
AFGHAN INSURGENT TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCEDURES FIELD GUIDE

Based on “The Other Side of the Mountain:
Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War”
by Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau

With several new MCIA-developed vignettes
from recent U.S. operations in Afghanistan

Foreword by Lester W. Grau

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Marine Corps Intelligence Activity
2033 Barnett Avenue
Quantico, VA 22134-5103
feedback@mcia.osis.gov
(703) 784-6167, DSN: 278-6167

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FOREWORD

If you want to make a difference, ask the USMC! I spent 26 great years in the U.S. Army infantry. I fought in Vietnam and became a Cold Warrior. Along the way I met Ali Jalali. Ali was a Colonel in the Afghanistan Army, a former Mujahideen commander. In 1992, I was visiting Moscow and received a copy of a Soviet military lessons-learned book from Afghanistan. I translated it and added commentary to produce *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*. It was only through the good graces of the Special Forces in Fort Bragg and the USMC in Quantico that I got the money to publish it. They saw the value of studying tactics in a counterinsurgency.

The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan addressed the conflict from the Russian point of view, and Ali and I wanted to explore the insurgent side. I approached the U.S. Army about writing a book on Mujahideen tactics. They had no interest since it was about Afghanistan (“we’ll never go there”) and insurgency (“we’ll never do that”). The USMC had vision. It recognized the project was about tactics, something that the Corps does very well. The Corps funded the research. In 1996, we headed off to Pakistan and Afghanistan to interview over 100 Mujahideen commanders. We met with guerrilla commanders, guerrilla warriors, and some bearded newcomers called the Taliban. Ali knew everyone, and it was the only way the project could succeed. We came back and produced *The Other Side of the Mountain*.

Since 9/11, *The Other Side of the Mountain* has been very popular with soldiers and Marines in Afghanistan. Over 100,000 copies have been printed. But there is a problem with *The Other Side of the Mountain*. It is over 400 pages long! If you are preparing for deployment, you don’t have a lot of time to put your nose in a book. MCIA has prepared this cut-down version that gives you examples of various types of guerrilla tactics and even adds three examples that were not in the original book. Ali went on to become the Interior Minister of Afghanistan. I am still trying to stay on

the right side of the wall at Fort Leavenworth. We both wish you every success and thank you for what you are doing for the United States and Afghanistan. Semper Fidelis.

Les Grau

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

November 2008

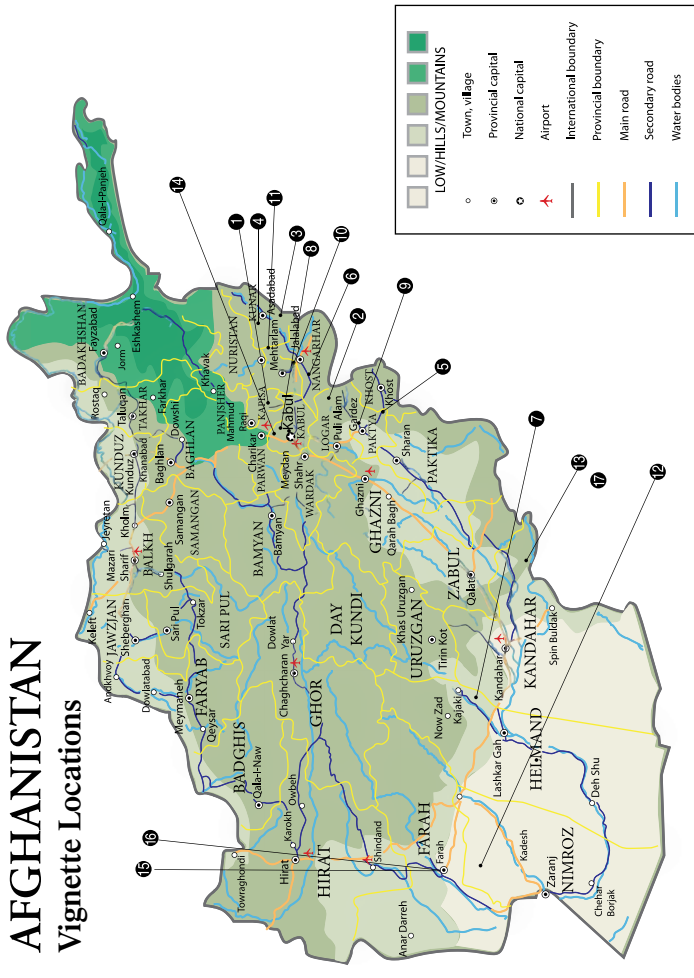
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Studying past combat helps gain insight into how insurgents may operate in the future. This guide uses short, simple vignettes to highlight common Afghan insurgent tactics. Each vignette focuses on a particular mission profile, such as raids, ambushes, and defending against a cordon and search.

While tactics are continually evolving, the Afghans have a well documented history of using similar techniques against foreign militaries. Most of the vignettes in this guide are from the 1980s when Afghan insurgents fought the Soviet Union. Despite being more than 20 years old, many of the tactics remain in use today. For a more complete description of Afghan insurgent tactics against the Soviets, MCIA strongly recommends reading *The Other Side of the Mountain* by Ali Jalali and Les Grau, which this guide is based on. The final three vignettes in this guide are from recent operations in Afghanistan and demonstrate the evolution of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) by Afghan insurgents.

AFGHANISTAN

Vignette Locations



Afghanistan Vignette Locations

VIGNETTE LOCATION GUIDE

Vignette	District or Village	Province
1	Abdullah-e Burj (Near Bagram Air Field)	Parwan
2	Pul-E Charkhi District	Kabul
3	Kama District	Nangarhar
4	Alingar District	Laghman
5	Wazi District	Paktia
6	Sarobi District	Kabul
	Alishing District	Laghman
7	Dehrawud District	Uruzgan
8	Bagram District	Parwan
9	Kama District	Lowgar
10	Farah District	Nangarhar
11		Parwan and Kapisa
12	Farah District	Farah
13	Shahr-E Safa District	Zabul
14	Afshar District	Kabul
15	Shewan	Farah
16	Gulistan	Farah
17	FOB Gibraltar (Near Sangin)	Helmand

