon discovered an old gravesite and hastily camouflaged tent, although there was not sufficient time to inspect the burial area before the Marines' scheduled extraction.[64]

After the SEALs had set explosive charges to destroy the war material and collapse the caves at approximately 1400, the raid force headed east toward Helicopter Landing Zone Boa. The Marine rifle platoons secured the north and south ends of the zone and prepared to depart, but at 1520 they learned that the extraction had been postponed. While waiting, three armed civilians approached the SEALs and claimed that several days earlier "a lot

of bad people headed this way and crossed over into Pakistan."[65] With the extraction delayed, Lieutenant Commander Seniff decided to return to the village near Landing Zone Rattler for the night and, after a small SEAL patrol reconnoitered the site to ensure that it was vacant, the raid force occupied the village.[66]

The possibility of a quiet evening ended abruptly around 1900 when the SEAL commander received orders to return to the complex and inspect the gravesite. He quickly assembled a 14-man patrol, composed of 2 SEALs, 2 Air Force combat controllers, and 10 Marines. After consolidating their remaining water supplies, the patrol stepped off around 0100 on the morning of 7 January. They headed quietly back up the streambed and when they were within 500 meters of the complex, an Air Force AC-130 gunship suppressed the target with its cannon. As the patrol attempted to approach the caves once the firing had stopped, secondary explosions from enemy munitions ignited during the air attack halted their progress. Lieutenant Cassidy determined that since current conditions were too dangerous for the force to pass through the complex area and they did not have enough time to find an alternate route around the facility, they should withdraw to the village and wait for the extraction.[67]

When extraction of the raid force was postponed a second time, the SEAL commander sent a patrol to assess battle damage to another complex situated to the south, which had also been struck by AC-130 gunships during the previous evening. As the patrol approached the cave entrance, it encountered five or six men with small arms. The SEALs immediately requested close air support, guiding a B-52 joint direct attack munitions strike against the squad-sized force. This effectively silenced the resistance, enabling the SEALs to search the area. They recovered several weapons, although there were no human remains.[68]

Lieutenant Ford led another joint patrol back up the wadi at 0700 to inspect the gravesite, which turned out to contain the remains of individuals killed during the 1998 U.S. missile strike.[69] Meanwhile, Lieutenant Solomon ran security patrols along a ridge situated north of the camp to prevent possible enemy infiltration from several villages located on the reverse side of the high ground.[70] After the combined force had identified additional subterranean structures, F-14 and F-18 aircraft dropped precision-guided bombs on the complex during two sorties flown between 0330 and 0630 the following morning.[71]

Around 0945 on 8 January, Marines at an observation post near the base camp spotted a jeep heading swiftly up the canyon toward the cave complex. Sergeant Brown gathered his squad and moved quickly to intercept the vehicle. They squad encountered four individuals, with the driver armed with a pistol and global positioning system device. After learning of the incident, Lieutenant Commander Seniff sent an interpreter and an agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to the location to identify the men's affiliation.* Following a rudimentary interrogation of the detainees, the Americans decided to send the four men back to Kandahar for further questioning that evening, on board one of several CH-53s that were arriving with supplies for the exploitation force.[72] Corporal Hayes, one of two Marines assigned to escort the detainees, carried a note from Captain Freeman to Colonel Lynes, the commander of BLT 3/6:

> Things are going great out here. We have been doing everything from digging graves to clearing rooms of deserted villages. We are presently ensconced in an abandoned compound, which was hastily deserted. The Marines found seven Pakistani passports, which have turned out to be very valuable. Have sent out four patrols over the past two days; Lt Solomon discovered a bunker up about 500 feet from where we are. The air guys got his grid

*An agent from the FBI accompanied Task Force K-Bar on this mission. If the SEALs detained a suspected terrorist who might later be tried in a court of law, the FBI agent would be able to establish a continuous chain of custody. (Crist comments)

> and plan on JDAMs [Joint Direct Attack Munitions] for it when we leave. I was on our first night patrol the first night with an AC-130 prepping our objective—very impressive. The air guys have been very busy with JDAMs and bunker busters landing daily and nightly… shakes our compound. This area is target rich.[73]

On the same day, the force began to focus on three villages located west of the complex, rumored to serve as residences for al-Qaeda and Taliban troops not inhabiting the caves, and a Marine reconnaissance patrol departed to observe the sites for enemy activity.[74] Around the same time that the squad had halted the jeep, a SEAL team entering one of the villages spotted five individuals attempting to flee. Although the team asked for permission to employ close air support against the group, Lieutenant Commander Seniff decided that they had not demonstrated hostile intent and denied the request. The SEAL force continued to run local security patrols and watch over the villages throughout the remainder of the day and into the next to prevent enemy interference with the base camp.[75]

By 10 January, the Marines had started to use the jeep commandeered two days earlier to insert patrols closer to observation posts overlooking the western village. After dismounting at the designated drop-off point, one of the patrols climbed to the top of the ridge and discovered an enemy bivouac site containing a sniper rifle, grenade launcher, four rocket-propelled grenades, and three sleeping bags. The patrol speculated that, given the terrain and proximity to the road, an unidentified force had occupied the site during the night and intended to ambush the jeep before departing hastily as the foot mobile patrol approached. After linking up with a SEAL team, the Marines brought the weapons and ammunition back to their base camp.[76] Coalition aircraft resumed bombing of the caves and tunnels at Zhawar Kili at around 1830 that evening, lasting for more than seven hours and dropping 44 precision weapons.[77]

At 0500 the next day, 3d Platoon and the SEALs headed back up the canyon to inspect the three villages located west of the cave complex; Lieutenant Solomon and 1st Platoon remained behind to provide base security. With two infantry squads occupying high ground on both sides of the wadi, Lieutenant Ford's third squad searched a village to the north side and the SEALs searched two others to the south. These inspections produced additional weapons, ammunition, and enemy propaganda, including posters of American skyscrapers. Before leaving, the patrol set explosive charges to collapse any caves that the bombers had not destroyed.[78]

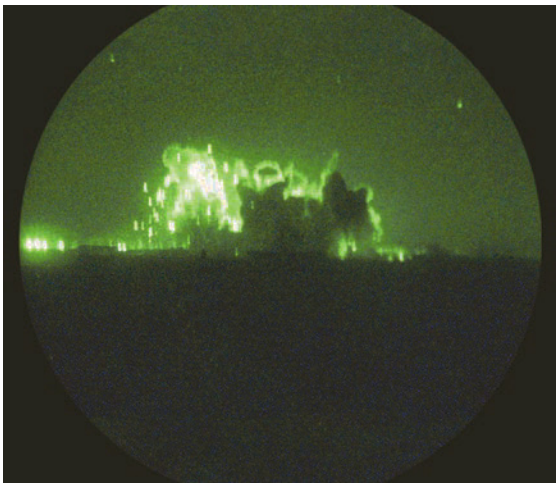


Photo by LCpl Nathan E. Eason

Explosions erupt from enemy tunnels destroyed by Marines of Battalion Landing Team 3/6 on 15 January 2002. The tunnels were part of the massive cave complex near Zhawar Kili, which contained large quantities of weapons, ammunition, and intelligence materials.

The Marines and sailors continued to run security and reconnaissance patrols and exploit the cave complexes for several more days. Around 0800 on the morning of 14 January, four CH-53 helicopters extracted the exploitation force and two desert patrol vehicles from Landing Zone Rattler to Bagram Airfield.[79] Upon completion of the exploitation phase, B-1, B-52, and F-18 aircraft delivered more than 120 precision bombs against the cave complexes, raising the total amount of ordnance dropped on the facilities to around 406,000 pounds.[80] Speaking during a Pentagon news briefing, Admiral

Stufflebeem confirmed that during the weekend they had leveled the remaining surface structures and closed all the caves they did not want reoccupied.[81]

After transferring to a Marine KC-130, the exploitation force continued on to Kandahar, arriving back at their base around 1250.[82] During their eight days on the ground, SEAL team 3-E "and the supporting Marines found numerous documents and other items of intelligence value, including one poster of bin Laden complete with a plane crashing into a building in the background… and killed an estimated 10–15 Taliban."[83]

Khost-Gardez Mission Planning and Band-e Sardeh Airfield Survey

Concurrent with the Zhawhar Kili mission, Task Force 58 received Fragmentary Order 06 to Operations Order 02-021 from General Mikolashek on 5 January.[84] This document directed that the Marines begin planning for operations in the rugged Khost-Gardez region of eastern Afghanistan, where numerous pockets of resistance remained active. For the moment, it looked as if the 26th MEU might now employ the cold-weather gear originally procured for 15th MEU operations at Tora Bora.[85]

The Marines not only believed that a significant force would be required to achieve General Franks's goal of preventing the enemy's escape, but they also anticipated that their ability to contribute combat power to the fight would increase as the Army relief force began to assume the security mission at Kandahar airport, originally scheduled to start in five days. The staff envisioned a joint-combined effort involving elements from Task Forces 58, 64, and K-Bar. In addition to providing security for the special operating forces, conventional Marine forces would be available to serve as a "hammer" to smash any opposition, if required. This plan, which appeared more in line with Central Command's concept for continuing operations, represented a shift from the one devised earlier for Tora Bora, where Marine fire support outposts would have served as the "anvil."[86]

Because the distance from Kandahar to Gardez was almost 250 miles, General Mattis determined that he would likely need to establish an intermediate support base closer to the area if his Marines were to facilitate the destruction of remaining al-Qaeda forces, prevent their escape, and exploit intelligence sources in a timely manner.[87] This, in turn, required Task Force 58 to find a suitable airfield from which to operate its KC-130 transports for the delivery of sustainment to additional forces. In addition to Marine forces arriving by air, a platoon of light armored vehicles could also convoy north from Kandahar, reaching the Khost-Gardez region within 40 hours. Once in position, Task Force 58 "would be able to 'pounce' on actionable intelligence in the area as it developed and if tasked."[88]

After considering the merits of two local airfields, Task Force 58 tentatively decided that an airport near the Band-e Sardeh Dam would be the best location for an intermediate support base.



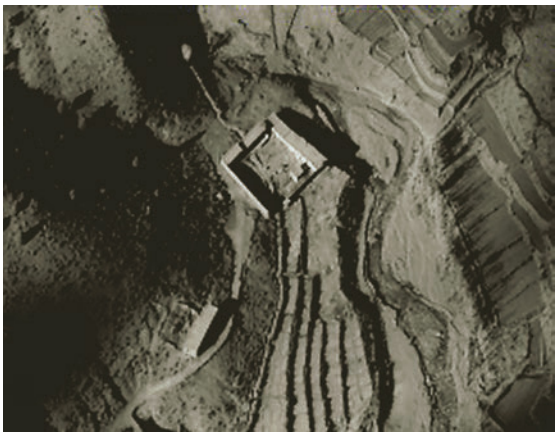
Official Department of Defense photo.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020114-n-8242c-005/dn-sd-04-12769
Al-Qaeda propaganda recovered from a cave complex in Zhawar Kili. In addition to an image of Osama bin Laden, the poster also depicts a U.S. missile and fighter jets as well as a passenger airliner and the World Trade Center.

Located only 18 miles southeast of Ghazni, Afghanistan, it possessed a nearly 7,000-foot runway and would enable the Marines to deploy a quick reaction force by air or land within an hour, rather than the two and a half hours currently required to reach the area from Kandahar.[89] Busy planning for the on-order assignment, Colonel Lynes and the BLT 3/6 staff envisioned a coordinated air-ground assault in which two rifle companies would arrive by helicopter while Task Force Sledgehammer would travel overland.[90]

The next step was to conduct a formal assessment of the airfield capabilities. Elements from Task Force 64 who had driven north from Kandahar to exploit sensitive sites in the region established surveillance and reconnaissance over the airfield.[91] After planning the operation for several days, 26th MEU delivered its confirmation brief on 14 January. Shortly afterward, three CH-53s from HMM-365 inserted Task Force K-Bar's "Jaguar" team into Band-e Sardeh, situated in a valley two miles north of Lake Mota Khan.[92] In addition to explosive ordinance disposal technicians, members of the joint special operations team included Marines from HMM-365 and the force reconnaissance platoon as well as personnel from the Air Force special tactics squadron and Navy SEAL teams. After extracting the survey team on 18 January, headquarters determined that the location was unsuitable for aviation operations.[93] In the end, arrival of the Army relief force would be delayed by competing strategic airlift priorities, and "the Khost operation would never require a sizeable Task Force 58 presence and, eventually, became a series of independent, yet linked, operations conducted by many different organizations."[94]

Tori Khel

On 19 January, two CH-53 helicopters from HMM-365 inserted Norwegian special forces into the Tori Khel compound, located near Ghazni in eastern Afghanistan. Taliban leadership had reportedly used the site in the past and B-52 bombers and AC-130 gunships had struck it during



Official Department of Defense photo.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: RS537619
Prestrike image of a Taliban compound in Tori Khel, Afghanistan. Aircrews from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 inserted Norwegian special forces into the site on 19 January 2002 to search for enemy fighters killed during a previous bombing raid.

December 2001.[95] The special operations forces team was reportedly searching for evidence of terrorists who they suspected had been killed during the bombing, but no remains were discovered.[96] After spending a night in Bagram, the two aircraft returned the next morning and extracted the Norwegian ground forces.[97]

Hazar Qadam

On the evening of 23 January, Task Force K-Bar exploited two compounds in Hazar Qadam, a village located approximately 18 miles southwest of Tarin Kowt in Uruzgan Province. Flying in support of the mission, two CH-53s from HMM-365 inserted special forces teams near the western target—labeled Objective Kelly—while three Army Boeing CH-47 Chinooks inserted special forces near the eastern target, labeled Brigid. Although the raid force encountered only limited resistance at Kelly, militiamen at Brigid fought tenaciously. When the operation was complete, Coalition forces had detained 27 individuals, killed 16 others, and seized documents and radios. At one point, a wounded fighter attacked a Marine interpreter helping to search the area, but the assault troops quickly killed the attacker.[98] Although the assault force would shortly realize that their

intelligence had been obsolete and that the compound's residents had recently proclaimed their allegiance to the new Afghan government, Secretary Rumsfeld later put the unfortunate incident in perspective: "It is no mistake at all, if you're fired on, to fire back."[99] Privately, however, the miscalculation agitated Rumsfeld, and higher headquarters soon inquired as to whether the assault force had possessed interpreters who spoke the local language; fortunately, it had the two enlisted Marines from Task Force 58.[100]

Khost Security Mission

Toward mid-January, following the murder of an American soldier and as the declining security environment threatened to derail Coalition activities in the Khost-Gardez region, 26th MEU received orders to provide a small detachment to guard a joint special operations forces (Task Force 11/Sword) safe house in Khost for 30 days.[101] The structure was situated next to an airfield renamed in honor of Sergeant First Class Nathan R. Chapman, who had become the first American soldier killed by hostile fire in Afghanistan when his special forces element was ambushed in the area.[102]

Although Captain Jeffrey S. McCormack subsequently deployed to the area with 77 Marines from BLT 3/6's Headquarters and Service Company on 16 January, inclement weather encountered along the way forced a delay at Bagram Air Base before they finally arrived two days later.[103] After arrival, they provided security for the building and compound and established a 300-meter security perimeter. Although never physically engaged during their 13-day mission, the Marines' situation was nonetheless tenuous.[104] Their positions were essentially on open ground, and in the months following their departure, for example, hostile forces twice assaulted the camp with rockets, mortars, and infantry.[105]

Tragedy struck Task Force 58 around 0730 on the morning of 20 January during an air mission to supply fuel to Marines operating in the region.[106] After spending the night in Bagram, one of two flights of Super Stallion helicopters departed the airfield and headed south toward Khost.[107] While transiting the rugged terrain approximately 200 feet above ground level, the number one engine on the trailing CH-53E flamed out. The aircraft, piloted by Captain Douglass V. Glasgow, lost power and crashed into a 9,800-foot mountain 40 miles southeast of Kabul.[108]

Looking rearward from the lead helicopter, the crew chief realized that the second aircraft was no longer visible and noticed a cloud of smoke billowing from behind a ridgeline. He informed the pilot, Captain Alison J. Thompson, who quickly reversed course and flew toward the smoke. Thompson circled the crash site several times after locating the aircraft hulk at the base of a snow-covered valley surrounded by soaring ridgelines. Although she made repeated attempts to contact the crew of the downed helicopter, they failed to answer, and there were no visible signs of movement among the wreckage. She also tried unsuccessfully to contact an orbiting Air Force Boeing E-3 Sentry airborne warning control system aircraft. Believing that the crew had died in the crash and hesitant to land at such a high altitude, particularly when the ground threat remained uncertain, Thompson reluctantly headed toward Bagram to notify authorities and acquire help.[109]

Although initially knocked unconscious during the accident, Captain Glasgow awoke to find himself inside a burning hulk. Disregarding his broken wrist, he helped four other injured crew members escape the helicopter, gathering them in a tight circle, and then recovered the bodies of two Marines before fire consumed the aircraft. The surviving crew members were Captain William J. Cody and Corporals David J. Lynn, Ivan A Montanez, and Stephen A. Sullivan.[110] The deceased were Staff Sergeant Walter F. Cohee III, a 26-year-old communications navigation system technician from Maryland, and Sergeant Dwight J. Morgan, a 24-year-old helicopter mechanic from California.[111] After stomping an SOS signal in the snow, Glasgow rendered what aid he could to the injured and waited for help to arrive.[112]

Coalition forces monitoring the area by an unmanned Predator aircraft saw the SOS and initiated the dispatch of rescue aircraft.[113] Given the variety of special and conventional forces operating in the area, there was some confusion regarding who had the authority to originate a rescue operation and who would provide security. Although the joint search and rescue center in Saudi Arabia launched Air Force Sikorsky HH-60 Pave Hawk and MH-53 Pave Low helicopters from different bases toward the crash site, the aircraft were several hours away, and it was the height of winter in Afghanistan. Task Force Dagger subsequently ordered crews from the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment to conduct the rescue mission, supported by an operational detachment from 5th Special Forces Group for security.[114]

At 0950, 90 minutes after the initial alert, two MH-47E Chinook helicopters lifted off from Bagram and quickly completed the 17-minute flight to the crash site. The first helicopter landed 50 feet left of the wrecked fuselage, while the other remained overhead to coordinate with tankers, fighters, and other rescue aircraft. The scene was later described in the special forces history:

> The crash site was horrible…. In stark contrast to the snow were grotesque charred and blackened chunks of cabin. The rotor blades stuck up from the ground like obscene memorials. About 30 feet beyond was an unidentifiable section of the cockpit that had broken off on impact and had not caught on fire. Nothing in the wreckage was taller than 3 feet high.[115]

As the reaction force secured the area, the rescue team approached the Marines, huddled off to the side of the aircraft hulk—Captain Glasgow was able to walk to the waiting helicopter, but the four other surviving crew members required litter transport. Once the survivors were safely loaded on board, the second helicopter landed to recover the two dead Marines and enhance security around the site. The first helicopter then took off and evacuated the wounded to Bagram, where elements of the 244th Forward Surgical Team provided medical treatment before transferring them to Landstuhl, Germany.[116] Meanwhile, two of MSSG 26's engineers, Sergeant Raley and Lance Corporal Player, were stranded at Band-e Sardeh with Task Force 64, waiting three days for aerial extraction.[117]

Commenting on the crash during an appearance on National Broadcasting Corporation's (NBC's) *Meet the Press*, Secretary Rumsfeld lamented, "Your heart just breaks every time something like this happens."[118] On 22 January, Marines and soldiers at Kandahar airport held a memorial service for their fallen comrades. After asking that the dead be granted "light, happiness, and peace," Navy Chaplain Joseph Scordo asked rhetorically, "What's it going to take, so the world is rid of terrorism? It's probably going to take some blood being spilled by innocent people."[119] Citing President Bush's warning that the war would be long and require sacrifice, Scordo continued, "Blood, sweat, and tears—we've shed them and will probably continue to shed them…. This is not a picnic, this is not a jamboree… this is an ugly thing called war."[120]

Staff Sergeant Larry J. Harrington and a squad from BLT 3/6's 81mm mortar platoon provided security at the crash site on that same day, while an investigator from the Naval Safety Center inspected the wrecked Super Stallion and took photographs of the scene for a mishap inquiry.[121] After deeming the helicopter unrecoverable, Captain Douglas W. Glover, the team's forward air controller, directed a section of F-18s to drop precision guided munitions on the remains of the aircraft to prevent pilfering and the "compromise of sensitive equipment."[122]

Back at Khost Airfield, the immediate threat came from unexploded ordnance and surface-laid landmines. When the Marines arrived, they discovered unexploded ordnance in the safe house and observed landmines scattered outside the security perimeter, and intelligence reported that antitank and antipersonnel mines covered the runway. The security force had to contend with the mine threat on several occasions: three encounters



Photo by LCpl. Marcus L. Miller

U.S. Navy Cdr Joseph A. Scordo, a Catholic chaplain with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, delivers mass at Kandahar International Airport on 20 January 2002 in rememberance of the seven Marines who died in a KC-130 crash on 9 January 2002.

involved leaving the relative safety of the perimeter to retrieve parachute-dropped supplies dropped between 400 and 2,000 meters beyond the safe house. In each case, explosive ordinance personnel were able to clear a safe lane through the mines.[123]

As the only overt U.S. presence in the Khost area, the safe house captured the attention of the region's local inhabitants and was constantly under surveillance. In an effort to mitigate the risk of attacks by those harboring ill will against the United States, the Marines vigorously screened visitors, operated a forward checkpoint to screen vehicles before they entered the compound, and maintained local security throughout the area. The concern about violence intensified on 21 January, when an armed crowd (chanting slogans that the Americans could not understand) gathered along the road approximately 30 meters from the entry control point.[124]

The Marines quickly went to full alert and reinforced the control point. Meanwhile, a group of 30 protesters approached the compound and demanded to speak with the senior American representative. Tension remained high for the next several hours, as the Afghans expressed their frustration over the lack of governmental control and security in Khost City, and the Americans explained their role in Afghanistan. The size of the crowd fluctuated from 150 to 300 people, with isolated groups approaching the Marine checkpoint throughout the day. As darkness approached, approximately six hours after the protest had begun, the crowd finally dispersed and calm returned to the compound.[125]

Perhaps the most pressing threat came from local militias competing for political control over the region. The Marines frequently observed sporadic exchanges of rifle fire among feuding factions at night, and they witnessed firefights in proximity to their position on two occasions. In the first case, occurring around 1000 on 22 January, they watched as militiamen traded rocket-propelled grenades and



Photo by SrA Latonia L. Brown, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020124-f-0362b-003/df-sd-04-12735

A Marine honor guard stands at attention as the remains of a comrade killed during a helicopter crash in Afghanistan are offloaded from an Air Force C-5A Galaxy aircraft at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, on 24 January 2002.

small arms fire only 400 meters from the safe house. They repositioned themselves to defend the safe house but otherwise withheld their fire in deference to the established rules of engagement. In the second case, occurring around 1820 on 24 January, Marines guarding the entry control point, which was 100 meters from the safe house, witnessed a similar exchange in which one militiaman died. The security force went to full alert, while friendly Afghan forces cleared the area and drove the hostiles away.[126]

The Marine security force was scheduled to begin its withdrawal from Khost on 28 January.[127] At 2000, however, an Army CH-47 helicopter crashed short of the southern end of the runway. The aircraft had been carrying relief forces from the U.S. Army's 3d Brigade Combat Team. After clearing a hasty pathway through the landmines, the Marines assisted in the evacuation of 14 wounded soldiers from the aircraft.[128]

Although the initial security force returned to the USS *Bataan* Amphibious Ready Group off the Pakistani coast that evening, the 26th MEU assembled a recovery force from BLT 3/6's Mike platoon (the security element for the expeditionary unit's maritime special purpose force) and returned to the airfield. The recovery force guarded the crash site throughout the night and into the next day, retrieving a variety of documents, equipment, and weapons from amid the scattered wreckage. They also remained alert for the arrival of "unknown extremists" (rumored to be planning a move against the crash site) until formally relieved by Task Force Rakkasan on 29 January.[129]



Chapter 14
Winding Down

Reconstitution of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit

Concurrent with conducting sensitive site exploitation missions and planning to establish a third forward operating base in Jalalabad, the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) had also begun preparing for its reconstitution on board the USS *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group (*Peleliu* ARG) off the Pakistani coast. As Lieutenant Colonel Olson remarked, after receiving the execute order on Christmas Eve, "The challenges of getting out of Rhino were almost as significant as getting in."[1] Although Forward Operating Base Rhino (FOB Rhino) had played an important role in the Marines' success, the dirt runway was rapidly approaching the end of its useful life after 30 days of continuous operations.[2]

An Air Force assessment team had been monitoring the airstrip on a daily basis, and it was concerned that the growing deterioration would soon become irreparable. Colonel Olson recalled, "It took C-17s to move the heavy stuff…. I think the load-bearing rating… required a 9.0 for C-17 operations, and by the time we were ready to leave Rhino, it was all the way down to 9.2—a very small margin of safety remaining before we would have to cease operations. Task Force 58 evaluated a dry lakebed approximately 10 kilometers from Rhino as an alternate airfield just in case the runway did become unusable.[3] The 15th MEU's site assessment team determined that the location would likely work during an emergency, but that, fortunately, was not necessary.

One of the 15th MEU's most pressing requirements was washing down its vehicles before steaming back to California, a standard U.S. Customs precaution to prevent agricultural contamination. Colonel Olson explained that the Marines did not want to go back to an intermediate site in Pakistan where they would have to provide airfield security, as they did at Jacobabad, or treat their own water, as in Pasni. They were not welcome on Masirah Island, Oman, and there was no room in Bahrain, but once granted permission to use the U.S. Army facilities at Camp Doha, Kuwait, the expeditionary unit's retrograde progressed rapidly. While some equipment and most of the personnel flew to Pasni before heading out to the ships, they flew 102 vehicles directly from the two forward operating bases to Kuwait on board KC-130 and C-17 transports.[4]



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

An Air Force C-17 Globemaster lands at Kandahar International Airport. Opening the airfield to daylight C-17 flights at the end of December 2001 was not only an important milestone in establishing a sustainable forward operating base, it also paved the way for a rapid exchange of Marine and Army ground forces in southeastern Afghanistan.

As the focus of Task Force 58's operations shifted toward Kandahar, airlift priorities alternated between supporting 15th MEU's withdrawal from FOB Rhino and sustaining the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (26th MEU) and a growing number of Coalition forces in Afghanistan and in Pasni, Shamsi, and Jacobabad, Pakistan. Task force and expeditionary unit planners monitored the fluctuating requirements closely, holding daily meetings to assign priorities and allocate both organic and intratheater airlift; Marine

liaison officers at the Combined Air Operations Center in Saudi Arabia continued to assist them in performing this task. Staff Sergeant Brian Koval, the 26th MEU's embarkation chief, aptly characterized the team-oriented atmosphere by nicknaming the operation a "41st MEU" effort, derived by adding the two unit designations. Transportation Command's director of mobility forces also played an important role, adapting operations to provide continued support to the Marines. One means of doubling the airlift capability was to institute aggressive air and ground patrols around the dirt airstrip, which enabled the first daylight C-17 landing at FOB Rhino on the morning of 30 December.[5]

As the New Year approached, the 15th MEU had nearly completed its departure. The Marines made every attempt to leave FOB Rhino in a "prewar" state, filling in fighting holes, collecting concertina wire, policing the buildings, and painting over markings. General Mattis conducted a final inspection of the forward operations base and requested permission to close the desert airstrip. After receiving approval, the last two C-130s departed FOB Rhino early in the morning of 4 January, carrying Colonel Bourne, his jump command post, and a small security force from Battalion Landing Team 1/1.[6]

Although seven members of the Task Force 58 staff remained in Kandahar to coordinate ongoing operations, others from FOB Rhino and the *Peleliu* returned to their rear headquarters in Bahrain.[7] Once reestablished, they began to compile a historical record of Task Force 58's experiences: General Mattis charged Major Michael P. Mahaney, the primary author, with drafting a solid narrative—complete with supporting documentation—that would present the "good, bad, and ugly."[8]

Back in Kuwait, after completing their washdown and backload, Marines and sailors of the *Peleliu* ARG anxiously set sail for Perth, Australia.[9] As Captain Jezierski and the *Peleliu* ARG helicoptered back to Fifth Fleet, Captain Kenneth M. Rome, USN, became the new deputy commander of Task Force 58 on 4 January.[10] Two weeks later, the *Peleliu* ready group transferred to Seventh Fleet and their participation in Operation Enduring Freedom ended.[11] Although Colonel Olson noted that there was a brief pickup in tempo over the escalation of hostilities between India and Pakistan in the Kashmir region* that required them to dust off the noncombatant evacuation plan they had developed back in September, "that never came to pass [and] the tensions kind of diffused themselves."[12]

As the Marines and sailors departed Central Command's theater of operations, they received congratulatory messages from both General Tommy Franks and General James Jones. While extending his appreciation for a job well done, the combatant commander acknowledged many of the *Peleliu* ARG's accomplishments and concluded, "Your ability to rapidly plan and execute complex missions was truly impressive and is indicative of the outstanding training and the superb combat readiness of the U.S. Navy/Marine Corps team." Among Commandant Jones's words of praise, he noted,

> By establishing an expeditionary base of operations 400 miles from the sea in landlocked Afghanistan, you demonstrated to the world that the Marine Corps is far more than a "hit the beach" organization and proved, once again, that naval forces can rapidly deploy to and operate out of an austere location for a sustained period of time.[13]

Before departing Fifth Fleet's area of operations, Marines and sailors from the *Peleliu* ARG conducted a turnover with the incoming USS *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6) Amphibious Ready Group. Amphibious Squadron 3 (CPR-3), commanded by Captain Robert J. Connelly, USN, provided the naval component for the newly arrived ready group, and the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (13th MEU), commanded by Colonel Christopher J. Gunther, provided the Marine component.

*By October 2002, India and Pakistan had begun to demobilize their forces along the border. They signed a cease-fire agreement in 2003.

They had set sail from San Diego on 1 December 2001, six weeks before their scheduled departure date, and were anxious to get into the fight. Task Force 58 also anticipated the group's arrival with great interest because the 13th MEU would add eight CH-53E helicopters to the battle roster. Admiral Moore assigned tactical control of the *Bonhomme Richard* ready group to Task Force 58 on 14 January, with the amphibious squadron and expeditionary unit becoming Task Groups 58.1 and 58.2, respectively.[14]

Continuing to Develop Kandahar

Meanwhile, back at Kandahar during a flag-raising event on 1 January 2002, American and Afghan service personnel flew their nations' standards simultaneously over the airport. General Mattis and Governor Sharzai presided over the ceremony, which served as a poignant display of strengthening relations between the two countries. Referring to the high-flying colors, Sharzai proclaimed, "Peace, unity, and friendship," while shaking the general's hand.[15] Mattis in turn stated, "This symbolic gesture solidifies the close working relationship we have established with the Afghans here."[16] The staff later wrote, "This joint effort was indicative of the Task Force's efforts to disassociate ourselves from the Soviet Army's recent occupation. We were not doing things to Afghanistan, but with Afghanistan."[17]

Local Security

With the special forces' assistance, Task Force 58 effectively integrated local militiamen into its perimeter defense. The local anti-Taliban leader was a battle-hardened veteran—Commander Galaluy had first fought against the Soviets when he was 14 years old, and then against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. He was reputed to have killed 15 of the enemy by detonating a remote-controlled explosive device at the "Arab House" in Kandahar. On another occasion, he had reportedly walked across the desert dressed like a shepherd, carrying a transponder to mark the runway at Camp Rhino for Task Force Sword's October 2001 assault. More recently, he had served alongside Sharzai in the battle for Kandahar and established a close relationship with General Mattis when Task Force 58 occupied the airport.[18]



Photo by LCpl Marcus L. Miller

Members of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit raise the American flag alongside an Afghan flag during a flag-raising ceremony at Kandahar International Airport on 1 January 2002. The flag detail included Sgt Eric L. Davis (left), LCpls Avias T. Jones and Patrick Meyers, and PO3 Patrick O. Ebili.

