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# TRANSFORMATION

cannot be viewed with optimism.

Like the AOE light divisions, the overriding hallmark of the interim brigade is its strategic mobility. Unfortunately, virtually all of the enhancements related to the brigade's command and control (C2), lethality, survivability, and flexibility will have to wait for the fielding of yet-to-be-developed technologies and weapons platforms. In the meantime, the only meaningful design requirements being developed and tested are those relating to transportability. The interim brigade platform must be C-130 transportable; everything else is negotiable.<sup>9</sup>

If emphasis on strategic agility is laudable, it is also explicitly dangerous to the soldiers involved. While the interim brigade will likely be deployable in 550 sorties, this agility is likely to be achieved at the cost of the CS and CSS assets needed to make the organization viable in a theater of war. As with the 9th Motorized Division, the interim brigade will lack the ability to stand up to a mechanized or armored opponent in a direct firefight. The new initiative solves only one problem—tactical and operational mobility—while sidestepping the much tougher problems that surround sustainability, survivability, and lethality.

If the interim brigade's inability to survive on the 21st century direct-fire battlefield places formations at risk, the lack of effective fire support presents an even greater challenge. As currently designed, the interim brigade will lack even the woefully inadequate 105-millimeter artillery battalion that represented the light divisions' heaviest close battle fire support. Why? Because self-

propelled howitzers, such as the Paladin and the much-anticipated Crusader, are deemed too heavy to play a role with the new formations. The result will be an organization at a disadvantage in the direct firefight and wholly at the mercy of the enemy in the indirect-fire arena. Unfortunately, adding the high-mobility artillery rocket system and mortars as deep and close-in firepower assets will not significantly redress this shortcoming.

Three fundamental truths plague the Army's new interim brigade concept:

1. The new interim brigade would lack the same CS and CSS assets that the AOE light divisions lacked which undercut their effectiveness in the 1980s.

2. The advanced technologies necessary to allow the new interim brigade to hold its own on the modern battlefield do not exist.

3. Fire support will not improve in the future unless a completely revolutionary fire support system is developed.

These three red flags should prompt a time-out, not a Pentagon call for full speed ahead. In effect, the only IBCT breakthrough is the development of operational and tactical mobility once a unit is deployed, although even this capability comes at an exchange ratio of 3 to 1 in terms of deployable combat assets as compared to AOE light infantry divisions.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, the interim-brigade concept's success hinges overwhelmingly on the accelerated development of new technologies. The concepts' proponents hope it will achieve what has historically been unattainable—lightweight, highly

deployable units that can go toe to toe with an armored or mechanized opponent while providing indirect-fire support and requiring minimal logistic and C2 support.<sup>11</sup>

History should not tie the Army down or hold back the prudent application of new technologies; but neither should the Army ignore lessons learned. If history is any judge, the chances of a revolutionary system arriving in time to save the interim brigade concept are not encouraging. **MR**

#### NOTES

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11. Jim Caldwell, "Technology Breakthroughs Keep Transformation on Track," *Army News Service* (11 January 2001).

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## Operation Anaconda, Shah-i-Khot Valley, Afghanistan, 2-10 March 2002<sup>1</sup>

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*They just kept sending them into our meat grinder. We've killed several hundred of them, but they just keep coming.*

—Major General F.L. Hagenbeck<sup>2</sup>

As of 2 March 2002, Operation Anaconda was the largest combat operation in Afghanistan of the War on Terrorism that began after the attack on the World Trade Center and

the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. Major General F.L. Hagenbeck, commander of the U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division, led the major effort to clean out remaining al-Qaeda fighters and their Taliban allies in the Shah-i-Khot Valley. The mission involved about 2,000 coalition troops, including more than 900 Americans, 200 U.S. Special Forces and other troops, and 200 special

operations troops from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Norway, New Zealand, and Afghan allies.

Operation Anaconda began before dawn on 2 March 2002. The battle area occupied about 60 square miles. The terrain is rugged, and the peaks have many spurs and ridges. The base of the Shah-i-Khot Valley is approximately 8,500 feet in altitude.