VIGNETTES FROM THE SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN

Vignette 1: Ambush

Ambush Near Abdullah-e Burj

October 1980

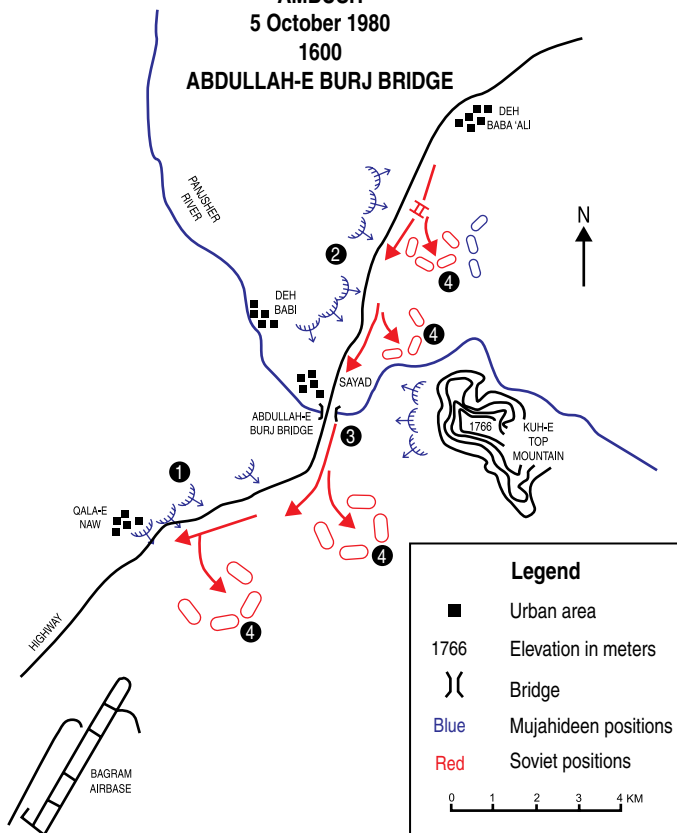
A Soviet column, returning to its base after a 4-day operation against the Mujahideen, was ambushed as it crossed a bridge going south on the main highway to Bagram.

The insurgents had observed the column headed north on the highway. They believed that the convoy would return the same way since the bridge was the only one in the region over the Panjsher River. The location was chosen because it would allow the Mujahideen to hit the convoy when it was most vulnerable: when half the column had crossed the bridge, and the force was divided by the river. They would ambush the column on its return trip when the troops were tired.

The Mujahideen secretly deployed on the day of the ambush. One group of 150 men was positioned in the orchards and hills south of the river (Map Point 1); a second group of 200 men was positioned to the north (Map Point 2). In both areas, rocket-propelled grenade launchers in covered positions were placed close to the road, with heavy machine guns on the more dominant terrain. Recoilless rifles and 82 mm mortars were placed for support. The Soviet column returned in the afternoon, and by 1600 it was split in two as it crossed the river (Map Point 3).

At a commander's signal, the Mujahideen opened fire on the tanks, armored personnel carriers, and trucks along the entire length of

AMBUSH
5 October 1980
1600
ABDULLAH-E BURJ BRIDGE



Ambush Near Abdullah-e Burj

the convoy. The Soviets drove off the road trying to escape. Those near the orchards had little room to maneuver. Twenty to 30 vehicles were burning. Soldiers dismounting from the armored personnel carriers came under heavy machine gun fire (Map Point 2). While some of the Soviets set up perimeter defenses to hold until help came, many abandoned their vehicles and tried to ford the river. Some were washed away while others headed for Bagram across the open plain.

As night fell, Soviet artillery ineffectively pounded Mujahideen positions. The insurgents moved through the abandoned vehicles, taking supplies and weapons. In the morning, the Soviets sent a relief column from Bagram to free the trapped convoy. The insurgents withdrew. The Mujahideen had two killed and seven wounded, with Soviet casualties unknown.

Learning Points

The Mujahideen's success was due to:

- Proper selection of the ambush site
 - Forced the column to split in two at the river (Map Point 1), thus fighting two battles
 - Engaged the entire column, leaving the convoy commander no reserves
 - Allowed the insurgents interlocking fields of fire
 - Used terrain to reduce Soviet movement
- Proper selection of time
 - Late afternoon restricted time for Soviet air support
 - Soviet troops tired at end of patrol
 - Night operation allowed access to weapons and supplies in vehicles

The Soviet's failure was due to:

- Used predictable route and expected to be unopposed
- Did not use reconnaissance
- Failed to secure dominant terrain (bridge) ahead of the column
- Poor training for counter-ambush operations
- Failed to leapfrog artillery along the route
- Apparent failure to place forward observers for artillery support
- Reluctance of Soviet soldiers to risk ambush

Local Knowledge

- Mujahideen were unpaid volunteers with family responsibilities
- All heavy weapons captured along with 20 percent of the spoils went to the commander
- 80 percent of the spoils were divided among the rest of the Mujahideen
- Such spoils would be sold to support families

Vignette 2: Raid

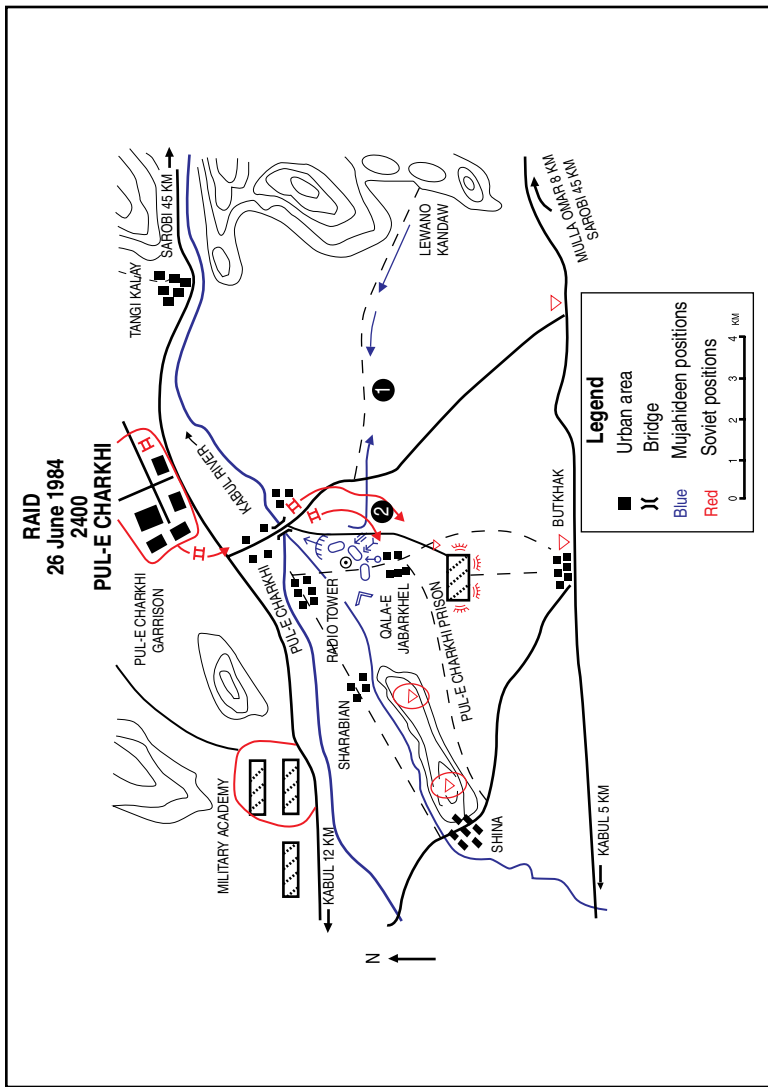
Raid on Pul-e Charkhi Radio Transmitter Station