In addition to helping the Marines screen local laborers hired to help with numerous construction and habitability projects around the airport, the anti-Taliban forces also manned roadblocks and outposts, and conducted joint patrols around the airfield, significantly decreasing the enemy's ability to infiltrate the base. Commander Galaluy, who possessed a keen eye for tactics, positioned his outposts in areas with clear fields of fire, enabling them to effectively cover the approach and takeoff cones in the area around the airport. Air Force Brigadier General Vern M. Findley, director, Mobility Forces Command, visited Kandahar and



Photo courtesy of Maj Michael P. Mahaney

Members of Task Force 58 share a meal with the local anti-Taliban militia commander at Kandahar International Airport during January 2002. Seated from left rear to right are Cdr Galaluy; interpreter Asad; an unidentified U.S. Army Special Forces soldier; BGen James N. Mattis, commander of Task Force 58; and Col Anthony P. Frick, commander of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

acknowledged that the only reason he was willing to fly airplanes into the airport during daylight hours was because of his confidence in the security provided by the Afghan militia and the Marine snipers, ambushes, and patrols.[19]

An Afghan named Asad, rumored to have once been a member of the Taliban, served as a translator for Commander Galaluy and General Mattis. While driving the two leaders to visit Afghan outposts around the airfield, Asad pulled a handful of dried dates out of the pocket of his leather jacket. Cleaning dirt and lint off the questionable-looking fruit, he offered some to General Mattis, who politely declined. Asad continued to press the offer and General Mattis relented. Asad then pulled out a handful of stringy meat, which appeared to have been stored there for some time. After going through the same cleansing procedures, he offered the meat to Mattis, who politely sampled this, too. During the next 24 hours, however, the general required a hefty dose of antibiotics. Mattis's willingness to participate in the Afghan culture, despite personal inconveniences, illustrated how he was able to bolster his relationship and eventual friendship with Galaluy. Mattis's open mindedness also helped promote the Marines' acceptance in nearby villages. The Marines also provided the fighters with money for tents, blankets, motorcycles, and radios and conducted medical and dental visits in the surrounding area.[20]

Coalition Forces

Coalition forces continued to flow into Kandahar airport, with British, German, Jordanian, and Norwegian forces joining those already on scene from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Turkey. This influx placed additional stress on communications and logistics capabilities as well as the small amount of available space. Fortunately, Major Treeva Enger arrived at the beginning of January with a 15-man contingent of Norwegian soldiers and a mine flail. Shortly after landing, they used the device to methodically proof the entire airfield perimeter. They also helped equip a Jordanian mine clearing detachment, enabling it to contribute to the de-mining campaign.[21]

Relief in Place and Ongoing Operations

As part of their developing concept of operations in Afghanistan, General Franks and the Central Command staff had always intended to replace Task Force 58 with a more permanent presence.[22] During early December, even before the fall of Kandahar, General Mikolashek announced his tentative plan to swap out the two Marine expeditionary units for an Army brigade. Following the battle for Tora Bora, both Franks and Mikolashek issued orders for the Marines to turn over the facilities at Shamsi, Pakistan, and reconstitute the two expeditionary units at sea. Near the end of December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued Deployment Order 097, which provided an Army brigade combat team for the relief of Task Force 58.[23] Central Command subsequently announced that soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division would replace the 15th MEU in Afghanistan. At Central Command, Commander Dave Cullen, USN, told reporters, "The Marines are an expeditionary force. They've done their job and now they're leaving."[24]

The news quickly spread throughout the media, and one story appearing in the *New York Times* read, "Airborne Troops Relieving Marines at Kandahar Base."[25] The journalist went on to explain,

> Although the 101st is a light, fast-moving force similar to the Marines, it is typically used for longer-term missions than the Marine Expeditionary Units now in the region are accustomed to. Those units are trained and equipped for 30-day missions where they are expected to conduct lightning assaults and secure territory but not hold it for long periods. That, historically, has been the job of the Army.[26]

The report also quoted Lieutenant Colonel Martin B. Compton, USAF, a spokesman for Central Command, as stating that "this frees up the Marines to do other things." Other Pentagon officials added that, although the 15th and 26th MEUs were returning to their amphibious assault ships, they were not necessarily leaving the region and could be dispatched "for other tasks in the campaign against terrorism."[27]

During the relief-in-place, Task Force 58 was to turn over the security mission and airfield operations in Kandahar to Colonel Frank J. Wiercinski, USA, commander of the U.S. Army's 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division.[28] Task Force Rakkasan, as the relief force was known, derived its call sign from the nickname for the 187th Infantry Regiment, which had earned the moniker—Japanese for falling umbrella—while serving as part of the American occupation force following World War II.[29] The advance echelon of the relief force arrived at Kandahar on 3 January, followed by the initial elements of the main body on the 7th, and Colonel Wiercinski on the 9th.[30] Although the relief was originally scheduled to begin the following day, the lack of strategic airlift would delay the first exchange of forces.

KC-130 Hercules Mishap

A fatal aviation mishap tragically occurred on the same day Colonel Wiercinski arrived in Kandahar. Around 1845, a KC-130 transport from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (VMGR-352) crashed into the Lundi Mountains while attempting to land at Bandari airfield in Shamsi, Pakistan.[31] At the time of the accident, the crew was making the first of four scheduled refueling stops after departing Jacobabad, Pakistan,



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

A KC-130 Hercules from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 takes off from Bandari Airfield near Shamsi, Pakistan, on 21 January 2002. Two weeks earlier, an aircraft from the same squadron crashed into the mountains surrounding the airfield while attempting an unassisted night landing, instantly killing the crew of seven.

earlier that evening.[32] Although the night was clear, there was no moonlight,[33] and landing was arguably more difficult than necessary—the aircraft was not equipped with night-vision equipment, terrain-avoidance radar, or satellite navigation computers, and the airfield was not equipped with a control tower, air traffic control radar, or navigational beacons.[34] The aircrew of "Raider O4" made due with conventional instrumentation and expeditionary lights set around the airfield as they had on so many nights preceding the incident.[35]

Although the pilots had asked to land on a runway normally used for departing flights, air traffic control personnel denied the request, and the crash occurred as the plane approached a runway for incoming flights.[36] One news source suggested that the aircraft "was redirected to take a different approach because the military wanted to reduce jet noise over the town and helicopters were parked too close to the airstrip."[37] Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the mishap, the aircraft was slightly off course and, according to one report, 200 feet below the crest of the surrounding mountains when it attempted its third and final approach into Shamsi.[38] Colonel Randolph D. Alles, commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group 11 (MAG-11), speculated that the pilots may have been flying at a lower altitude because they were attempting a visual landing.[39]

When the loaded tanker struck the mountain, it erupted into a fierce fireball that witnesses could see 20 miles from the airfield.[40] Lance Corporal Hollenbeck, one of the Battery K Marines providing security at the base, recalled, "It wasn't a normal mushroom cloud explosion; it was a huge, nuclear-looking green and yellow fireball."[41] Although two corpsmen and four artillerymen quickly climbed on board a CH-46 helicopter and circled the crash site for 30 minutes, the pilots were unable to find a suitable landing zone and returned to the airfield. Staff Sergeant William A. Toomey later described the scene as the entire side of the mountain being on fire. He stated that they saw a total of five secondary explosions.[42] Meanwhile, as Pakistani Army forces headed toward the crash site on foot, another CH-46 from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM-365) departed the USS *Bataan* and became the on-scene commander for recovery operations at Shamsi.[43] Combat search and rescue aircraft from Jacobabad also responded to the emergency.[44]

The crash site was located in steep, difficult terrain, which complicated search and recovery efforts. Operating with no illumination and with secondary explosions occurring among the wreckage, the Pakistani soldiers scaled the mountain slope with little regard for their own safety. Major Nasir Khan and Captain Omar Khan of the 11th Balach Battalion, 11th Balach Regiment, of the Pakistani Army, assisted in the search. Tragically, despite their quick response to the accident scene, rescue crews soon realized that all seven Marines on board the aircraft had perished in the crash.[45] A squad of Marines from Battery K made a second attempt to reach the crash site and secure the area around 1600 the following afternoon; however, without mountaineering equipment they were unable to get closer than 1 kilometer south and 1,200 feet below the aircraft.[46]

A day after the crash, the 26th MEU's air officer led an eight-man investigation team from Kandahar to Shamsi. Supported by two CH-46 aircrews from HMM-365, the team also included five assault climbers from Battalion Landing Team 3/6 (BLT 3/6), led by Corporal E. B. Yeven, an explosive ordnance disposal technician from MEU Service Support Group 26 (MSSG 26), and a photographer from the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*. After reaching Forward Operating Base Impala, the team linked up with Marines from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252 (VMGR-252), an Army mortuary affairs team, and an Air Force chaplain. During the next five days, the joint recovery team carried out the task of retrieving the remains of their comrades.[47] Those killed were Captains Matthew W. Bancroft and Daniel G. McCollum, Gunnery Sergeant Stephen L. Bryson, Staff Sergeant Scott N. Germosen, Sergeants Nathan P. Hays and Jeanette L. Winters, and Lance Corporal Bryan P. Bertrand.[48]



Official Marine Corps photo

Weary assault climbers from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit rest on a mountaintop southwest of Bandari Airfield in Shamsi, Pakistan, on 12 January 2002. The Marines were instrumental in recovering the remains of an aircrew killed in the crash of a KC-130 from Marine Aerial Transport Refueling Squadron 352. From left to right are LCpls Timothy R. Hall, Mike S. Brann, Jason R. Eldridge, Bobby R. Threadgill, and Cpl Eric B. Yeuin.

The remains were flown to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, and a common tombstone was later erected at Arlington National Cemetery to honor their memory.

The recovery team continued to examine the accident scene until 16 January, when an air mishap board from the Naval Safety Center assumed control of the site* and investigation.[49] The board released its findings five months later. During a press conference at Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar, Colonel William D. Durrett, Staff Judge Advocate for the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, stated, "The KC-130 R crew perished as a result of controlled flight into terrain. The cause of the crash was loss of



Photo by LtCol Keith Whitehouse

Members of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 erected this monument to memorialize seven comrades killed in the tragic crash their KC-130 while attempting to land at Bandari Airfield on the evening of 9 January 2002.

*News reports later told of clashes between local police and villagers when authorities confiscated scrap metal salvaged from the crash site. (DAWN, "Villagers Clash with Police for Plane Wreckage," 30Mar02, http://www.dawn.com/2002/03/30/nat17.htm)

situational awareness by the aircrew under difficult conditions and due to lack of visibility. It was not the result of mechanical failure or hostile fire."[50] The board also faulted the aircrew for flying 3,000 feet below the safe flight altitude when circling to attempt the night landing.[51]

Lieutenant Colonel Carl T. Parker, commanding officer of VMGR-352, said that "the finding of human error was 'a bitter pill' for members of the squadron and families of the victims."[52] By the time of the report's release, the Marine Corps had retrofitted 3 of the aging KC-130 aircraft with night-vision equipment and had plans to update 10 more. In addition, newer Model J versions of the aircraft, which possess both night-vision and terrain avoidance capabilities, were scheduled to be added to the Marine air fleet within two years.[53]

Probing at Kandahar Airport

Back in Kandahar on 10 January, Vice Admiral Moore visited with the Marines and sailors of Task Force 58. He met with General Mattis and other Coalition commanders, spoke with the Seabees, toured the detainment facility and medical facilities, and walked the defensive perimeter. Then, he boarded a P-3 Orion and observed the abandoned ruins of Camp Rhino from the air. Following the maritime component commander's visit, General Mattis and Colonel Wiercinski traveled to Islamabad to meet with Major General Farooq, chief of plans at the Pakistani Joint Army Headquarters.[54] During their absence, while Colonel Frick was the senior on-scene Marine commander, another crisis emerged.

That evening, only 15 minutes after the first planeload of detainees had departed Kandahar airport for Guantanamo Bay, between 8 and 14 armed intruders probed 26th MEU's positions along the northern end of the airfield. Moving deftly through the darkness, the probing force used meandering ravines for concealment while approaching within 200 meters of BLT 3/6's frontlines, where they fired on the Marines from three successive locations. The expeditionary unit maneuvered armed vehicles and attack helicopters through the area after returning fire, driving the intruders from the battlefield.[55]

The first sign of trouble appeared around 2000, when someone fired eight illumination flares over the northern end of the airfield at 30- to 60-second intervals. While this was occurring, Marines along the northern perimeter began to notice movement 200 meters to their front, although they could not identify the individuals or activity as hostile. At 2008, a platoon from Company L spotted two individuals running toward several adobe dwellings situated on a knoll to their right front. In response to the rapidly rising threat, BLT 3/6 went from 50 to 100 percent alert, members of the staff assumed their battle positions in the combat operations center, and flights into Kandahar airport were temporarily suspended.[56]

Almost immediately, while illumination flares continued to burst sporadically over the airfield, hostile forces near the adobe structures began to engage the battalion's northern battle positions with assault rifles and light machine guns. Situation reports from Headquarters and Service and Company L platoons at that location described a steady stream of small arms fire impacting their sandbagged fighting positions and kicking up dirt. Captain James P. McDonough III and Battery K,

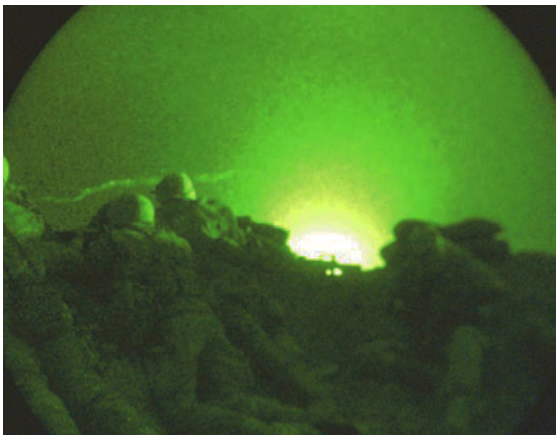


Photo by Sgt Thomas Michael Corcoran

Marines from Battalion Landing Team 3/6 engage armed intruders at Kandahar International Airport on the evening of 10 January 2002. The intruders fired on Marines from three locations near the north end of the runway but were easily repulsed with small arms and heavy machine guns.

situated along the southwest portion of the defensive perimeter and opposite side of the runway, turned in similar reports. Because of the flat terrain and trajectory of the incoming fire, the artillery battery and elements of the 81mm mortar and engineer platoons also became targets.[57]

Lieutenant Colonel Jerome M. Lynes and Captain Daniel Q. Greenwood, situated in the battalion's combat operations center, immediately directed Captain Jeffrey S. McCormack's Headquarters and Service Company "to engage and destroy the identified enemy targets." As the northern rifle platoons returned fire with their M16 rifles and M240G machine guns for approximately eight minutes, Captain Brian M. Howlett, BLT 3/6's fire support officer, cleared the 81mm mortar platoon to fire illumination rounds over the battlefield to silhouette the enemy's positions and identify the targets.[58]

Meanwhile, other Marines deployed to enhance security around the various combat operations centers, ammunition supply point, detainment facility, and other areas inside the perimeter.[59] As this was occurring, the northern units began to receive small arms fire from a second location, approximately 900 meters west of the attacker's initial position. They responded in kind for another four to five minutes, employing all available weapons systems, including MK19 automatic grenade launchers.[60]

Around 2033, approximately 30 minutes following initial contact and with the probe now developing into a two-pronged attack, Colonel Lynes activated BLT 3/6's mobile quick reaction force to get their thermal sites into play.[61] Captain Greenwood, BLT 3/6's operations officer, subsequently directed Lieutenant Lennon to reinforce the northern battle positions with his light armored reconnaissance platoon. After moving from their staging area near the airport terminal and across the runway, Marines from Headquarters and Service Company guided the armored vehicles into position.[62]

Although the rifle platoon saw people moving around the adobe buildings and heard the characteristic snap of rounds passing overhead, the reconnaissance platoon initially had difficulty identifying targets through their thermal sights. At the same time, the rifle platoon began to receive additional fire, and two armored vehicles each fired approximately a dozen 25mm cannon rounds into the enemy position.[63]

After exchanging fire for more than 20 minutes, a vehicle crew from the anti–air defense platoon, co-located with the Headquarters and Service Company on the northwestern perimeter, reported that it was receiving machine gun fire from a third position, located approximately 100 meters west of the second. As before, the trajectory of the fire carried the rounds well down range, where they impacted among another section of the 81mm mortar platoon and Marines of Company K, who were guarding the southwestern portion of the perimeter. Disregarding the hostile fire descending on the southern sector, Master Sergeant Fredie L. Sizemore II, the Weapons Company operations chief, worked with battalion logistics personnel to acquire additional illumination rounds and resupply the two mortar positions. After firing continuously since the firefight had begun, they were running low on ammunition.[64]

Despite the heavy fires being delivered by BLT 3/6 Marines dug in along the perimeter, the intruders continued to resist. Maneuvering in response, the combined antiarmor platoon positioned its vehicles along the left flank of the battalion's centerline battle position at 2049, reinforcing Headquarters and Service Company and the armored reconnaissance platoon.[65] At 2051, Captain Todd Tomko reported that Company K had spotted 10 personnel on the roof of a building approximately three kilometers south of their position; five minutes later he added that the company was receiving additional machine gun fire from the north. At the same time, Headquarters and Service Company reported that anti-Taliban forces manning a nearby observation post had begun to engage opposing forces near their location. This was the first action by the Afghan militiamen that evening, likely an attempt to interdict the enemy's withdrawal, and it continued for approximately 15 minutes.[66]

Amid this activity, Colonel Frick launched the MEU's rotary-wing close air support section, consisting of two Cobra helicopters from HMM-365, at 2100. Perimeter positions observed muzzle flashes to the southwest and north shortly after takeoff. These appeared to be surface-to-air fires directed unsuccessfully against the aircraft, which continued to patrol overhead for the next two hours.[67]

At 2110, with the Marines easily maintaining fire superiority, Colonel Lynes directed Lieutenant Lennon to reposition his armored reconnaissance platoon near the airport's entry control point in case they were needed to counterattack or clear the area north of the defensive perimeter. At the same time, BLT 3/6's combat operations center contacted Python 31, a special forces operational detachment at Kandahar, and directed them to join Lennon's platoon at the control point to clear the contested area.[68] Approximately 40 minutes after the probe began, the intruder's fire gradually subsided and the perimeter grew still.[69] This was likely good news to soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division, who had just arrived as part of the relief force and received a rude welcome to Kandahar. Prohibited from flying with loaded weapons on board Air Mobility Command aircraft, they found themselves unarmed in the midst of the firefight and were forced to take cover while the exchange took place.[70]

At 2133, Python 31 and the anti-Taliban forces departed the airport's entry control point in an eight-vehicle convoy, while Lieutenant Lennon's armored reconnaissance platoon stood by in reserve. Under illumination provided by the 81mm mortar platoon, the patrol searched four separate locations across a 2-kilometer frontage. They discovered numerous footprints, shell casings, and rocket-propelled grenades in the adobe buildings near the enemy's three firing positions, but they failed to recover any al-Qaeda or Taliban dead. After sweeping the northern area for another three hours to ensure that the threat did not reappear, the mobile patrol returned shortly after midnight.[71] Meanwhile, at 2149, Companies I and K each observed several individuals attempting to maneuver between their positions in the southwestern sector of the perimeter. Concerned that the enemy was trying to breech the defense and reach the short-term detainment facility, the two units coordinated illumination fire from 60mm mortars and 40mm M203 grenade launchers to identify the intruders and discourage trespassing.[72]

The armored reconnaissance platoon returned to its assembly area around 2241 and resumed the mobile quick reaction force mission. Approximately an hour later, at 2339, Captain Ryan Pike, BLT 3/6's intelligence officer, noted that Scorpion infrared sensors placed along revetments southwest of Company K's position had registered two positive readings. Captain Berry, the battalion's air officer, subsequently coordinated a P-3 flyover, which confirmed the presence of three individuals approximately 900 meters southwest of the perimeter.[73] After another positive sensor reading at 0028, Company K requested additional 81mm mortar illumination and observed three dismounted individuals through their thermal imagery systems. Fortunately, the potential infiltrators continued moving west and the night remained calm. Around 0100, the Marines resumed normal security operations, standing half their force down for the evening and reopening the airport to traffic.[74]

Several days later, 2d Platoon, Company L, reported seven personnel placing a mortar tube and rocket-propelled grenades inside one of the adobe buildings. Lieutenant Lennon's armored reconnaissance platoon subsequently conducted a second sweep of the northern area, recovering a cache of weapons and identifying several underground storage areas. Gunnery Sergeant Tom McCloud, a combat engineer assigned to the patrol, also destroyed one building that possessed a fighting position overlooking the airfield.[75] Three days after that, Marines from 26th MEU's force reconnaissance platoon and infantry from BLT 3/6 conducted a 48-hour ambush operation in anticipation of additional probing attacks, although no infiltration attempts occurred during that period.[76]



Photo courtesy of Cpl Jemssy Alvarez Jr

Combat engineers from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit recover a cache of weapons and explore several underground storage areas situated outside the defensive perimeter at Kandahar International Airport during January 2002.

The Relief Continues

After a short delay, the exchange of forces at Kandahar began on 13 January. At that time, elements of Captain Frank Gasca's Company B, 187th Infantry, replaced two rifle platoons from Major Feight's Company I at the airport's entry control point.[77] The turnover between line units continued for another week with designated organizations exchanging positions every other day. Adding a degree of difficulty to this transition, Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. "Chip" Preysler, USA, commander of 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry, possessed only half the number of personnel that Colonel Lynes had and ultimately required reinforcements to cover the same amount of space as BLT 3/6. As Marine units came off the line, they continued to conduct live-fire training at Tarnak Farms, run ambush patrols around the airfield, and serve as quick reaction forces.[78]

Meanwhile, Task Force 58 remained poised and ready for combat operations in the Khost-Gardez region as well as anywhere else in southeastern



Photo by Capt Charles G. Grow

Leaders from Task Forces 58 and Rakkasan discuss the ongoing relief of Marines at Kandahar International Airport on 18 January 2002. Standing from left to right are LtCol Daniel D. Yoo, operations officer for the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit; LtCol Charles A. "Chip" Preysler, USA, commanding officer of 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment; and LtCol Jerome M. Lynes, commanding officer of Battalion Landing Team 3/6.

Afghanistan that Central Command might need them. Unfortunately, as poor weather, additional analysis, and continued deliberation by "strategic decision makers" delayed execution, "the tactical situation… changed."[79] With the verdict to move north apparently in limbo, General Mattis instructed Colonel Frick to begin preparations for the 26th MEU's retrograde to the amphibious ships. Concurrently, Task Force 58 continued to support quick reaction force and tactical recovery requirements for special operating forces in Afghanistan.

After bringing additional Army forces into Kandahar for approximately two weeks, Colonel Frick and Colonel Wiercinski agreed that the soldiers were ready to take charge of the airfield. At 0800 on the morning of 19 January, command and control of Kandahar formally shifted from Task Force 58 to Task Force Rakkasan. On the same day, the land component disestablished the Marines' initial area of operations and assigned them Area of Operation Truman in its place.[80] One news account noted, "No formal ceremony marked the change of command at the Kandahar airport, but soldiers now occupy many of the bunkers and foxholes dug by the Marines."[81] The same story cited anonymous Pentagon officials who claimed that Army occupation of the largest base in Afghanistan signaled "the intention of American forces to remain in the country indefinitely" and that the base could serve "as a staging area for military operations, including continued searches for al-Qaeda hideouts."[82]

Since the Army was still hampered by a lack of strategic airlift, the Marines used their own KC-130s to transfer a company of 101st Airborne paratroopers from Jacobabad to Kandahar to facilitate the relief.[83] Moreover, due to 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry's delayed arrival and establishment of its tactical operations center, BLT 3/6's combat operations center remained in control of the perimeter at Kandahar for approximately 24 hours following the official transfer of authority. Colonel Lynes reported directly to the commander of 3d Brigade during this period and had the privilege of exercising control over two Army infantry companies manning the defense. During the next nine days, the relief would expand to encompass the entire perimeter, including the mortar firing positions, entry control point, and quick reaction force responsibilities.[84]

In a *Stars and Stripes* article, members of BLT 3/6 expressed their frustration about the lack of offensive action seen in Afghanistan.[85] Colonel Lynes explained, "We've been here defending for more than a month, but Marines are more culturally disposed to the attack." Staff Sergeant Grady N. Brooks, an LAV-25 commander, commented, "Sure we're disappointed—everyone came here expecting to have some fun, to go up against the Taliban or al-Qaeda." Captain Tomko remarked, "If we could stay here and go out and search caves and kill al-Qaeda, we'd stick around for another three years. It's not really a matter of revenge; it's more a matter of principle—it's what Marines do." Attempting to put the experience into perspective, Tomko added, "We got to do just about everything a Marine dreams of doing in real life, and the beauty of it is I get to bring all of my Marines home alive."

General Mattis met with Navy Captain Connelly and Colonel Gunther in Kandahar on the day of the relief and then visited the Marines and sailors of the *Bonhomme Richard* ready group at sea the following day. Despite the Marines' unanimous desire to become further involved in the destruction of al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan, operational control of the group reverted back to Fifth Fleet on 24 January, and the *Bonhomme Richard* set sail for the Horn of Africa to participate in Exercise Edged Mallet.[86]

Company L, BLT 3/6's last line company along the perimeter, completed its relief with 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry, on 20 January, the same day as the 26th MEU began its three-week retrograde and reconstitution on board the USS *Bataan* Amphibious Ready Group (*Bataan* ARG). Helicopter crews from HMM-365 supported the other elements throughout the operation, ferrying Marines and sailors through Pasni to ships awaiting



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020205-N-2383B-509
During their retrograde from Afghanistan on 5 February 2002, fatigued Marines from Company L, Battalion Landing Team 3/6, relax in Pasni, Pakistan, while awaiting transport back to the Bataan *Amphibious Ready Group.*

their arrival in the North Arabian Sea. The withdrawal quickly picked up momentum: after Company I boarded the Navy vessels, Company K and the light anti–air defense detachment left Kandahar for Pasni, followed by the light armored reconnaissance platoon. Battery K also headed to Pasni on the 26th but traveled south from Shamsi.[87]

MSSG 26 handed off all of its combat service support functions at Kandahar to Task Force Rakkasan and the forward arming and refueling facility at Shamsi to the U.S. Army's 561st Corps Support Battalion, although 10 Marines remained to provide air traffic control, airfield lighting, and refueling capabilities for another week. Meanwhile, the Seabee detachment completed its airfield repair and essential projects mission and began its withdrawal to Okinawa. On 28 January, Task Force 58 and Task Force Rakkasan completed a final battlefield handover at Kandahar, and operational control over Task Force 64, which had recently pulled its forward deployed forces back to Kandahar, transferred from the Marines to Task Force K-Bar.[88]

While the turnover and withdrawal took place,



Photo by CPO Johnny Bivera, USN.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020206-N-2383B-522
Capt William D. Valentine, commander of the USS Shreveport *(LPD 12), welcomes aboard members of Company L, Battalion Landing Team 3/6, on 6 February 2002. The Marines are returning from a two-month deployment to Afghanistan.*

a suite of high-ranking personnel continued to pass through Kandahar—a clear sign of the improving security environment. These included Dr. Zalmay M. Kalizad, U.S special envoy to Afghanistan; Robert S. Mueller, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Lieutenant General Mikolashek, Central Command's land component commander; Lieutenant General Earl B. Hailston, commander of U.S. Marine Forces Central Command; and Major General John F. Goodman, commander of the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade.[89]

After General Mikolashek relinquished tactical control over Task Force 58 on 3 February, Admiral Moore reclaimed operational control over the small staff and amphibious ready group. By the following day, the only forces remaining in Kandahar were the Task Force 58 and 26th MEU staffs and small embarkation and aircraft maintenance detachments. General Mattis and his staff soon returned to Bahrain, while Colonel Frick and his Marines rejoined the *Bataan* ARG. The expeditionary unit's remaining Marines withdrew from Shamsi—some retrograded through Pasni, while VMGR-252 headed for Bahrain to support Operation Anaconda, planned to occur during early March. By 9 February, following a weather delay, the 26th MEU had reconstituted on board the amphibious ships in the North Arabian Sea.[90]

The Final Mission

On the same day that the 26th MEU completed its reconstitution on board the *Bataan* ARG, Task Force 58 received a follow-on mission from Central Command, which required its quick return to Afghanistan. According to Fragmentary Order 03-037, Task Force K-Bar needed a tactical recovery force and heavy lift capability to support ongoing sensitive site exploitation operations approximately 35 miles north of Gardez. General Mattis subsequently returned to Kandahar with a four-man jump command post on 11 February.[91] Colonel Frick followed two days later, accompanied by a skeleton staff and a rifle platoon from Company I, BLT 3/6.[92]

While General Mattis returned to Bahrain, Colonel Frick and his staff continued to plan their



Photo by CWO2 William D. Crow

Members of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit board a KC-130 Hercules aircraft in Jacobabad, Pakistan, on 12 February 2002. They have been recalled to support Task Force K-Bar during a mission north of Gardez, Afghanistan.

portion of the mission with Task Force K-Bar. Lieutenant Colonel Kevin DeVore, commanding HMM-365, subsequently joined the Marines at Kandahar with three of his squadron's CH-53s. The 26th MEU's forward headquarters deployed to Bagram Airfield the next day, with Marine KC-130s providing lift for elements of Task Forces Rakkasan and K-Bar. On 18 February, the Marine helicopter crews inserted Canadian, New Zealand, and Norwegian special operation forces near the Tabu Tanga cave complex, where they conducted two simultaneous exploitation missions. The Marine aircrews returned the following day and extracted the special operating forces.[93]

A day following the extraction of the special operating forces, General Mikolashek released tactical control of the small Marine air-ground task force, numbering approximately 90 individuals. This enabled them to rejoin the rest of the 26th MEU later that day and begin a long overdue maintenance stand down and rest period. On the 26th, Vice Admiral Timothy J. Keating, USN, who had recently replaced Admiral Moore as the maritime component commander at Fifth Fleet, disbanded Task Force 58.[94]

Among its successes, the provisional Marine brigade had served ashore in Afghanistan for approximately three months, operating from 400 to 700 miles from the Pakistani coast. This was well outside the doctrinal parameters of 30 days and 200 miles previously envisioned for a similarly sized Marine force. After the operation, Colonel Waldhauser reflected on the expeditionary mind-set necessary to accomplish missions that might initially appear to be "off the wall":

> You have to take a couple of deep breaths and say, "Okay, what is doable here? What is actually possible?" Try to approach these things not from the negative standpoint of what we can't do, but "Okay, that's what you want me to do. Let's see how we can come close to achieving the intent you want."[95]

For their role in defeating al-Qaeda and the Taliban, as part of the Fifth Fleet battle force, the Marines and sailors of Task Force 58 later received the Navy Unit Commendation.



Chapter 15
Marines during Operation Anaconda

Operation Anaconda, a bold attempt to encircle and capture or kill Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in the Shahi Kot Valley south of Gardez, arose from intelligence collected by a special forces detachment in December 2001.[1] As analysts evaluated the information and additional reports gathered in January 2002, they concluded that not only were Taliban and al-Qaeda fugitives regrouping in the Gardez-Khost-Orgun triangle of rural Paktia Province, they also surmised that these fugitives believed U.S. forces were unwilling to pursue them into their traditional mountain sanctuary during the winter.[2] In response, General Tommy Franks, commander in chief at U.S. Central Command, issued Fragmentary Order 03-007 to Army Lieutenant General Paul Mikolashek, his land component commander. The higher headquarters estimated that 1,500 to 2,000 of the enemy were concentrated in the Gardez region and considered them the most volatile pocket of remaining resistance in Afghanistan.[3]



Official Army photo
Afghan Interim Chairman Hamid Karzai and U.S. Army MajGen Franklin Hagenbeck talk to 10th Mountain Division soldiers.

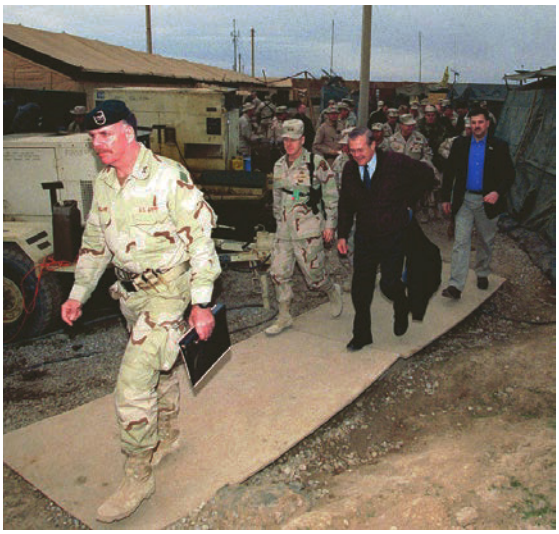


Photo by Helen C. Stikkel, courtesy of the Department of Defense
Col John F. Mulholland, USA, commander of Task Force Dagger, leads a procession through the base camp at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, in January 2002. He is followed by MajGen Franklin L. Hagenbeck, USA, commander of Task Force Mountain, and Donald H. Rumsfeld, secretary of defense.