The surrounding mountain peaks rise to 11,000 to 12,000 feet. Only small juniper trees grow on the mountain slopes. The actual snow line began about 100 feet above the valley floor. Mountain villages include the hamlets of Sher Khan Khel, Babal Khel, Marzak, Kay Khel, and Noor Khel. On the day battle began, the valley floor was sprinkled with small patches of snow. Temperatures hovered near 15 to 20 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>3</sup>

The opposition forces were mostly non-Afghan al-Qaeda and Taliban members although the force also included some Arabs, Chechens, Uzbeks, and Pakistanis. Scattered groups, numbering as many as 20 members, including some family members, holed up in a 3,000-year-old complex of mountain tunnels, caves, and crannies.

The terrorists, who had come to the valley villages six weeks before the battle began, took control; prudently, most of the civilians left. One Afghan villager said the people were told, "If you want to leave or stay it is up to you, but we're staying in those caves because they were ours in the holy war against Russia."<sup>4</sup> The terrorists gave 700 sheep to the people of Shah-i-Khot for their troubles; others received bus fare.

Predator drones and other CIA intelligence assets spotted the enemy assembling in groups south of Gardez, but rather than immediately attacking, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) let the terrorists gather to present a larger target. A small U.S. Special Forces detachment accompanied local Afghan commander Zia Lodin as his men entered the valley from the south and headed to Sirkankel to flush out suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban forces.<sup>5</sup>

To the east and southeast of the combat area, Afghan generals Kamal Khan Zadran and Zakim Khan's units had responsibility for the perimeter. U.S. Special Forces teams were with each Afghan general to help coordinate operations. This noose of allied troops enclosed four specific combat zones. The two most significant zones were code-named Objectives Remington and Ginger. Reconnaissance forces slipped into the mountains a few days before the main attack was scheduled to begin on 27 February, but the operation was postponed 48 hours because of rainy, blustery weather.

When the operation began, Zia ran into trouble. His 450-man unit was caught in a mortar barrage and prevented from entering Sirkankel. Two of Zia's men were killed and 24 were wounded. Retreating under mortar and rocket fire, the Afghan column stumbled into a second ambush to the rear. U.S. Special Forces Chief Warrant Officer Stanley L. Harriman was killed. Most of Zia's trucks were destroyed, and his troops retreated to Gardez.<sup>6</sup>

The hole left by Zia's retreat had to be plugged. U.S. troops, who had been slated to block fleeing terrorists or hopscotch around the battle zone, were immediately dropped into the gap to await Zia's return. Elements of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain and 101st Airborne Divisions were to set up blocking positions to support Afghan allies as they swept through the villages and dislodged al-Qaeda forces. Both units ran into heavy resistance.

Allied special operations troops were tasked to block known routes of escape from the south and southwest, conduct reconnaissance, and call in air strikes. Brigadier General Duncan Lewis, commander of the Australian Army's special operations forces, told the press that about 100 Special Air Service (SAS) commandos had been inserted into remote observation points atop mountains near the towns of Marzak and Sher Khan Khel. The commandos were to pinpoint rebels retreating from the large target area known as Remington.<sup>7</sup>

### **The 10th Mountain Division, 2 March**

1/87th Infantry Regiment Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Frank Grippe said that the regiment's initial mission was to conduct blocking positions in the southern portion of the valley south of Marzak. Scout sniper teams directly east of Marzak were watching two small canyons that ran out of the village. Just to the north of Marzak, a platoon-size element guarded a larger canyon that ran east out of the valley. In the south, intelligence units estimated that their two positions would possibly have to contain the most terrorist exfiltrators. They also had two blocking positions, one in a canyon running from the southeast of the valley and one running directly south.<sup>8</sup>

At 0600, 2 March 2002, 125 men from the 1/87th Infantry Regiment and three CH-47 helicopters arrived. One CH-47 went to the northern blocking position, which had a platoon-size element and two scout snipers set up as hunter/killer teams. In the south, 82 men on the other two CH-47s arrived at two landing zones separated by about 400 meters. To the south, troops landed at the base of an al-Qaeda stronghold and literally within a minute of being dropped off began taking sporadic fire as they moved to cover. A small ridgeline separated the landing zone from the source of fire. Some soldiers maneuvered to a small depression behind the ridge while others moved onto some small ridges to their south.

After the first 10 minutes, al-Qaeda fighters left their caves and well-fortified positions to dump a heavy volume of fire onto the 10th Mountain Division. The al-Qaeda were familiar with the area and had all the low ground in the valley already zeroed in with their mortars, so it did not take long for them to bracket the 10th's mortar and cause the first injuries. After U.S. troops called in close air support, things quieted down. Once troops took cover, organizing and returning fire, they hunkered down for the 18-hour battle of attrition.