June 1984

A force of 110 Mujahideen destroyed a radio transmitter station during a night raid near an enemy military complex. The station was targeted because the Soviet-backed Afghan government was expanding it to reach a wider audience. While the raid was a success, the whole Mujahideen contingent was nearly encircled by an Afghan Army tank column that responded to the assault. A tank brigade and other units of the Soviet-backed Afghan Army were based in the vicinity. A government-paid militia force also patrolled an area nearby, but the militia chief was a major Mujahideen collaborator.

The Mujahideen raiding party was divided into four teams. A 20-man assault team was to attack the transmitter from the southwest, destroy the facility, and then withdraw under cover of a 20-man support team deployed immediately to the east of the target. A 25- to 30-man containment team would prevent enemy forces from reaching the target by blocking a road just south of a bridge over the Kabul River. The fourth team consisted of supply and evacuation elements.

All groups reached their designated areas just before 2400. The assault team, covered by the support team, opened fire and set the transmitter site on fire with rocket-propelled grenades. The defenders panicked and failed to put up an organized resistance. Several were killed. A tank column from the nearby garrison quickly responded, crossing the bridge, but then left the main road and bypassed the Mujahideen blocking position. Fearing encirclement and containment, the Mujahideen assault and blocking teams im-



Raid on Pul-e Charkhi Radio Transmitter Station

mediately broke off and pulled out. They did not notify the support team, which was left behind. The support team commander instructed his men not to panic but to exfiltrate individually between the tanks. They did so successfully, joining the other teams at a designated assembly area, where the wounded were evacuated by trucks from the collaborating militia. Mujahideen casualties were one killed, five wounded.

Learning Points

The Mujahideen's raid and escape were successful due to:

- Assistance from the collaborating militia (Map Point 1)
- The support team commander's good leadership

The Mujahideen's raid was less effective due to:

- Lack of reliable internal communications
- Failure of the blocking team to lay mines or engage the tanks with rocket-propelled grenades (Map Point 2)
- Fear of being cut off inhibited much of the Mujahideen action
- Preferred moving in large groups rather than using a smaller group of 15 men, which would have been more appropriate for a raid

The Afghan Army's response was less effective due to:

- The apparent lack of an Afghan Army planned response to an attack
- Failure to deploy infantry, to support armor

Local Knowledge

- The government-paid militia was recruited from a local tribe, whose chief was also a Mujahideen supporter, while appearing to be a government supporter

- Militia trucks appearing to hunt the Mujahideen were used to transport wounded Mujahideen
- Men preferred to fight with relatives and close friends, which caused the team size to grow too large

Vignette 3: Shelling Attack

Mortar Attack on Brigade Garrison

December 1979

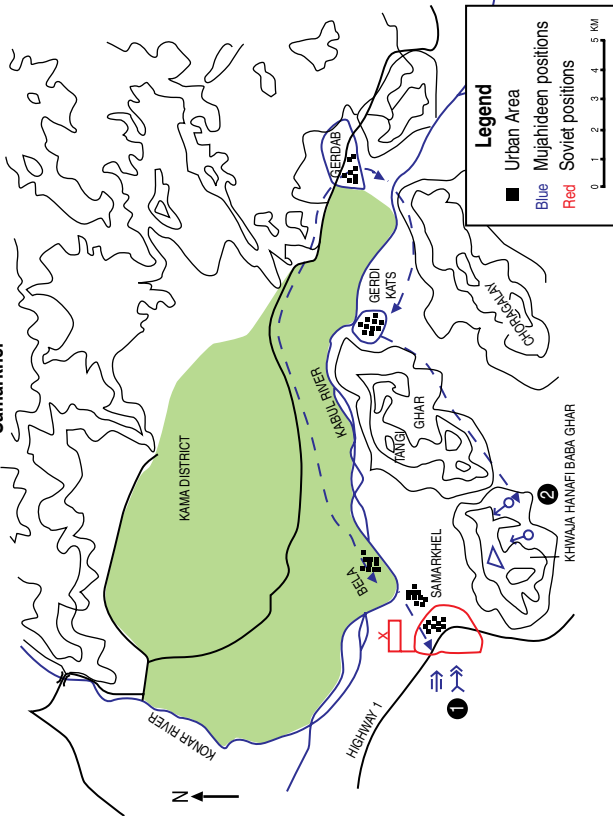
A Mujahideen mortar attack from a mountain overlooking the Soviet garrison in Samarkhel killed or wounded 200 Soviet troops. Soviet counterbattery fire was ineffective.

The Mujahideen commander divided 150 men into groups: two mortar groups, an observation post/fire adjustment group, and a light group. He placed his nephew in command of the operation and his son in charge of one of the mortar groups. The light group, armed with a recoilless rifle, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and antitank mines, made its way to Samarkhel. The rest of the Mujahideen loaded two 82 mm mortars and 250 mortar rounds on donkeys and mules for a 2-day journey to the mountain area. The movements were undetected by the Soviets. The mortars were set up in a valley behind the mountain, and an observation post was established on the top.

The plan was to start with a quick strike by the light group, then follow with the mortar attack. Local Mujahideen met the light group, guided them to the objective, and helped them plant the mines in the road near the main gate of the Soviet compound. At 2200, the light group launched the attack by firing the recoilless rifle and rocket-propelled grenades at the gate (Map Point 1). Tanks and armored personnel carriers came out in response. Two were destroyed or damaged by the antitank mines. The light group withdrew as the mortars went into action (Map Point 2). The Soviets raked the front of the mountain with return fire, while the Mujahideen mortars continued their shelling from the valley between the mountains, firing all 250 rounds. Neither the return fire, nor

SHELLING ATTACK
27 December 1979
2200

Samarkhel



Mortar Attack on Brigade Garrison

airstrikes by helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft the following day resulted in Mujahideen casualties.