Once again, responsibility for planning the enemy's eradication fell to Colonel John Mulholland, commander of the U.S Army's 5th Special Forces Group and Task Force Dagger, who was already working at Central Command's behest to consolidate the Taliban rout.[4] These efforts were coordinated with Major General Franklin L. Hagenbeck, USA, commander of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, who was co-located at Karshi Khanabad, Uzbekistan, as Mikolashek's deputy commander and forward representative in the joint operating area. Although the land component possessed tactical control over most overt special operating forces in theater, operational control over these assets "fell under a separate chain-of-command emanating from the Joint Special Operations Command… headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina."[5] Task Force Sword, another

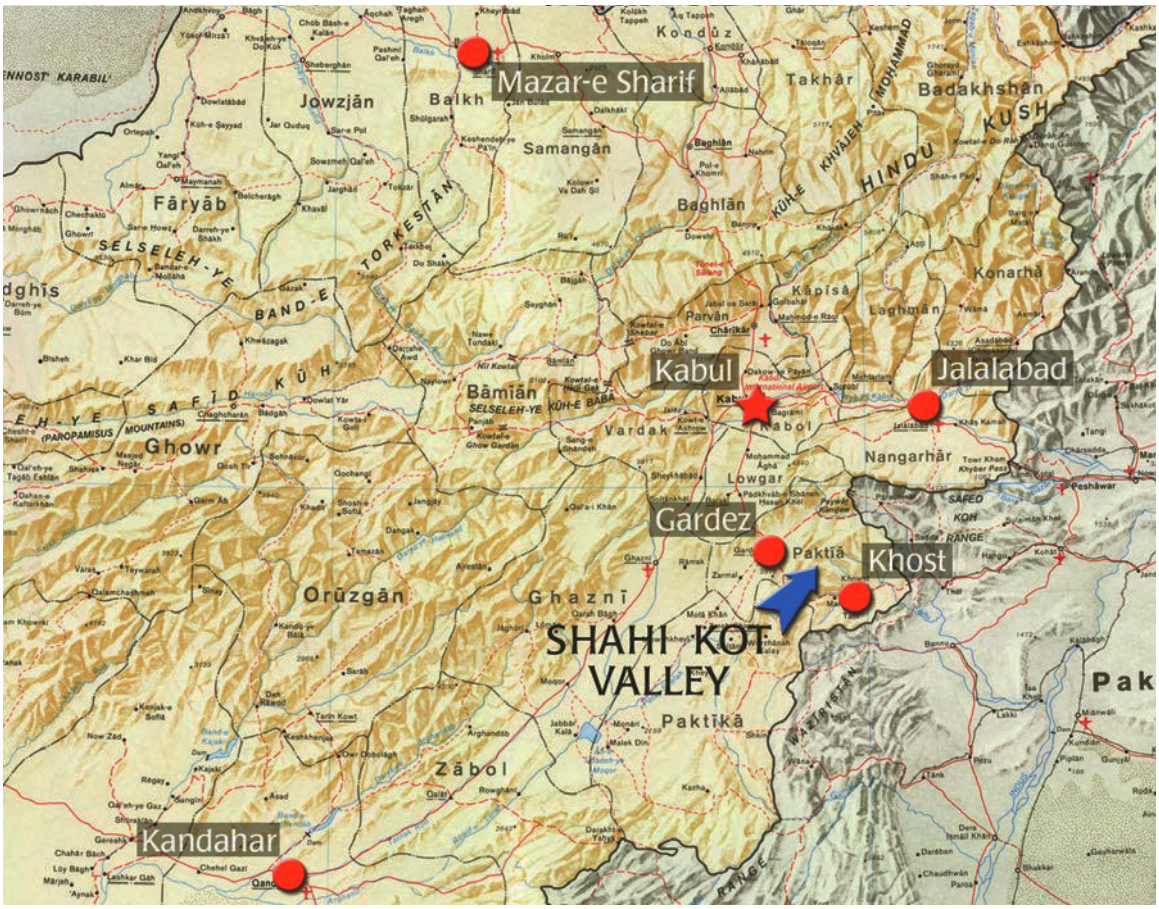


Diagram by Vincent J. Martinez

Map depicting the location of Shahi Kot Valley in northeastern Afghanistan.

covert entity, "received direction straight from CENTCOM's [Central Command's] director of operations that was unknown to General Mikolashek and to other SOF [special operations force] components."[6] After the operation, "Hagenbeck would later portray the disparate and often highly compartmented pockets of U.S. activity focused on the Shahi Kot Valley as a collection, in effect, of individual component commanders reporting directly to General Franks."[7]

Task Forces Dagger (Joint Special Operations Task Force–North) and K-Bar (Joint Special Operation Task Force–South) began planning sensitive site exploitation operations in the Shahi Kot area in early January.[8] Although Colonel Mulholland's initial thought was to attack Shahi Kot with several hundred Afghan militiamen supported by special forces, the indigenous fighters warned of a sizable enemy presence in the valley following a reconnaissance patrol conducted later in the month.[9] Now realizing that a substantial number of conventional forces would be required to clear the area, he devised a new plan* in which one force would flush the opposing forces out of the valley and into the surrounding ridgelines, while another blocked all known avenues of escape.[10]

By the middle of February, after additional intelligence indicated that the Taliban and al-Qaeda

*This sounds much like the plan BGen James Mattis proposed for Tora Bora in December 2001.

troops were readying for battle, Colonel Mulholland decided that planning and executing "a deliberate attack against a well-entrenched enemy force exceeded the capabilities of his task force."[11] After learning of Mulholland's concerns regarding the escalating scale and scope of operations during a briefing at Bagram (attended by "senior representatives from every joint and conventional headquarters in theater"), General Mikolashek directed that General Hagenbeck take charge of the planning effort.[12] Later that day, Hagenbeck led elements of Combined Joint Task Force Mountain (10th Mountain Division) from Uzbekistan to Bagram Airfield, which became his forward field headquarters during Operation Anaconda.[13] At this time, the Coalition order of battle included six special forces A-teams, three special forces command and control elements, three other special operations task forces, a U.S. Army infantry brigade containing three battalions from the 10th Mountain and 101st Airborne Divisions, and approximately 1,000 Afghan militiamen.[14]

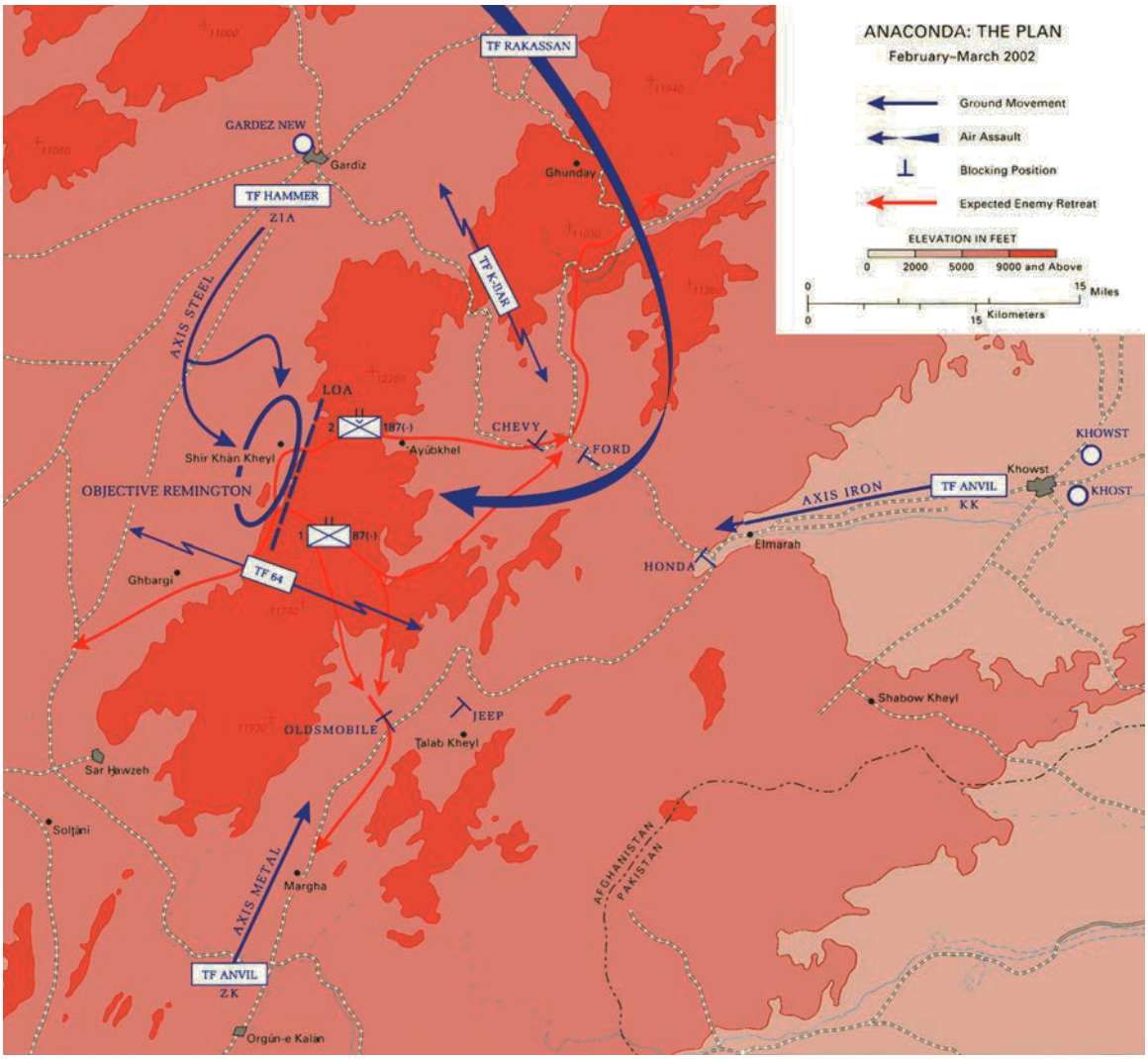
The planning of operations now "shifted from a geographically dispersed SOF-centric force with decentralized planning to a large, concentrated conventional force with operations requiring detailed functional component planning."[15] One lamentable oversight resulting from the bifurcated command structure, "mission creep," and eventual change in planning responsibilities was that the land component disseminated the Anaconda operations order without considering preplanned support from the air component. Because of several factors influencing the conduct of air operations—including lack of joint experience by the Task Force Mountain staff, miscommunication between the components and participating commands, and unrealistic operational expectations established earlier in the campaign—Central Command also denied General Hagenbeck's request to deploy his division's aviation squadron to Bagram.[16]

Hagenbeck experienced similar constraints that Marines at Forward Operating Base Rhino faced two months earlier, as higher headquarters reportedly desired to minimize the personnel footprint in Bagram and felt that Hagenbeck's force-protection mission did not require such support. Although Task Force Mountain did eventually ask the air component for a division-level air liaison officer, its forward headquarters lacked ultrahigh frequency radios to communicate with aircraft, robust communications to contact the Combined Air Operations Center in Saudi Arabia, and a holistic appreciation for the impending operation. Although Air Force Colonel Michael A. Longoria, the senior of two air liaisons on Task Force Mountain's staff, recognized the deficiency and scoured the theater for enough resources to establish a small close air support cell at Bagram, the Combined Air Operations Center was not able to staff a similar cell as Operation Anaconda commenced.[17]

It was not until 21 February that the Army's battlefield coordination element briefed a copy of the operations plan, signed a day earlier by General Mikolashek, to Air Force Lieutenant General John D. W. Corley, director of the Combined Air Operations Center. By 24 February, with the largest land battle of the Afghan campaign scheduled to begin in only four days, Lieutenant General T. Michael Moseley, USAF, the theater's air component commander, and his staff worked feverishly to assemble sufficient aviation resources to support the operation. Generals Moseley and Mikolashek discussed the plan for the first time two days later, during a video teleconference in which Anaconda was briefed to General Franks and the Central Command staff.[18] Although "Moseley expressed unease over what he felt to be the inadequacy of air support provisions occasioned by the short notice.. .. Franks accepted the proposed command structure and command relationships for Anaconda, approved CJTF [Combined Joint Task Force] Mountain's plan, and authorized an execute date of 28 February."[19]

Into the Valley

Shahi Kot Valley lies along the eastern side of an expansive plain running southwest from Gardez City, located 15 miles to the north. Measuring approximately six miles in length and three miles in



Courtesy of U.S.Army Center of Military History

Operation Anaconda: The Plan.

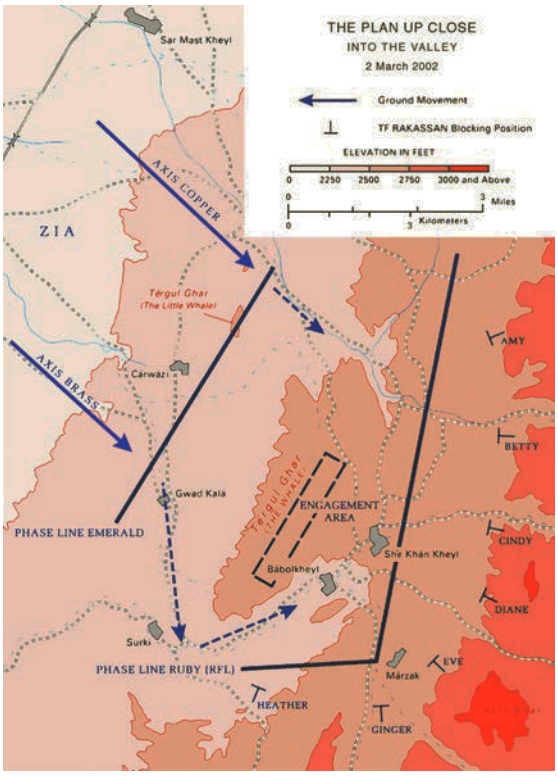
width, it is contained by a 600-foot (8,860 feet above sea level) ridgeline to the west and a 3,000-foot (10,000 to 12,000 feet above sea level) mountain range to the east. Although locals know the western ridgeline as the Ter Gul Ghar, Army troops nicknamed it the "Whale" because of its likeness to a partially submerged whale's back and similarity to a terrain feature located at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California. A smaller 475-foot ridgeline directly to the northwest was similarly nicknamed the "Little Whale." Takur Ghar, another significant terrain feature located southeast of the valley, is among the first line of mountain peaks and is approximately 2,200 feet high.[20]

There are two main avenues into the Shahi Kot Valley, one from the northwest above the Whale and the Little Whale, and another from the southwest between the Whale and Takur Ghar. Suspecting that opposing forces had occupied the villages of Shayr Khan Khel, Babu Khel, and Marzek, planners identified the valley as their operational focus and labeled the three villages Objective Remington.[21] From the Taliban's perspective, "the mountainous region was classic guerrilla terrain—easily

defendable, controlled access, numerous routes of escape, and near a sympathetic border."[22] From the Coalition perspective, "the valley was surrounded by formidable terrain, making the area difficult—nearly impossible—to isolate."[23]

The planners designed a complex operation to isolate and encircle the valley, followed by converging attacks to destroy the al-Qaeda and Taliban forces within.[24] Three days before the assault, Task Forces 64—a detachment from the Australian Special Air Service—and K-Bar, primarily composed of Navy SEALs, were to establish surveillance positions several miles from the objective area. One day before the assault, Task Force Anvil, a combined force of Afghan militia groups supported by special forces, would move west from Khost along Axis Iron and north from Orgun along Axis Steel to establish an outer ring of five blocking positions along main routes of retreat from the objective area. Then, on the day of the assault, Task Force Rakkasan, composed of troops from the 10th Mountain and 101st Airborne Divisions, would conduct a helicopter assault to establish an inner ring of seven blocking positions along the eastern side of the valley. As the main effort, another combined force of Afghan militiamen and special forces (Task Force Hammer) would travel south from Gardez along Axis Steel toward Ter Gul Ghar. As they approached the western hill mass, one group would then head west along Axis Copper to establish a blocking position near the Little Whale to the north, while another would head west along Axis Brass to assault Objective Remington from the south. According to the U.S. Army Center of Military History's *U.S. Army in Afghanistan: Operation Enduring Freedom, October 2001–March 2002*, "The goal was to hit the enemy hard enough to kill or capture as many al-Qaeda as possible and to squeeze the survivors out of the valley into the blocking positions where they would then be eliminated."[25]

Task Force Mountain launched its offensive on 2 March, following a two-day weather delay. In a risky maneuver apparently intended to maintain the



Courtesy of U.S. Army Center of Military History
The Plan Up Close: Into the Valley.

element of surprise, the staff planned for aerial munitions to be dropped on only 13 of 62 known al-Qaeda firing positions and cave entrances prior to the assault, and General Hagenbeck limited these few preparatory fires to only 20 minutes duration.[26]

Although the special reconnaissance forces and Task Force Anvil had been able to situate themselves prior to D-Day with little or no resistance, the Afghan forces associated with Task Force Hammer were less fortunate. Commander Zia Lodin led his men south from Gardez at 2400, reaching his first checkpoint along Axis Steel without difficulty, but then mired, broken, and overturned vehicles slowed the force's forward movement and required some militiamen to continue toward Ter Gul Ghar on foot. Those who swung north on Axis Copper were hit by friendly fire from a circling AC-130 gunship, killing Army Chief Warrant Officer Stanley L. Harriman and three Afghan soldiers, while those who moved to the south along Axis Brass received mortar and artillery fire,



Photo by Spec David Marck, USA

Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), scan a ridgeline for enemy forces near Sirkankel, Afghanistan, during Operation Anaconda on 4 March 2002. The soldiers encountered heavy fire while landing along the eastern slopes of the Shahi Kot Valley and then began the arduous job of clearing the terrain.

wounding 3 American and 14 Afghan soldiers.[27] Subsequent air support was "poorly coordinated and generally ineffective," and after consultation with Task Force Dagger, Commander Zia and his special forces counterparts withdrew at dusk to regroup.[28]

On the opposite side of the valley, Task Force Rakkasan fared even worse. Covert special operations forces maneuvering in the area halted the preplanned air strikes unexpectedly, forcing the task force to begin its air assault before the air component had finished preparing the battlefield. Unfortunately, reconnaissance flights over the area conducted by pilots flying Boeing AH-64 Apache helicopters had failed to detect the enemy's presence, and after the first of two planned helicopter lifts inserted the infantry into their assigned landing zones, the soldiers immediately began to receive fire.[29] The fire was particularly effective near Blocking Positions Ginger and Heather, located at the south end of the valley below Takur Ghar, where hostile forces engaged Company C, 87th Infantry Regiment, with mortars, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. Although 1st Platoon eventually occupied and held Heather, 2d Platoon and the headquarters element pulled into a company-strong point short of the blocking position. Meanwhile, poor weather prevented Task Force Mountain from launching the second helicopter lift and reinforcing the beleaguered troops until early the next morning.[30]

The air component answered more than 150 requests for immediate close air support and dropped approximately 200 precision-guided bombs on al-Qaeda positions during the first 24 hours of Operation Anaconda.[31] Navy and Marine pilots on board the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, then preparing for its return voyage to the United States, were among those air forces answering the call for assistance. On their final day of combat operations in theater and after supporting the Afghan campaign



Official Marine Corps photo

Capt Simon M. Doran, an F/A-18 Hornet pilot with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251, provided close air support to beleaguered assault forces in Shahi Kot Valley, Afghanistan, during the first day of Operation Anaconda.

since mid-October 2001, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond Damm Jr. led a division of four Hornets from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 (VMFA-251) into the enemy-infested Shahi Kot Valley. Captain Simon M. Doran, leading one of the two aircraft sections, described his experience:

> We didn't know [the forward air controller's] position, but we had just gotten there after a B-52 dropped a string of about 30 MK-82s [unguided bombs] in the valley, so I knew that he wasn't in the valley where the B-52s just hit. Then the fire started coming out of that same valley where the B-52s had hit, so he asked us not to drop our bombs, but to come in. We made a total of five strafing passes here just into the valley because he was taking so much fire he couldn't get out of his foxhole to see anything. So we came in and made strafing passes. We got them to stop shooting at him and then he got his head up and we just dropped one 500-pound laser-guided bomb to try and help him, but at that point we reached a critical fuel state and had to leave. We got more fighters over though and they all eventually dropped six laser-guided bombs for him.[32]

Back on the ground, the soldiers of Company C held steadfast for 18 hours before being withdrawn at nightfall, sustaining 25 casualties while successfully thwarting al-Qaeda attempts to outflank and overrun their positions.[33] Their success, as well as that of the soldiers occupying the other five blocking positions, was facilitated by seven Apache helicopter crews who repeatedly attacked al-Qaeda troop concentrations, observation posts, and firing positions throughout the day. All of the aircraft sustained battle damage; three required substantial repairs at Bagram before they could continue the fight, while two others needed to be evacuated to the United States.[34] General Hagenbeck subsequently requested reinforcements in the form of 24 additional Apache helicopters, although these had to be flown into Bagram from the United States on board Air Force C-17 transports.[35] As Task Force Mountain regrouped in Afghanistan that evening, Task Force Rakkasan began to develop a new plan for isolating the Shahi Kot Valley and seizing the high ground to the east.[36]

The Battle for Takur Ghar

On the morning of 4 March, elements of Task Force Rakkasan initiated complementary thrusts into the Shahi Kot Valley. While 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry, attacked east of the valley and began to clear the high ground of defenders, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry, air assaulted into the northernmost landing zone and began to clear the ridgeline south, linking



Photo by Spec David Marck, USA

During Operation Anaconda on 4 March 2002, soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) prepare to dig in to fighting positions after a day of heavy fighting in Shahi Kot Valley, Afghanistan.

the various battle positions. Although hindered by broken terrain and high-altitude conditions, they succeeded in reaching Battle Position Diane, located just north of Takur Ghar, by the end of the day. Commander Zia also returned to the field on the 4th, positioning a reconnaissance team on the north end of the Little Whale to observe enemy movements in response to renewed air strikes.[37]

Most of the fighting on this day—the bloodiest encountered by American forces since the infamous shootout in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993—occurred southeast of the Shahi Kot Valley, where a series of escalating firefights quickly drew national attention.[38] The trouble began around 0300 hours, when machine gun and rocket fire struck an Army MH-47 Chinook helicopter from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (call sign "Razor 03") attempting to insert a SEAL team (call sign "Mako 20") onto a small saddle atop Takur Ghar (Objective Siberia). Although the pilots were able to take evasive action and land their damaged aircraft several kilometers to the north, Petty Officer First Class Neil C. Roberts, USN, had fallen from the back of the helicopter as it abruptly pulled away. The SEAL team contacted a nearby AC-130 gunship for protection, and a short time later another MH-47 (call sign "Razor 04"), which had just inserted a reconnaissance team further north on Objective Ginger, evacuated them to Gardez.[39]

Although Petty Officer Roberts likely survived the fall from the helicopter and attempted to fight off the attackers, they overran his position and killed him within minutes. Unaware of Roberts's death, his crewmates quickly formulated a rescue plan and, at 0455, the same MH-47 that had just extracted the SEALs from the battlefield reinserted them into the compromised landing zone. While hostile fire again ripped through the descending aircraft's fuselage, the crew was able to disembark their passengers this time and make their way back to base. Although the six-man team had exited the aircraft unharmed, it immediately came under intense small arms fire and attempted to move toward more defensible high ground. The team killed several al-Qaeda troops during the ensuing firefight, but the firefight wounded two SEALs and killed their Air Force tactical air combat controller, Technical Sergeant John A. Chapman. Under covering fire from an orbiting AC-130, the team chose to disengage and withdrew to the northeast.[40]

Meanwhile, around 0500 and in response to the initial opposed insert, the special operations headquarters at Bagram had launched Army Captain Nathan E. Self and a small quick reaction force to Gardez.[41] After receiving a call for assistance subsequent to the second opposed insert, headquarters redirected the two en route ranger teams to Takur Ghar.[42] At 0610, plagued by ineffective communications and largely unaware of the deteriorating tactical situation atop the mountain, the first of two MH-47 helicopters (call sign "Razor 01") descended rapidly into the landing zone. As it approached the ground, it began receiving small arms, machine gun, and rocket fire, which destroyed one of its three engines and forced the pilots to execute a controlled crash landing.[43]

With one dead and two wounded crewmen, and now receiving heavy fire from three directions, the soldiers exited the aircraft hulk and sought cover among the rock outcrops. Three of the rangers died in the process, although the team succeeded in killing the same number of al-Qaeda.[44] After an attempt to assault enemy bunkers at the top of the hill failed, the surviving troops hunkered down, while Navy Tomcats from Strike Fighter Squadron 211 (VF-211) on board the USS *John C. Stennis* provided immediate close air support. The pilots remained on station for three hours, conducting multiple bombing runs, dropping 500-pound bombs within 50 meters of friendly positions, and helping guide an Air Force AC-130 gunship onto target.[45] By 0700, the rangers were no longer in danger of being overrun.

Marine F-18s from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314) also provided close air support to the beleaguered ranger force that day, working with a soldier from the downed helicopter (call sign "Slick 01").[46] Major Jack G. Bolton, who

led the four-aircraft division (call sign "Stone 31"), later recalled his experiences over Takur Ghar:

> We arrived in the Operation Anaconda [area of responsibility] and found that a CH-47 had gone down. We were in comms with a nonqualified controller on the ground who was at the crash site and an [unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)] operator (call sign "Stiletto"). My wingman and I worked for at least 20 minutes to capture a laser "spot" from the UAV in order to receive precise targeting information on enemy troops that were engaging the downed aircraft from across a draw just to the south of the crash site. Stiletto informed us that once we called "spot," he would give us a "cleared hot." We tried multiple run-in headings to acquire the laser spot but could not. My guess was that the snow-covered terrain was preventing our LDTs [laser target designators] from picking up the laser energy. Stiletto stated on multiple occasions that we could not drop until we acquired the laser energy.
>
> Based on the urgency in the ground controller's voice ("We need a bomb now"), I decided to transition to a visual delivery of a GBU-12 (Guided Bomb Unit-12) since I had the crash site and the enemy troops across the draw in sight. Post delivery, the ground controller responded with, "Nice bombs, but no closer or you are going to hit us." Following the delivery, Stiletto was extremely p——ed that I dropped without a "cleared hot" and "no spot." I was skeptical to say the least about whether a UAV could provide a FAC(A) [airborne forward air controller] or was even qualified to be a FAC(A). Regardless, Bossman (the airborne warning control system aircraft) came on the TAD [tactical air direction net] and instructed us that K-Mart (the combined air operations center) directed us to [return to base] immediately. My section left with two GBU-12s on my jet and three on my wingman's jet.[47]

Captain Jonathan R. Ohman, following in the second section, echoed Bolton's comments: "It was an extremely frustrating experience, and there was some confusion over what authority the [unmanned aerial vehicle operator] had, particularly when the guy on the ground was not a trained [joint tactical air controller]. Our section didn't drop any ordnance."[48]

After watching the first helicopter go down, the second MH-47 (call sign "Razor 02") disembarked the second ranger team 800 meters east and 2,000 feet below the mountaintop. At 1030, following a grueling climb at high altitude accomplished under opposing mortar fire, they linked up with the rest of the quick reaction force and together successfully assaulted the bunkers. The battered force continued to receive sporadic sniper and mortar fire—which injured an Army medic and killed an Air Force pararescueman who were aiding the wounded—as

Table 5: American Servicemen Killed during the Battle for Takur Ghar

Name	*Service*	*Organization*	*Billet*
Petty Officer Neil C. Roberts	USN	Recon Team	SEAL
Technical Sergeant John A. Chapman	USAF	Recon Team	Combat Control Team
Sergeant Philip J. Svitak	USA	Quick Reaction Force	Aircrew
Sergeant Bradley S. Crose	USA	Quick Reaction Force	Ranger
Corporal Matthew E. Commons	USA	Quick Reaction Force	Ranger
Specialist Marc A. Anderson	USA	Quick Reaction Force	Ranger
Senior Airman Jason D. Cunningham	USAF	Quick Reaction Force	Pararescueman

it labored to consolidate its position atop the hill. The force responded by requesting additional close air support, while special operating forces on surrounding hilltops also directed air support against al-Qaeda forces attempting to reinforce Takur Ghar. At around 2015, four helicopters from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment extracted both the ranger quick reaction force and SEAL team, including the body of Petty Officer Roberts (Table 5).[49] Although what began as a supporting operation atop Takur Ghar had taken "public interest away from the main effort by conventional forces… the popular attention span drifted shortly after the rescue was complete."[50]

Building Air Power

Following the withdrawal of Task Force Hammer and the Apache helicopters on the first day of battle, and with only half of Task Force Rakkasan remaining along the eastern slopes, the nature of Anaconda changed "from an operation focused primarily on land power to an operation increasingly dependent on Air Force, Navy, and later Marine air assets."[51] General Moseley focused on pushing air power to the fight. During the first two days of the operation, he tripled the number of fighter sorties flying out of Al Jaber Air Base in Kuwait and forward deployed Air Force Fairchild-Republic A-10 Thunderbolt IIs to further increase responsiveness. As the buildup of air power over eastern Afghanistan grew, so did the variety of participating fixed-wing aircraft, which eventually included A-10s, AC-130s, and AV-8Bs; B-1s and B-52s; F-15s, F-16s, and F/A-18s; and even 16 French Dassault-Breguet Super Etendards and Dassault Mirage 2000Ds. Navy pilots from Carrier Air Wing 7 (CVW-7), on board the USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV 67),* and Navy and Marine pilots from Carrier Air Wing 9 (CVW-9), on board the *John C. Stennis*, flew many of these aircraft and conducted more than 100 sorties each day.[52] Aviation historian Benjamin Lambeth later concluded that

> in the end, the application of allied air power in Anaconda was more responsive than in earlier portions of Enduring Freedom, and its concentration of fire was unprecedented in the Afghan campaign. Ten heavy bombers, more than 30 fighters, and 2 AC-130s continuously operated within the 70-square-mile battle area.[53]

The sudden escalation of air operations apparently came as a surprise to the Marine F-18 pilots on board the *John C. Stennis*, who would fly combat missions around the clock in support of the ground forces. According to Major John M. Jansen, executive officer of VMFA-314, their first indication that Operation Anaconda was taking place came from an ambiguous disclosure by the ship's intelligence center, which indicated that "some Army forces are being helo-lifted into a valley in eastern Afghanistan."[54] Although the Marines hopefully anticipated heading inland to support the ground forces, their attempts to familiarize themselves with the ongoing operation were hindered when the ship's intelligence personnel were "kicked out" of Task Force Mountain Internet chat rooms for asking questions without a "need to know."[55] The Marines persevered, however, and were soon conducting mock flights into the Shahi Kot Valley on the ship's Topscene simulator.[56]

Once they began flying actual missions, they pushed to use 500-pound bombs with variable timed fuses to engage enemy personnel with air bursts and "to put out hard-hitting, real-time" after-action reviews and situation reports that were propagated throughout the theater.[57] On 5 March, Major Jansen described the basic problem "gleaned from debriefs conducted with OEF [Operation Enduring Freedom] element leads" in an e-mail report to Navy Captain Donald P. Quinn, commander of CVW-9. He emphasized, "The Joint Task Force commander must understand that, while there are multiple maneuver elements on the ground, there is ONLY ONE OBJECTIVE/TARGET AREA."[58] Lambeth echoed this sentiment in his history of the air campaign:

*The *John F. Kennedy* battle group relieved the *Theodore Roosevelt* battle group on 6 March 2002 and flew its first mission in support of Operation Anaconda that evening. (Baker and Evans, "Year in Review 2002," 29)

> From an air perspective, the biggest problem presented by the initial planning of Anaconda entailed coordinating the many concurrent strike operations with too few prior preparations. That problem occasioned serious concerns for both the [Combined Air Operations Center] and on board the participating aircraft carriers, since the congested traffic operating within the tightly confined airspace over the battlefield and the ever-present danger of midair collision or other fratricide incident meant that there was no margin for error in managing the flow of aircraft through the airspace.[59]

Years later, Major Jansen observed that the after action reports were "not necessarily well received" by the air component command, but they served as the genesis for an emergency close air support conference, convened by the Air Force A-10 fighter wing in Kuwait following the operation.[60] Major Chad A. Vaughn, another pilot from VMFA-314, recalled that "CVW-9 never did have a face-to-face with the Army or Air Force to coordinate how we were going to conduct business in support of the ground scheme of maneuver."[61] He explained that the purpose of the emergency conference was "to try and standardize the procedures among all the services that were involved in operations in Afghanistan."

As the representative for Carrier Task Force 50 (the joint-combined carrier forces operating in Fifth Fleet's area of responsibility), Major Jansen presented a 12-slide PowerPoint brief arguing for the implementation of joint close air support basics. This included premission pilot orientation, check-in briefs, discrete target descriptions from forward air controllers, nine-line support requests, marking rounds, unambiguous clearance to engage, meaningful targets, accurate battle damage assessments, clear use of fire control measures, and adherence to joint doctrine.[62] As Jansen later commented, "You can infer from the brief's (almost pleading) focus… how completely dysfunctional was the operational construct for the aerial fire support efforts [in support of Task Force] Mountain."[63]



Photo by Cpl Bryant V. Cox.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020215-m-1761c-046/dm-sd-02-07639
Cpl Robert D. Walkley, a computer systems specialist with 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, provides a local construction worker with a bucket of cement. The Marines helped repair a schoolhouse in Faza, Kenya, during Operation Edged Mallet on 15 February 2002.

A Force in Readiness

More than a thousand miles from northeastern Afghanistan, Fifth Fleet's amphibious force waited for a chance to engage the Taliban and al-Qaeda with growing anticipation. After its brief and uneventful assignment to Task Force 58 in mid-January, the USS *Bonhomme Richard* Amphibious Ready Group had departed the Arabian Sea and steamed toward Kenya to participate in Exercise Edged Mallet.

Throughout February, the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (13th MEU) conducted both humanitarian-civic assistance operations and sustainment training, contributing to Central Command's

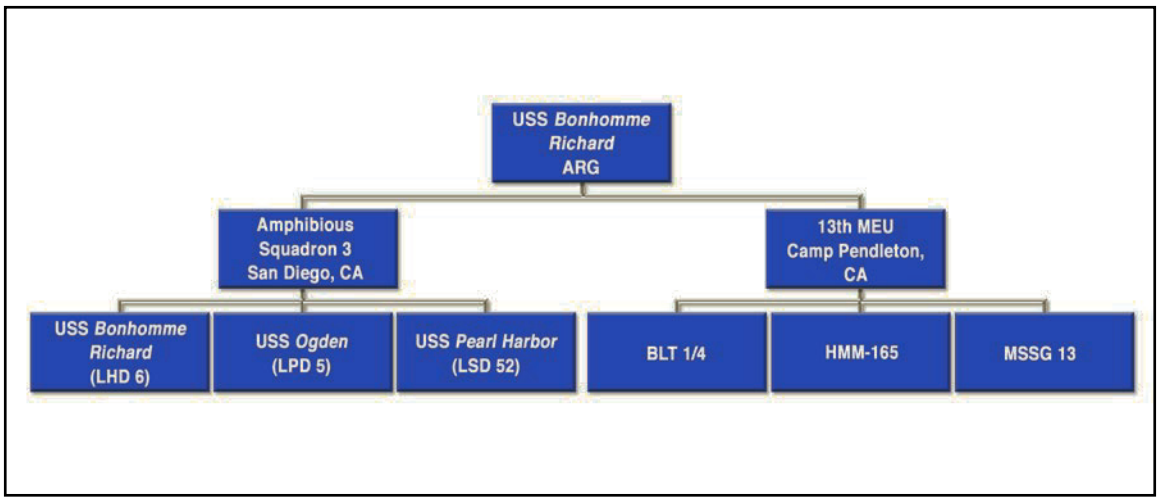


Diagram 8: USS *Bonhomme Richard* Amphibious Ready Group

theater engagement plan.[64] Lieutenant Colonel Rodman A. Sansone and MEU Service Support Group 13 fanned out to six different coastal areas where they dug a well, repaired a footbridge, completed carpentry work at a school for the deaf, built a two-room schoolhouse, and provided medical and dental treatment to more than 1,700 patients.[65] At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Robert O. Sinclair and Battalion Landing Team 1/4 (BLT 1/4) participated in joint maneuvers with the Kenyan army, which included heliborne operations and patrolling coastal villages.[66] Colonel Christopher J. Gunther, the expeditionary unit's commanding officer, commented positively on the experience in the unit's newsletter: "This was a great opportunity to meet people who genuinely needed our assistance."[67]

In addition to providing aviation support to the 13th MEU's other elements, Lieutenant Colonel Gregg A. Sturdevant and crews from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (HMM-165) conducted reconnaissance missions to collect communication intercepts off the coast of Somalia and flew terrain flights to refamiliarize themselves with operating over land.[68] The pilots were provided an opportunity to reacquaint themselves with rapidly changing terrain, elevation, and airspeed requirements encountered while operating over land, a change from encountering a uniform operating environment day after day during two months at sea. They also practiced transporting passengers, executing helicopter raids, and delivering ordnance.[69] This was particularly important for the Harrier detachment from Marine Attack Squadron 211 (VMA-211). Major Michael J. Gough, the officer-in-charge, recalled, "In anticipation of the mission coming back to Afghanistan, we practiced some of those profiles that we didn't get to practice before we got to the theater—the high-altitude deliveries, high-altitude roll-ins—and practiced basically some of the procedures we wanted to do."[70]

Following the conclusion of Exercise Edged Mallet, the *Bonhomme Richard* Amphibious Ready Group headed north toward the Persian Gulf to participate in Exercises Eastern Maverick in Qatar and Sea Soldier in Oman.[71] The 13th MEU also had tentative plans to support special operating forces in Yemen and along the Horn of Africa by supplying its standard quick reaction and tactical recovery force packages.[72] En route, the ready group stopped at Masirah Island to replenish its stores and take on aircraft parts.