Grippe noted that more Afghan forces never arrived.<sup>9</sup> Some of Grippe's soldiers took out targets at ranges up to 500 meters with 5.56-millimeter M4 carbines and M249 small arms weapons. Second Lieutenant Christopher Blaha, who inscribed the names of two of his friends lost on 11 September on all his hand grenades, radioed in an air strike while his 1/87th rifle platoon returned fire on the enemy mortar position about 2,500 meters away. Within five minutes, a B-52 dumped its load and scored a direct hit on the mortar position, ending all movement.<sup>10</sup>

First Lieutenant Charles Thompson and his 10th Mountain troops secured a small al-Qaeda compound before a platoon-size force "hit them by surprise" south of the compound, the direction from which Zia's troops were supposed to have been moving. Thompson's unit repelled the assault with mortar fire and air strikes and apparently inflicted heavy casualties.

Later, the much-reduced al-Qaeda force came up the valley in twos or threes, firing some sniping shots but never mounting a serious threat to troops positioned on ridges on the eastern and western sides of the valley.

A mortar ambush injured at least 12 U.S. soldiers when they landed on top of an al-Qaeda command bunker near Marzak. Because they were wearing body armor, the shrapnel struck mostly their arms and legs. Private First Class Jason Ashline was struck by two bullets in the chest but survived because the rounds lodged in his vest. Ashline later told the press, "For a couple of seconds, everything was . . . in slow-motion. I was pretty scared because I didn't feel no pain. I thought, 'what's wrong?' I thought maybe I was dead."<sup>11</sup> Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Ron Corkran later said, "I didn't really expect them to try and duke it out with us. I was just surprised at the intensity of what I saw on the valley floor."<sup>12</sup> Sergeant First Class (SFC) Thomas Abbott, whose right arm was injured by shrapnel, added, "I've never been so scared in my life. We thought we were all going to die."<sup>13</sup> The wounded were evacuated at around 2000. Near midnight, all elements were extracted from the battle.

### **The 101 Airborne Division, 2 March**

Elsewhere in the valley, 101st Airborne Division brigade commander Colonel Frank Wiercinski landed on a ridge to the south of Sirkankel with an 11-man detachment whose mission was to monitor Charlie Company's progress. As they were moving the command post to higher ground, they began taking fire. Charlie Company was also under fire from an al-Qaeda military compound about 200 meters from where they had landed. Wiercinski described the fight: "We survived three mortar barrages during the day, and at one point we had between 9 to 10 al-Qaeda coming to do [kill] us. But instead, we did [killed] them."<sup>14</sup> Five Charlie Company soldiers stayed on the ridge and, while receiving sniper and machine-gun fire, covered those moving away from the mortar impacts.

Platoon leader Lieutenant Shane Owens' unit was forced into a hasty

defense position from its original task of blocking the northern end of the valley. Support Platoon Leader Captain David Mayo of the 1/182d Infantry Regiment and his group provided security for the command and control element and conducted reconnaissance of potential resupply landing zones for the operation. As it turned out, the paratroopers' basic load was enough for 24 hours, and resupply was unnecessary.

Captain Kevin Butler watched in frustration as the enemy ducked into caves seconds before supporting jets dropped their bombs. Moments later, the enemy popped back out to wave, throw rocks, then fire their mortars and heavy machine guns at U.S. troops. Some rounds came within 30 meters of Butler's troops. Frustrated and angry, Butler ran 45 meters uphill six times onto the peak and exposed himself to enemy fire to pinpoint the enemy's position so he could call in an air strike. As the F-15s neared the caves, Butler ordered his own men to fire their 60-millimeter mortars. When the enemy re-emerged to taunt the U.S. soldiers, the mortar rounds detonated over their heads and sprayed them with shrapnel. Four were killed.<sup>15</sup>

When allied troops searched the snow-covered mountains for caves and other signs of al-Qaeda fighters, they found several 57-millimeter recoilless rifles, an 82-millimeter mortar, some documents, and night-vision goggles identical to U.S. models.