Learning Points

- The operation was well-planned and executed
- The reverse slope firing positions, with observed fire from the forward slope, made it difficult for Soviet artillery to reach the firing positions
- Soviet commanders apparently failed to survey and plot the likely firing sites in the mountains above their garrison
- Soviet intelligence efforts in the area were inadequate to detect the attack in advance

Mujahideen fired from fixed, surveyed sites, from mobile fire bases, and from unmanned firing bases. The mobile bases deployed in two phases:

- In daylight: the firing survey party would move into the area, determine weapon positions, map locations, heading, intended positions for the aiming stakes, and firing data
- At night: the firing party would arrive in a jeep, meet with the survey party, set up their weapons, conduct a quick firing, and depart
- Unmanned bases were used against targets without cover and concealment:
 - Mujahideen would survey these points in daylight, set up rockets on makeshift or disposable launchers, attach time-delay firing devices, and be well away from the area before the enemy could respond

Mujahideen shelling attacks had mixed results:

- When launched against military airfields and garrisons, they could destroy targets, prevent soldiers from sleeping, and depress morale
- When launched against cities, they frequently killed civilians, costing Mujahideen potential supporters
 - Some civilians said, “The government oppresses us during the day, the Mujahideen oppresses us at night.”

Local Knowledge

- Relatives were given command responsibilities
- Mujahideen had contacts who could gain access to Soviet garrisons
- Civilians resented any forces causing harm
- Indigenous assets (donkeys and mules) supported Mujahideen operations

Vignette 4: Attacking a Strong Point

Taking Alingar District Capital

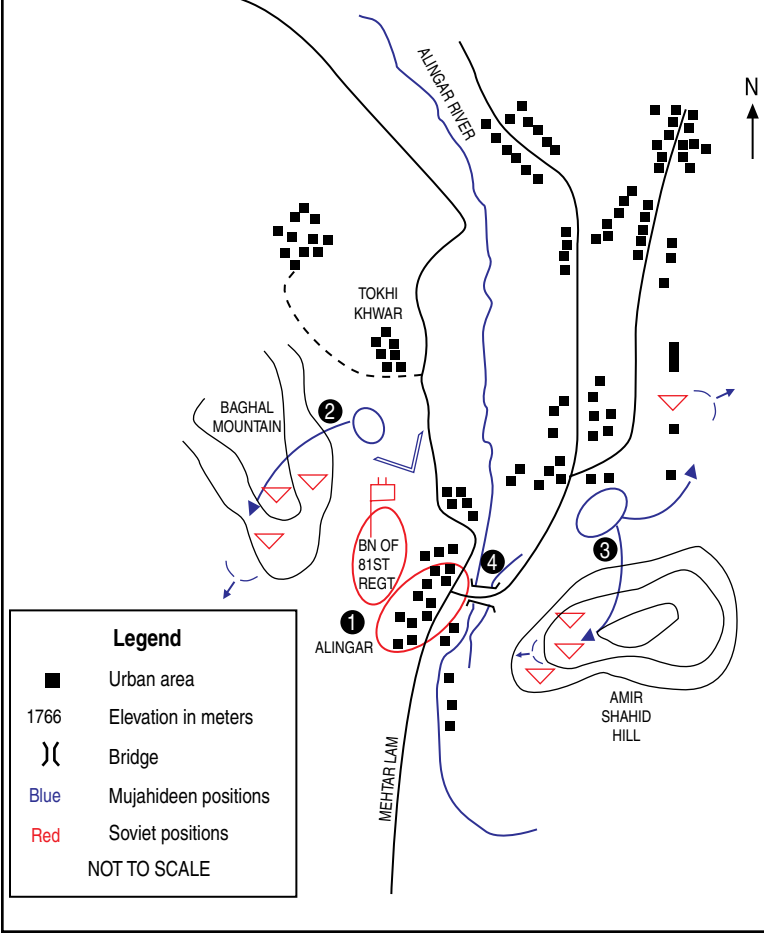
July 1980

A force of 300 Mujahideen seized a district capital in an overnight battle killing 285 Soviet-backed Afghan government officials, police, soldiers, militia, and civilians. A number of government officials were also captured, and a large number of weapons, including armored vehicles and artillery pieces, were seized. There were five insurgents killed and seven wounded.

A battalion of the Soviet-backed Afghan Army's 81st Regiment and some government militia forces were based in the town (Map Point 1). Among them was a captain who routinely provided the insurgents information about government plans (his brother was a Mujahideen), a cook who agreed to drug the army garrison's food before the attack, and other Mujahideen sympathizers who would kill the Afghan Army officers.

The Mujahideen formed four groups and deployed forces to the north, south, and west of the district center. One group attacked security posts on a mountain to the northwest (Map Point 2), and another attacked Afghan Army posts on a hill to the southeast (Map Point 3). A third group attacked along the main road along a river, and the fourth group attacked to seize and cross a bridge (Map Point 4). The drugged food did not have its desired effect, but the cook and 10 other sympathizers killed the Afghan Army officers. The Afghan Army did not want to fight the Mujahideen. Instead, elements of the military cooperated with the insurgents, turning their guns on local militia units who were reluctant to surrender and continued to protect government enclaves.

ATTACKING A STRONG POINT
July 1980
Overnight
ALINGAR



Taking Alingar District Capital

The fighting continued through the night, as the Mujahideen moved to cut off fleeing Afghan government officials and pursued them in the dark. The battle ended in time for morning prayers. The Mujahideen held the district capital for some time until a joint Soviet/Afghan Army force pushed them out and reestablished the Afghan government.

Learning Points

Seizure of a political center (Map Point 1) was an important objective of the Mujahideen. It had propaganda value and supported its claim to be the legitimate government of Afghanistan:

- Insurgent groups were unsuited to trade mobility and anonymity for holding strong points
- Implied missions after seizing strong points include regular resupply, continuous manning, and the ability to withstand artillery and air strikes
- Crew-served weapons and sufficient ammunition required to hold a strong point are hard to remove during a forced withdrawal