While they were in port on 2 March, Rear Admiral Calland, Central Command's special operations component commander, visited the *Bonhomme Richard* and received a capabilities brief from Colonel Gunther, his staff, and the major

subordinate commanders.[73] Although any association between the briefing and the delay in getting helicopter reinforcements to Task Force Mountain in Afghanistan remains speculative, the next morning Colonel Gunther received an e-mail inquiring how many Super Cobra helicopters he could contribute to Operation Anaconda and how long it would take them to reach Bagram.[74]

Colonel Sturdevant recalled that the expeditionary unit's staff had taken a Sunday break from their usual morning meetings and he was sleeping when the phone in his stateroom rang at 0911 to inform him of the request for information. After discussing the situation briefly with Colonel Gunther, he quickly assembled the squadron staff and they began to look over maps, estimate distances, figure fuel requirements, and identify potential refueling sites. Drawing from their brief operating experience with Task Force 58, they were able to answer the immediate question of supportability and then formulate a tentative concept of operations. The Marines delivered their confirmation brief that evening and approximately three hours later, around 2100, received Central Command's execute order, directing them to support Task Force Mountain.[75]

Meanwhile, the ready group had departed Masirah around 1300, and by steaming north at 26 knots was able to reach the coast off Pasni, Pakistan, around 0330 the following morning.[76] After "an overnight jam session" to work out the final details of their plan, the crews of the five Cobra helicopters from Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 369 (HMLA-369), led by Major Victor S. Stover, headed inland at 0730, delaying their scheduled departure time by approximately a half hour due to communications problems.[77]

They were followed by a flight of three Super Stallion helicopters around 1000, their departure delayed an hour and a half in order to stow extra equipment on board the aircraft. Two of these aircraft carried cargo and personnel, while the third transported the tactical bulk fuel delivery system the Marines referred to as Robertson Gear (after the manufacturing company's name). The Super Stallions were part of two detachments from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 361 (HMM-361) and Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462 (HMH-462), and were led by Majors Marc A. Sehrt and Kevin G. Moss.[78]

Aircrews spent approximately nine and a half hours completing the 730-mile journey to Bagram, which they divided into four legs for refueling purposes. Each flight flew the first two legs into Pasni, Pakistan, and Kandahar, Afghanistan, independently. Once both flights were ready to depart Kandahar, they continued north with the Super Cobras flying approximately 10 minutes ahead of the Super Stallions.[79] Halting briefly at a forward arming and refueling point that the Army had established just north of Kabul (call sign "Texaco"), the Super Stallion crews used the Robertson Gear to refuel the Cobras. After approximately 40 minutes on the ground, the aircraft began their final leg and arrived in Bagram at around 1700. Although the two cargo-laden CH-53s remained overnight in Bagram, the third helicopter with the refueling equipment returned to Kandahar due to space constraints at the base.[80]

The Marines' initial experience was surreal. They had heard secondhand accounts of intense fighting during the first two days of Anaconda and then arrived at dusk with small arms fire going off around the edge of the airfield as they unloaded the aircraft. Major Stover recalled,

> No one was there to meet us, we just showed up [and] they told us where to park…. I hate to use this term, but it was just like any other third-world ——hole… a lot of run-down places, especially around Bagram. We'd been warned about the mined areas, "Don't walk here, don't walk there." And it showed, because the Soviets had left a lot of junk there. You could tell the history from the battles between the Taliban and Northern Alliance up there because there was wreckage everywhere. It was kind of a scenic-desolate place, if you will, because [there] were beautiful mountains in the background, yet in and around the airfield, you'd trip over things left and right as you walked around.[81]



Photo courtesy of LtCol Gregg A. Sturdevant

Pilots from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 pose in front of the officers' tent at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, during Operation Anaconda in March 2002. The media often conducted interviews in front of the tent because the Marines possessed the only American flag at the base camp. From left to right are Capt Bruce W. Laughlin, Capt Chad J. Comunale, Capt William D. Collier, Capt Timothy R. Gabriel, LtCol Gregg A. Sturdevant, and Capt Philip E. Eilertson.

Colonel Sturdevant was fortunate enough to run into Lieutenant Colonel Mark A. Clark, an old shipmate who was then fulfilling a joint special operations role for Central Command. Clark oriented Sturdevant toward Task Force Mountain's combat operations center, and the squadron commander quickly introduced himself to General Hagenbeck and his chief of staff. After checking in with the command, Sturdevant met with the camp commandant and acquired two general-purpose tents for the 41 Marines who had accompanied him into Afghanistan; unfortunately, they were located on opposite corners of the tent city.[82]

Major Sehrt recalled that one of the first things the Marines did was hang a sign announcing the squadron's presence at Bagram and erect an American flag outside their tent. This was reportedly the first flag to appear in the tent city and "all the Army officers and enlisted would come by and want to salute the flag, but also get their picture by the flag because it symbolizes that… they're in country fighting the war and… they're proud to do what they're doing."[83] He added that the flag became a rally point for the Army, Marines, and media, because the flag "was the centerpiece of what we represent."[84]

The 13th MEU's KC-130 detachment also deployed forward on 4 March, basing itself out of Jacobabad, Pakistan. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Bradley S. James, the unit was composed of two aircraft from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 234 (VMGR-234), a reserve squadron based in Fort Worth, Texas, and two others from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (VMGR-352), an active squadron based in Miramar,

California. Both Colonel Gunther and Lieutenant Colonel Sturdevant emphasized their contribution to sustaining operations ashore. Shortly after arriving, they began flying two to four missions per day, supporting the 13th MEU out of Pasni, Pakistan, and resupplying Task Force Mountain in Bagram.[85]

In addition to transporting personnel, equipment, and supplies into Bagram, the KC-130s regularly replenished the Army's fuel supply, which was critical to sustaining air operations during Operation Anaconda. Although they occasionally observed muzzle flashes and rocket-propelled grenades while flying into Afghanistan at night, they reduced the threat by traveling around the higher elevations and staying above the enemy's range. Commenting on the successful integration of active and reserve forces, and overdue appreciation for the aircraft's capabilities, Marines in the detachment jokingly referred to their deployment as the "Bastard to Beauty Tour."[86]

Although Colonel Sturdevant and one of the three CH-53 crews had initially intended to return to the *Bonhomme Richard* after establishing the Cobra detachment at Bagram, a fragmentary order cut during the evening of 4 March amended the initial request so that all eight aircraft could remain in Afghanistan. This raised the number of HMM-165 Marines operating from the forward operating base to 46, although the total would eventually peak at 83 after additional staff, maintenance, and flight personnel came forward to support the deployment. The Super Stallion crews lived out of their helicopters for the first five days in country but eventually erected a tent near the Marine aircraft after Sturdevant had the area swept for mines. The crews also constructed three sandbagged bunkers as protection against potential indirect fire.[87]

Most of Colonel Sturdevant's initial duties involved coordinating squadron air operations and serving as a liaison between the Marines and Task Force Mountain.[88] This was no small task, particularly for Marines who were used to having mission requests routed through the chain-of-command and assigned to the squadron. As Major Sehrt described,

> The missions were coming so fast to the Army out there that they had more missions than they had aviation assets…. They would prioritize their missions… and they found… that the Cobras and the [CH-]53s… could do more than one mission at a time because we have the fuel endurance or the legs to reach more than one place.… The first list of missions would come out sometime early in the morning, but that was the first part of it, because the missions would change because there were so many competing units for Marine assets.… There were times they would call us on the radio, "Hey, can you do this? This is a different mission change." We said, "Sure, we can adapt to that. We can do it."[89]

As Sturdevant later commented, "We didn't do a lot of deliberate [planning] because it was a fairly fluid situation. We ended up doing more of a rapid response planning evolution, and it was very easy to do because of the training I've received over… multiple MEU (SOC [Special Operations Capable]) cycles."[90]

Among others, the squadron's small headquarters staff—the "DASCateers"—included Corporal Rickie G. Tucker Jr. from the operations section, Corporal Brian M. Nabb and Sergeant Kenneth A. Edwards from the intelligence section, First Lieutenant Dennis C. Trogus from Marine Air Control Group 38, and Captain Leaf H. Wade from the 13th MEU staff. Colonel Sturdevant specifically emphasized the hard work of Sergeant Edwards, who would prepare weather reports and intelligence updates for the premission briefings, record crew manifests for all departing flights (reported to the commanding general every four hours), and then conduct postmission debriefings following the crew's return.[91]

Colonel Sturdevant also recalled the importance of managing the expenditure of available flight hours (crew days) to maintain the intense operational tempo, noting that he would quickly brief returning pilots on their next missions and then get them asleep so they could fly the next day.[92] This turned out to be an around-the-clock proposition as pilot

training and aircraft capabilities enabled the squadron to absorb some of the night-flying requirements from the Army.[93] According to Captain Philip E. Eilertson, while the Apache pilots were unable to fly in conditions below 25 percent illumination, Cobra helicopters possessed forward-looking infrared thermal imaging devices, and the pilots were trained to fly under low-light conditions with night-vision goggles.[94] Major Sehrt similarly remarked that the Chinook pilots were surprised to learn the Super Stallions were also equipped with forward-looking infrared thermal imaging devices and capable of conducting armed reconnaissance missions.[95]

Major Sehrt observed that the HMM-165 detachment required only about 15 percent of the 2,000 personnel that the Army had to support its 30 helicopters. Sehrt explained that one of the organizational capabilities that enabled the detachment to remain small was that some Marine flight crews helped perform routine aircraft maintenance, whereas the Army had separate maintenance and flight crews. Moreover, he noted, Army doctrine did not provide for the same level of field maintenance that the Marines were equipped to accomplish and routinely practiced during combined arms training exercises in Twentynine Palms, California.[96]

Several of the pilots commented on the hard work of the Marine maintenance crews, crediting their dedication to the squadron's ability to keep two of three CH-53s and four of five AH-1Ws mission capable throughout the duration of their three-week deployment.[97] As Major Stover recalled, "My maintenance guys never had a shed to work in, any sort of cover or lights other than a flashlight.… The dust was horrible up there, and if it wasn't dusty it was muddy…. Those guys pulled off some miracles to keep us in the fight as well as they did."[98] Major Sehrt echoed this praise:

> It was amazing to see the young lance corporal who might be out there at midnight by himself or with another lance corporal and it's raining and it's cold; the first couple of weeks, it was miserably cold and… then the rain came down and there was mud all over the place; it was miserable. Young Marines, who were 18 and 19 years old, carrying toolboxes out to fix those planes because they've got to meet a five o'clock launch—it was motivating.[99]

He continued,

> Our aircrew, who flew every single day, were also the same individuals who mainly worked on the planes every single night, so a lot of guys did double duty. Again, they never complained. They realized they had a mission at hand, which was to keep the planes available for flying every day.[100]

AH-1W Super Cobras

Following a lull in the ground offensive as commanders adjusted plans for the next attack, close air support increased in intensity during Phase Two of Operation Anaconda.[101] Heavily armed with Hellfire missiles, 2.75-inch rockets, and 20mm cannons, Cobra helicopters were well equipped to accomplish the pilot's primary mission of providing close air support to maneuvering ground forces. Moreover, advanced avionics enabled the Cobras to serve in a variety of supporting roles. They could escort assault helicopters, covering their inbound flight, reconnoitering the landing zone, and suppressing hostile fire during the insert. They could also conduct strike coordination armed reconnaissance flights to identify targets forward of friendly lines. If they chose not to engage the enemy themselves, they could pass a precise grid coordinate on to the orbiting air control aircraft, perhaps marking the target with their laser for fixed-wing aircraft to hit or even directing the attack while acting as an airborne forward air controller.[102]

The Cobras flew their first mission in support of Operation Anaconda on 5 March, following behind an Army Apache during an armed reconnaissance from Bagram to Gardez, which enabled the Cobra pilots to familiarize themselves with the terrain.[103] The Army had designated four helicopter routes into the Shahi Kot Valley and established a forward arming and refueling point midway to decrease their response time. As Major Stover recalled, "It was kind of disorganized because



Photo courtesy of LtCol Gregg A. Sturdevant

Members of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 established this temporary forward arming and refueling point in Afghanistan during Operation Anaconda. It is situated five miles west of the "Whale Back," near Shahi Kot Valley. As the crew of a CH-53E Super Stallion (foreground) resupplies one AH-1W Super Cobra, another attack helicopter circles overhead. U.S. Army and Canadian infantry provided local security for the Marines.

[the] helo traffic all did sort of their own thing going down there—as far as we could tell—and there didn't seem to be a lot of integration between how we would get down there and how the [CH-]47s and Apaches and everybody were getting down there."[104] Unfortunately, after reaching the valley, they could not get close enough to Objective Remington to observe much detail as Coalition bombers were busy striking targets within the engagement area.

The next day, HMM-165 dispatched two Cobra sections to the Shahi Kot Valley. While one team of two aircraft went after a suspected high-value target south of the objective area, Major Stover's section escorted a Chinook and two Black Hawk helicopters during a mission to resupply troops near Objective Remington. After completing their primary mission, they made several passes through the valley and identified two enemy trench lines and a mortar position. While the enemy fired small arms and rocket-propelled grenades at the attack helicopters, the Marine pilots engaged them with rockets, cannon fire, and missiles. Once the target was eliminated, they destroyed a second mortar position that a nearby forward air controller had identified, stopped briefly at a nearby refueling point, and then returned to hit two more mortar positions that had been harassing the ground troops for several days.[105]

Reflecting later on the tactical differences between the two Services, Colonel Sturdevant speculated that one reason the Cobras were so effective was their employment of "running fire," while the Apaches appeared to be doing more "hover-cover" from behind terrain features.[106] He explained that at high altitudes, the pilots needed to maintain their momentum during an attack in order to take evasive action quickly when receiving hostile fire. Consequently, the Marines would fly over the objective, identify the target, and then swing around

to engage the enemy during subsequent passes. Major Stover offered the following analogy:

> Think of it—if you drive a pickup, you load your truck down—how it's slow to brake, it's slow to accelerate, at times really heavy. That's the same sort of thing—your aircraft's heavy. There's less air up there for the blades to take a bite out of, so then it doesn't turn as quick as you're used to or it's harder to slow down or you don't have as much excess power as you thought you had to accelerate as quick as you can.[107]

CH-53E Super Stallions

Major Sehrt recalled that the CH-53 pilots would fly between two and eight hours a day, conducting two or three missions that varied from transporting troops and cargo to bringing fuel and ordnance forward to replenish other tactical aircraft.[108] The Marines also remained on standby to transport an Army company that had been designated as the task force's quick reaction force, although that never became necessary.[109] To maintain this fast-paced operational tempo, the four pilot sets established a one-off, three-on rotation schedule.

Colonel Sturdevant described how the CH-53s' presence on the battlefield greatly enhanced the Cobras' effectiveness. After taking the 160-mile round-trip to the Shahi Kot Valley, the attack helicopters could remain on station for only 20 minutes before they had to return to Bagram for ammunition and fuel. However, he could rearm the AH-1Ws quickly and extend their time on station for up to two hours by deploying the Super Stallions to establish forward arming and refueling points near Objective Remington.[110] The Marine CH-53s could also replenish their fuel supply and resume operations by linking up with overhead KC-130 tankers, whereas the Army CH-47s were required to return to base once their fuel supply had been exhausted.[111]

The squadron planned its initial forward refueling and rearming operations in detail, coordinating the mission between the Cobra and Super Stallion pilots. As Major Sehrt explained, they would work with the intelligence community to identify secure locations that would enable the AH-1Ws to remain in proximity to Objective Remington and the CH-53s to remain on station for several hours. He recalled that they often used sites the Army Special Forces had previously surveyed and over which they maintained observation, noting that they alternated the location four or five times during the operation to thwart enemy plans to shoot down helicopters.[112]

The Super Stallion section would normally depart Bagram in the early morning and fly 45 minutes south carrying more than 5,000 pounds of fuel in each aircraft. After landing in the designated zone—often an abandoned dirt airfield—at the appointed time, they would deploy their own security force, which was variously provided by the squadron's ordnancemen, paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division, Army Rangers, Canadian soldiers, and even British commandos.[113] Major Sehrt explained that one factor making the security piece difficult "was that you could not tell a bad guy from a local because they all dressed the same."[114] He continued,

> We always landed near the village because all the villages were real close to the Whale, so there'd be a lot of foot traffic. The question is… is he walking to attack you or is he walking to get to his own village? A couple times we had individuals with AK-47s who would come up to the [forward arming refueling point], would wave hello, and we would try to wave back and try to shoo them away. A couple [of] times we had to fire over their heads and they kindly walked away and turned around.[115]

Once on the ground, the CH-53 crews would unwind their hoses and rearm and refuel the first Cobra while the wingman circled overhead, waiting for his turn to land. Major Moss recalled that they would generally distribute from 9,000 to 14,000 pounds of fuel for two to four Cobras. By the second half of the deployment, the rearming and refueling missions had become so routine that the CH-53 pilots were essentially responding to on-call requests.[116]

Around 0230 on 7 March, CH-53 Number 22 (call sign "Lady Ace 21") experienced a hard landing

during a night mission.[117] Gunnery Sergeant Andy D. Hathcock, the helicopter crew chief, recalled that while descending toward forward arming and refueling point Texaco, the pilot encountered brownout conditions in which thick, swirling dust obscured the landing zone. Although he requested a wave-off, the aircraft was heavily loaded with approximately 6,000 pounds of fuel and another 5,000 pounds of ordnance and personnel, and it had insufficient power to pull away. After losing its tail rotor authority, the helicopter started to rotate, slide through the air, hit the ground, and bounce to a stop.[118]

During the crash, as Hathcock wondered anxiously if the cargo would shift and crush him against the frame, the aircraft suffered a broken left rear landing gear, damaged left mini-wing, and a fuel leak. Although the aircraft remained serviceable, the crew left it in place due to deteriorating weather conditions. During the delay, KC-130 crews operating out of Jacobabad picked up additional aircraft parts and troops in Pasni and flew them into Bagram. Marine mechanics repaired the damaged helicopter on site the following day, and the crew returned it to Bagram to resume operations in support of Anaconda.[119]

AV-8B Harriers

On 5 March—the same day the Cobra and Super Stallion pilots at Bagram flew their first missions into the Shahi Kot Valley—HMM-165's Harrier pilots on board the *Bonhomme Richard* flew their first mission in support of Operation Anaconda. As was customary, after meeting the amphibious ready group's own operational needs, Colonel Gunther had offered his excess aircraft sorties to the air component command in Saudi Arabia. After coordinating for hours with Marine liaison officers at the air operations center (who advocated forcefully for the integration of Marine assets within the air campaign), the air component added the 13th MEU's six AV-8Bs to the armada building over eastern Afghanistan. For the next 18 days, the Harrier detachment was locked into a continuous 12-hour mission cycle: three hours of planning and preparation; a two-hour flight into Afghanistan; two hours on station; a two-hour return flight; and three further hours of postmission debriefings with the operations, intelligence, and maintenance sections.[120]



Photo courtesy of LtCol Gregg A. Sturdevant

An AV-8B Harrier from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 takes on fuel from a Royal Air Force tanker while flying in support of Coalition forces operating in Afghanistan during Operation Anaconda.

Major Gough recalled that there was a different feeling in the air on the morning of 6 March when he and a younger pilot headed into harm's way for their first time. Although he had experienced antiaircraft threats while flying over Iraq in support of Operation Southern Watch and there had always been a possibility of dropping bombs during the week of flights over Afghanistan during January 2002, this time they expected to engage an aggressive adversary who would likely fight back. According to Gough, "The best part about it was that we didn't miss a beat. We took off, launched, and followed procedures."[121]

The two Harriers headed north from the *Bonhomme Richard*, took on fuel from an orbiting tanker, and held on station while waiting for an assignment. After hearing their call sign over the radio, they switched to a secure frequency, and the airborne air control center directed them to contact a particular forward air controller who had requested support. As they were switching to the forward controller's tactical air direction frequency, however, they spotted explosions in the distance and passed an Air Force B-1 bomber exiting the area. The forward controller subsequently apologized, "Well, sorry about that, your targets are destroyed and we don't have anything for you now."[122]

Major Gough and his wingman returned to the tanker for more fuel, slipping in ahead of a section of disappointed Navy F-14 pilots who subsequently returned to their carrier. Before long, the control center directed the Marines to contact another forward air controller. Gough described the process:

> He passed us the enemy position and his distance from that position, and we organized an attack so that we could roll in and hit the position…. And what's interesting is we're rolling in from altitudes we're not too accustomed [to], rolling in from about 28 to 30,000 feet because you're still trying to stay above the terrain and… out of the threat envelope…. Unfortunately, the [forward air controller] didn't have a laser designator, so our bombs had nothing to guide on, but we still can drop "dumb."… You see, basically, what [the forward controller has] described and our… "diamond" is sitting right on where those guys are. So our "diamond" is what guides us, and we fly down and drop our bombs on that spot.[123]

The section hit two targets that day, located just south and east of the Whale, initially destroying an occupied enemy fighting position and then attacking a group of soldiers attempting to hide near a bridge. Major Gough remembered that, although his first bomb was a near miss, the second bomb went right into the position on the next pass. With their ordnance expended, the Marines topped their fuel tanks for a third time and headed back to the ship. Gough flew six more missions before the end of the operation, dropping bombs on two other occasions.[124]

Captains Joshua L. Luck and Matthew J. Hafner flew the squadron's second mission into eastern Afghanistan on the afternoon of 6 March. In Luck's case, the British airborne warning and control system aircraft (call sign "Spartan") directed them to switch to secure communications and then change to the forward air controller's radio frequency. Slipping ahead of two F-18s who were having communications problems, the AV-8B pilots received two complete nine-line target briefs from the air controller (call sign "Playboy 90"). He described Taliban troops near a cave entrance along the Whale and recommended that they conduct their attack from north to south. Luck, who took the high cover position, recalled that the weather was bad that day, with few holes in the cloud cover, making the attack difficult, particularly with the high-altitude delivery requirement. Hafner conducted his bomb run first, achieving good effect on target while dropping a 500-pound "smart bomb" without the assistance of laser guidance. Luck then achieved effect on a second target approximately 500 meters west before the section headed back to the ship.[125]

During the 20-day operation, the six AV-8Bs compiled 221.4 flight hours and delivered 34 munitions. Colonel Sturdevant noted that "the Harrier missions were so effective that ground forces in direct contact with the enemy specifically asked for their support" by name.[126] The Harriers'



Official Marine Corps photo

An F/A-18 Hornet from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314, call sign "Demon-41," flies over Afghanistan during a mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

success was more than a source of pride for the young pilots—it was a personal and emotional vindication of their troubled aircraft. After spending more than two years learning to fly the Harrier, they were devastated when 3d Marine Aircraft Wing grounded the airplane for 6 months due to problems with its number three engine bearing and then took 10 months to replace the defective parts.[127]

Appreciative of the real-world training opportunity for his nine pilots, seven of whom had never deployed, possessed only limited flight time, and had lost confidence in their aircraft, Major Gough rotated his pilots so that each had an opportunity to drop ordnance in support of a major combat operation. Moreover, once his senior pilots had been afforded an opportunity to lead their sections during the first cycle of missions, he rotated the assignments so some of the junior pilots could also acquire combat leadership experience.[128] Captain Luck captured the pilots' pride and enthusiasm after the operation by stating that while the Army and Air Force might be impressed by what the Cobras and Harriers did independently, "it would blow their minds" if they saw what they could accomplish when working together.[129]

Operation Anaconda: Phase II

During a press conference at the Pentagon on 6 March, Secretary Rumsfeld told reporters that Coalition forces were turning up the pressure on al-Qaeda and Taliban troops in the mountains of Gardez, explaining that, although the battle would take time to play out, he expected the enemy to surrender or be killed in the days ahead.[130] Task Force Rakkasan continued its southerly advance down the eastern ridgeline from Battle Position Diane over the next few days, methodically clearing enemy caves, buildings, and heavy weapons emplacements. Although al-Qaeda and Taliban forces attempted to resist, showering the soldiers with sporadic mortar fire, they proved unable to reinforce their positions or mount a sizable attack.[131] On the opposite side of the valley, Afghan militiamen and elements of Task Force Dagger established a small command post on 7 March—dubbed Checkpoint Charley—and occupied Observation Posts North and South, which overlooked the Whale. With the main ridgeline now declared a free-fire zone, Coalition aircraft bombed the Whale incessantly for the next 48 hours.[132]

The Marine Cobra pilots provided close air support to maneuver elements operating around the valley. On the morning of 7 March, they first escorted a mission to resupply Task Force 64 south of the Whale and then screened the special forces movement up the Little Whale toward Observation Post North, firing rockets at cave entrances and observing secondary explosions.[133] They returned to the valley later in the day and again the next afternoon, continuing their attack on the Whale. Captain Philip E. Eilertson recalled that the latter flight received fire from a 12.7-millimeter heavy machine gun, which the Cobras quickly suppressed with Hellfire missiles.[134] He also noted that they engaged additional cave entrances with their 20-millimeter cannon and more missiles. The Marine F-18 pilots were also actively engaged during this period, with Hornets from VMFA-314 dropping bombs on multiple targets, including a heavy machine gun struck by Lieutenant Colonel James L. Stalnaker and Captain Chad A. Vaughn and a suspected escape route struck by Major Jansen and Captain Ohman.[135]

While the combined air forces were busy whittling down resistance throughout the valley, special forces leaders had decided that armor support would facilitate Commander Zia's eventual assault on Objective Remington. This led to negotiations between Task Force Dagger and the Afghan Interim Authority, after which Defense Minister Fahim Khan directed General Gul Haider to lead a battalion-sized force from Kabul to Gardez. General Haider arrived on the evening of 8 March, accompanied by 600 Tajik fighters, 4 Russian T-54 tanks, and 6 Russian armored personnel carriers. Despite Task Force Dagger's initial concerns over the fact that the Pashtun and Tajik leaders were traditional enemies, they appeared willing to cooperate, and the special forces planned a coordinated attack in which Haider would assault into the valley from the north and Zia would assault from the south.[136]

Task Force Dagger found that controlling Gul Haider's advance proved near impossible, which made it difficult to coordinate the attack with Zia Lodin's force. While moving toward their assault position on 10 March, several of Haider's dismounted troops broke formation and secured the northern half of the Whale. The following morning, while lining up to secure the remainder of the hill, the Tajik militia broke again, this time descending the slope to loot the three abandoned villages in the valley below. Later in the afternoon, a special forces detachment and 20 of Zia's Pashtun fighters, trailed by 300 Tajiks, swept southward along the Whale without encountering resistance.[137] At the same time, Marine Cobra pilots continued to hit enemy targets along the Whale. In addition to engaging several cave entrances, two mortar positions, a bunker, and a car, they also collected videotape footage of possible landing zones in anticipation of a future helicopter assault.[138] Meanwhile, on the eastern side of the valley, Task Force Summit (1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division) had relieved elements of the 101st Airborne Division as the point of main effort and continued to push south.

While speaking on CNN's (Cable News Network's) *Late Edition* and ABC's (American Broadcasting Corporation's) *This Week*, respectively, Generals Myers and Franks each denied that the operation was nearing completion. Franks explained that while he was satisfied with the operation's progress "up to this point… we will not stop until each of the pockets that we're able to identify has been reduced."[139] He also defended the operation's prosecution, stating that he thought the planning that went into this operation by General Hagenbeck was very good and thorough and had been carried out in a way that was absolutely terrific.[140]

On 12 March, with the Whale now secured, Gul Haider's armored column finally entered the valley from the north, indiscriminately firing two tank rounds toward the eastern ridgeline before Task Force Rakkasan convinced them to cease firing. As the procession advanced southward, an Air Force combat controller attempted to coordinate a Cobra attack against several cave entrances he observed along the Whale, but a Tajik leader informed him that a "watering party" was operating in the vicinity and he aborted the mission. Upon reaching their objective,



Associated Press

Rockets fired by AH-1W Cobras from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 impact villages in Shahi Kot Valley on 10 March 2002. Targeted as al-Qaeda and Taliban strongholds, the three villages of Sherkhankheyl, Marzak, and Bobelkiel were cleared of enemy forces during Operation Anaconda.

the Tajiks cleared the villages of Shayr Khan Kheyl and Babu Khel, while Zia's Pashtun force moved in from the south and cleared Marzek. The enemy had fled the three villages by this time, however, and they captured only two prisoners. Journalists soon began streaming into the Shahi Kot Valley with leaders of the various Afghan militias arriving shortly thereafter for photographs and interviews.[141] Meanwhile, on the eastern side of the valley, Task Force Summit had continued to push south for two days. It met only light resistance along the way and withdrew after reaching Objective Ginger—located just west of Takur Ghar—the next day.[142]

During a press conference back at the Pentagon, Air Force Brigadier General John W. Rosa Jr. told reporters, "As we speak, we are clearing the Whale's back."[143] Spokeswoman Victoria Clarke added, "I think the characterizations we feel comfortable with are 'winding down.' I think the secretary used 'mopping up.' But there clearly is still work to be done."[144] As if to emphasize the point, multiple sections of Marine F-18 and AV-8B aircraft continued to drop bombs on targets in the area.[145]

Operation Harpoon

As the intensity of Operation Anaconda began to decline and the focus shifted from seizing terrain to exploiting enemy positions for arms, ammunition, and intelligence, the 101st Airborne Division's Apache and Chinook helicopters returned to Kandahar. This reduced Task Force Mountain's rotary-wing capability to only 16 aircraft. These included two Black Hawks, one each for medical evacuation and command and control flights; six Chinooks from Company B, 159th Aviation Regiment (an 18th Airborne Corps asset commanded by Army Major Terry J. Jamison); and the three Sea Stallions and five Cobras from the 13th MEU. In order to support secondary mop-up operations, dubbed Operation Harpoon, Task Force



Photo courtesy of Nathan Hodges

A Canadian infantryman views the Shahi Kot Valley from atop the "Whale Back" during Operation Harpoon.

Mountain combined its remaining Army and Marine aviation assets under Colonel Sturdevant's command as Task Force HMM-165.[146] Sturdevant was quick to praise the Army crew's courage and capabilities:

> These guys were flying Chinooks. They were carrying 43 combat-loaded soldiers into zones… as high as 10,200 feet. A lot of times they were making two-wheel [pinnacle] landings… on the edge of a cliff…. I tell you what, I have nothing but respect for those soldiers; they did a hell of a job.[147]

The small joint aviation task force remained in general support of Task Force Mountain, with priority of effort assigned to Task Force Commando (2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division).[148] The latter organization, a combined force commanded by Colonel Kevin V. Wilkerson, USA, was composed of 2d Brigade Headquarters; 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment; and 3d Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Their first task was to conduct a series of sensitive site exploitation missions to clear the Whale of enemy holdouts, equipment, and supplies.[149]

The operation began with a battalion-level helicopter assault into the valley during the early morning hours of 13 March (although Task Force Mountain had initially intended to employ the Marines several days earlier). Colonel Sturdevant recalled that "we'd done the initial planning, had stood up, got all the briefs knocked out, and they decided that they didn't want to do it."[150] He remembered that a national tasking of some sort had come up and HMM-165 had stood down for three days before being told that the mission was back on.

Colonel Sturdevant served as the air mission commander during the operation, which involved the insertion of approximately 500 soldiers from the Canadian battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Patrick B. Stogran, Princess Patricia's Light Infantry, and 100 soldiers from Company A, 4th Battalion, 31st U.S. Army Infantry. This was a unique

opportunity for the Canadians, as they were not only the point of main effort, but they were also conducting their first ever battalion-sized helicopter assault.[151] Sturdevant directed the airlift from one of the Black Hawk helicopters, with Colonel Wilkerson alongside as the overall commander, later noting that they inserted two-thirds of the force on the first day and the remainder on the second.[152]

On the morning of the operation, Task Force HMM-165 launched 10 aircraft. These included four Cobras to escort the assault force, four Chinooks to carry the troops to the objective, and two Super Stallions to establish a forward arming and refueling point approximately 12 miles from the Whale. One of the CH-53s was devoted to carrying the Robertson Gear, while the other carried extra ammunition.[153] The CH-47s carried approximately 170 soldiers per assault wave, slinging extra equipment and supplies beneath the helicopters from cargo hooks.[154] Although a special forces detachment had identified and marked several landing zones atop the ridge's broken terrain, the aircraft flew over the sites and descended at the base of the slope.[155]

Once the Chinooks had disembarked their passengers and headed back to Bagram for another load, one Cobra section worked with the infantry on the Whale, while the other replenished its fuel supply at the nearby refueling point. When the Super Stallions had exhausted the 500-gallon bladders, the pilots linked up with Marine KC-130 tankers flying overhead to replenish their own fuel supply. Sturdevant recalled that the buildup of forces continued for approximately eight hours during the first day.[156]

For the next five days, the Canadian and American infantry methodically searched the Whale, clearing more than 30 caves and bunkers in the process.[157] While many of the positions were empty and the soldiers encountered few al-Qaeda troops, they succeeded in collecting weapons and ammunition; supplies and equipment; and a variety of "valuable intelligence" materials, including DNA samples for the potential identification of enemy dead.[158]

Task Force HMM-165 continued to support Task Force Commando throughout the operation, conducting resupply missions, transporting troops, and investigating cave locations along the ridgeline. During one mission, CNN correspondent Martin Savage accompanied the CH-53 crews to the forward arming and refueling point to document their role in the operation. Captain Eilertson recalled that the anticipated Apache reinforcements from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, arrived around 15 March, but, he added, although they appeared over the battlefield one day, they all flew back to Kandahar the next day for some reason, which happily meant more flight time for the Cobras.[159]

The next major mission occurred on 18 March, the same day that Brigadier General Rosa announced to reporters at the Pentagon, "Operation Anaconda is over but Operation Enduring Freedom continues."[160] Using the same force mix that he had during Operation Harpoon, Colonel Sturdevant inserted elements of Task Force Commando on and around Takur Ghar. This included the deadly promontory, codenamed Objective Siberia, where hostile forces had shot down the MH-47 helicopter two weeks earlier. Operating in this environment was a challenging proposition; some of the landing zones were at 10,200 feet and required the Chinook pilots to perform two-wheeled pinnacle landings to disembark their passengers.[161]

Lieutenant Colonel Sturdevant and Colonel Wilkerson landed atop Objective Siberia with the soldiers to view the battlefield and consider the possibility of retrieving components of the abandoned $80 million MH-47 aircraft. As Sturdevant recalled, "That was a pretty sobering experience. When you sit there and you see this hunk of metal and you realize that we lost seven American lives—that was tough."[162] Unfortunately, the helicopter was beyond salvaging, due in part to the large number of bombs dropped on the enemy positions during the battle, so the soldiers burned the fuselage with a thermite grenade.[163]



Photo by Spec. Eric E. Hughes, USA. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020824-A-3497H-038

Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Central Command, Gen Tommy R. Franks shakes hands and talks with U.S. enlisted soldiers gathered around at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, on 24 August 2002. He spoke motivational and encouraging words to the deployed soldiers about their involvement in the ongoing war on terrorism.