Units of the 101st Airborne Division moved into the mountains north and east of Sirkankel to block mujahideen escape routes and, with Australian and U.S. Special Forces, blocked routes to the south. A new assault south along the high ground east of the valley began on 3 March.

### **The Special Operations Battle, 3-4 March**

During a 24-hour-long battle on 3-4 March 2002, a handful of U.S. soldiers killed "hundreds" of al-Qaeda fighters while repelling waves of heavily armed mujahideen trying to overrun an isolated hilltop position in the Arma Mountains of southeastern Afghanistan.

The hilltop battle developed during a nighttime attempt to establish a new observation post overlooking a major al-Qaeda supply and escape

route. Initial wire service reports were vague and confusing since few reporters accompanied the troops into combat. Later, Commander in Chief, CENTCOM, General Tommy Franks explained that many landing zones had been picked for helicopter assaults, and some enemy forces had evaded detection.<sup>16</sup>

At 0830, an MH-47 Chinook attempting to land a team on a hilltop near Marzak was hit by one or more rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and small arms fire. One grenade bounced off the helicopter and did not explode, but apparently the small arms fire damaged the helicopter's hydraulic system.<sup>17</sup> The Chinook managed to fly a short distance before making a forced landing. A head count showed that all but one of the team had managed to escape aboard the heavily damaged helicopter. The lone man not accounted for was U.S. Navy Petty Officer First Class Neil C. Roberts, a door gunner.<sup>18</sup>

According to Hagenbeck, a second Chinook, flying in tandem with the first and containing a quick reaction force of about 30 special operations troops, flew to the rescue of the downed aircraft.<sup>19</sup> The rescuers, who landed under fire later on the night of the 3 March at the hilltop where Roberts was last seen, came under intense fire. A 21-man Special Forces team was dropped off.

At 1200, a third Chinook was hit while inserting more special operations forces near the site of the first incident. According to Joint Staff briefer U.S. Air Force Brigadier General John Rosa, the helicopter was hit by machine-gun and RPG fire and either crash-landed or experienced a hard landing.<sup>20</sup> Six soldiers were killed and five wounded in subsequent firefights, since the valley suddenly swarmed with enemy troops. Senior Airman Jason Cunningham darted out of the helicopter several times to pull others to safety and was hit by machine-gun fire while treating the wounded.<sup>21</sup>

Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders must have smelled blood, because the shift in U.S. tactics drew masses of them out of hiding and into combat. From the original estimate of only about 150 to 200 men in the area on 2 March, about 500 fresh fighters were detected moving from southern Afghanistan's Khost area as well as from Waziristan, a Pakistani

tribal area where smugglers traditionally found refuge and where many fighters fled after the Taliban government collapsed in November 2001.<sup>22</sup> Some estimates of terrorist strength ran as high as 2,000, but in truth, no one knew how many were in the valley.

Two Australian SAS teams, calling air strikes against the ring of attackers, saved the rescue group that was under intense fire from mortars, machine guns, and small arms. Spectre AC-130 gunships dumped 105-millimeter fire into mujahideen positions while Apaches shot up enemy vehicles moving toward the fight along the narrow mountain roads twisting up steep valleys. Hagenbeck told the press that the "hilltop was surrounded, but we were pounding them all night long. We thought when morning came they were going to do a ground assault. They were poised to overrun the [U.S.] position. We gave everything we had to get those guys out."<sup>23</sup> A heavily armed infantry force was standing by to fight its way up the hilltop to open an escape route if necessary.<sup>24</sup>

Shortly after dark, but before the moon rose on 4 March, more helicopters raced in under covering fire from dozens of strike fighters and attack helicopters to extract the Special Forces and their dead comrades. Next to be withdrawn was the 10th Mountain force. As the helicopters returned safely to Bagram Air Base, the sprawling hub of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan, throngs of soldiers anxiously awaited their return.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to 7 U.S. dead, there were at least 40 wounded soldiers, of which 18 were treated and returned to duty.<sup>26</sup> Another 9 Special Forces soldiers and 13 others arrived on 6 and 7 March at Germany's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, all in good condition.<sup>27</sup> As the smoke figuratively cleared, Franks estimated that U.S. and Afghan forces had killed from 100 to 200 al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters during the hilltop battle.<sup>28</sup>