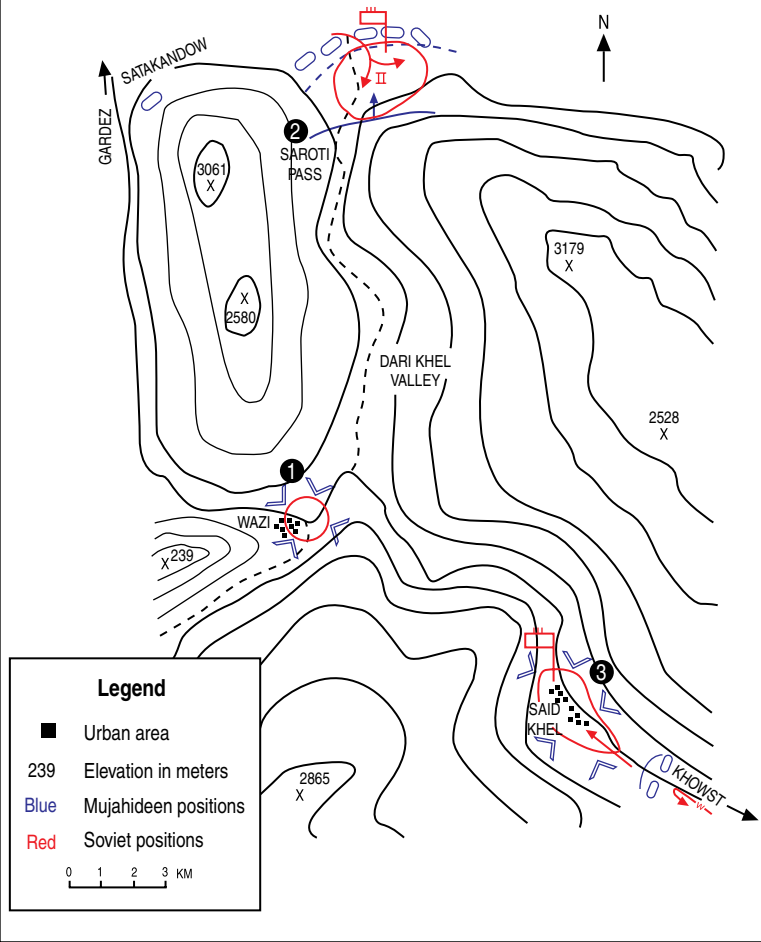
Local Knowledge

- Insurgents may have relatives in government forces
- Mullahs cooperated with the insurgents
- Teenage boys supported the Mujahideen and participated in the fight

BLOCKING ENEMY LINES OF COMMUNICATION

April 1980

Night
WAZI



Carving Up Regiments on the Approach to Wazi

Vignette 5: Blocking Enemy Lines of Communication

Carving Up Regiments on the Approach to Wazi

April 1980

Two Soviet-backed Afghan Army columns were sent to reestablish control after Mujahideen captured a district headquarters. The Mujahideen blocked the mountain passes and surrounded the army columns, capturing hundreds of troops and weapons.

The Wazi District Headquarters sits astride the main highway between the eastern Afghan towns of Khowst and Gardez (Map Point 1). The headquarters commander knew the Mujahideen commander. He surrendered the headquarters after negotiations. Since the Mujahideen controlled a pass on the highway, the only approach for Afghan Army columns to retake the headquarters was through other passes to the north (Map Point 2) and south (Map Point 3) of the Dari Khel Valley.

The local Afghan insurgent commander did not have enough fighters to fight the column coming from the north. He sent tribal police to rally the tribes and to reinforce some of his men. In addition, to recruit a larger force called a *lashkar*, he assembled barbers to play drums to rally warriors. Local tribes responded because of their concern the Afghan Army would loot their villages if the army entered the area. The commander decided first to engage the column to the north, originally planning merely to defend the pass. When he saw how large a tribal force had gathered, he decided to attack the column, defeating it and capturing weapons and tanks (Map Point 1). He left a blocking force to deal with any additional columns and then turned his attention to the south.

The Afghan Army column approaching from the south formed an assembly area at the pass. The insurgents cut the road behind

the column and surrounded it (Map Point 3). The Afghan Army sent a relief force and tried to rescue the column, but it could not get through the Mujahideen blockade. After being trapped for 20 days, the column surrendered. The Mujahideen captured 1,200 men and 50 to 60 armored vehicles and trucks.

Learning Points

Early in the war, recruitment from local tribes was required to produce sufficient fighters to engage Afghan Army columns:

- The method was similar to when the same tribes were fighting British forces over the same ground in the 19th century
- The focus of recruitment changed from tribal loyalties to religious-based factions after Western and Arab countries began supplying the Mujahideen through the factions

Local Knowledge

- The local commander made use of tribal cultural practices and authority figures (tribal police) to raise additional forces quickly
- Tribal leaders knew each other, which helped negotiations when they were on opposite sides

Vignette 6: Blocking Enemy Lines of Communication

Operation Ghashey (Arrow in Pashto)

October–November 1988

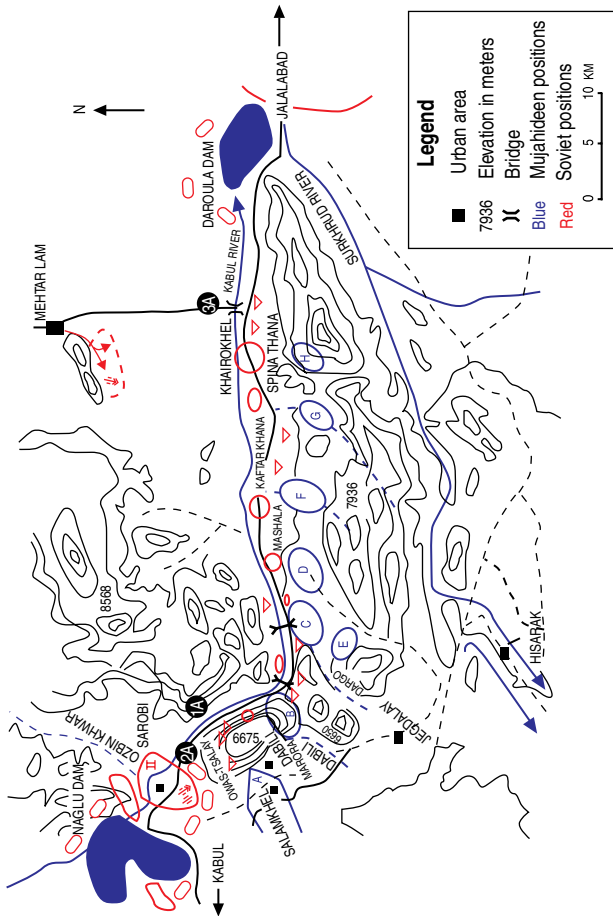
A coordinated attack, involving 2,000 Mujahideen, shut down the eastern supply route to Kabul from 23 October to 7 November 1988.

Operation Arrow covertly brought together widely dispersed Mujahideen groups from two provinces, four factions, and from as far away as 200 kilometers. Four hundred tons of weapons and other supplies were moved from Pakistan to the area of operation by mules and other pack animals. The Mujahideen force was divided into nine groups: five strike groups, two containment groups to protect the operation's eastern and western flanks, a rocket launcher group to make a diversionary attack on the Kabul airport, and a reserve group. The Mujahideen were armed with automatic rifles, light and heavy machine guns, anti-tank grenade and missile launchers, recoilless rifles, single and multi-barrel rocket launchers, and shoulder-fired air defense missiles. The Soviet-backed Afghan Army had six bases along the road (each manned by at least a platoon, reinforced by 1 or 2 armored vehicles, howitzers, and heavy machine guns) and 20 outposts (5 or 6 men with machine guns, grenade launchers, and mortars).