While the infantry searched enemy positions, the two Cobra sections (consisting of two aircraft each) took turns attacking targets—including a truck, two tents, and four sets of bunkers—along the southeastern slope of the mountain. They also identified another bunker site to the north, which the ground troops destroyed with satchel charges. Task Force HMM-165 returned to Takur Ghar late in the morning of 19 March and ferried Task Force Commando back to Bagram. In the process, the Cobras struck several additional bunkers that had been spotted the previous day.[164]

General Franks declared Operation Anaconda officially over that same day, stating that it had been highly successful. Although the initial ground attack had failed and a number of al-Qaeda likely escaped to safe havens inside the Pakistani tribal regions, Coalition forces had located al-Qaeda and Taliban resistance, forced them into a losing battle, killed many of their most experienced and aggressive fighters, and forced the others to flee without their heavy equipment and stockpiles of supplies. As succinctly put by one U.S. Army historian, "In a guerrilla war, that counts for much."[165]

Although the conclusion of Operation Anaconda effectively ended HMM-165's operational association with 2d Brigade and the Marines were scheduled to rejoin the amphibious ready group momentarily, General Hagenbeck apparently lamented the loss of air support and requested that Colonel Sturdevant's squadron remain in Afghanistan a while longer.[166] For the rest of the 13th MEU, trained and organized to operate as a combined air-ground task force, this was a bittersweet compliment. While visiting Bagram midway through the operation, Colonel Gunther had asked Hagenbeck for an opportunity to employ his battalion landing team and combat service support group ashore, only

to learn that Task Force Mountain did not require additional ground support.[167]

Reaction to this piecemeal employment varied among the Marine pilots. Captain Eilertson believed that "because of the great success the Marine Corps had in the very beginning of the war—taking Rhino and Kandahar and helping out there—that now it was kind of the Army's time to shine."[168] Less philosophically, Colonel Sturdevant wondered at the Army's reluctance to place 101st Airborne Division assets under Task Force Mountain's tactical control and noted the cumulative gain that could have been achieved by employing the 13th MEU as an articulated whole. He later reflected, "I think there was plenty of work for everybody and the MEU could have done very well had they been invited in total."[169]

Task Force HMM-165 continued to fly in general support of Task Force Mountain. It remained on standby to transport the quick reaction force, conducted several armed reconnaissance missions around Bagram, and flew a number of resupply runs in support of special forces operating from Khost Airfield. This remaining involvement brought a chance for additional action on the morning of 20 March, when Colonel Sturdevant was awakened around 0115 and told that enemy fighters had attacked the Khost outpost with small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortar fire, wounding one American soldier.[170] While the Marine pilots initiated approximately 30 minutes of rapid planning, Sturdevant visited the combined operations center and learned that the task force deputy commander had decided to use an orbiting AC-130 gunship to discourage the enemy, rather than deploy the Cobras at night in bad weather.[171] The following afternoon, Task Force HMM-165 deployed a section of AH-1Ws and another of CH-53s during a combined medical evacuation and resupply mission to Khost.

The Marines planned to hook south and east over the mountains. This was the shortest route, although the CH-47 pilots referred to it as the "Valley of Death" because of the propensity for drawing opposing fire. Major Moss recalled that his helicopter alone carried approximately 10,000 pounds of bottled water, meals-ready-to-eat, ammunition, weapons, and miscellaneous equipment. Unfortunately, Moss's aircraft experienced engine trouble and had to return to base, but before doing so, he landed on a convenient highway and handed a small hand pump—known as a "pig"—over to a Cobra crew that was experiencing troubles with their hydraulic system. The remaining aircraft continued to Khost and retrieved the wounded soldier, while Moss and two Cobras completed his portion of the resupply mission the next morning.[172]

Task Force HMM-165 flew its final missions in support of Task Force Mountain on 24 March. Early in the morning, a combined force of Cobras, Chinooks, and Sea Stallions headed south toward the Whale. After dropping off a team of explosive ordnance disposal technicians to certify several loads of ordnance for pickup later in the day, they returned to Bagram because of deteriorating weather conditions. Once flying conditions had improved at around 1100, a flight of two CH-47s and three CH-53s returned to Khost one last time. The Sea Stallion carried an eleven-man special forces team and two Toyota Forerunner vehicles, while the two Chinooks carried food, blankets, and other humanitarian items to support an impending civil affairs project. Then the Army and Marine helicopters returned to Bagram, arriving at the air base just as the sun was setting.[173]

As the squadron prepared to return to the ship the following day, members of Task Force Mountain surprised the Marines by organizing a ceremony to recognize the 13th MEU's contribution to Operation Anaconda. With Fox News, Colonel Gunther, Sergeant Major Jeffrey A. Morin, and Lieutenant Colonel Sinclair in attendance, the Army and Marine units exchanged plaques, and General Hagenbeck awarded 14 decorations.[174] In addition to seven ground personnel who received Army Commendation Medals and six Cobra pilots who

received Air Medals, Colonel Sturdevant earned a Bronze Star for leading Task Force HMM-165 and serving as air mission commander on three occasions during Operation Harpoon.*

At 0905 on 26 March, all eight Marine helicopters lifted off from Bagram and headed for the Pakistani coast and the amphibious ready group. Once again, they completed the lengthy journey in several legs: the first two Sea Stallions flew directly to Kandahar, while the third stopped briefly in the desert to refuel the five Cobras. After linking up in Kandahar, the eight aircraft continued southward. Although crossing into Pakistani air space should have brought a sense of relief to the Marines, several unexpected incidents only served to raise the aircrew's anxiety.[175]

The pilots began to gain altitude gradually after crossing the border, observing Pakistani restrictions against flights lower than 4,500 feet above ground level. Shortly thereafter, Major Moss looked out the right window of his aircraft, spotted several flashes and puffs of smoke, and sent his aircraft into a steep dive once he realized they were being shot at; another aircraft observed a pickup truck with an unidentified object in its bed. Next, although the lead CH-53, piloted by Major Sehrt and Captain Eric D. Oliphant, was supposed to take on fuel from an airborne KC-130 tanker, it was running late and did not make the scheduled connection. This would not normally have been a problem (since they had enough fuel on board to reach Pasni), but the aircraft began to experience trouble with one of its three engines.[176]

The helicopter was flying about 3,000 feet above ground level (6,000 feet above mean sea level) and was 60 to 70 miles from Pasni when a "chip light" came on, warning that the "engine's starting to chew itself up."[177] Two minutes later, Major Sehrt radioed the other aircraft that his engine had begun to fluctuate.[178] Colonel Sturdevant, who was reading a book in the back of the aircraft at the time, recalled that the engine started making a loud whining noise and began vibrating badly.[179] The pilots pulled the speed lever back—reducing the power to ground idle to preserve the engine—and the vibrations stopped. But they soon discovered that the two remaining engines were not powerful enough to keep the heavily laden aircraft flying level and that they were losing altitude—a troubling situation as they had to cross two major ridgelines before descending to the coast.

Major Sehrt's first solution was to begin jettisoning some of his limited fuel supply, dumping approximately 8,000 pounds overboard. When that failed to halt their descent, the pilots reluctantly engaged the third engine and the aircraft slowly began to climb. Despite attempts to nurse the engine along, it began to vibrate violently and emit a "really loud whining noise" before quitting entirely.[180] Fortunately, the pilots had gained just enough altitude during their last push to slip through a saddle as they crossed over the final ridgeline before the coastal plain.[181]

Meanwhile, Major Moss had flown ahead and obtained clearance for an emergency landing at Pasni.[182] Thirty-five minutes later, with only 1,800 pounds of fuel and approximately 15 minutes of flight time remaining, Major Sehrt performed a running landing into that facility. Captain Oliphant, who acknowledged that the incident "was probably the most exciting thing that happened to me the entire time, as far as being in danger or in harm's way," remarked that the landing was "probably the smoothest… I've had in a [CH-]53."[183] Colonel Sturdevant later joked that he was happy to be on the ground—he was getting too old for this.[184]

The helicopter detachment returned to the amphibious ready group that evening, leaving the damaged CH-53 ashore overnight, secured by members of Marine Air Control Group 38, who had been conducting logistics operations at the

*LtGen Earl B. Hailston later awarded 13 Marines their Combat Aircrew Wings for operations in Afghanistan. Sgt Jennifer Austin, one of the recipients, was reported to be the first woman to earn the designation. (SSgt April D. Tuggle, "13th MEU (SOC) Aircrews Earn Combat Aircrew Wings for Anaconda," *Marine Corps News*, 2002)

airfield throughout Anaconda. Mechanics from HMM-165 returned to Pasni with a new aircraft engine the following morning, which they replaced in approximately six hours.[185] Once repaired, the pilots flew the helicopter out to the ship, and 13th MEU brought in its shore party as the sun set over the horizon. Although this effectively ended the squadron's support of military operations in Afghanistan, the Marines had the satisfaction of knowing their presence had influenced the outcome of the battle. General Hagenbeck reportedly mentioned them in dispatches, noting that the departure of Marine aircraft would have a significant impact on the command's ability to conduct operations.[186]

Concurrent with the participation in Operation Anaconda, the 13th MEU supported bilateral training exercises in the region, participating in Eastern Maverick in Qatar during March and Sea Soldier in Oman during April. The Marines were extended in theater around this time, reflecting rising tensions between the Israelis and Palestinians, and told to prepare for a possible noncombat evacuation operation if the situation continued to deteriorate. Fortunately, that was not necessary and the expeditionary unit headed home in early May. After helicoptering from the Fifth to the Seventh and, finally, to the Third Fleet, the Marines reached the West Coast on 17 June 2002.[187]


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Epilogue
A New Beginning

Almost from the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom, the United Nations (UN) had pursued concurrent efforts to foster political change, restore order, and promote reconstruction. These mutually supporting efforts together composed a tripartite strategy for ushering in a new era of security, prosperity, and democracy in Afghanistan. In what would amount to a sequential model for counterinsurgency operations, American-led forces continued to do much of the fighting in contested regions, international security forces focused primarily on policing actions in less-contested areas, and nongovernment organizations endeavored to rebuild the nation's infrastructure in pacified provinces. One of the first steps in this long process was the Bonn Agreement.

The Bonn Agreement

On 12 November 2001, international representatives from the United States, the Russian Federation, and six countries neighboring Afghanistan met in New York with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. They agreed on the need for a broad-based and freely chosen Afghan government and pledged to continue their support for the UN's humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan and refugee camps in neighboring states.[1] Two days later, immediately following the liberation of Kabul, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1378, in which they pledged to support Afghan efforts to establish a transitional administration to form a new government.[2] While urging the Afghan forces to refrain from acts of reprisal, they encouraged member states to ensure the safety and security of areas no longer under Taliban control and to respect Kabul as the capital of all the Afghan people.

Less than a week later, as Coalition forces laid siege to Kunduz, former President Burhannudin Rabbani and other Northern Alliance leaders agreed to recognize a Kabul-based transitional government and informed the American ambassador, James F. Dobbins, that they would participate in a UN-sponsored conference in Bonn, Germany, to chart the future of Afghanistan.[3] On 4 December, after nine days of heated negotiations, delegates from four rival factions chose Hamid Karzai to lead the new 30-member Afghan Interim Authority and signed the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions.[4] The UN Security Council endorsed the agreement the following day, unanimously adopting Resolution 1383. The resolution, which "determined to end the tragic conflict in Afghanistan and promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability, and respect for human rights in the country," represented a commitment to facilitate implementation of the agreement and its three annexes.[5]

Under the general provisions of the agreement, the Afghan Interim Authority would represent Afghan sovereignty for only six months. During its brief tenure, this administration was responsible for establishing "a judicial commission to rebuild the domestic justice system in accordance with Islamic principles, international standards, the rule of law, and Afghan legal traditions," as well as a special independent commission for the "Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga" (grand assembly) to "elect a head of state for the transitional administration and… approve proposals for the structure and key personnel of the transitional administration."[6] The succeeding Transitional Authority would have 18 months to convene a constitutional loya jirga to establish a new Afghan constitution and 24 months to hold "free and fair elections."

Recognizing the magnitude of the Afghan Interim Authority's mission, Annex I of the agreement specifically requested "the assistance of the international community in helping the new Afghan authorities in the establishment and training of a new Afghan security and armed forces." This included "the early deployment to Afghanistan of a UN mandate force [to] assist in the maintenance of security for Kabul and its surrounding areas."[7] Annex II similarly directed that "the United Nations shall advise the Interim Authority in establishing a politically neutral environment conducive to the holding of the Emergency Loya Jirga in free and fair conditions."[8] Annex III contained a number of miscellaneous requests, including assistance with voter registration; rehabilitation, recovery, and reconstruction of Afghanistan; reintegration of the mujahideen; creation of a fund to assist the dependents of fighters and victims of the war; and the combating of international terrorism and the cultivation and trafficking of illicit drugs.

During an inauguration ceremony on 22 December, attended by approximately 2,000 Afghan leaders and foreign diplomats, Chairman Karzai accepted power from President Rabbani and swore in the members of his new cabinet. Reflecting the tenuous nature of the proceedings, Karzai spoke in his native Pashto; read a poem in Dari; and stood before a backdrop image of Ahmad Shah Masood, the Northern Alliance's slain Tajik leader and hero of the Soviet-Afghan War.[9] Addressing the audience,

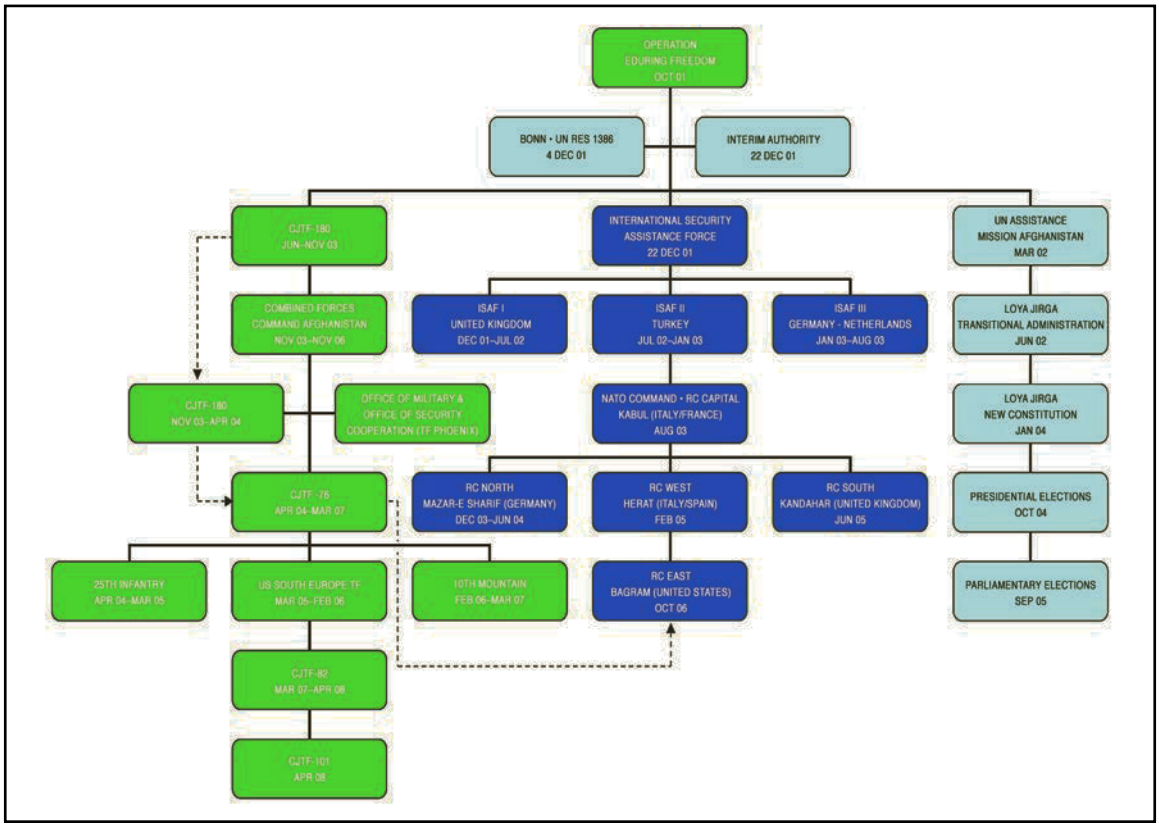
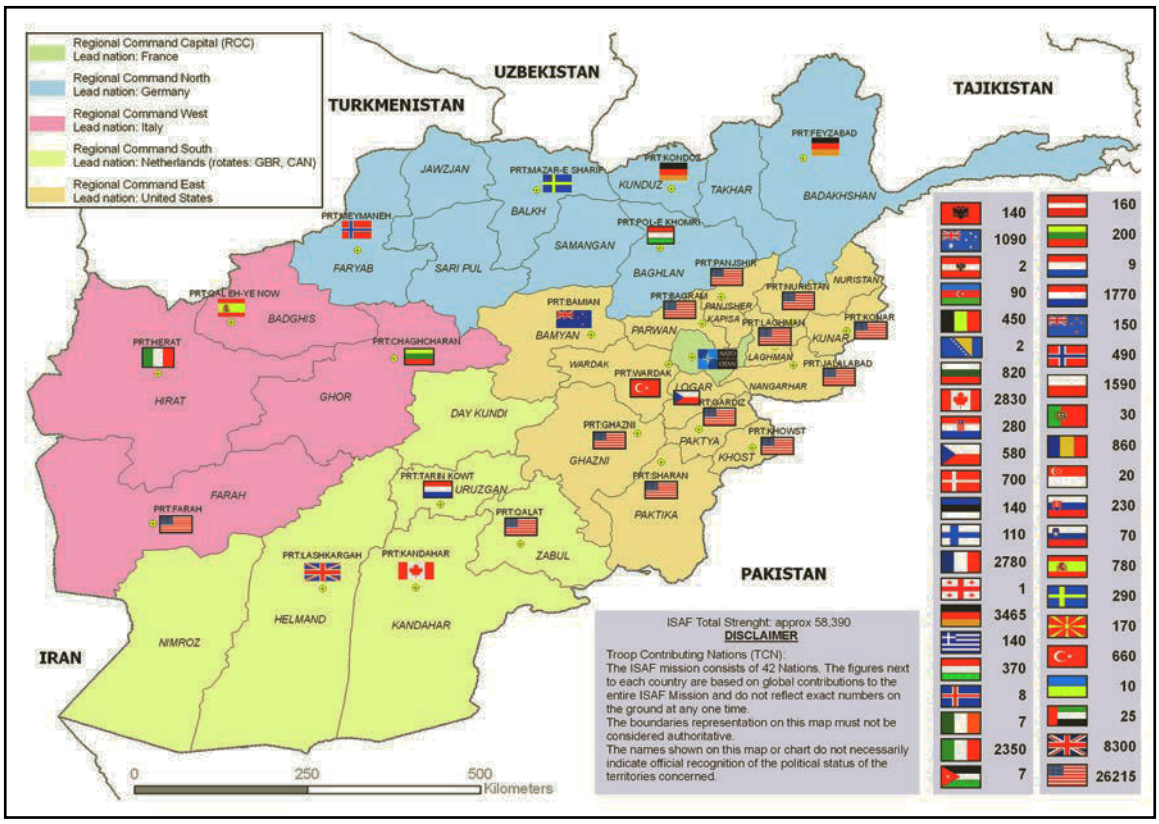


Illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Diagram 9: *The chronological development of the tripartite strategy employed in Afghanistan. This includes Coalition forces combating insurgents, International Security Assistance Forces training national police and army units, and United Nations personnel guiding reconstruction. Between 2003 and 2006, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan served as a higher headquarters directing both Combined Joint Task Force 180 (counterinsurgency) and the Offices of Military and Security Cooperation (training). After the United States assumed control of Regional Command East, Task Force 76 was reestablished as the senior division-level Coalition command in Afghanistan.*



Map courtesy of NATO International Security Assistance Force

Map depicting International Security Assistance Force regions and the location of Provisional Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan as of 3 April 2009. Between 2003 and 2006, responsibility for coordinating security operations was gradually transferred by region to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

he stated, "Our country has had destruction in all aspects of life. We need a new beginning and hard work from all Afghans."[10] He also noted that first among the new government's duties was ensuring security and peace. As if to punctuate the remark, a combined force of police, soldiers, and British Royal Marines remained alert outside the ministry.[11]

International Security Assistance Force

In accordance with the Bonn Agreement, members of the international community established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help the Afghan Interim Authority "create a secure environment in and around Kabul and support the reconstruction of Afghanistan."[12] Although sanctioned by the UN Security Council under Resolution 1386, the ISAF was a coalition of nations rather than an actual UN security force. The vanguard of the force, a small group led by British Major General John C. McColl, left the United Kingdom in mid-December, while the main body began deploying to Kabul later in the month.[13] Its principal tasks, detailed in a Military Technical Agreement reached with the Interim Authority in early January 2002, included identifying reconstruction needs, training the Afghan army and police forces, and conducting stability and security operations, as well as supporting disarmament, counternarcotic, and humanitarian assistance operations.[14]

Command of the multinational force initially rotated among the international community members on a six-month basis, with the United Kingdom leading ISAF I until July 2002, Turkey leading ISAF II until January 2003, and Germany and the Netherlands leading ISAF III until August

Table 6: ISAF Regional Command Structure and Provisional Reconstruction Teams as of May 2008

Region	*Lead Nation*	*Headquarters Location*	*Forward Support Base Location*	*PRT and National Teams*
Capital	Italy	Kabul (France)	Kabul (Belgium)	
North	Germany	Mazar-e Sharif	Mazar-e Sharif	Germany(2), Sweden, Hungary, Norway
West	Italy	Herat (Italy)	Herat (Spain)	United States, Italy, Spain, Lithuania
South	United Kingdom	Kandahar	Kandahar	United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Netherlands
East	United States	Bagram	Bagram	United States (10), New Zealand, Turkey, Czech Republic

2003. At that time, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) took over command and coordination of the ISAF, appointing Minister Hikmet Cetin of Turkey to the post of senior civilian representative in Afghanistan.[15] Working in coordination with Afghan authorities, the UN, and the ISAF commander and with guidance from NATO's North Atlantic Council, the civilian representative was responsible for advancing the political-military aspects of NATO's engagement in Afghanistan.[16]

Two months following NATO's assumption of command, the UN Security Council authorized the expansion of ISAF operations throughout Afghanistan by adopting Resolution 1510.[17] That December the North Atlantic Council authorized Marine General James Jones, its Supreme Allied Commander, to initiate the expansion by assuming control over the German-led provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Kunduz.[18] Thereafter, during a four-phase process, the NATO contingent gradually extended its influence throughout northern Afghanistan by October 2004, and then to the west in February 2005, the south in July 2006, and finally to eastern Afghanistan in October 2006.

The NATO expansion resulted in the establishment of five regional commands, each to coordinate civil-military activities in its area of responsibility (Table 6). Every command, headed by a lead nation, is composed of a headquarters, a forward support base to address logistical requirements, and multiple PRTs.[19] The latter are small teams of civil and military personnel who work with local authorities to spread stability across the country by enhancing security and furthering reconstruction efforts in designated provinces.[20]

United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan

During the first month of the conflict in Afghanistan, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed Lakhdar Brahimi, the former Algerian foreign minister, as his special envoy. After arriving in Kabul during December 2001, Brahimi and his small team combined several existing UN staffs from the Special Mission in Afghanistan, the Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs, and a technical survey team from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to facilitate control and coordination. Annan outlined the organizational structure and mandate for a proposed UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan in a report to the Security Council three months later, that described "the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security."[21]

Directed and supported by the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Assistance Mission

would "integrate all the existing United Nations elements in Afghanistan into a single mission" designed to fulfill "the tasks and responsibilities… entrusted to the United Nations in the Bonn Agreement… by promoting national reconciliation… [and] managing all United Nations humanitarian, relief, recovery, and reconstruction activities in Afghanistan."[22] Working under Special Representative Brahimi, Jean Arnault would serve as the deputy special representative for Political Affairs (Pillar I), while Nigel Fisher would serve as the deputy special representative for Relief, Recovery, and Reconstruction (Pillar II).[23] Although based in Kabul, the Assistance Mission intended to establish seven regional offices throughout Afghanistan and several liaison offices in neighboring countries. On 28 March 2002, the Security Council formally established the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan by passing Resolution 1401.[24]

The Special Independent Commission for the Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga was established early in 2002, and by April it had begun the arduous task of selecting 1,500 delegates from approximately 400 districts throughout Afghanistan. When the loya jirga convened in Kabul during June, it elected Chairman Karzai president of the Transitional Authority in a landslide victory garnering 82 percent of the vote. Concurrently, the Afghan Judicial Commission was established in May and tasked with rebuilding the domestic justice system.[25]

During 2003, the assistance mission helped the Afghan administration create a national development framework and budget; begin forming the national army and police forces; initiate a reformation of the defense department; and engage the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process. It also established a joint Afghan-UN committee to register voters and organize elections. Despite these successes, continued factional clashes, criminal activity, and terrorist activities aimed at the UN limited progress.[26]

During January 2004, another specially convened loya jirga ratified the country's new constitution, and by September the Joint Election Management Body had registered 10.5 million citizens to vote, with women comprising approximately 42 percent of these. On 9 October, over 8 million Afghans cast ballots in the country's first democratic-style presidential election. President Karzai secured 55 percent of the vote and was sworn in on 7 December, almost three years to the day after the signing of the Bonn Agreement.[27] Citizens returned to the polls the following September to elect parliamentary and provincial council representatives.

Operation Enduring Freedom–Phase III

As the UN Assistance Mission and the ISAF initiated stability and support operations in and around Kabul, the U.S.-led Coalition continued to pursue renegade al-Qaeda and Taliban forces throughout the country. In addition to continued combat operations, the Coalition was also subject to local and regional changes reflecting the transition to a new phase in the Afghan conflict, as well as an escalation of the Global War on Terrorism along the Horn of Africa and eventually in Iraq.

While supporters defended General Franks's long-range leadership style during the initial round of the Afghan campaign—arguing that modern technology supported more decentralized operations than those conducted in the past and subsequently allowed for a new type of generalship—critics argued for a more hands-on approach.* As Thomas E. Ricks reported in December 2001,

> There is some disquiet in the military, especially in the Air Force and Army, about Army General Tommy R. Franks's decision to keep his headquarters… in Tampa…. Critics say Franks should have followed the example of his predecessor at Central Command, Army General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who

*According to LtGen Michael DeLong, the Central Command staff had actually begun to build a deployable command that they could maneuver to hotspots throughout the region as early as January 2001. The mobile command eventually deployed to Qatar in February 2003, just prior to the invasion of Iraq. (DeLong and Lukeman, *Inside CentCom*, 91)



Photo by TSgt Mike Buytas, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020519-f-9085b-007/df-sd-04-06341

Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 3d Special Forces Group, instruct Afghan National Army recruits at the military academy in Kabul on 19 May 2001. Foreign internal defense, one of the special operating forces' doctrinal missions, remains a key component of the International Security Assistance Force initiative.

moved to Saudi Arabia to direct the 1991 Persian Gulf War.[28]

Taking a more neutral position during the spring of 2002, one Central Command official explained to reporters that "the operational command structure put in place at the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom worked very well at the time, but as conditions evolved, a new structure was required."[29] The solution was to establish a corps-level headquarters at Bagram Air Base on 31 May 2002.

Lieutenant General Dan K. McNeill, USA, commander of the U.S. Army's XVIII Airborne Corps, led the newly formed Combined Joint Task Force 180. Although he answered directly to General Franks and was responsible for orchestrating Coalition forces operating in Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, his authority did not extend over the ISAF.[30] Task Force 180's multidimensional mission included eliminating armed resistance against the new Afghan government as well as training Afghan National Army units and conducting civil-military, humanitarian assistance, and information operations in coordination with the Transitional Authority. Combat power was primarily supplied by paratroopers from the U.S. Army's 82d Airborne Division (Task Force Panther), who replaced the 101st Airborne Division (Task Force Rakkasan) at Kandahar during June 2002.[31]

The trend toward change also affected the various special operating forces that had been fighting separate campaigns in Afghanistan since the previous autumn. During late March 2002, special operations Task Forces Dagger and K-Bar had merged to form Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan, headquartered at Bagram under Colonel Mark P. Phelan, USA, and the U.S.



Photo by SSgt Joshua T. Jasper, USAF. Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 071107-F-0451J-011

Members of the Afghan National Police pose for a photo in Nangarhar Province on 7 November 2007. Developing a competent police force remains a key component in extending security throughout the nation.

Army's 3d Special Forces Group. The centralized special operations task force was initially placed under operational control of Rear Admiral Albert Calland, USN, the region's special operations component commander based in Oman, and tactical control of Major General Franklin Hagenbeck, USA, the deputy land component commander situated in Bagram.[32]

Within months, as the likelihood of war in Iraq increased, operational control shifted to Combined Joint Task Force 180 and leadership transitioned to the 20th Special Forces Group, a National Guard unit headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama. Now that the maneuver phase of the campaign was over, the special forces' overt mission switched from unconventional warfare to foreign internal defense. This involved training, advising, and assisting the Afghan forces in their effort to stabilize and secure the region, ostensibly conducted from small forward operating "firebases" scattered throughout the countryside, which served as the forerunner of the ISAF's PRTs.[33]

Small teams of Marine advisors, deployed by the Marine Corps' Coalition and Special Warfare Center (part of the International Military Education and Training Program, headquartered at Quantico, Virginia), began to assist the special forces and ISAF that spring.[34] Marine advisory teams would continue to support the training mission throughout the Afghan conflict, although the Security Cooperation Education and Training Center replaced the Coalition and Special Warfare Center in 2004.[35] The new designation represented "a shift in focus based on the growing demands of education and training related to security cooperation," resulting in a functional realignment of expeditionary unit deployment training policy oversight to the assistant chief of staff, G-3, Training and Education Command.[36]

The Afghan training mission (Task Force Phoenix) passed to U.S. Army National Guard forces in late 2003, with command responsibility rotating through several brigade commands.[37] As oversight of the program shifted from the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan to the Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan during the summer of 2005, the mission grew to include reforming the Afghan National Police Force, which a German contingent had previously led.[38] The following spring, after changing its name to Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, the task force's mission expanded to help "plan, program, and implement structure, organizational, institutional, and management reforms of the Afghanistan National Security Forces in order to develop a stable Afghanistan, strengthen the rule of law, and deter and defeat terrorism within its borders."[39]

Marine Security Forces, 2002–2005

The Marine Corps also supported Operation Enduring Freedom by executing a number of its traditional missions, including providing security for the U.S. embassy in Kabul. The 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Anti-Terrorism) (4th MEB), activated at Commandant Jones's direction in October 2001 and commanded by Brigadier General Douglas V. O'Dell Jr., provided the bulk of these forces.[40] Although the new antiterrorism brigade* initially consisted of the Marine Corps' Chemical Biological Incident Response Force and a rotating infantry (antiterrorism) battalion, it grew to include the Marine Security Guard and Security Force Battalions during June and October 2002.[41] As the Global War on Terrorism escalated, the 4th MEB would deploy units to support operations in Guantanamo Bay, Djibouti, and Iraq, in addition to enhancing security in Afghanistan.[42]

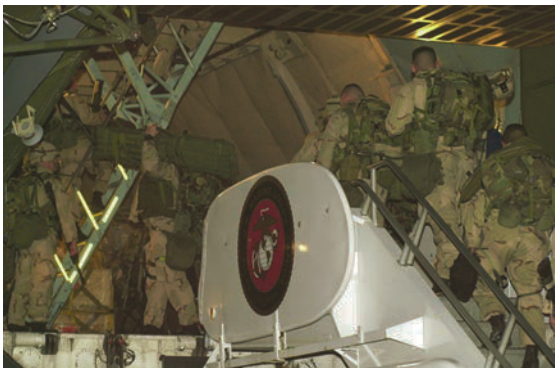


Photo by Cpl. Matthew Roberson

Marines and sailors from the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Anti-Terrorism) board a C-5 Galaxy to deploy in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. These Camp Lejeune Marines are specially trained to deter, detect, defend, and conduct initial incident response to combat terrorism worldwide.