### Continued Operations, 5-10 March

Although the intensity of fighting slacked off on 5 March, allied Afghan commanders sent fresh platoons to the fight while troops in contact kept pressing forward with minesweepers clearing their way. Franks described the fighting as a se-

ries of short, often intense clashes with small numbers of fugitives, saying, "We might find five enemy soldiers in one place and then perhaps some distance away from there we may find three and then some distance we may find 15 or 20."<sup>29</sup> One Special Forces soldier said the Taliban he encountered used "spider holes"—well-camouflaged shallow caves stocked with machine guns—that provided protection from the 500-pound bombs where "a couple of guys can hold up a whole company."<sup>30</sup>

At a Pentagon briefing that same day, Hagenbeck said, "We caught several hundred [al-Qaeda] with RPGs and mortars heading toward the fight. We body slammed them today and killed hundreds of those guys."<sup>31</sup>

Zia's forces finally resumed their advance on 6 March. U.S. commanders reported that U.S.-led bombing attacks and ground assaults might have killed as many as 400 fighters of a total of perhaps 800.<sup>32</sup> Sergeant Corey Daniel, who commanded an eight-man forward observation unit, told the press on 9 March that al-Qaeda resistance waned over the next few days as they ran out of ammunition and wilted under non-stop bombing.<sup>33</sup>

Coalition planes continued to hammer the terrorists. Between 2 and 5 March, coalition air forces, using a mix of long-range bombers and tactical aircraft, dropped more than 450 bombs, 350 of which were precision munitions.<sup>34</sup> Rosa told reporters that the U.S. offensive was making progress: "I would say we are softening up in certain portions, but there's still a lot of work to be done. We're far from over."<sup>35</sup>

Afghan commander Abdul Muteen said that U.S. and Afghan forces had advanced to within less than 100 meters of the enemy, who were trying to hold off the allies with copious machine gun and RPG fire. According to Muteen, the enemy was "ready for martyrdom and will die to the last man."<sup>36</sup>

At high altitudes, troop rotation was an important factor in maintaining operational tempo. Another 300 U.S. troops were brought into the battle from a U.S. helicopter base at Kandahar. The helicopters returned one or two hours later to refuel and head out again with fresh troops and supplies.<sup>37</sup>

### More Afghans to the Front, 7 March

On 7 March, wind and sandstorms slowed allied air and ground operations, but near dusk a caravan of 12 to 15 Afghan tanks and armored personnel carriers rumbled down the main road south of Kabul toward Paktia Province and the high-elevation combat. The 1,000 Afghan reinforcements, under Northern Commander Gul Haider, were largely Tajik troops who had fought under their late commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud, against the Taliban.<sup>38</sup>

To western journalists the T-55 tanks and BMP-1 personnel carriers of General Muhammad Nasim's command looked like a moving museum. Eventually, mechanical attrition took its toll on the aging armored vehicles as they made the 60-mile drive from Kabul.

As the armor column reached the battle zone on 9 March, driving winds and snow forced al-Qaeda holdouts to retreat into their caves. The Tajiks were tasked with helping drive hidden Taliban snipers and fighters from the valley villages of Sher Khan Khel, Babal Khel, and Marzak.<sup>39</sup>

Because the initial grouping of 1,000 Afghan government troops committed to Operation Anaconda were ethnic Pashtuns, cooperation between them and the Tajiks could have been problematic. Apparently, by 10 March, complaints from local commanders prevented Afghan tanks from going any farther than Gardez.

Local ethnic Pashtun commanders warned they would fight national army forces if the Afghan defense ministry, controlled by ethnic Tajik General Mohammed Fahim, did not withdraw troops joining the offensive. Bacha Khan and the other Pashtun commanders insisted that they had enough firepower to defeat the al-Qaeda holdouts without the central government's help or interference.<sup>40</sup>

An unidentified Special Forces officer noted that the majority of the new forces were Pushtun and that their commanders had dropped old rivalries for the larger goal of eliminating the last of the al-Qaeda and Taliban pockets.<sup>41</sup> On 10 March, the officer estimated that between 100 to 200 al-Qaeda forces remained in the valley and that U.S. forces were not approaching the most dangerous part of the war but were in it.