The operation plan had four phases:

1. Attack to destroy and seize enemy bases and outposts.
2. Block the road by destroying bridges, laying mines, and shelling enemy columns attempting to reopen the highway.

BLOCKING ENEMY LINES OF COMMUNICATION A
23 October to 7 November 1988
SAROBI



Arrow 1

3. When the highway was reopened, conduct a large-scale ambush to inflict heavy enemy casualties.
4. Break contact and withdraw.

In the first phase of the battle, the Mujahideen placed their heavy weapons on the southern high ground above the Debili and Dargo area (Map Point 1A, Arrow 1 Map) to provide covering fire for assault groups that moved down to the road in a gorge below. Fanning out along the road, the assault groups stormed enemy positions, seizing 14 outposts and 4 bases in the first 3 days (Map Point 2A, Arrow 1 Map). In phase two, they destroyed highway bridges, mined the road, and established roadblocks (Map Point 3A, Arrow 1 Map). They also established firing positions overlooking the blocked areas.

The Afghan Army reaction was slow and ineffective. It responded with artillery fire and air attacks, but helicopter gunships did not dare to fly low into the gorge or near Mujahideen positions. The Afghan Army made no attempt to outflank the Mujahideen positions and made no attempt to use heliborne troops to cut off the insurgent supply and withdrawal routes. Instead, the Afghan Army concentrated on frontal attacks on the roadblocks at the two entrances to the gorge. They were able to build up forces on the eastern side, including reinforcement by Soviet troops, because Mujahideen task forces protecting that flank withdrew a week after overrunning their objectives. The insurgents abandoned the operation after learning that their permanent bases elsewhere were under enemy threat. They returned home to protect them.

The third phase of the operation began with the Mujahideen observing radio silence, ceasing fire, and withdrawing some of its forces, as a deception. The following day, with the entire front quiet, the Afghan Army replaced the necessary bridges and be-

gan moving large numbers of vehicles over the road. When the four-kilometer stretch of road between the restored bridges was jammed with traffic, the Mujahideen opened fire along the entire front (Map Points 1B and 2B, Arrow 2 Map). The firing continued until evening, when the insurgents withdrew without Afghan Army interference.

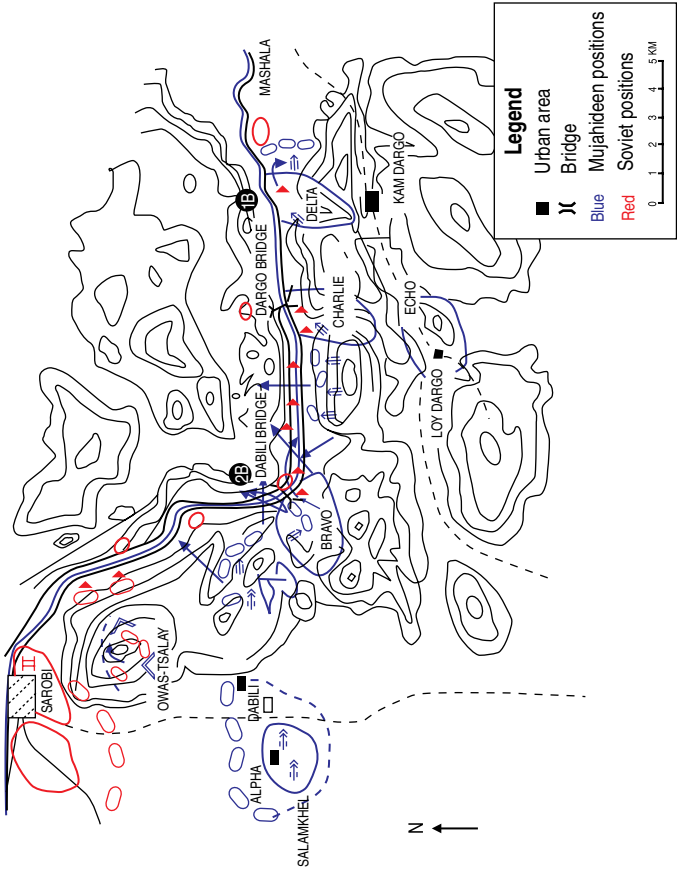
The Afghan Army and Soviet losses during the entire 2-week operation included 42 tanks and armored personnel carriers, 9 artillery pieces, 65 soft-skin vehicles, 2 aircraft, and 2 helicopter gunships. More than 500 soldiers were killed or wounded; 212 soldiers and 11 officers were captured. Mujahideen losses were 18 killed and 53 wounded.

Engagements on the Eastern Flank

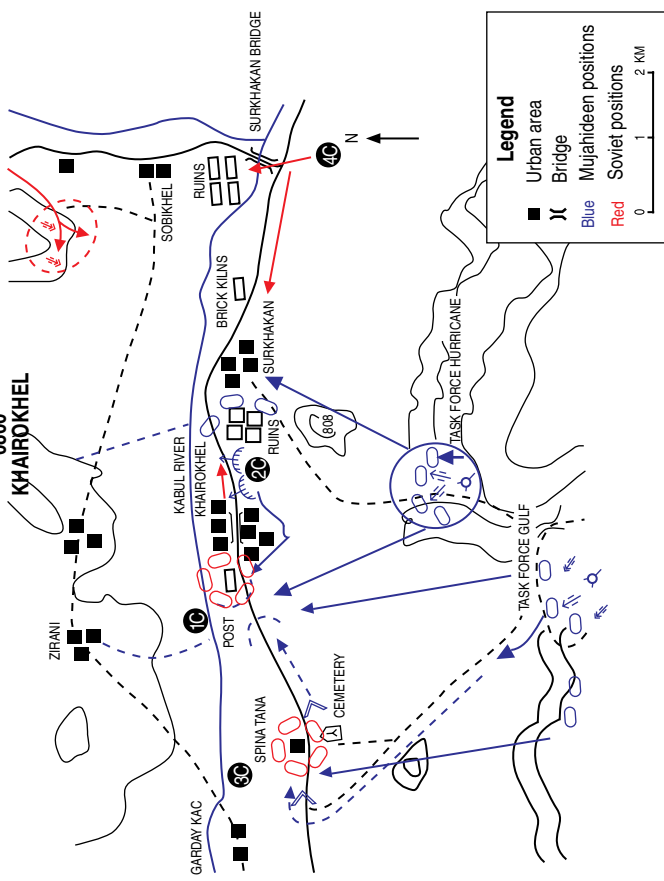
Strike groups, designated Task Forces Falcon, Gulf, and Hurricane were on Operation Arrow's eastern flank. Task Force Hurricane was assigned to seize an Afghan Army post (Map Point 1C, Arrow 3 Map) near Khairokhel village, west of Jalalabad.