Third Battalion, 8th Marines, served as the first of four temporary antiterrorism battalions attached to 4th MEB. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Stephen W. Davis, its three rifle companies rotated through Kabul at 90-day intervals between January and September 2002.[43] A variety of personnel augmented the security forces in Afghanistan during this period, including a similar rotation of military working dog teams from Marine installations in California, Hawaii, and Okinawa.[44] Following Davis's battalion in succession were 3d Battalion, 6th Marines (September 2002 to November 2003); 3d Battalion, 2d Marines (November 2003 to September 2004); and 2d Battalion, 6th Marines** (September 2004 to April 2005).[45]

Concurrent with 2d Battalion, 6th Marine's tour in Afghanistan—which included deploying Company E to Bagram from September to December 2004 in support of the national elections—4th MEB activated a permanent, rather than rotating, antiterrorism battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Michael P. Killion

*At the time of 4th MEB's activation, Col Thomas X. Hammes commanded the Chemical and Biological Response Force, Col Bruce A. Gandy commanded the Marine Corps Security Forces, and Col Boyette S. Hasty commanded the Marine Security Guard Battalion. (4th MEB CmdC, 1Jan02–30Jun02, Part 1)

**During this period, 3/6 was commanded by LtCol Jerome M. Lynes (5Sep02–11Dec02), Maj Edward T. Dewald (11Dec01–21Feb02), and LtCol Charles S. Dunston (21Feb02–17Feb03); 3/2 was commanded by LtCol Paul B. Dunahoe (17Nov04–Sept04); and 2/6 was commanded by LtCol Scott D. Aiken (1Oct04–1May05).

on 29 October.[46] During March 2005, with dissolution of the Kabul security mission rapidly approaching, 4th MEB accepted responsibility for training, equipping, and deploying military training teams, border transition teams, and special police transition teams in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.[47] Killian subsequently reorganized the new antiterrorism battalion to support a wide range of training and security missions around the globe.[48]

The 4th MEB operated successfully until 24 February 2006, when it was deactivated and its major subordinate units were assigned to other commands. The Marine Corps formally established its Special Operations Command, which assumed control over 4th MEB's foreign military training unit, on the same day.[49] On 20 May 2007, after successful deployments to Africa and South America, the training unit was designated the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group.[50] The antiterrorism battalion continued to operate under the auspices of II Marine Expeditionary Force until 13 July 2007, when it was designated 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, and assigned to 2d Marine Division.[51]

Marines in the Air, 2002–2006

Following the initial Coalition victory over al-Qaeda and Taliban forces during the spring of 2002, the deployment of Marine units to Afghanistan occurred sporadically and in relatively small numbers. A detachment from Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 provided airfield lighting at Kandahar through March 2003, when it relocated to Kuwait just prior to the launching of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Marine Air Control Squadron 2 deployed a tactical air operations center detachment to Karshi Khanabad, Uzbekistan, and an air traffic control detachment to Manas, Kyrgyzstan, into the autumn of 2002, while Marine Air Control Squadron 4 similarly deployed a tactical air operations center detachment to Kandahar, Afghanistan, and an air traffic control detachment to Manas into February 2003.[52] Concurrent with these air control operations was the initiation of a three-year effort to provide tactical close air support to forces serving in Afghanistan.



Photo by SSgt James Arrowood, USAF.
Defense Imagery, VIRIN: 020417-F-2939A-001
Marine F/A-18D Hornets fly overhead during their arrival at Manas International Airport, Kyrgyzstan, on 17 April 2002. During its five months in theater, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 flew 900 combat sorties, conducting escort, tactical reconnaissance, airborne air control, and close air support missions.

After receiving a request for forces issued on 27 November 2001, Marine All Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 121 (VMFA[AW]-121), known as "The Green Knights" and commanded by Lieutenant Colonel David C. Myers, began preparing for the deployment of a detachment of F/A-18s to Manas, Kyrgyzstan. While remaining on a 96-hour tether through March 2002, the pilots continued to develop their skills in aerial refueling, air-to-ground tactics, weapons employment, and forward air control operations. After receiving the anticipated deployment order, the six aircraft departed Marine Corps Air Station Miramar on 10 April and arrived at Peter J. Ganci Air Base approximately one week later. Constructed by the U.S. Air Force, the base was home to various Coalition forces and possessed a multinational tone. More important to the Marine pilots, however, Air Control Squadron 2 provided the airfield with a precision approach capability.[53]

After folding into the Air Force's 376th Air Expeditionary Wing and familiarizing themselves with the local area of operations, pilots from VMFA(AW)-121 began flying combat missions on 24 April. Although they were initially tasked with supplying four sorties per day, that requirement grew to six following the arrival of six additional fighters on 25 May. The intense operational tempo kept the



Photo by LCpl Andrew Williams

An AV-8b Harrier of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 513 takes off from Bagram Air Base on 9 August 2003. While serving in Afghanistan from October 2002 to September 2003, the "Flying Nightmares" flew 1,250 combat sorties and employed the Litening II targeting pod.

maintenance crews busy around the clock with the goal of maintaining at least 11 operational jets at any given time and flights lasting six to eight hours.[54]

In addition to providing close air support, serving as airborne air controllers, and escorting convoys and heliborne assaults, VMFA (AW)-121 also conducted tactical reconnaissance missions in support of both Task Force 180 and Joint Task Force–Southwest Asia Coalition collections. Using its advanced tactical air reconnaissance system while executing the latter mission, it collected images of approximately 400 targets; half of these were posted on the imagery product library for exploitation by other units. On 23 September, after five months in theater, the squadron began its retrograde to Miramar. During its tenure in Kyrgyzstan, the Green Knights flew 900 combat sorties in support of eight different operations, including Mountain Lion, Buzzard, Condor, Snipe, Full Throttle, Cherokee Sky, Mountain Sweep, and Iron Talon.[55]

During the latter half of October 2002, following the departure of VMFA (AW)-121, a detachment of six AV-8s from Marine Attack Squadron 513 (VMA-513) deployed to Bagram in support of Task Force 180. Lieutenant Colonel James A. Dixon, the squadron's commander, had first learned of the unexpected six-month deployment during July and spent the limited lead time schooling his pilots in aerial refueling; rocket employment; and the use of night-vision goggles, forward looking infrared sensors, Litening II targeting pods, and GAU-12 gun systems. Meanwhile, First Lieutenant Flanagan led a small advance party to Bagram in September and began construction of a base camp in preparation for the aircraft detachment's impending arrival. This was no small task, as it involved clearing mines, erecting tents, building bunkers, and establishing entry control points and basic utility services. The advance party also began construction of an ammunition

supply point and high power turn-up ramp for the jet aircraft. The Marines would eventually designate the squadron's compound Camp Teufel Hunden (Devil Dogs) on 18 December, naming it after the moniker earned by their predecessors on the battlefields of France during World War I.[56]

Colonel Dixon and Captain Michael D. Trapp flew the squadron's first combat missions over Afghanistan on 18 October 2002. After the initiation of flight operations, the detachment began flying a wide range of missions. These flights, lasting approximately two and a half to four hours, included escort, aerial reconnaissance, and close air support missions. The Litening II targeting pod, used for the first time in combat by VMA-513, proved particularly useful in capturing video imagery of target areas and enabled the pilots to self-designate and mark targets for the delivery of precision munitions. The Harriers dropped their first ordnance on 14 November, after joining Air Force A-10s in the defense of a special forces safe house in Lwara, scoring a direct hit on an enemy mortar position. They dropped again on 29 December, successfully bombing an enemy compound near Shkin following a skirmish between U.S. ground forces and al-Qaeda fighters.[57]

Given the squadron's initial success, Central Command requested, during February 2003, that VMA-513 remain in theater for an additional six months.[58] The request was approved and the "Flying Nightmares" continued to fly for Task Force 180, dropping ordnance in support of ground forces on 10 more occasions. On 31 March and 8 April they attacked enemy positions along the Pakistani border, and on 2 April they hit others near Kandahar.[59] On 19 July, the squadron suppressed hostile forces who had ambushed a mobile patrol in the Gayan Valley, enabling extraction of the Americans—some of whom had been wounded—and on 23 July, it attacked an enemy rocket position firing on Asadabad fire base near the Pakistani border.[60]

The Marine pilots encountered their heaviest fighting during August, engaging the enemy on five separate occasions. On 11 August, at the behest of U.S. Navy SEALs, they attacked an enemy force that had withdrawn to a village compound. Two days later, now supporting U.S. Army Special Forces, they attacked a retreating force that had overrun an Afghan National Army position near Khost and was making contact with the American soldiers. On the 25th, they supported another special forces team that had become pinned down, by attacking an enemy force massing on a ridgeline near Deh Chopan. Two days later, they attacked a hostile force that had ambushed an American patrol outside the Shkin fire base. Then, on 29 August, they delivered preparatory fires against enemy positions in Deh Chopan prior to a helicopter assault conducted by U.S. Army troops.[61]

A day after flying their final mission over Afghanistan on 15 September, the Nightmares began their 10-day retrograde to Yuma, Arizona. During their year in theater, with only six aircraft and 10 pilots on hand, VMA-513 had flown 1,250 combat sorties and supported numerous operations. These included Dragon Fury, Unified Resolve, Haven Denial, Warrior Sweep, Dragon Strike, Eagle Claw I and II, and Mountain Viper.[62] During the same period, another six-plane detachment from the squadron twice deployed with Marine expeditionary units, flying missions in support of operations both in Iraq and off the Horn of Africa.[63]

In October 2003, following the departure of VMA-513, a detachment of six Super Cobras and three Hueys from Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (HMLA-773) arrived at Bagram to continue support of Task Force 180.[64] Unlike their active duty predecessors, the "Red Dogs" were members of a mobilized reserve unit based at Naval Air Station Belle Chasses, Louisiana. During three successive detachment rotations, they performed escort, reconnaissance, and close air support missions similar to those previously flown by the Hornet and Harrier pilots. The squadron forward deployed to Fire Base Salerno, located north of Khost, to support ground operations near the Pakistani border during their 18-month tenure in theater.[65]

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 769 (HMH-769), a reserve unit based out of Edwards Air Force Base in California, also supported Task Force 180. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Richard D. Mullen, the "Road Hogs" deployed to Bagram in May 2004 and ferried personnel, supplies, equipment, and even mail to forward operating bases throughout Afghanistan.[66] During their six-month tenure in theater, HMH-769 flew 1,083 combat sorties, carried 9,193 passengers, and transported 2,228,745 pounds of cargo.[67] Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462 (HMH-462), an active duty unit from Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, replaced the Road Hogs in October 2004. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Moss (who had previously flown in Afghanistan as a member of the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit during Operation Anaconda), the "Heavy Haulers" provided a heavy lift capability to Coalition forces until departing in May 2005.[68]

Marines on the Ground, 2003–2009

Marine ground combat forces did not return to Afghanistan until November 2003, when 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Petit, arrived in Bagram to support Task Force 180's stability and security operations in northern Kabul Province.[69] This development, part of a troop surge following the rise of insurgent activity during the previous year and growing concern over security requirements for the impending voter registration campaign, coincided with both NATO's decision to expand the ISAF's presence throughout the country and Central Command's establishment of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (commanded by Army Lieutenant General David W. Barno). The added layer of bureaucracy provided centralized leadership over Task Force 180, which was now relegated to a subordinate role, as well as the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan and Task Force Phoenix.[70]



Photo by LCpl Justin M. Mason

Members of Company K, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, search a compound during Operation Lynx on 7 August 2004. The battalion was working to secure Khost Province in northeastern Afghanistan, prior to national elections scheduled for October.



Photo by LCpl Justin M. Mason

Members of Weapons Company, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, speak with villagers while patrolling near Khost on 19 September 2004. The Marines are conducting local security assessments in support of the upcoming presidential election while maintaining an offensive presence throughout the region.

As part of its ongoing effort to quell resistance in southern and eastern Afghanistan, Task Force 180 launched Operation Mountain Storm during early March 2004.[71] By this time, Colonel McKenzie and the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (22d MEU) had redeployed to Central Command's theater of operations. The Marines were part of Expeditionary Strike Group 2, an innovative naval configuration reflecting the earlier success of then–Brigadier General James Mattis and Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58. McKenzie was assigned the lead role in the Coalition's annual spring offensive and given tactical responsibility for Uruzgan Province. This rural mountain region located north of Kandahar was a known safe haven for renegade Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. Following a turnover between the 10th Mountain and 25th Infantry Divisions, Task Force 180 had been renamed Task Force 76 on 25 April to emphasize the Coalition's commitment to securing the future of the fledgling Afghan democracy.

The 22d MEU's mission was threefold: secure the region's major population centers, create a stable environment for voter registration, and defeat the anti-Coalition militia forces. It accomplished this through a four-phase campaign conducted between 26 March and 10 July, which centered on establishing Forward Operating Base Ripley* in the provincial capital of Tarin Kowt, securing the surrounding valleys, and then simultaneously engaging the Afghan citizenry and insurgent forces in concurrent civil and military operations.[72] In a series of running

*The 22d MEU named its forward operating base after Col John W. Ripley, USMC. While serving as a military advisor to South Vietnamese forces in 1972, he received the Navy Cross for destroying the bridge at Dong Ha during the North Vietnamese Easter Offensive.

gun battles, principally fought by Lieutenant Colonel Asad A. Khan and his 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, 22d MEU was credited with eliminating more than 100 enemy fighters from an area previously avoided by conventional forces. As the Marines prepared to depart, having turned their forward operating base over to a PRT, Major General Eric T. Olson, USA, commander of the 25th Infantry Division, remarked, "You're the best this place has ever seen."[73] He continued, quoting General Barno, "Never in the history of Operation Enduring Freedom has there been an offensive operation like the one the 22d MEU conducted. Never have we been this successful. You have made history here."[74]

Following the successful completion of the spring offensive, Task Force 76 began Operation Lightning Resolve, an initiative to reinforce Coalition forces, step up security, and support the UN's effort to register voters.[75] Although the elections were twice postponed (first from June to September and then from September to October) due to security concerns over the rising number of insurgent attacks, the Taliban campaign to derail registration ultimately failed to undermine the population's enthusiasm.[76] As one report emphasized, "The desire to vote was so strong, Afghans in the Panjab district began to line up four hours before the polling center was scheduled to open, with a foot of snow on the ground."[77]

Lieutenant Colonel Julian D. Alford and 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, which had replaced Lieutenant Colonel Petit's battalion during May, contributed to this success and continued to conduct stability and support operations at various locations into December 2004.[78] They were in turn succeeded by Lieutenant Colonel Norman L. Cooling and 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, from November 2004 to June 2005; Lieutenant Colonel James E. Donnellan and 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, from June 2005 to January 2006;[79] and finally Lieutenant Colonel James W. Bierman and 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, from January to June 2006.[80]

During the same period, the Italy-based Southern European Task Force had replaced the 25th Infantry Division as head of Task Force 76 in March 2005, in turn being replaced by the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division in February 2006. Following NATO's assumption of responsibility for operations throughout the country late in 2006, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan stood down. This change resurrected Task Force 76 as the senior U.S. command in Afghanistan, as well as the lead for the ISAF in Regional Command East. In March 2007, the 82d Airborne Division replaced the 10th Mountain Division as the senior command, and Task Force 76 subsequently became Task Force 82.[81]

During January 2007, following another brief hiatus in ground combat participation, Marine Special Operations Command deployed its first special operations company under the tactical control of Colonel Gregory Sturdevant and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit.[82] A month later, Major Fred C. Galvin led Company F, 2d Marine Corps Special Operations Battalion, ashore in support of Central Command. Unfortunately, reports of indiscriminate killings by Marines after insurgents ambushed a six-vehicle convoy as it approached a bridge near Jalalabad on 4 March led Major General Frank H. Kearney III, USA, chief of Central Command's Special Operations Command, to order the company's expulsion from Afghanistan and direct that the Naval Criminal Investigative Service begin an investigation of the incident.[83] Around the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Paul D. Montanus, commander of the Marines' 2d Special Operations Battalion, chose to relieve Galvin and his senior staff noncommissioned officer.[84]

General Kearney's controversial decision to expel the special operations company from Afghanistan raised questions among Marine Corps leaders, Defense Department personnel, and congressional representatives regarding the role played by command influence in the Marines' removal.[85] Yet Lieutenant General James Mattis, commander of Marine Forces Central Command, ordered that a court of inquiry be conducted to review the evidence collected during the previous investigation.[86] On 23 May 2008, after hearing from

more than 45 witnesses and examining more than 12,000 pages of documents, the court determined that the Marines of Company F, 2d Marine Special Operations Battalion, had "acted appropriately" in response to the ambush.[87] Meanwhile, the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion had successfully deployed its first special operations company to southeastern Afghanistan during the spring and summer of 2007 and to the Philippines in the autumn of the same year.[88]

Continuing Operations

During conversations with members of the Joint Staff and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates in October 2007, Marine Commandant James T. Conway suggested that the Marine Corps withdraw from Iraq and assume primary responsibility for the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. This proposal, which followed a significant decline in violence in al-Anbar Province, the Marine's area of responsibility in Iraq, raised the possibility that a growing surplus of Marine forces in that region could gradually replace Army soldiers fighting in Afghanistan. Proponents of the plan emphasized that the Marine Corps' integrated air, ground, and logistics units were ideally suited for dispersed operations in rugged terrain, particularly given the recent combat deployment of their new Bell-Boeing MV-22B Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft. Opponents, on the other hand, argued that the Marine's traditional seven-month tours were too short for long-term counterinsurgency operations and that a single-Service approach would discourage joint operations.[89]

Although Secretary Gates rejected the idea in early December, desiring instead that the international community increase its contribution to the peacekeeping force,[90] by mid-January 2008 President Bush had approved a one-time "deployment of 3,200 Marines to help the NATO-led security effort in the south and to increase the number of trainers for the Afghan army and police."[91] Colonel Peter Petronzio and the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit subsequently arrived in Afghanistan during March, and within a month had



Photo by Sgt Christopher M.Tirado
Gen James T. Conway, 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps, speaks with members of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit in Kandahar on 22 February 2008.

launched a massive operation into the volatile Garmsir District of southern Helmand Province.[92] At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Richard D. Hall and 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, deployed to Regional Security Command South to help train district police forces.[93] Both of these units served in support of Task Force 101 (101st Airborne Division) into November. As they departed, Colonel Duffy W. White arrived with Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan, continuing Marine operations in support of the ISAF in southwestern Afghanistan. Lieutenant Colonel David L. Odom and his 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, provided the ground component, while Lieutenant Colonel Michael J. Jernigan and his Combat Logistics Battalion 3 provided the support element.

Despite an escalation in Coalition operations during 2008, the security situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate. In December, the Paris-based International Council on Security and



Photo by Cpl Alex C. Guerra

Members of Company A, Battalion Landing Team 1/6, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, conduct combat operations in Garmsir, Afghanistan, on 4 May 2008. The Marines are attached to the International Security Assistance Force.

Development reported that Taliban influence had spread to the north and west, and resistance forces now operated in nearly three-quarters of the country, threatening several highways leading into Kabul.[94] Although NATO officials questioned the report's accuracy, after encountering a series of successful attacks against Coalition-bound convoys in northwestern Pakistan, the Coalition began negotiations to increase the flow of supplies into Afghanistan from the north.[95] Moreover, NATO's own data indicated that the number of insurgent attacks had risen by 31 percent and the number of Afghan civilian deaths had increased by 40 percent during the year.[96]

In the same month that the International Council on Security and Development released its report, the Coalition's top commander, Army General David D. McKiernan, requested an additional four brigades, and President-elect Barak Obama committed to shifting the focus from Iraq and significantly increasing the American presence in Afghanistan.[97] During a press interview, McKiernan explained that an increase in force levels was "needed until we get to this tipping point where the Afghan army and Afghan police have both the capacity and capability to provide security for their people…. That is at least three or four more years away." He also clarified, "I don't like to use the word 'surge' here because if we put these additional forces in here, it's going to be for the next few years. It's not a temporary increase of combat strength."[98]

At the same time, retired General James Jones, former military head of NATO and President-elect Obama's national security advisor, warned that a U.S. troop surge would only work if other changes also take hold. He commented, "You can always put more troops into Afghanistan, but if that's all you do, you will just be prolonging the problem."[99] In addition to training security forces and rebuilding Afghanistan's infrastructure, Coalition officials embarked on a two-pronged strategy to reconcile with moderate Taliban

and isolate remaining hardliners affiliated with al-Qaeda.[100] One aspect of the plan, based on a similar program successfully employed in Iraq, was to raise local militias under the auspices of the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program.[101]

In December 2008, Defense Secretary Gates announced that the 3d Brigade of the 10th Mountain Division was scheduled to arrive in Afghanistan during January 2009, followed by two additional brigades in the spring.[102] Although the first unit to deploy would occupy the region south of Kabul, Canadian forces indicated that they were ready to vacate Kandahar before the end of their mandate in 2011, making way for a major U.S. command in southern Afghanistan.[103] When asked whether Marines might contribute to the surge, Gates told reporters that the decision had not been made but added, "It's clear that the Marines want to be in the fight, that's what you'd expect…. I don't have a problem with General Conway's desire to have a bigger part of the mission in Afghanistan for the Marine Corps."[104] On the issue of transitioning Marine forces from Iraq to Afghanistan, Conway remarked that the secretary understood his "public stance on the fact that we can be better used elsewhere and he certainly hasn't told me to pipe down. So I think he understands the logic of it."[105] Conway also confided that Marine units tentatively scheduled to go to Iraq during spring 2009 were already incorporating some training for Afghanistan into their preparations.

By the end of May, Brigadier General Lawrence D. Nicholson's Marine Expeditionary Brigade–Afghanistan (Task Force Leatherneck; 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade) had superseded Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan. This change represented a major increase in both the size and scope of Marine Corps operations in southwestern Afghanistan. Based out of Camp Leatherneck, northwest of Lashkar Gah, the brigade totaled more than 10,000 Marines and sailors from Regimental Combat Team 3, commanded by Colonel Duffy W. White; Marine Aircraft Group 40, commanded by Colonel Kevin S. Vest; and Combat Logistics Regiment 2, commanded by Colonel John W. Simmons. Distributed at subsidiary battalion outposts and company patrol bases along the Helmand River valley, their mission was to conduct counterinsurgency operations—which included securing the region—in partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces. Appropriately, the southernmost position was situated west of Forward Operation Base Rhino, where Marines and sailors from Task Force 58 had landed almost eight years earlier.[106]

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Appendix A
Command and Staff List

National Security Council

President

George W. Bush

Vice President

Richard B. Cheney

Secretary of State: Colin L. Powell

Secretary of the Treasury: Paul H. O'Neill

Secretary of Defense: Donald H. Rumsfeld

Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs: Condoleezza Rice

Director of National Intelligence: George J. Tenet

Joint Staff

Chairman

Gen Henry H. Shelton, USA (October 1997–September 2001)
Gen Richard B. Myers, USAF (from October 2001)

Vice Chairman

Gen Richard B. Myers, USAF (March 2000–September 2001)
Gen Peter Pace, USMC (from October 2001)

Chief of Staff of the Army: Gen Eric K. Shinseki

Chief of Staff of the Air Force: Gen John P. Jumper

Chief of Naval Operations: Adm Vernon E. Clark

Commandant of the Marine Corps: Gen James L. Jones

Director, Joint Staff

VAdm Scott A. Fry, USN (through October 2001)
LtGen John P. Abizaid, USA (from November 2001)

J-2, Director for Intelligence: RAdm Lowell E. Jacoby, USN

J-3, Director for Operations: LtGen Gregory S. Newbold, USMC

J-4, Director for Logistics: VAdm Gordon S. Holder, USN

J-5, Director for Strategic Plans and Policy: LtGen John P. Abizaid, USA (through October 2001)
LtGen George W. Casey Jr., USA (from November 2001)

U.S. Central Command

Commander in Chief: Gen Tommy R. Franks, USA

Deputy: LtGen Michael P. DeLong, USMC

J-2, Director for Intelligence: BGen John F. Kimmons, USA

J-3, Director for Operations: LtGen Victor E. Renuart Jr., USAF

J-4, Director for Logistics: MajGen Dennis K. Jackson, USA

J-5, Director for Political-Military Affairs: RAdm Jay Campbell, USN

Special Operations (SOCCent): VAdm Albert M. Calland III, USN

Army Forces (Third Army): LtGen Paul T. Mikolashek

Air Forces (Ninth Air Force): LtGen T. Michael Mosley

Naval Forces (Fifth Fleet): VAdm Charles W. Moore Jr.

Marine Forces (MarForPac): LtGen Earl B. Hailston

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

Commanding General: LtGen Earl B. Hailston

Deputy: BGen John G. Castellaw

I Marine Expeditionary Force

Commanding General: LtGen Michael W. Hagee

Deputy/Commanding General 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade: BGen James N. Mattis

Commanding General 1st Marine Division: MajGen James T. Conway

Commanding General 3d Marine Aircraft Wing: MajGen Charles F. Bolden Jr.

Commanding General 1st Force Service Support Group: BGen (Sel) Edward G. Usher III

Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58

(1 November 2001–26 February 2002)

Commanding General: BGen James N. Mattis

Deputy: Capt William E. Jezierski, USN (28 November–13 January 2002)
Capt Kenneth M. Rome, USN (4 January–26 February 2002)

Chief of Staff: Col Peter T. Miller (1 November 2001–17 January 2002)
Col Ronald R. McFarland (18 January 2002–26 February 2002)

N-1: SSgt Benny A. Rodriguez

N-2: LtCol Steven P. Martinson (05 November 2001–04 February 2002)
Maj Timothy J. Oliver (05 February 2002–26 February 2002)

N-3/5: Capt Richard Hascup, USN (01 November 2001–13 February 2002)
LtCol Clark R. Lethin (14 February 2002–26 February 2002)

N-4: LtCol John J. Broadmeadow

N-6: Maj Scott F. Stebbins

Attachments (partial list)

Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 Air Detachment: LCdr Leonard W. Cooke, USN

Task Force 64 (Australian Special Air Service): LtCol Peter Gilmore, ADF

Task Force K-Bar (Naval Special Warfare): Capt Robert S. Harward, USN

I Marine Expeditionary Force Shock Trauma Platoon: Cdrs Bruce C. Baker, Burgess, Peter M. Rhee, USN

II Marine Expeditionary Force Shock Trauma Platoon: Cdrs Robert P. Hinks and Ritchie, USN

21st Special Tactics Squadron Detachment: Capt Michael J. Flatten, USAF

USS Peleliu *Amphibious Ready Group*
(U.S. Central Command Area of Operations 28 September 2001–18 January 2002)

Amphibious Squadron 1
Commodore: Capt William E. Jezierski, USN

15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)
Commanding Officer: Col Thomas D. Waldhauser
Executive Officer: LtCol Kevin P. Spillers
Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Hubert O. Caloud

S-1: Capt James A. McLaughlin
S-2: Maj James B. Higgins
S-3: LtCol Gregg P. Olson
S-4: Maj Michel E. Stroud
S-6: Maj Stephen O. Vidaurri
Commanding Officer, Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 1st Marines: LtCol Christopher M. Bourne
Commanding Officer, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163: LtCol James K. LaVine
Commanding Officer, MEU Service Support Group 15: LtCol Carl D. Matter

USS Bataan *Amphibious Ready Group*
(U.S. Central Command Area of Operations 14 November 2001–20 March 2002)

Amphibious Squadron 8
Commodore: Capt Kenneth M. Rome, USN

26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)
Commanding Officer: Col Andrew P. Frick
Executive Officer: LtCol Gary R. Oles
Sergeant Major: SgtMaj William McKnight Jr.

S-1: Capt Darren S. Boyd
S-2: Maj Gregory G. Koziuk
S-3: LtCol Daniel D. Yoo
S-4: LtCol Andrew N. Killion
S-6: Maj David B. Parks
Commanding Officer, Battalion Landing Team 3d Battalion, 6th Marines: LtCol Jerome M. Lynes
Commanding Officer, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365: LtCol Kevin M. DeVore
Commanding Officer, MEU Service Support Group 26: LtCol William M. Faulkner

USS Bonhomme Richard *Amphibious Ready Group*
(U.S. Central Command Area of Operations 10 January–2 May 2002)

Amphibious Squadron 3

Commodore: Capt Robert J. Connelly, USN

13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)

Commanding Officer: Col Christopher J. Gunther

Executive Officer: LtCol Timothy W. Fitzgerald

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Jeffrey A. Morin

S-1: Capt Heather J. Cotoia

S-2: Maj Joseph D. Sinicrop Jr.

S-3: LtCol Richard C. McMonagle

S-4: Maj Joseph N. Raftery

S-6: Maj Robert M. Flowers

Commanding Officer, Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 4th Marines: LtCol Robert O. Sinclair

Commanding Officer, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165: LtCol Gregg A. Sturdevant

Commanding Officer, MEU Service Support Group 13: LtCol Rodman D. Sansone

Appendix B
Unit List

Major Marine Deployments to Afghanistan

Operation Enduring Freedom (Phase II)

USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71)			
Carrier Air Wing 1 [CVW-1]	Oct 2001	Mar 2002	
Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 [VMFA-251]			
USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74)			
Carrier Air Wing 9 [CVW-9]	Nov 2001	Apr 2002	
Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 [VMFA-314]			
Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58			
USS *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group [*Peleliu* ARG] 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit Special Operations Capable [15th MEU SOC]	Oct 2001	Jan 2002	Forward Operating Base Rhino (FOB Rhino), Kandahar
Battalion Landing Team 1/1 [BLT 1/1] Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 [HMM-163] MEU Service Support Group 15 [MSSG 15]			
USS *Bataan* Amphibious Ready Group [*Bataan* ARG] 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit Special Operations Capable [26th MEU SOC]	Nov 2001	Feb 2002	FOB Rhino, Kandahar, Kabul, Khost
Battalion Landing Team 3/6 [BLT 3/6] Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 [HMM-365] MEU Service Support Group 26 [MSSG 26]			
Combined Joint Task Force Mountain			
13th Marine Expeditionary Unit Special Operations Capable [13th MEU SOC]	Mar 2002	Mar 2002	Bagram
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 [HMM-165]			

Operation Enduring Freedom (Continuing Operations)

Embassy Security			
3d Battalion, 8th Marines (Anti-terrorism) [3d Bn, 8th Mar (AT)]	Dec 2001	Sep 2002	Kabul
3d Battalion, 6th Marines (Anti-terrorism) [3d Bn, 6th Mar (AT)]	Sep 2002	Nov 2003	Kabul
3d Battalion, 2d Marines (Anti-terrorism) [3d Bn, 2d Mar (AT)]	Nov 2003	Sep 2004	Kabul
2d Battalion, 6th Marines (Anti-terrorism) [2d Bn, 6th Mar (AT)]	Sep 2004	Apr 2005	Kabul, Bagram
Training Teams			
Coalition and Special Warfare Center	Jun 2002	Jun 2005	
Security Cooperation Education Training Center	Jun 2005	Present	
Aviation Operations			
Marine All Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 121 [VMFA (AW)-121]	Apr 2002	Sep 2002	Manas, Kyrgyzstan
Marine Attack Squadron 513 [VMA-513]	Oct 2002	Sep 2003	Bagram
Marine Light Helicopter Squadron 773 [HMLA-773]	Oct 2003	Feb 2005	Bagram
Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 769 [HMH-769]	May 2004	Nov 2004	Bagram
Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462 [HMH-462]	Oct 2004	Apr 2005	Bagram
Ground and Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Operations			
2d Battalion, 8th Marines [2d Bn, 8th Mar]	Nov 2003	May 2004	
22d Marine Expeditionary Unit Special Operations Capable [22d MEU SOC] Battalion Landing Team 1/6 [BLT 1/6] Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266 [HMM-266] MEU Service Support Group 22 [MSSG 22]	Feb 2004	Jul 2004	
3d Battalion, 6th Marines/6th Marines Headquarters [3d Bn, 6th Mar/6th Mar Hq]	Apr 2004	Dec 2004	
3d Battalion, 3d Marines [3d Bn, 3d Mar]	Nov 2004	Jun 2005	
2d Battalion, 3d Marines [2d Bn, 3d Mar]	Jun 2005	Jan 2006	
1st Battalion, 3d Marines [1st Bn, 3d Mar]	Jan 2006	Jun 2006	
2d Battalion, 7th Marines [2d Bn, 7th Mar]	Mar 2008	Nov 2008	
24th Marine Expeditionary Unit	May 2008	Nov 2008	

Special Operations Capable [24th MEU SOC]			
Battalion Landing Team 1/6 [BLT 1/6] Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 [HMM-365] Combat Logistics Battalion 24 [CLB 24]			
Special Purpose MAGTF–Afghanistan	Nov 2008	May 2009	Helmand & Farah Provinces
8th Marines Headquarters [8th Mar Hq] 3d Battalion, 8th Marines [3d Bn, 8th Mar] Combat Logistics Battalion 3 [CLB 3]			
Marine Expeditionary Brigade–Afghanistan	May 2009		Helmand Province
2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade Headquarters Group [2d MEB HqGru] Regimental Combat Team 3 [RCT 3] Marine Aircraft Group 40 [MAG 40] Combat Logistics Regiment 2 [CLR 2]			

Special Operations

Company F, 2d Marines Special Operations Battalion [Co F, 2d MSOB]	Feb 2007	Mar 2007	
Company, 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion [Co, 1st MSOB]	Apr 2007	Sep 2007	
Company, 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion [Co, 1st MSOB]	2007	2008	

Appendix C
Selected Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

5th Group	5th Special Forces Group
ABC	American Broadcasting Corporation
al-Qaeda	"The base"; an international militant Islamic terrorist organization
AOR	Area of Responsibility
ArCent	U.S. Army Forces Central Command
ARG	Amphibious Ready Group
ASAS	Australian Special Air Service
ASD	Assistant Secretary of Defense
AT	Anti-terrorism
BLT	Battalion Landing Team
burqa	An loose enveloping garment worn by some Muslim women to cloak their faces and bodies in public places
CAAT	Combined Antiarmor Team
caliph	Leader of all Muslims
CATF	Commander of the Amphibious Task Force
CBIST	Chemical Biological Intelligence Support Team
CentCom	U.S. Central Command
CFLCC	Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command
CFMCC	Combined Forces Maritime Component Command
CFSOCC	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command
CG	Commanding General
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CinC	Commander in Chief
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force

CLF	Commander of the Landing Force
CMH	U.S. Army Center of Military History
CNN	Cable News Network
CO	Commanding Officer
ComdC	Command Chronology
ConPlan	Concept of Operations Plan
CSAR	Combat Search and Rescue
CV	Aircraft Carrier (Fixed-Wing Aircraft)
CVN	Nuclear-Powered Aircraft Carrier (Fixed-Wing Aircraft)
CVW	Carrier Air Wing
DCG	Deputy Commanding General
DCinC	Deputy Commander in Chief
D-Day	Day on which operations are scheduled to commence
DoD	Department of Defense
DON	Department of the Navy
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FAC(A)	Forward Air Controller (Airborne)
FARP	Forward Arming and Refueling Point
fatwa	Islamic religious ruling
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FOB	Forward Operating Base
GPO	U.S. Government Printing Office
GPS	Global Positioning System
GRC	Gray Research Center
H-Hour	Hour when operation is scheduled to commence
HMH	Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron
HMM	Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron

HMMWV, humvee	High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle
HQMC	Headquarters Marine Corps
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (Pakistan)
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JDAM	Joint Direct Attack Munitions
JIC	Joint Intelligence Center
jihad	Holy war waged as an Islamic religious duty
LAV	Light Armored Vehicle
LDT	Laser Target Designator
LHA	Landing Helicopter Assault (general purpose amphibious assault ship)
LHD	Landing Helicopter Dock (multipurpose amphibious assault ship)
loya jirga	Traditional meeting of Afghan tribal elders to solve problems
LPD	Landing Platform Dock (amphibious transport dock)
LPH	Landing Platform Helicopter (amphibious assault ship)
LSD	Dock Landing Ship (amphibious assault ship)
madrassa	Islamic religious school
MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MarCent	U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command
MarForPac	U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific
MCCDC	Marine Corps Combat Development Command
MCHD	Marine Corps History Division
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MPF	Maritime Prepositioning Force
MRE	Meal, Ready-to-Eat
MSSG	Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Service Support Group
mujahideen	Those who wage a jihad; holy warriors

mullah	Male religious teacher or leader who is schooled in Islamic law
MWR	Navy Morale, Welfare, and Recreation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NavCent	U.S. Naval Forces Central Command
NBC	National Broadcasting Corporation
nm	Nautical Mile
NMCB	Naval Mobile Construction Battalion
NSA	Naval Support Activity
NSC	National Security Council
NZSAS	New Zealand Special Air Service
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
ODB	Operational Detachment Bravo
ODD	Operational Detachment Delta
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OP	Observation Post
PA	Public Affairs
PR	Public Relations
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RPG	Rocket-Propelled Grenade
SAS	British Special Air Service
SeaBee	U.S. Navy Construction Battalion
SEAL	Sea, Air, and Land (U.S. Navy special operations force)
sharia	Islamic law
SOC	Special Operations Capable
SOF	Special Operations Forces (generic)
TAD	Tactical Air Direction Net
Taliban	"Seekers, religious students"; an Islamic-based, Afghan political-military organization that emerged during 1994 and that ruled large parts of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001
TEMPER	Tent, Extendable, Modular, Personnel

TF	Task Force
TOW	Tube-Launched, Optically Tracked, Wire-Guided Missile
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
ummah	Muslim nation
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States Army
USAF	United States Air Force
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USN	United States Navy
USNS	United States Naval Ship
USO	United Service Organizations
USS	United States Ship
VMFA (AW)	Marine All Weather Fighter Attack Squadron
VMFA	Marine Fighter Attack Squadron
VMGR	Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron
Wahhabism	A conservative Islamic reform movement

Appendix D
Chronology of Events

1992	
29 December	Al-Qaeda affiliates target U.S. Marines during hotel bombing in Aden, Yemen.
1993	
26 February	Al-Qaeda affiliates bomb the World Trade Center in New York City.
1994	
Spring	Mullah Mohammed Omar mobilizes a small group of Taliban (religious students) against regional warlords in Kandahar.
1995	
13 November	Al-Qaeda affiliates attack an American-run military training facility in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
1996	
3 April	Mullah Omar proclaims himself "Commander of the Faithful" and "Emir of Afghanistan" during a gathering of the nation's religious leaders in Kandahar, declaring a jihad against Burhanuddin Rabbani's regime.
May	Osama bin Laden relocates to Jalalabad, Afghanistan, after Sudanese authorities ask him to leave their country.
25 June	Al-Qaeda terrorists bomb Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The barracks housed U.S. Air Force personnel.
23 August	Osama bin Laden issues a "Declaration of War Against Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places (Mecca and Medina)."
26 September	Taliban forces capture the Afghan capital city of Kabul.
1997	
13 June	Northern anti-Taliban alliance establishes the United Islamic and National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan in Mazar-e Sharif, reappointing Burhanuddin Rabbani as president and Ahmad Shah Masood as defense minister. This group is known in the West as the Northern Alliance.
1998	
23 February	Osama bin Laden issues a manifesto under the banner of the International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, expanding his terror campaign to include liberating the Muslim Middle East and attacking Americans around the globe.