Meanwhile, on 7 March and early on 8 March, U.S. troops came under fire in the southern sector. The clash seemed like a last, defiant gesture. With local terrorist forces severely hurt, U.S. forces repositioned. About 400 U.S. troops returned to Bagram Air Base on 9 March; however, within hours of the withdrawal of one-third of the 1,200 U.S. troops involved in the 8-day-old operation, B-52 bombers had to return to the area.<sup>42</sup>

### **(Mis)Perceptions of Afghan Allied Support**

Some Afghan commanders in Gardez and Kabul asserted that the United States may have made the mistake of relying on a select few local commanders who gave wrong estimates of enemy troop numbers, then backed out on pledges to assist in the battle. Commander Abdul Mateen Hassankheil, who had 1,500 men fighting in Shah-i-Khot, was one of the critics: "The U.S. does not understand our local politics; it does not know whom to trust, and [it] trusts the wrong people."<sup>43</sup>

According to *Financial Times* journalist Charles Clover, in a report from Gardez, Hassankheil claimed that the beginning of the battle was badly planned because the United States relied on intelligence from Padshah Khan, who had told them that the mujahideen at Shah-i-Khot were less numerous than was actually the case.<sup>44</sup> Khan, a powerful local commander ousted as province governor weeks before the battle after clashes with militias in Gardez, allegedly had previously provided misleading information to U.S. military leaders. Khan denied that he had misled the United States and insisted that everyone in Gardez making accusations against him were al-Qaeda. Others in Gardez believed that Khan implicated his enemies as members of al-Qaeda so the United States would remove them.<sup>45</sup>

One unnamed U.S. officer, supposedly familiar with Zia's combat history, said that after Zia's men took heavy fire, Zia probably held them out of the fight with the self-assured knowledge that U.S. forces would have to take up the slack. "This is the way everybody fights over there. Fight and fall back. You don't want to take too many combat losses yourself. You save your resources from attrition to make sure you stay in

power when it's all over."<sup>46</sup> Hagenbeck and Wiercinski said they did not know Zia's experience or background, but commanders who had worked with Zia before had spoken highly of him.<sup>47</sup>

Other U.S. officers theorized that someone leaked the plan of attack to the enemy. U.S. troops had trained as many as 500 Afghan allies for a major battle weeks beforehand, and there were hints that Afghans from both sides were talking to one another. This is not surprising given the nation's culture.<sup>48</sup>

Several U.S. soldiers heaped derision on Zia, painting a picture of a well-prepared opposition that made ample use of advanced weaponry. One soldier told the press that Zia "punked out on us. . . . I don't know how much we paid him, but I'll shoot him myself. He was supposed to roll in. Day 1, he was supposed to attack, and we were supposed to set up blocking positions so they couldn't get out."<sup>49</sup> Another soldier said Zia "didn't perform. He took a couple of mortar rounds and took off."<sup>50</sup> The soldiers had respect for the enemy: "They're a helluva lot more fancy than people give them credit for. . . . There were lots of weapons, mortar tubes. These guys were good with mortars."<sup>51</sup>

Noting that Afghan units had an insufficient force ratio but that they recovered from a serious mortar attack to take several key positions, one unnamed Special Forces colonel defended Zia: "The forces [Afghans] put together are different from our American military force. They're not an American military force. We can't expect them to be. It makes them no less noble, no less brave, no less willing to get out and engage our common enemy, and General Zia has, make no mistake about it. I take exception to those folks who complain about what these people have done to get us to this point in the battlefield. You wear his shoes that he has worn for five months in this battlefield."<sup>52</sup>

An unnamed senior USAF officer, quoted in the *Washington Times*, criticized U.S. tactics in the battle of Shah-i-Khot.<sup>53</sup> He asserted that commanders should have used air strikes for days or weeks, allowing precision-guided bombs and AC-130 howitzers to pummel the caves and compounds. This less-than-discreet

officer also attempted to draw a parallel to the 1993 U.S. debacle in Mogadishu, Somalia. He pointed to the mid-December 2001 Tora Bora air campaign as a successful template, but he failed to mention that many al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders had slithered away during that period. Franks simply modified the Tora Bora tactics and sent in U.S.-trained Afghans to block escape routes and do the fighting, only committing relatively large numbers of U.S. ground troops when Afghan allies ran into problems. As another unnamed senior officer rightly observed, "No tactical plan ever survives the first encounter with the enemy. . . , and this plan changed 180 degrees."<sup>54</sup>