The night before the assault, the commander went into the village on reconnaissance and had dinner with the local elders. He asked them to talk to the government post commander and convince him to abandon his position rather than face attack. He then returned to his attack position in the hills overlooking the village. The Afghan Army post commander may not have been alarmed because Mujahideen had been known to be operating in the area for some time.

BLOCKING ENEMY LINES OF COMMUNICATION B
23 October to 7 November 1988
DEBILI and DARGO



BLOCKING ENEMY LINES OF COMMUNICATION C
 23 October 1988
 0800



Arrow's operational commander had ordered the attack to begin at 0800 the following day. The Hurricane commander had set up an ambush near the highway for a patrol that left Khairokhel post every morning (Map Point 2C, Arrow 3 Map). At 0700 the patrol started moving west toward another post at the Surkhakan Bridge over the Kabul River. The patrol was attacked by the Mujahideen, with six Afghan soldiers killed. The action drew a heavy artillery barrage from enemy bases on either side of Khairokhel. The Hurricane commander radioed to the adjacent Gulf task force to "get the dogs off my back." Since it was 0800, the Gulf force was ready, and it attacked the base to the west at Spina Thana (Map Point 3C, Arrow Map 3). Gulf's gunners set part of the base on fire. Taking advantage of the panic, a 60-man group assaulted the base, which was protected by minefields. The commander instructed his men to stay on the road, which was not mined. Those who strayed were wounded by mines.

In coordinated attacks, the two groups overran their objectives by 1430. Later, the Hurricane task force engaged a convoy trying to move Afghan officials to safety. Protected by a steep turn in the road, the Mujahideen were able to assault the enemy tanks with rocket-propelled grenades without being hit by return fire. A heavily mined area protected their flank, and a blown bridge prevented a frontal assault (Map Point 4).

Later, as the force moved its spoils and prisoners to mountain positions in the south, the commander withdrew his security elements from the highway, since the Afghan Army was moving another motorized column into the area from Jalalabad. He continued to fire artillery at enemy forces on the road, but it was ineffective because of the distance. By the next day, all three task forces to the east had withdrawn their forces from along the highway, and the

Afghan Army reinforcements moved toward the area of the main action, largely unimpeded.

It was this circumstance that caused Operation Arrow's commander to narrow his front and concentrate on the four-kilometer stretch between Dargo and Debili.

Learning Points

Operation Arrow achieved an ambitious goal despite numerous challenges faced by its commander:

- Avoiding enemy attack while moving thousands of men and tons of supplies long distances to the deployment area
- Commanding and controlling a volunteer multi-regional force was difficult, as illustrated by the unannounced withdrawal of the eastern flank forces
- Shortage of working radios compounded command and control problems
- Mujahideen preferred short battles, fought on their home territory
- Long treks in the mountains contributed to fatigue before the battle began; commanders were hard pressed to keep hungry and tired fighters together for a long period of time
- Minefields surrounding Afghan Army and Soviet posts made capturing those positions very difficult (13 million mines were estimated to have been left behind after the Soviet withdrawal)

Operation Arrow was a thoroughly planned and well coordinated operation, but it had serious shortcomings:

- It was not very cost-effective

- Resources could have been better used and the blockade extended for a longer period, by substituting a series of smaller actions, by 50 to 70 Mujahideen at different points along the highway
- Political requirements to use forces of four Mujahideen factions added complexity and expense
- The highway closure hurt the local economy by stopping fruit exports, with potential loss of crucial support for the Mujahideen from the local population
 - Local Mujahideen maintained the best highway blocks, some for weeks, months, and even years, while looking after their personal interests
 - Mobile Mujahideen were least effective in maintaining blocks because they lacked supplies and commitment required to keep the road closed

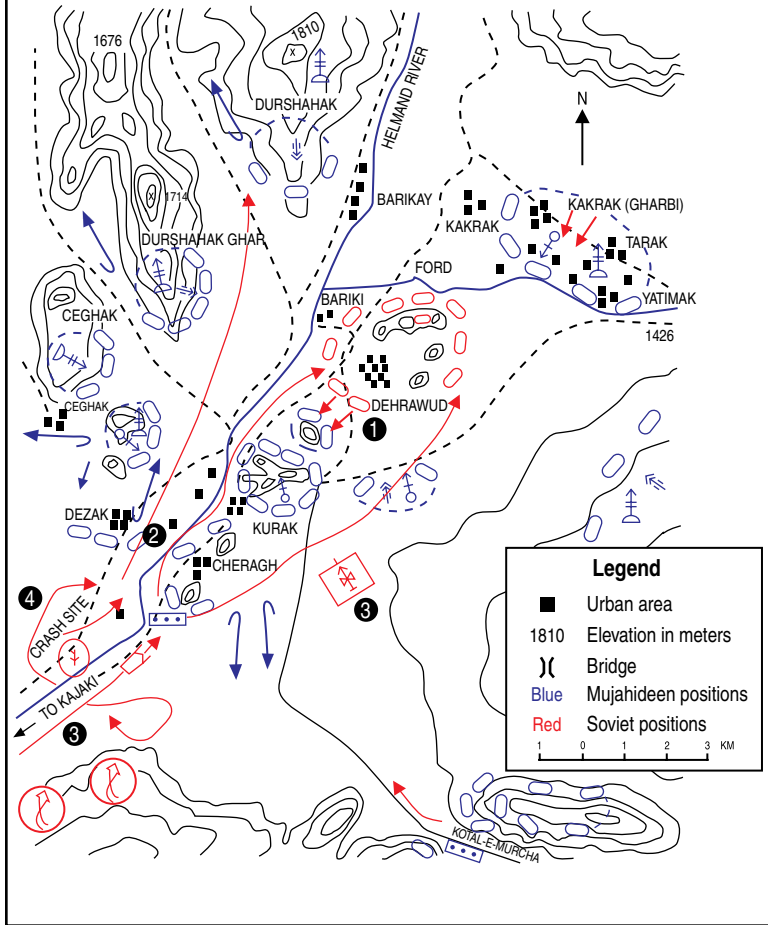
The Afghan Army committed several errors:

- Ineffective reconnaissance, allowing the Mujahideen to deploy 2,000 fighters within a short distance of Afghan Army positions without detection
- Failure to establish observation posts on the high ground
- Failure to launch a flanking attack
- Being deceived by the phony Mujahideen ceasefire
- Heavy traffic allowed on an unsecured highway

Local Knowledge

- Convincing unpaid insurgents to perform vital and unglamorous rear area and security missions was always difficult when they wanted to fight instead
- Since no one battle would be decisive, the Mujahideen felt that combat should be short to enhance survival

SEIGE WARFARE Spring-Summer 1984 DEHRAWUD



Dehrawud Offensive

Vignette 7: Siege Warfare

Dehrawud Offensive

Spring–Summer 1984

Heavy air bombardment and the approach of two columns of Soviet and Afghan Army troops lifted a 45-day Mujahideen siege of a district capital and its Afghan government militia garrison of 500 men.