7 August	Al-Qaeda terrorists bomb U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
20 August	President William J. Clinton retaliates against the embassy bombings by launching cruise missiles against terrorist training camps in Sudan and Afghanistan and ordering the Justice Department to freeze bin Laden's financial assets.

1999

5 July	President Clinton orders the Justice Department to freeze Taliban financial assets after they refuse to extradite bin Laden.

2000

12 October	Al-Qaeda terrorists bomb the USS *Cole* (DDG 67) during a routine refueling stop in Yemen

2001

11 January	During his Senate confirmation hearing, incoming Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld outlines the need to defend against missiles, terrorism, and threats against America's space assets and information systems, as well as the need to use new technologies to create a military for the 21st Century.
January	George J. Tenet, director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), informs President-elect George W. Bush and senior members of the new administration that Osama bin Laden is one of the top three threats facing America. He emphasizes that the question is not whether al-Qaeda will attack, but when and where.
April	The National Security Council Deputies Committee recommends arming the Northern Alliance and supporting an offensive to eliminate al-Qaeda and destabilize the Taliban in Afghanistan.
June	Osama bin Laden releases a recruitment video stating, "It's time to penetrate America and Israel and hit them where it hurts."
June	The National Security Council Deputies Committee recommends supporting an offensive to eliminate al-Qaeda and destabilize the Taliban in Afghanistan.
September	The National Security Council (NSC) approves a covert campaign to arm the Northern Alliance and support an offensive to eliminate al-Qaeda and destabilize the Taliban in Afghanistan.
9 September	Al-Qaeda agents assassinate Ahmad Shah Masood, defense minister for the Northern Alliance.
10 September	During a town meeting at the Pentagon, Secretary Rumsfeld characterizes military bureaucracy as a serious threat to national security and commits to transforming it.

2001

11 September	Al-Qaeda terrorists fly two hijacked airliners into the World Trade Center in New York City, while another hits the Pentagon in Washington, DC. A fourth aircraft, targeting the Capitol or the White House, crashes in rural Pennsylvania after passengers attempt to retake control of United Airlines Flight 93. The unprecedented attacks result in approximately 3,000 dead from 80 nations.
13 September	CIA Director Tenet briefs the NSC on a concept to synthesize intelligence, technology, and paramilitary and indigenous forces into a covert action against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan, potentially augmented by military power and special operating forces.
	Gen Tommy R. Franks, USA, commander in chief of U.S. Central Command (CentCom), informs his staff that access to the region and sustainment of forces will rely heavily upon intertheater airlift, and that the landlocked nature of any Afghan campaign will preclude the use of Marine amphibious forces.
14 September	Gen Franks presents a sequence of related options to the Pentagon: immediate retaliation with Navy cruise missiles, followed by a 10-day air war employing Air Force and Navy bombers, and further followed by the deployment of joint special operating forces.
15 September	President Bush convenes a war cabinet meeting at Camp David, Maryland, to review national security developments. The consensus is to negotiate with the Taliban, attack al-Qaeda, and then address other state sponsors of terrorism at a time of the administration's choosing. The president and Secretary Rumsfeld agree that military options presented by Gen Henry H. Shelton, USA, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, are obsolete and that the Pentagon needs to pursue unconventional approaches.
	BGen John G. Castellaw, deputy commanding general (DCG) of U.S. Marine Forces Pacific (MarForPac), arrives in Tampa, Florida, and begins assembling a wartime staff at U.S. Marine Forces Central Command (MarCent) headquarters.
15–17 September	After departing the West Coast on 13 August, the USS *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group (*Peleliu* ARG) conducts humanitarian operations in East Timor. Col Thomas D. Waldhauser (Commanding Officer [CO], 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit [15th MEU]) and Navy Capt William E. Jezierski (CO, Amphibious Squadron 1 [CPR-1]) attend the inauguration of the country's new constitutional assembly.
17 September	The State Department delivers an ultimatum to the Taliban, demanding they extradite Osama bin Laden.
19 September	*Peleliu* ARG receives orders to report to CentCom's Area of Responsibility (AOR) and begins planning for possible noncombatant evacuation operations in Pakistan.

20 September	Gen Franks presents his four-phase concept of operations to Secretary Rumsfeld and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Reactions from the service chiefs are lukewarm.
	USS *Bataan* Amphibious Ready Group (*Bataan* ARG) (26th Marine Expeditionary Unit [26th MEU]/Amphibious Squadron 8 [CPR-8]) departs the East Coast for U.S. European Command's EuCom's AOR.
21 September	Gen James L. Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and Adm Vernon E. Clark, USN, Chief of Naval Operations, meet with Gen Franks and assure him of their support.
	Gen Franks presents his concept of operations to President Bush and senior administration officials.
	While addressing members of 1st Marine Brigade at Twentynine Palms, California, BGen James N. Mattis, serving concurrently as brigade commander and Deputy/Commanding General for I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), emphasizes that their professional conduct will convey a message to the world that there is "no better friend, no worse enemy" than a U.S. Marine.
24 September	Gen Jones and Adm Clark forward a memorandum to Secretary Rumsfeld, describing their ability to provide an integrated maritime strike force consisting of a carrier battle group and amphibious ready group.
26 September	The CIA's first paramilitary team arrives in northeastern Afghanistan.
28 September	*Peleliu* ARG arrives in CentCom's AOR and reports to the Fifth Fleet.
1 October	*Bataan* ARG arrives in EuCom's AOR and reports to the Sixth Fleet.
3 October	A detachment from the Air Force's theater airlift command arrives at Karshi Khanabad Air Base after Uzbekistan agrees to allow U.S. forces to operate within its borders.
5 October	BGen Mattis and his personal staff arrive at King Khalid Military Complex in Egypt for Exercise Bright Star and begin concurrent planning for potential amphibious operations off the coast of Somalia.
7 October	CentCom commences Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) by launching missile and air strikes against preplanned targets in Afghanistan and dropping humanitarian aid packages to the Afghan people.
	The 5th Special Forces Group arrives at Karshi Khanabad Air Base and establishes Joint Special Operating Task Force North (TF Dagger).
	The 15th MEU deploys airfield security and tactical recovery forces (Force Recon and Company A, Battalion Landing Team 1/1 [BLT 1/1]) to Jacobabad, Pakistan, in support of U.S. Air Force combat search and rescue teams.
11–25 October	The 26th MEU participates in Exercise Bright Star.

14 October	BGen Mattis is designated Commanding General (CG), MarCent (Forward) and Combined Joint Task Force Consequence Management. The latter organization is a CentCom initiative to establish an initial response force at Camp Doha, Kuwait, to assist nations dealing with a nuclear, chemical, or biological incident.
16 October	During the daily NSC meeting, CIA officials propose building an airfield and establishing a forward operating base (FOB) in southern Afghanistan to facilitate developing a southern corollary to the Northern Alliance. Secretary Rumsfeld states that he has a candidate in Helmand Province, situated west of Kandahar.
18 October	LtGen Michael P. DeLong, Deputy Commander in Chief (DCinC), CentCom; BGen Mattis; and Egyptian Gen Amin visit the *Bataan* ARG.
	A section of F/A-18 Hornets from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 (VMFA-251), serving with Carrier Air Wing 1 (CVW-1) on board the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71), conducts the Marine Corps' first strike mission of the war.
16 October	The CIA's first pilot team arrives in northeastern Afghanistan.
19 October	TF Dagger inserts its first two operational detachments into northeastern Afghanistan.
	Task Force Sword (TF 11) temporarily seizes an auxiliary airstrip in the southwestern desert (Objective Rhino) to support a follow-on raid against Mullah Omar's Kandahar residence.
	The 15th MEU's Bald Eagle Force (Company B, BLT 1/1) stands by on board the USS *Peleliu* (LHA 5), ready to reinforce rangers at Objective Rhino.
20 October	U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NavCent) orders 15th MEU to recover a MH-60 Black Hawk helicopter that crashed during the raid at an auxiliary airfield in Dalbandin, Pakistan. Although the small recovery team retrieves the aircraft, they temporarily abandon it during the return flight after receiving small arms fire while refueling at an auxiliary airfield in Panjgur, Pakistan.
23 October	Vice President Richard B. "Dick" Cheney asks other members of the administration if they should wait for the Northern Alliance to begin its advance or go ahead with conventional forces. By this time, CentCom is already developing contingency plans for the deployment of 50,000 U.S. ground troops to Afghanistan.
	Gen Jones, 32d Commandant of the Marine Corps, and SgtMaj Alford L. McMichael, 14th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, visit the *Bataan* ARG.
24 October	Gen Jones and SgtMaj McMichaels visit the *Peleliu* ARG. Col Waldhauser expresses difficulty getting 15th MEU's AV-8B Harriers onto the air tasking order for Afghanistan.

	The 15th MEU launches a reinforced tactical recovery force to Panjgur, Pakistan. Working in conjunction with Pakistani security forces, they retrieve the previously abandoned Black Hawk helicopter and return it to the USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63).
25 October	National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice asks President Bush if he wants to consider deploying several Army or Marine divisions to Afghanistan during the spring. He responds that it is too early to begin second-guessing their initial strategy.
	CentCom assumes operational control of MarForPac, as Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MarForCent), for the duration of OEF.
26 October	Secretary Rumsfeld inquires if CentCom is preparing for the possibility of a major land war in Afghanistan.
27 October	Arriving at Naval Support Activity Bahrain (NSA Bahrain) with his personal staff, BGen Mattis introduces himself to VAdm Charles W. Moore, USN, commander of Fifth Fleet, NavCent, and CentCom's Combined Forces Maritime Component Command (CFMCC).
28 October	*Peleliu* ARG receives a warning order regarding security operations in support of World Trade Organization conference in Doha, Qatar.
29 October	CentCom releases its 30-60-90 day plan for OEF and Operations Order 002-02, execution of Phase II operations in Afghanistan.
30 October	While visiting the USS *Peleliu*, Secretary of the Navy Gordon R. England states that the war on terror will require the deployment of conventional forces ashore and hints that the 15th MEU might play an offensive role in the future.
	CentCom notifies NavCent of a forthcoming warning order for the conduct of amphibious raids into southern Afghanistan. VAdm Moore recalls BGen Mattis from Kuwait, where he is evaluating the requirements for establishing Task Force Consequence Management. BGen Mattis confers with LtGen Earl B. Hailston, CG of MarForPac, and LtGen Michael W. Hagee, CG of I MEF.
	NavCent and MarCent (Forward) planners begin mission analysis for potential interdiction or noncombatant operations along the Horn of Africa. They envision a combined force involving two ARGs reinforced with additional CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopters and KC-130 Hercules transports.
	Bataan ARG is directed to consider the feasibility of replacing the USS *Kitty Hawk* as a floating forward support base for the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment in the north Arabian Sea. This option, which would require off-loading the Marine contingent, is not exercised.
31 October	CentCom issues a warning order for amphibious raids into Afghanistan; NavCent reissues the order.

	BGen Mattis meets privately with VAdm Moore in Bahrain. Moore anticipates that the Taliban will eventually withdraw to Kandahar and wants to strike before spring, thus denying the enemy an opportunity to strengthen their defenses. He places Mattis in charge of all amphibious forces in theater, designating him commander of Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58 (TF 58), and tasks him with conducting three to five raids during a 30-day period to destabilize the enemy's command and control.
	BGen Mattis and his personal staff, augmented by liaison officers from the MarCent Coordination Element, assemble to identify personnel requirements for TF 58's staff. Mattis chooses not to duplicate existing MEU capabilities and estimates that he will require 25 to 30 personnel.
	BGen Mattis encounters Navy Capt Robert S. Harward at NSA Bahrain. Harward, an old acquaintance and commander of the SEAL component of the Naval Special Warfare Detachment, is assembling Joint Special Operations Task Force South (Task Force K-Bar) and looking for an avenue into Afghanistan. The two men conspire to work together on the amphibious raids.
1 November	VAdm Moore establishes TF 58. CPR-1 is designated Task Group 58.1, and 15th MEU is designated Task Group 58.2.
	NavCent issues a written warning order directing TF 58 to begin planning for amphibious raids into southern Afghanistan.
	NavCent requests transfer of the *Bataan* ARG to CentCom's AOR and sufficient forces to relieve 15th MEU security forces in Jacobabad, Pakistan.
3 November	BGen Mattis presents three scalable options to VAdm Moore: a 6–12 hour company raid, two simultaneous 24–36 hour company raids, and a 48–72 hour battalion raid. When Moore asks if TF 58 could conduct an indefinite duration raid and how many personnel it would require, Mattis responds that he would need 1,000 Marines.
	Four AV-8Bs from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163) (15th MEU) conduct their first bombing missions of the war, attacking enemy forces near Garmabak Gar.
4 November	BGen Mattis releases a personal (P-4) message to the commanders of CPR-1 and 15th MEU, expressing his thoughts for future operations.
	TF 58 issues Planning Directive 001, regarding raid planning.
5 November	NavCent issues its concept of operations for raids into southern Afghanistan.
	TF 58 issues planning directives for raids into southern Afghanistan and interdiction of main supply routes.
6 November	TF 58 requests the deployment of additional CH-53 helicopters to CentCom's AOR.

7 November	CentCom alerts its operational components to the possibility of providing military support to the World Trade Organization meetings in Doha, Qatar.
	NavCent consents to Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command's (CFLCC's) request to use CFMCC forces to support the opening of the U.S. embassy in Kabul.
	BGen Mattis meets privately with Army MajGen Dell L. Dailey, CG, TF 11, at the U.S. embassy in Muscat, Oman. Dailey believes that an FOB in Afghanistan would benefit conventional and special operating forces and suggests the auxiliary airfield used during the 19 October raid (Objective Rhino) as a possible location.
8 November	CentCom issues a Combined Joint Forces Command planning order to CFLCC, directing that it establish an FOB in Afghanistan.
9 November	BGen Mattis delivers his formal concept of operations brief to VAdm Moore.
9–13 November	*Peleliu* ARG provides security for the World Trade Organization meetings in Doha, Qatar.
9–17 November	*Peleliu* ARG participates in Exercise Image Nautilus in Djibouti.
10 November	Mazar-e Sharif falls to the Northern Alliance.
	BGen Mattis delivers his formal concept of operations brief to LtGen Michael DeLong and LtGen Victor E. Renuart Jr., USAF, CentCom's DCinC and Director of Operations, respectively. Other commands in Bahrain, Kuwait, Hawaii, and Washington also view the presentation. DeLong tells Mattis to proceed with his planning, including the possibility of seizing and holding an FOB in southern Afghanistan.
11 November	Taloqan falls to the Northern Alliance.
	CentCom issues Fragmentary Order 02-004, directing CFLCC to be prepared to assume land operations in Afghanistan.
	Bataan ARG is ordered to report to CentCom's AOR.
12 November	As Northern Alliance forces approach Kabul, senior administration officials discuss strategies to secure the capital city after its capture. As a stopgap measure, until the United Nations (UN) can assemble and deploy a multinational force to Afghanistan, officials consider sending in American and British special operating forces or elements of the 10th Mountain Division based in Uzbekistan. Secretary Rumsfeld reminds the group that they also have Marines stationed off the Pakistan coast.
	Kofi Annan, UN secretary general, chairs a meeting with representatives from the United States, Russia, and the six nations neighboring Afghanistan. They agree on the need for a broad-based and freely chosen Afghan government and pledge to support continued humanitarian operations.

	Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314), serving with Carrier Air Wing 9 (CVW-9) on board the USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN 74), arrives in CentCom's AOR.
13 November	CentCom issues a planning order for CFMCC amphibious raids into Afghanistan; NavCent readdresses.
14 November	Kabul falls to the Northern Alliance.
	UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1378, pledging to support Afghan efforts to both establish a transitional government and form a new government.
	Bataan ARG receives a draft order to prepare to conduct raids in southern Afghanistan.
15 November	NavCent issues Modification 01 to the planning order for amphibious raids, approving TF 58 Course of Action C, including the establishment of an FOB at Kandahar International Airport.
	Fifth Fleet assumes operational control of the *Bataan* ARG. CPR-8, commanded by Capt Kenneth M. Rome, USN, is designated Task Group 58.3 and 26th MEU, commanded by Col Andrew P. Frick, is designated Task Group 58.4.
	BGen Mattis releases a P-4 message to the commanders of CPR-8 and 26th MEU welcoming them on board.
	Approximately 100 British Royal Marines arrive at Bagram Airfield.
16 November	BGen Mattis refines his concept of operations in a fragmentary order to subordinate commanders. After Navy SEALs establish surveillance over the main objectives, 15th MEU will secure the desert airstrip (Objective 1) on 21 November. The 26th MEU will subsequently flow through Rhino and seize Kandahar airport (Objective 2) on 24 November. On order, the Marines will also interdict enemy movement along Asian Highway Route 1 (Objective 3).
17 November	BGen Mattis briefs his concept of operations to MajGen Farooq, chief of plans for the Pakistani Joint Staff, in Islamabad, Pakistan. Although Farooq denies access to Dalbandin airfield, he offers another facility in Shamsi, Pakistan.
	TF 58 issues its official operations order to establish an FOB in southern Afghanistan and seize Kandahar International Airport.
	TF 58 requests twenty C-17 Globemaster sorties during the first three days of operations to support the buildup of forces in southern Afghanistan. Officials at Transportation Command are reluctant to expose the aircraft to potential enemy antiaircraft fire, although the pilots are enthusiastic to fly missions.
	A detachment of four additional CH-53 helicopters from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361 (HMH-361) arrives in theater.
17–18 November	TF 58 elements (SEALs, Force Recon, MEU Service Support Group 15 [MSSG 15]) conduct hydrographic survey of Chur Beach in Pasni, Pakistan.

18 November	BGen Mattis briefs VAdm Moore on TF 58's developing concept of operations.
	TF 58 requests a Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Air Detachment (NMCB) to conduct anticipated runway repairs at FOB Rhino.
19 November	CentCom approves TF 58's request to use "Chaos" as its official call sign. The staff select the moniker based on BGen Mattis's intent to inflict chaos on the enemy.
	NavCent requests special operations forces for reconnaissance and terminal guidance at the desert airstrip and FOB.
20 November	LtGen Paul T. Mikolashek, USA, commander of Third Army and Army Forces Central Command (ArCent), assumes the duties of CFLCC. Headquartered at Camp Doha, Kuwait, he is tasked with directing land operations in Combined Joint Area–Afghanistan.
	TF 58 embarks on board USS *Peleliu*.
	Col Waldhauser and the 15th MEU staff deliver their "Confirmation Brief for Seizure of Desert Airfield and Combat Power Buildup" to BGen Mattis and the TF 58 staff. H-Hour is tentatively established at 1700Z on 23 November.
	Relieved by soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division, 15th MEU recovers its remaining security forces from Jacobabad, Pakistan.
	MSSG 15 deploys a forward arming and refueling point (FARP) detachment to Shamsi, Pakistan, and fills fuel bladders in support of the future operations.
	Capt Jezierski issues OpTask Amphib in support of surface landings at Chur Beach in Pasni, Pakistan.
	The 26th MEU delivers its confirmation brief for assuming the on-call tactical recovery mission from the 15th MEU.
21 November	TF 58 issues its amphibious operations air control plan, while air officers coordinate close air support requirements with pilots on board the USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70).
	The 15th MEU begins staging forces (Company A, BLT 1/1) ashore in Pasni, Pakistan, for follow-on movement to Afghanistan.
	A SEAL detachment from Task Force K-Bar (TF K-Bar) inserts into southern Afghanistan to provide surveillance and special reconnaissance over Objective Rhino.
22 November	BGen Mattis postpones D-Day for 24 hours while waiting for an execute order.
	Three AV-8Bs from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (HMM-365) (26th MEU) fly their first combat mission over Afghanistan, attacking an enemy convoy and destroying four vehicles.

23 November	Kunduz falls to the Northern Alliance.
	CentCom issues an execute order for Operation Swift Freedom.
	BGen Mattis postpones the assault for another 24 hours to ensure sufficient fuel stocks are available, establishing H-Hour at 1700Z on 25 November.
24 November	BGen Mattis issues his execute order for Operation Swift Freedom, seizure of the desert airstrip, and establishment of an FOB.
25 November	Task Force 58 requests additional air traffic control assets for FOB Rhino and the use of TF K-Bar forces for surveillance and reconnaissance operations in Afghanistan.
	0900Z: TF 58 assumes operational control of the Shamsi FARP from TF 11.
	1100Z: TF 58 confirms H-Hour.
	1215Z: An aviation escort from HMM-163 (four AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters and three UH-1N Iroquois "Huey" helicopters) departs the USS *Peleliu*. During their flight north they will stop briefly at Shamsi to refuel.
	1300Z: TF 58 assumes operational control of the operations area. The first half of the assault force departs the USS *Peleliu* on board three CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters from HMM-163. During their flight north they will receive fuel from airborne KC-130 tankers.
	1345Z: The second half of the assault force departs the USS *Peleliu* on board three CH-53 helicopters from HMM-365 (26th MEU).
	1700Z: The first assault wave lands in Afghanistan; Capt James P. Fallon and Company C, BLT 1/1, seize the desert airstrip.
	1745Z: The second assault wave lands, including LtCol Christopher M. Bourne and BLT 1/1's jump command post.
	1830Z: The first Marine KC-130 transport lands at FOB Rhino. Aircrews from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadrons 252 and 352 (VMGR-252 and VMGR-352) support TF 58 throughout its tenure in Afghanistan, flying more that 1,400 sorties and accumulating over 2,500 flight hours.
25 November	Taliban prisoners held in Qala-e-Jangi fortress outside Mazar-e Sharif stage a bloody three-day revolt.
26 November	BGen Mattis, Col Waldhauser, and members of their staffs arrive at FOB Rhino.
	Multiple news agencies quote BGen Mattis's claim that "the Marines have landed and we now own a piece of Afghanistan." Mattis later remarks that that media has taken his statement out of context and that they failed to report that the Marines were liberating the country for the Afghan people.

During a Pentagon press conference, Secretary Rumsfeld emphasizes that the Marines are not an occupying force—they are there to establish an FOB and interdict enemy movement about the country. During the same conference, when asked if the operation's title indicated that the conflict was nearly over, Air Force Gen Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), indicates that the Global War on Terrorism would continue for years. Within a week of landing, CentCom states that the Marine operation falls under the general purview of OEF and they will no longer refer to it as Operation Swift Freedom.

Marines from Company C, BLT 1/1, raise the first American flag over Camp Rhino; CentCom tells them to take it down several days later.

While conducting an armed reconnaissance flight north of FOB Rhino, two AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters from HMM-163 help coordinate an attack on an eastward moving convoy of 15 enemy vehicles. After patrolling F-14B Tomcats from Fighter Squadron 102 (VF-102) on board the USS *Carl Vinson* bomb the column, the helicopter pilots attack several armored personnel carriers and strafe dismounted troops fleeing the damaged vehicles.

27 November

Secretary Rumsfeld informs Gen Franks that President Bush would like the Defense Department to review options for Iraq. When asked about the state of operational plans for that country, Franks replies that they are out of date and under revision.

CentCom issues Fragmentary Order 02-029, delegating tactical control over Australian special operating forces (Task Force 64 [TF 64]) to TF 58.

28 November

CentCom limits the number of naval forces operating in Afghanistan to 1,000 personnel; this is later adjusted to 1,078 to reflect the number of forces already ashore. Marine commanders reconfigure their force structures to meet security and operational requirements.

BGen Mattis designates Capt Jezierski, commodore of CPR-1, as the deputy commander of TF 58.

The first Air Force C-17 aircraft lands at FOB Rhino, carrying the lead elements of NMCB 133's Air Detachment. The Navy Seabees are subsequently designated Task Group 58.5.

29 November

CentCom raises its limitation on the number of naval forces operating in Afghanistan to 1,100 personnel.

CentCom directs CFLCC to begin planning for the isolation of Kandahar.

30 November

CentCom informs TF 58 that its sole mission is to establish an FOB in southwestern Afghanistan. TF 58 receives planning and fragmentary orders from CFLCC and CFMCC the same day, directing the Marines to plan for the interdiction of enemy lines of communication west of Kandahar.

	CFMCC transfers tactical control of TF 58 elements (15th MEU, 26th MEU, and NMCB 133) operating ashore in Afghanistan and Pakistan to CFLCC. CPR-1 and CPR-8 remain under NavCent control.
1 December	With the CFLCC advocating on the Marines' behalf, CentCom raises its limitation on the number of naval forces operating in Afghanistan to 1,400 personnel. This enables TF 58 to land 26th MEU combat forces, including Task Force Sledgehammer (TF Sledgehammer), who are necessary for securing the FOB and conducting interdiction operations.
2 December	CentCom and CFLCC issue execute orders, directing TF 58 to isolate Kandahar and prevent the escape of enemy forces from Afghanistan.
3 December	TF 58 issues Fragmentary Order 002, directing 15th MEU to isolate Kandahar and block escape routes west of the city along Highway 1. Capt Philip J. Treglia leads his force reconnaissance platoon, as the vanguard of BLT 1/1's interdiction force, north to the Arghandab River.
4 December	While participating in a UN-sponsored conference in Bonn, Germany, rival militia factions choose Hamid Karzai to lead the new Afghan Interim Authority and sign the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions.
	During a Pentagon press conference, Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen Myers state that there are no plans to involve American forces in the assault on Kandahar, that the job will fall to Southern Alliance forces currently encircling the city.
	LtCol Bourne leads the main body of BLT 1/1's interdiction force (Grim Reaper) north to the Arghandab River. It is composed of his jump command post, the battalion's combined antiarmor platoon, and Company B, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion.
	MEU Service Support Group 26 [MSSG 26] assumes airfield operations at FOB Impala in Shamsi, Pakistan. A provisional rifle platoon from Battery K, 10th Marines, provides security.
	TF 64, an Australian Special Air Service squadron commanded by LtCol Peter Gilmore, arrives at FOB Rhino.
5 December	The UN endorses the Bonn Agreement by adopting Security Council Resolution 1388.
	Hamid Karzai, leading Southern Alliance forces north of Kandahar, begins negotiating the surrender of Kandahar with Taliban leaders via cell phone.
	BLT 1/1's interdiction force establishes Patrol Base Pentagon four miles south of the Arghandab River and 25 miles west of Kandahar. HMM-163 inserts a reinforced rifle platoon from Company B to enhance security.

Due to technical problems, a B-52 Stratofortress drops a GBU-31 bomb on Afghan and special forces operating north of Kandahar. At TF Dagger's request, TF 58 helicopter crews insert reinforcements and help evacuate casualties to FOB Rhino for triage. The American soldiers are immediately flown to an Air Force hospital in Seeb, Oman, for medical treatment. After receiving initial medical care from the Navy's Shock Trauma Platoon at FOB Rhino, the Afghan fighters are flown to the USS *Peleliu* and USS *Bataan* (LHD 5) for continued treatment. During the transfer of patients, a CH-53 helicopter experiences engine problems, compelling the pilots to drop their external fuel tanks and execute an emergency landing at FOB Rhino.

An AH-1W Super Cobra helicopter from HMM-365 experiences a hard landing in a dry lake bed 6 miles south of FOB Rhino. The 26th MEU's combined antiarmor platoon secures the aircraft for the night and pilots fly it back to base the following day.

The wing of a taxiing C-17 aircraft strikes a parked CH-53 helicopter. Although the transport remains serviceable, the helicopter sustains damage requiring several days' worth of repairs.

Sporadic small arms fire erupts along the defensive perimeter at FOB Rhino as Marines engage a camel wandering through their frontlines. Prior to their deployment, they had learned that guerrilla forces sometimes used transport animals to deliver explosives against Russians troops during the Soviet-Afghan War. The camel apparently escaped unharmed.

6 December

Afghan Eastern Alliance forces, supported by TF Dagger, begin their assault against al-Qaeda and Taliban positions in the mountains of Tora Bora. TF 11 reinforces them two days later.

VAdm Moore issues planning orders for detainee handling and reconstitution of the *Peleliu* ARG and a warning order to support the reopening of the U.S. embassy in Kabul.

TF 58 requests additional fuel storage and distribution assets to support operations at Shamsi and FOB Rhino.

Maj Thomas J. Impellitteri leads an interdiction force of fast attack, antiarmor, and light armored vehicles across the Arghandab River, establishing a roadblock along Highway 1. Early the following morning, a reconnaissance team halts the lead vehicle in a Taliban convoy traveling west toward Lashkar Gah. During an ensuing firefight with the occupants, they kill seven enemy soldiers. After withdrawing to their objective rally point, the forward air controller directs two sections of Navy F-14 Tomcats and Air Force F-16 Falcons against several loaded troop transports attempting to bypass the roadblock. He then directs a section of Marine F-18 Hornets from VMFA-251 against the first vehicle, attempting to disguise the fact that it has been destroyed by ground fire.

A Naval Special Warfare Task Unit (SEAL Team 6, supported by members of MSSG 26 and Company L, Battalion Landing Team 3/6 [BLT 3/6]), embarked on board USS *Shreveport* (LPD 12), boards the maritime vessel *Kota Sejarah* off the coast of Karachi, Pakistan, in an effort to thwart the escape of al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders. Subsequent searches fail to locate contraband weapons or fleeing fugitives.

A squad-sized enemy force probes Company C's sector of the defensive perimeter, situated along the north side of FOB Rhino. BLT 1/1 initially responds with illumination and high explosive rounds from their 60mm and 81mm mortars. After reinforcing Company C's position, a section of vehicles from BLT 3/6's combined antiarmor platoon moves forward of friendly lines and briefly fires upon the enemy with MK19 automatic grenade launchers. After the antiarmor section withdraws, three vehicles from BLT 3/6's Light Armored Reconnaissance platoon go forward to reconnoiter the area, although by this time the enemy has withdrawn. Foot mobile patrols recover a water bottle, blanket, and sandals the following day; several days later, engineers discover a discarded AK-47 assault rifle in the same area.

John Walker Lindh, an American Taliban captured while fighting against Northern Alliance forces outside Kunduz and then held captive in the Qala-e-Jangi fortress, arrives at FOB Rhino. He earns the dubious distinction of being the first of several hundred detainees held by TF 58. Marines subsequently transfer Lindh to the USS *Peleliu* on 14 December, the USS *Bataan* on 31 December, and Kandahar International Airport on 22 January. On 23 January, he departs for the United States.

7 December

Hamid Karzai announces that he has reached a surrender agreement with Taliban forces inside Kandahar. Meanwhile, finding the city vacant, Gul Agha Sharzai moves in from the south and reoccupies the governor's mansion.

Eastern Alliance forces at Tora Bora unexpectedly halt their advance into the mountains to negotiate with al-Qaeda and Taliban forces.

CentCom issues Fragmentary Order 02-027, regarding support for reopening the U.S. embassy in Kabul.