At a 6 March Pentagon press conference, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said that "other than very brave people being involved, this has nothing to do with Mogadishu, and the individual who was killed; his body has been retrieved, and so too have the wounded. And, I don't see any comparison."<sup>55</sup>

When asked by ABC interviewer Sam Donaldson if the U.S. troops who were attacked and pinned down by al-Qaeda fire on 2 March were surprised by the tenacity of the resistance, Franks pointed out that intelligence is an inexact endeavor. "There will certainly be places . . . where we'll encounter very, very substantial resistance. We will almost never have perfect intelligence information. I would not downplay the possibility that forces that moved into this area got into a heck of a firefight at some point that they did not anticipate. I think that is entirely possible. . . . I think we've seen it in the past. . . . I think we'll see it in the future."<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps enemy commander Maulvi Saifurrahman Mansoor, who was up in the mountains, inadvertently best described the battle's outcome when he said that al-Qaeda fighters would "continue to wage jihad until our last breath against the Americans for the glory of Islam and for the defense of our country."<sup>57</sup> **MR**

### **NOTES**

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10. *Ibid.*

11. Kathy Gannon, "Hundreds of Fighters Mass at Front Line for Final Push on Al-Qaida Caves," *AP*, 11 March 2002.

12. "US-led troops locked in fierce fight with al-Qaeda remnants," *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), 7 March 2002.

13. Gerry J. Gilmore, "U.S. Troops Describe All-Day Shah-Khot Battle," *American Forces Information Service* (AFIS), 7 March 2002.

14. Ewing.

15. "Army Capt. Zaps Al Qaeda Guides U.S. firepower at jeering enemy," *New York Daily News*, 7 March 2002; Butler was nominated for a Bronze Star; Ewing, "Al-Qaida Taunt US Forces at a Price," *AP*, 7 March 2002.

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## The Search for Larry A. Thorne: Missing in Action, Vietnam

Jeffrey B. McDowell

To the U.S. Army, he was Captain Larry A. Thorne. In Finland, he was much-decorated war hero Lauri Torni. Vietnam was his fourth war. He had worn a uniform for three different armies, three different countries, in four different decades. In October 1965, he and three South Vietnamese crewmen disappeared in a Republic of Vietnam Air Force CH-34 helicopter somewhere in the jungle near Kham Doc.

Thorne enlisted in the U.S. Army in January 1954. However, it was not his first time in uniform—not even close. He had also served in the Finnish Army, fighting in the Winter War of 1939-1940, and in Germany he did a training stint with the Waffen S.S. After his return to Finland, he fought in the Continuation War. He also fought with German guerrillas against the Russians during World War II, for which he was awarded the German Iron Cross Second Class. In six years, he had fought in three wars and had been awarded every award for valor that Finland had to give, including the Mannerheim

Cross, Finland's equivalent of the Medal of Honor.

Thorne's stint with the Waffen S.S., complete with photos of himself in a German S.S. uniform, proved an especially tough hurdle to overcome when he later applied to join the U.S. Army. But, in 1956, after serious lobbying, he received U.S. citizenship and his commission as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

By late 1960, Thorne had attained the rank of captain and become a member of the Army's elite Special Forces, the Green Berets. In 1962, he led his Special Forces detachment to the summit of Iran's Zagros Mountains to recover classified material that was being transported on a U.S. Army aircraft that had crashed. Although German and Iranian expeditions to the 14,000-foot crash site had failed, Thorne and his men secured the information and recovered the bodies of the aircrew.

In November 1963, Thorne and Detachment A-743 entered Vietnam for a six-month tour. In April 1964,

author Robin Moore was in Tinh Bien where Thorne's detachment was stationed. Moore was gathering material for a book on Special Forces based on the detachment's exploits. The book, *The Green Berets*, became a best-selling novel and later became a movie that starred John Wayne.<sup>1</sup>

The film did not accurately depict the ferocious fighting that occurred at Tinh Bien and other camps. As evidence of the battle's true fierceness, consider this: every member of Detachment A-743 received a Purple Heart for wounds suffered at the camp in Tinh Bien. Thorne received two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star for valor.

Thorne's second tour to South Vietnam was his last. In February 1965, he was assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Soon afterward, Thorne was funneled into a special operations augmentation program, then into Headquarters Company, U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), Special Detachment 5 89 1. Thorne became a soldier in the