MarCent requests 4th Marine Brigade (4th MEB) forces to provide security at the U.S. embassy in Kabul.

TF Sledgehammer (26th MEU Combined Antiarmor Team and Light Armored Reconnaissance platoons) returns to FOB Rhino after recovering disabled vehicles belonging to the BLT 1/1 interdiction force.

8 December

LtGen Mikolashek, CG, CFLCC, congratulates TF 58 on a job well done but announces his intent to replace 15th and 26th MEUs with an Army brigade combat team.

	TF 58 issues a fragmentary order directing 26th MEU to provide a security detachment to support a survey team at the U.S. embassy in Kabul. They subsequently assign the mission to Capt James P. McDonough and Battery K, 10th Marines. After staging ashore in Pasni, the battery flies to Bagram Air Base the following day.
10 December	CentCom issues a planning order for the intelligence exploitation of abandoned al-Qaeda and Taliban camps.
	Battery K, 10th Marines, arrives in Kabul, establishes security posts around the U.S. embassy, and begins sweeping the facility for explosives.
11 December	Eastern Alliance forces at Tora Bora unexpectedly halt their advance into the mountains to negotiate with al-Qaeda and Taliban forces. During a Pentagon news briefing, Secretary Rumsfeld acknowledges that some of the enemy are likely escaping across the border into Pakistan.
	CentCom issues Fragmentary Order 02-006 to Operations Order 02-012 regarding the reconnaissance of sensitive sites. TF 58 is to support Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear inspection teams around Kandahar.
	TF 58 drops 17,400 humanitarian rations to thank Afghan civilians who assisted the Highway 1 interdiction force on 6–7 December.
	TF 64 discovers and destroys enemy weapons cache and refueling sites located northeast and northwest of FOB Rhino.
12 December	BGen Mattis travels to Kandahar and discusses the impending operation with Southern Alliance commanders Hamid Karzai and Gul Agha Sharzai and their TF Dagger advisors.
	TF 58 issues a fragmentary order transferring responsibility for detainee handling from the 15th to 26th MEU; 26th MEU is subsequently directed to establish a short-term handling facility at Kandahar International Airport.
	Col Andrew Frick arrives at FOB Rhino and begins directing the remainder of his forces ashore to support the occupation of Kandahar International Airport and establishment of a second FOB.
13 December	CFLCC directs TF 58 to assess sensitive sites near Dewalak.
	Assault forces from the 15th MEU (Company B, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion) and 26th MEU (TF Sledgehammer) assemble at Patrol Base Pentagon, now situated 40 miles west of Kandahar on Highway 1. Meanwhile, LtCol Bourne leads the remainder of his interdiction force west on Highway 1 to Lashkar Gah and then south to FOB Rhino.

14 December	BGen Mattis accompanies a convoy of 44 antiarmor and light armored vehicles east on Highway 1 to Kandahar City, and then south to the airport. After linking up with special forces already occupying the facility, the Marines establish security positions around the airfield. Company I, BLT 3/6, subsequently arrives via CH-53 helicopters to reinforce their positions. The 26th MEU's tactical command post is in place in the terminal building by the end of the day, and MSSG 26 begins sweeping the area for explosives.
14–15 December	TF 58 supports a Chemical Biological Intelligence Support Team (CBIST) searching Tarnak Farms military training facility near Kandahar International Airport. The team recovers a variety of ammunition, weapons, and documents.
14–23 December	BLT 3/6 deploys its Mike platoon to the USS *Shreveport* to support SEAL Team 8 during maritime interdiction operations.
15 December	VAdm Moore issues an execute order for the transfer of prisoners captured at Tora Bora to Kandahar International Airport. The 26th MEU establishes a preliminary 100-person short-term detainment facility in a hanger at the airfield. The facility will eventually be capable of holding 400 detainees.
	The first Marine KC-130 aircraft lands at Kandahar after the 26th MEU has cleared the runway of debris.
16 December	The 26th MEU's subordinate commands begin to arrive in Kandahar, and BLT 3/6 extends its perimeter to cover enemy avenues of approach.
	Cpl Christopher T. Chandler detonates a landmine while providing security for an explosive ordnance disposal team at Kandahar International Airport. Shrapnel from the explosion injures Chandler, PFC Nicholas J. Sovereign, and Sgt Adrian Aranda. Chandler Small Arms Range at Kandahar airport is dedicated on 1 January 2002. A year later, Chandler graduates from the Basic Airborne Course with a prosthetic limb.
	The first 15 detainees arrive at Kandahar International Airport (other sources indicate this occurred on 18 December). By 11 January 2002, the Marines would be guarding 391 prisoners.
17 December	Eastern Alliance forces at Tora Bora declare victory over al-Qaeda and the Taliban. During a Pentagon news briefing, however, RAdm John D. Stufflebeem, USN, states that isolated pockets of the enemy remain in the area, and the operation continues. At this time, TF 58 is considering the possibility of establishing a third FOB to support operations at Tora Bora.
	Marines raise the American flag over the U.S. embassy compound in Kabul during a ceremonial reopening of the facility held by State Department officials. They are unaware that Army Col John F. Mulholland Jr. and special forces soldiers had briefly raised a flag over the site on 10 December, before the Marine security force arrived.

HMM-163 inserts a sensitive site exploitation team near Dewalak, located west of FOB Rhino near the Helmand River. The team is composed of 15th MEU's force reconnaissance platoon, several members of the CBIST team, and two interpreters. TF 64 has been providing surveillance over the area for two days and continues to provide security. While inspecting several compounds in the area, the team attracts a large number of curious Afghans and eventually requests an emergency resupply of office supplies to distribute among the villagers. The mission, however, fails to locate contraband weapons or intelligence materials.

18 December — CFLCC issues Operations Order 02-06, directing TF 58 to begin plans to clear Tora Bora of enemy forces.

BGen Mattis and Col Frick preside over the raising of an American flag over Kandahar International Airport. New York firefighters had previously flown this national ensign over the site of the World Trade Center bombing.

TF 58 issues Fragmentary Order 004, directing reconstitution of the 15th MEU in time for it to detach from Fifth Fleet by 18 January 2002.

The first Air Force C-17 lands at Kandahar International Airport (several sources indicate this occurred on 19–20 December).

19 December — News sources report that Gen Franks has proposed sending conventional Army or Marine forces into the mountains of Tora Bora to search for al-Qaeda and Taliban. CentCom issues an execute order for continued operations in the region; NavCent readdresses.

TF 58 issues a supplement to Fragmentary Order 004, delaying reconstitution of the 15th MEU until further notice. It subsequently directs 15th MEU to begin planning for deployment into northeastern Afghanistan. The operation is apparently to commence no later than 25 December.

Gen Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and LtGen Hagee, CG, I MEF, visit TF 58 forces ashore. The following day they visit the USS *Peleliu* and USS *Bataan*.

20 December — UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1386, sanctioning the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

TF 58 learns that CentCom would prefer employing indigenous or special operating forces at Tora Bora, rather than deploying conventional ground forces, and that there is no intention of the Marines operating independently in the region. The goal is to spur the Eastern Alliance to search the area for al-Qaeda, rather than to establish blocking positions along the Pakistani border (this may have occurred on 19 December).

21 December — Gen Franks and USO entertainers (Wayne Newton, Drew Carey, Neil McCoy, and two Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders) visit TF 58 forces ashore. The following day they visit the USS *Peleliu* and USS *Bataan*.

	CFLCC issues Fragmentary Order 01 to Operations Order 02-026, addressing operations to attack and clear Tora Bora.
	TF 64 relocates from FOB Rhino to Kandahar International Airport.
22 December	During an inauguration ceremony held in Kabul, Hamid Karzai accepts power from former President Rabbani and swears in his new cabinet.
	CentCom issues Operations Order 03 regarding Phase III and IV operations in Afghanistan.
23 December	CentCom approves the CFLCC's concept of operations for Tora Bora and issues Fragmentary Order 02-045 to its air component regarding airfield survey operations at Jalalabad. It also issues an execute order for reconstitution of the 15th and 26th MEUs.
24 December	CFLCC issues Operations Order 02-032. TF 58 is to remain prepared for the possible deployment of Marine forces to Tora Bora.
	CFLCC reiterates execute order for reconstitution of the 15th MEU. TF 58 issues an execute order for Fragmentary Order 004, directing the 15th MEU to begin retrograde operations and reconstitute on board the *Peleliu* ARG.
25 December	TF 58 receives holiday care packages, courtesy of VAdm Moore. Two sections of F-14s and F/A-18s from the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) perform aerial maneuvers over FOB Rhino. President Bush speaks to Cpl Arellano at Kandahar International Airport and wishes him a Merry Christmas.
26 December	LtGen Mikolashek, CG, CFLCC, visits Kandahar airport.
27 December	During a Pentagon news briefing, Secretary Rumsfeld tells reporters that captured al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters will be transferred to Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Marines will transfer the first 30 prisoners on 10 January.
28 December	CJCS issue Deployment Order 097, providing for a brigade combat team to relieve TF 58.
30 December	HMM-365 inserts a sensitive site exploitation team into Garmabak Ghar (CB 003) to search a military training camp. TF 64 has been observing the area for two days and continues to provide security. Meanwhile, aircraft mechanics supported by 26th MEU's light armored reconnaissance and 81mm mortar platoons begin to repair a CH-53 helicopter damaged while inserting additional TF 64 assets near the site the previous evening. On 2 January, pilots fly the aircraft back to Kandahar for disassembly and shipment to the United States.
	Company L, 8th Marines, 4th MEB (Anti-terrorism), relieves Battery K, 10th Marines, 26th MEU, of its security mission at the U.S. embassy in Kabul.
	First daylight C-17 flight into FOB Rhino.
31 December	TF 58 staff at FOB Rhino redeploy to NSA Bahrain.

2002

1 January	BGen Mattis and Governor Sharzai preside over a dual American and Afghan flag raising at Kandahar airport.
	The 26th MEU conducts a vehicular raid against Maiwand military complex (AQ 024), situated 40 miles west of Kandahar and 3 miles north of Highway 1. LtCol Jerome M. Lynes leads the force, composed of several Afghan militiamen and special forces soldiers; light armored reconnaissance assets from the 15th and 26th MEUs; and Company K, BLT 3/6. HMM-365 provides air cover during the operation, including a section of recently arrived Harriers, representing the first fixed-wing tactical aircraft to operate from Afghanistan. After searching 14 walled compounds for six hours, the raid force withdraws and returns to Kandahar the following day.
	TF 64 completes a sensitive site exploitation mission near Lashkar Gah (AQ 019) that began on 28 Dec.
3 January	Marine KC-130s extract BLT 1/1's remaining security forces from FOB Rhino, permanently closing the base.
	Advance echelon of 101st Airborne Division relief force arrives at Kandahar International Airport.
4 January	Fifth Fleet resumes tactical control of the *Peleliu* ARG, and Capt Kenneth Rome (CPR-8) succeeds Capt William Jezierski (CPR-1) as deputy commander, TF 58.
	Elements of TF 64 and the 26th MEU conduct a sensitive site exploitation mission at Islam Darreh (AQ 032), an al-Qaeda cave complex located 37 miles northwest of Kandahar.
	LtGen Peter J. Cosgrove, chief of the Australian Army, visits TF 64 at Kandahar airport.
4–6 January	RAdm Charles R. Kubic, USN, commander of 3d Naval Construction Brigade, visits Kandahar International Airport.
5 January	CentCom issues Fragmentary Order 03-007 regarding CFLCC operations in the Khost-Gardez region.
	CFLCC issues Fragmentary Order 06 to Operations Order 02-021, directing TF 58 to begin planning for potential combat operations in the Khost-Gardez region. BGen Mattis envisions establishing an intermediate support base at Band-e-Sarde Airport to sustain TF 64 and TF K-Bar operations and tentatively employs conventional Marine forces.
	The 26th MEU conducts a heliborne raid against an enemy command and control center, situated 50 miles west of Kandahar near Lashkar Gah. LtCol Lynes leads the force, consisting of several Afghan militiamen; the MEU's force

	reconnaissance platoon; and 1st Platoon, Company I, BLT 3/6. After TF 64 isolates the objective area, HMM 365 inserts the raid force in two waves. A search of the area produces small arms, ammunition, and intelligence documents. At Kandahar, Marines detain four men for questioning, which reveals that they are likely drug runners.
	MajGen Farooq, chief of plans of the Pakistani Joint Headquarters Staff, visits Kandahar airport.
6 January	Kandahar International Airport opens to daylight flights.
6–14 January	The 26th MEU supports TF K-Bar during the inspection of Zhawar Kili al-Badar military complex, situated 30 miles southwest of Khost. HMM-365 inserts the raid force, consisting of SEAL platoon 3E and 50 Marines from Company L, BLT 3/6, with the intent of extracting them by nightfall. Following the discovery of a mass grave, huge weapons caches, and massive amounts of data, the mission is extended for another eight days to exploit the site. During this period, the force directs multiple strategic bombing missions against one surface and two underground facilities, engages a squad of enemy soldiers, and captures a jeep with two occupants.
7 January	Third Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, begins to arrive at Kandahar International Airport, followed by Col Frank J. Wiercinski, commander of Task Force Rakkasan (TF Rakkasan), two days later.
8 January	After detaining four individuals possessing communications equipment at a suspected al-Qaeda site near Khost, TF 58 forces transport the suspects to Kandahar airport.
9 January	CentCom releases TF 58 of its on-call mission to supply forces for operations in Tora Bora.
	Raider 04, a KC-130 aircraft from VMGR-352, crashes into a mountain and bursts into flames while attempting an unassisted night landing at Bandari airfield in Shamsi, Pakistan. U.S. Marines and Pakistani Army forces stationed at the base, as well as combat search and rescue aircraft from Jacobabad and 26th MEU personnel on board the USS *Bataan*, respond to the accident scene. All eight crewmembers perished in the crash: Capts Matthew W. Bancroft and Daniel G. McCollum, GySgt Stephen L. Bryson, SSgt Scott N. Germosen, Sgts Nathan P. Hayes and Jeanette L. Winters, and LCpl Bryan P. Bertrand. Recovery operations continue through 16 January.
10 January	Two fire team-sized patrols probe BLT 3/6 positions along the northern end of Kandahar International Airport for approximately 40 minutes, sporadically firing flairs overhead and engaging Headquarters and Service and L Company sectors with small arms fire from three separate locations. The Marines illuminate the area with 81mm mortars and return fire with M16 rifles, M240G light machine guns, M19 automatic grenade launchers, and 25mm cannon from

	the light armored reconnaissance vehicles. While a section of Cobra helicopters launch to provide close air support to the north, Companies I and K observe enemy personnel in their sectors to the southwest. After the enemy fire subsides, a combined Afghan and special forces mobile patrol searches the two-kilometer frontage, recovering shell casings and rocket-propelled grenades from the enemy's firing positions.
	Afghan security forces detonate a landmine near Kandahar International Airport, resulting in a foot amputation and two eye injuries. Wounded are treated by field surgical team.
	VAdm Moore visits Kandahar International Airport.
10–25 January	TF 64 conducts a long-range mobile patrol in support of TF K-Bar, providing surveillance and reconnaissance of a suspected al-Qaeda site and the surrounding area south of Gardez.
11 January	HMM-365 inserts/extracts TF K-Bar teams south of Gardez, near a suspected al-Qaeda safe house.
12 January	HMM-365 inserts TF K-Bar reconnaissance teams 93 miles NNE of Kandahar, near a suspected al-Qaeda/Taliban site.
13 January	USS *Shreveport* conducts visit, board and search, and seizure of maritime vessel *El Obeid*.
14 January	TF 58 assumes tactical control of USS *Bonhomme Richard* Amphibious Ready Group (*Bonhomme Richard* ARG). Amphibious Squadron 3 (CPR-3), commanded by Capt Robert J. Connelly, is designated TG 58.1, and 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (13th MEU), commanded by Col Christopher J. Gunther, is designated TG 58.2.
14–18 January	HMM-365 inserts an airfield survey team from TF-K-Bar into Band-e Sardeh, located 18 miles south of Gardez. After evaluating data collected by the team, higher headquarters determines that the site is not suitable for supporting combat operations in the region.
15 January	HMM-365 extracts TF 58 forces from suspected terrorist camp in the vicinity of Khost.
	Dr. Zalmay Kalizad, U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan, meets with BGen Mattis at Kandahar airfield.
16–28 January	Headquarters and Service Company, BLT 3/6, deploys an 18-man detachment to provide security for a special forces safe house near Khost airfield. They witness a civil protest outside the base camp on 21 January and firefights between competing Afghan factions on 22 and 24 January. On the evening of 28 January, they assist Army soldiers when a CH-47 Chinook helicopter carrying their relief crashes while landing at the airfield.

17 January	MarCent headquarters begins its forward deployment to NSA Bahrain.
	TF 64 soldier detonates an antipersonnel land mine at suspected terrorist facility south of Gardez. He is treated by the field surgical team at Kandahar International Airport before being evacuated to Landstuhl, Germany, for additional medical care.
18 January	Fifth Fleet relinquishes control of the *Peleliu* ARG to Seventh Fleet.
19 January	TF Rakkasan assumes command and control of Kandahar airport; CFLCC disestablishes Area of Operations TF 58, establishing Area of Operations Truman.
	HMM-365 inserts Norwegian special operation forces into Tori Khel, a suspected Taliban site located near Ghazni. They extract the force the following day.
20 January	After BLT 3/6 completes its relief in place with TF Rakkasan, 26th MEU begins retrograde operations and reconstitution on board the *Bataan* ARG.
	After experiencing engine failure during a routine resupply mission, a CH-53E helicopter from HMM-365 crashes into mountains located 40 miles southeast of Kabul. SSgt Walter F. Cohee III and Sgt Dwight J. Morgan are killed by the impact, and five other Marines are injured. TF 58 holds a memorial service at Kandahar International Airport on 22 January.
22 January	Task Force 50 relinquishes tactical control of the USS *Shreveport* to the *Bataan* ARG, after completing maritime interdiction operations.
23 January	LtGen Mikolashek, CG, CFLCC, visits TF Rakkasan and TF 58 at Kandahar International Airport.
	HMM-365 inserts/extracts TF K-Bar forces near Hazar Qadam, a suspected al-Qaeda/Taliban site situated 93 miles northeast of Kandahar.
23–29 January	Lead elements of 561st Corps Support Battalion arrive in Shamsi, Pakistan. After relieving 26th MEU forces, they assume control of the FARP on 29 January.
24 January	Fifth Fleet resumes tactical control of the *Bonhomme Richard* ARG in preparation for Exercise Edged Mallet.
	LtGen Earl Hailston, CG, MarCent, and Army MajGen Franklin L. Hagenbeck, DCG, CFLCC, visit Kandahar International Airport.
25 January	HMM-365 supports Task Force Sword, evacuating six Afghan personnel from Tarin Kowt to Kandahar airport for medical treatment provided by the field surgical team.
	MSSG 26 relinquishes the remainder of its combat service support functions at Kandahar International Airport to TF Rakkasan. NMCB 133 Air Detachment completes airfield repairs and essential projects and begins its retrograde to Guam, completed on 31 January.

27 January	HMM-365 provides casualty evacuation support to special forces operating in Kandahar.
28 January	TF 58 and TF Rakkasan complete battle handover at Kandahar International Airport. Tactical control of TF 64 transfers from TF 58 to TF K-Bar.
28–29 January	The 26th MEU deploys its Mike platoon to Khost on the evening of 28 January, after an Army CH-47 helicopter carrying relief forces crashes while landing at the airfield. They secure the crash site and turn over the ongoing security mission to TF Rakkasan the following day.
30 January	MajGen John F. Goodman, DCG, II Marine Expeditionary Force, visits Kandahar airfield.
1 February	CFLCC issues Fragmentary Order 11 to Operations Order 02-024, directing TF 58 to support TF K-Bar operations northeast of Gardez. The following day, 26th MEU stages forces in Bagram to support the mission.
3 February	CFLCC relinquishes tactical control over TF 58, and Fifth Fleet reassumes operational control over all amphibious forces.
5 February	BGen Mattis and TF 58 personnel redeploy from Kandahar International Airport to NSA Bahrain.
9 February	CFLCC issues Fragmentary Order 03-037, directing TF 58 to provide helicopter support to TF K-Bar.
	The 26th MEU completes its backload and reconstitutes on board the *Bataan* ARG.
11 February	BGen Mattis deploys to Kandahar with a four-man staff, returning to Bahrain on the 14th.
13 February	Col Frick deploys to Kandahar with skeleton staff and reinforced platoon from Company I, BLT 3/6.
14–15 February	HMM-365 deploys two CH-53 helicopters to Kandahar, followed the next day by LtCol Kevin M. DeVore and a third aircraft.
16 February	The 26th MEU's forward headquarters shifts from Kandahar to Bagram; Marine KC-130 aircraft transport elements of TF Rakkasan and TF K-Bar from Kandahar to Bagram.
18–19 February	Operating from Bagram, HMM-365 inserts Canadian, Norwegian, and New Zealand special operating forces into Tabu Tanga cave complex, retrieving them the following day.
20 February	CFLCC relinquishes tactical control over the 26th MEU's small air-ground task force, enabling it to return to the *Bataan* ARG.
26 February	Navy VAdm Timothy J. Keating, having replaced VAdm Moore as commander of Fifth Fleet, stands down TF 58.

2 March	Task Force Mountain (TF Mountain) launches Operation Anaconda in an attempt to encircle and eliminate enemy forces in the Shahi Kot valley south of Gardez. TF Rakkasan encounters heavy resistance after landing on the eastern side of the valley, resulting in battle damage to the Army's seven AH-64 Apache helicopters. LtCol Raymond C. Damm, leading a division of F/A-18 aircraft from VMFA-251 on board the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, provides close air support to the beleaguered troops.
	While visiting Masirah Island, Col Gunther briefs RAdm Albert M. Calland, USN, head of CentCom's Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC), on the 13th MEU's capabilities.
3 March	Col Gunther receives an e-mail inquiry, asking how many AH-1Ws 13th MEU can contribute to Operation Anaconda and how long it will take them to arrive at Bagram.
4 March	The *Bonhomme Richard* ARG reaches Pasni, Pakistan, just before dawn. After sunrise, LtCol Gregg A. Sturdevant leads three CH-53 heavy-lift helicopters and five AH-1W attack helicopters to Bagram, located 730 miles north of the coast.
	Special operating forces encounter withering enemy fire during three successive attempts to insert teams onto Takur Ghar (Objective Siberia), resulting in the loss of two MH-47 helicopters and seven American servicemen. Marine F/A-18 pilots from VMFA-314 on board the USS *John C. Stennis* provide close air support to the beleaguered troops and continue to support TF Mountain for the duration of the operation.
5 March	Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 (HMM-161) begins flying combat missions in support of TF Mountain. Harriers provide close air support and Super Stallions transport equipment, supplies, and personnel and establish FARP's near Objective Remington. Cobras fly reconnaissance, escort, close air support, and strike missions.
10 March	Task Force Summit (1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division) relieves TF Rakkasan on the east side of valley. Around this time, 101st Airborne Division aviation assets return to Kandahar.
11 March	TF Mountain places its organic aviation assets under LtCol Sturdevant's command. Dubbed Task Force HMM-165 and comprised of assets from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (HMM-165) and the Army's 159th Aviation Regiment, this task force consists of two Black Hawks, three Super Stallions, five Cobras, and six Chinooks. Their priority of effort is toward Col Kevin V. Wilkerson, USA, and Task Force Commando (TF Commando) (2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division).
11–13 March	Coalition forces secure their primary objectives (Whale 11, Remington 12, Ginger 13).

13–4 March	Operation Anaconda transitions to Operation Harpoon and the exploitation of enemy sites.
	Task Force HMM-165 inserts TF Commando elements (3d Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and Company A, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment) onto the "Whaleback" (Ter Gul Ghar).
14 March	USS *Wasp* Amphibious Ready Group reports to Fifth Fleet, replacing 26th MEU.
18 March	Task Force HMM-165 inserts TF Commando elements onto Objectives Ginger and Siberia, extracting them the following day.
19 March	Gen Franks declares Operation Anaconda over. Around this time, CFLCC requests that HMM-165 remain in Afghanistan.
21 March	*Bataan* ARG returns to the Mediterranean Sea and rejoins Sixth Fleet.
24 March	HMM-165 flies its final mission in support of TF Mountain.
25 March	MajGen Hagenbeck decorates 14 members of HMM-165, awarding a Bronze Star medal to LtCol Sturdevant for his service as air mission commander during Operation Harpoon.
26 March	HMM-165 departs Bagram for the *Bonhomme Richard* ARG. One CH-53 helicopters loses an engine and conducts an emergency landing at Pasni, Pakistan.
27 March	The 13th MEU recovers all remaining shore parties.
28 March	UN Security Council passes Resolution 1401, establishing the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Based in Kabul, the mission has separate political affairs and relief, recovery, and reconstruction pillars.
16 April	The first of 12 F/A-18 Hornets from Marine All Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 121 (VMFA [AW]-121) arrive at Peter J. Ganci Air Base in Manas, Kyrgyzstan. The Marine pilots will fly 900 combat sorties in support of Combined Joint Task Force 180 (CJTF-180) before departing on 23 September.
31 May	CentCom establishes CJTF-180 in Bagram. The new command, led by Army LtGen Dan K. McNeil, CG of XVIII Airborne Corps, is responsible for coordinating Coalition operations in Afghanistan and it neighboring countries; its authority does not extend to the ISAF.
12–19 June	Emergency Loya Jirga convenes in Kabul, electing Chairman Hamid Karzai president of the Transitional Authority.

Appendix E
Unit Awards and Messages

Fifth Fleet Navy Unit Commendation:

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON. D.C. 20350-1000
2 October 2002

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION to UNITED STATES FIFTH FLEET BATTLE FORCE for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service during assigned missions from 11 September 2001 to 3 March 2002. The Sailors and Marines of the United States FIFTH Fleet Battle Force consistently demonstrated unparalleled success executing their missions of providing presence, power projection, and deterrence for the United States and Coalition forces in the Central Command Area of Responsibility. The United States FIFTH Fleet Battle Force met or exceeded all operational requirements while supporting Operation Enduring Freedom and the Global War on Terrorism. The FIFTH Fleet Battle Force executed over 7,840 strike missions in the skies over Afghanistan, effectively destroying the Al-Qaeda network and toppling the oppressive Taliban Regime. The superlative efforts of the Battle Force were instrumental in bringing stability to a nation perpetually at war for over 20 years. The Battle Force's successful engagement exercises in Afghanistan, Kenya, and Djibouti brought military cooperation and humanitarian relief and played a significant role in improving relations with numerous allies throughout the Central Command Area of Responsibility. By their truly distinctive accomplishments, unrelenting perseverance, and unfailing devotion to duty, the Sailors and Marines of the United States FIFTH Fleet Battle Force reflected great credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Gordon R. England
Secretary of the Navy

From Commandant of the Marine Corps
to the USS Peleliu Amphibious Ready Group:

RAAUZYUW RUEACMC0457 0171500-UUUU—RUFRPEL.
ZNR UUUUU
R 171500Z JAN 02 ZYB PSN 273738T30
FM CMC WASHINGTON DC//CMC//
TO RUWICAC/FIFTEENTH MEU
RHMFIUU/FIFTEENTH MEU
RUHPPEL/COMPHIBRON ONE
BT
UNCLAS //N00001//
MSGID/GENADMIN/CMC WASHINGTON DC/CMC//
SUBJ/15TH MEU AND PHIBRON-1 BRAVO ZULU//
POC/SGT WOODS/ADMIN CHIEF/CSG/-/TEL:(703) 614-2326
/EMAIL:WOODSJPOHQMC.USMC.MIL//
RMKS/

1. TO THE MARINES AND SAILORS OF 15TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT (SPECIAL OPERATIONS CAPABLE) AND AMPHIBIOUS SQUADRON-1, CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS! YOUR EFFORTS DURING OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM ENGENDERED PRIDE IN ALL AMERICANS AND STRUCK A BLOW FOR ALL FREEDOM LOVING PEOPLE.

2. WHEN TERRORISTS ATTACKED OUR HOMELAND, YOU WERE FORWARD DEPLOYED AND POISED TO DELIVER OUR NATION'S RESPONSE TO THOSE WHO WOULD CHALLENGE OUR BORDERS AND OUR WAY OF LIFE, DEMONSTRATING THE CAPABILITIES OF SEA BASED POWER PROJECTION IN THE PROCESS. AFTER RENDERING THREE DAYS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN EAST TIMOR—PROVIDING MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND TREATMENT, DENTAL CARE, FOODSTUFFS, CLOTHING AND CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS—YOU SAILED TO THE NORTH ARABIAN SEA AND IMMEDIATELY MADE AN IMPACT IN AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST TERRORISM. MARINE HARRIERS FROM THE 15TH MEU FLEW BOMBING MISSIONS AGAINST TALIBAN AND AL-QAEDA TARGETS. OTHER MARINES PERFORMED TASKS RANGING FROM HUMANITARIAN AND SECURITY OPERATIONS TO THE TACTICAL RECOVERY OF AIRCRAFT. MOREOVER, BY ESTABLISHING AN EXPEDITIONARY BASE OF OPERATIONS 400 MILES FROM THE SEA IN LAND-LOCKED AFGHANISTAN, YOU DEMONSTRATED TO THE WORLD THAT THE MARINE CORPS IS FAR MORE THAN A "HIT THE BEACH" ORGANIZATION AND PROVED, ONCE AGAIN, THAT NAVAL FORCES CAN RAPIDLY DEPLOY TO AND OPERATE OUT OF AN AUSTERE LOCATION FOR A SUSTAINED PERIOD OF TIME.

3. AS A GRATEFUL NATION AWAITS YOUR RETURN, KNOW THAT YOUR EFFORTS CONTRIBUTED GREATLY TO THE OVERWHELMING SUCCESS OF TASK FORCE-58, THE DEFEAT OF TALIBAN AND AL-QAEDA FORCES IN AFGHANISTAN, AND THE PROUD LEGACY OF AMERICA'S NAVAL FORCES.

4. SEMPER FIDELIS, J. L. JONES, GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS,
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS.//

BT#0457

From Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command to USS Peleliu Amphibious Ready Group:

FM USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL//CCCC//
TO RULYSCC/COMPHIBRON ONE
RULYSCC/FIFTEENTH MEU
RULYSCC/USS PELELIU
RULYSCC/USS DUBUQUE
RULYSCC/USS COMSTOCK
INFO RHHMHAA/CINCPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI//00//
RUWDEAA/COMNAVSURFPAC SAN DIEGO CA//00//
RHRMDAB/COMUSNAVCENT//0 0//
RUHBANA/COMUSMARCENT
RUWICBE/CG I MEF
RULYSCC/COMPHIBGRU THREE
RUCJNAV/DEPCOMUSNAVCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RUCJACC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL//SUPR//
BT
UNCLAS
MSGID/GENADMIN/CENTCOM/JAN//
SUBJ/BRAVO ZULU PELELIU ARG-15TH MEU(SOC)//
RMKS/

1. I WISH TO EXTEND MY SINCERE APPRECIATION TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE PELELIU AMPHIBIOUS READINESS GROUP/15TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT (SPECIAL FORCE CAPABLE) FOR YOUR SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE DURING OPERATIONS WHILE DEPLOYED TO THE USCENTCOM AOR.

2. DURING YOUR DEPLOYMENT, THE WELL-TRAINED CREWS OF USS *PELELIU*, USS *DUBUQUE*, AND USS *COMSTOCK* PROVIDED A POTENT CONVENTIONAL GROUND FORCE AND SERVED AS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF AMERICA'S MILITARY MIGHT AND THE NATION'S UNSWERVING COMMITMENT TO RID THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF TERRORISM. POISED TO STRIKE AT THE HEART OF THOSE WHO CHALLENGED OUR LIBERTIES AND BROUGHT TERROR AGAINST THE US HOMELAND, YOUR SUPERB TRAINING AND OPERATIONAL READINESS PLAYED A PROMINENT ROLE IN THE OPENING MILITARY OFFENSIVE. YOUR FLEXIBILITY, TENACITY, AND THE OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP OF YOUR CREWS CONTRIBUTED DIRECTLY AND SUBSTANTIALLY TO THE DEEPEST AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION IN HISTORY WHEN YOU SUCCESSFULLY ESTABLISHED FOB RHINO. YOUR CAPABILITIES AS A TRAP AND CSAR QUICK REACTION FORCE, AS WELL AS YOUR CAPABILITY TO ESTABLISH FORWARD OUTPOSTS SUPPORTING THESE MISSIONS, WERE CRUCIAL TO ESTABLISHING THE BASELINE NECESSARY TO COMMENCE THE AIR CAMPAIGN. YOUR POTENTIAL AS A POWER PROJECTION STRIKE FORCE WAS SUPERBLY DEMONSTRATED AS A BLOCKING FORCE AND THE FLAWLESS SEIZURE OF QANDAHAR AIRPORT. IN ACHIEVING THESE REMARKABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, YOUR COMBINED AIR ELEMENT, INCLUDING DEPLOYED KC-130S, SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED MORE THAN 1371 SORTIES. YOUR SUCCESSFUL EXECUTION OF EVERY ASSIGNED MISSION IS TESTAMENT TO THE UNPARALLELED ALLEGIANCE AND STEADFAST DEVOTION OF YOUR CREWS.

3. AS YOU PREPARE TO RETURN HOME, PLEASE TAKE PLEASURE IN KNOWING THAT THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE PELELIU ARG-15TH MEU STRUCK THE FIRST BLOW IN WHAT WILL BE A LONG AND ARDUOUS CAMPAIGN AGAINST TERRORISM. YOUR ABILITY TO RAPIDLY PLAN AND EXECUTE COMPLEX MISSIONS WAS TRULY IMPRESSIVE AND IS INDICATIVE OF OUTSTANDING TRAINING AND THE SUPERB COMBAT READINESS OF THE U.S. NAVY/MARINE CORPS TEAM. CONGRATULATIONS ON A JOB WELL DONE. WE ARE PROUD OF YOUR EFFORTS!

GEN FRANKS SENDS.//BT #8150

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Back Cover: The device reproduced on the back cover is the oldest military insignia in continuous use in the United States. It first appeared, as shown here, on Marine Corps buttons adopted in 1804. With the stars changed to five points, the device has continued on Marine Corps buttons to the present day.