More than 1,000 Mujahideen, many from other parts of Afghanistan, had surrounded and were advancing on militia positions in Dehrawud (Map Point 1). Five hundred insurgents deployed around the district center, surrounding government positions. A 300-man detachment sealed off the main approach to the town along the Helmand River from the south (Map Point 2), while another 100 men covered the mountain pass to the southeast and mined its road. The rest were engaged in full time logistics support.

The Soviets and Afghan Army supported the Dehrawud garrison with two or three daily air strikes on Mujahideen positions to check their advance (Map Point 3). In the meantime, the Soviet/Afghan Army command assembled ground forces to relieve the garrison. One force was to advance north along the river from the south, another through the pass. However, it took weeks to ready the large columns of infantry and tanks to move into the mountainous battlefield.

After a Soviet fighter-bomber was shot down and its pilot killed during a rescue attempt, Soviet air activity increased in an attempt to soften up the area for the upcoming attack (Map Point 4).

The Mujahideen suffered fewer casualties from the air bombardment than the garrison, who sustained losses from both collateral damage and friendly fire. Nevertheless, many insurgents who

were not fighting on their home territory departed during the siege, rather than remaining in place while the Soviet air force attacked them. By the time the first Soviet column arrived from the south, the Mujahideen realized that it had lost command and control over the scattered detachments and could not deal with the two-pronged enemy advance. The insurgent groups withdrew by mountain passes.

Learning Points

The Mujahideen, an insurgent force, was poorly organized to conduct a siege operation. The siege was broken because:

- The Mujahideen failed to hold their positions
 - Many fighters left rather than sit idly on the mountains
 - The Mujahideen leadership could not maintain tactical and logistic control over a large insurgent force for an extended period
 - They were not designed for long-term operations
- Soviet air power successfully delayed the Mujahideen assault and gained time for ground forces to reach the battlefield.

Local Knowledge

- The Mujahideen were not fighting on their home territory, so were not motivated to hold their positions for an extended period
- The Mujahideen prepared the battle area by mediating a truce between two rival groups in the region to ensure their full co-operation during the operation

Vignette 8: Defending Against Raids

Soviet Raid on Mujahideen Hideout at Sayghani

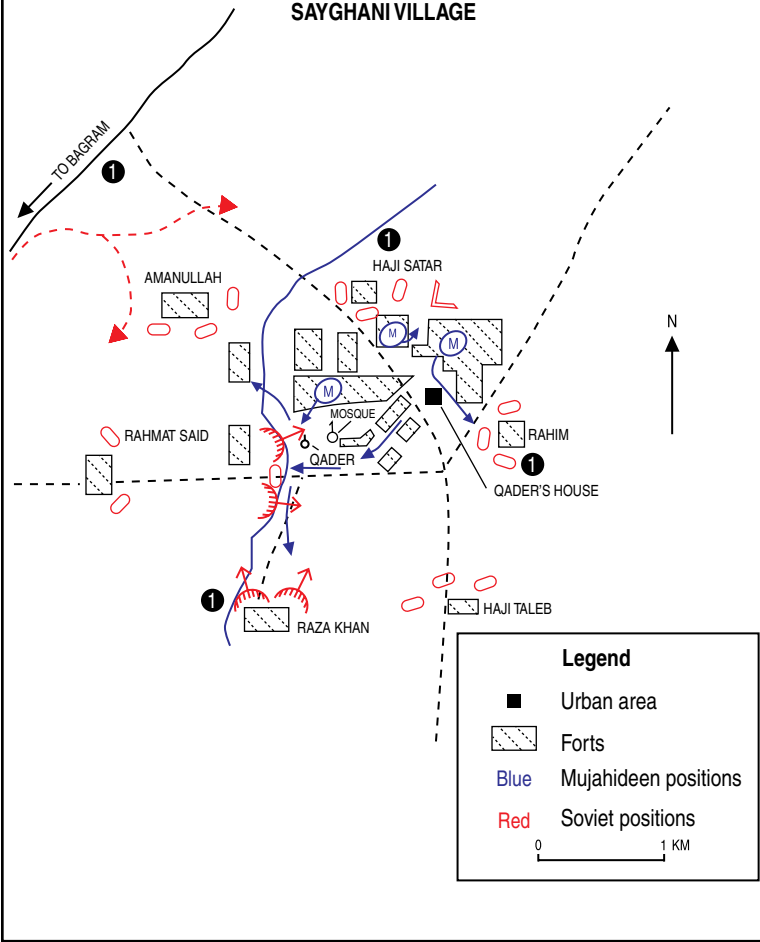
January 1981

A prominent Mujahideen commander, making a rare overnight stay at his home village near the Soviet Bagram air base, was surprised by an early morning Soviet raid. All 40 of the men accompanying the leader were killed, along with 15 civilians.

The commander had posted two guard details, one at his house and the other at a nearby mosque. When the commander awoke for early morning prayers, the guards on his roof reported no incidents. But soon after, he saw signal flares from the northeast and southeast. A Soviet raiding detachment, aided by local guides and informants, had walked the 6 kilometers from Bagram to his village undetected and taken up positions at several locations (Map Point 1).

The commander had no time to gather all his men, so he took the 15 who were staying at his house and attempted to leave the village. Shortly after leaving the house, the commander realized he had left his briefcase full of data about his group in the house. He sent his younger brother back for it and ordered his men to continue to move out. Once his brother returned, the two caught up with the men just as they were ambushed by Soviet soldiers. Three insurgents were killed by automatic rifle fire on the spot. The rest escaped in the dark, but were soon trapped in another ambush and were all killed. A tracer round set the commander's clothing on fire, and the burning cloth attracted the attention of Soviet soldiers. They opened fire and killed his brother. The commander managed to slip away. However, the Soviets had blocked all the escape routes for the other Mujahideen in the village, and none survived the raid.

DEFENDING AGAINST RAIDS
9 January 1981
Night
SAYGHANI VILLAGE



Soviet Raid on Mujahideen Hideout at Sayghani

Learning Points

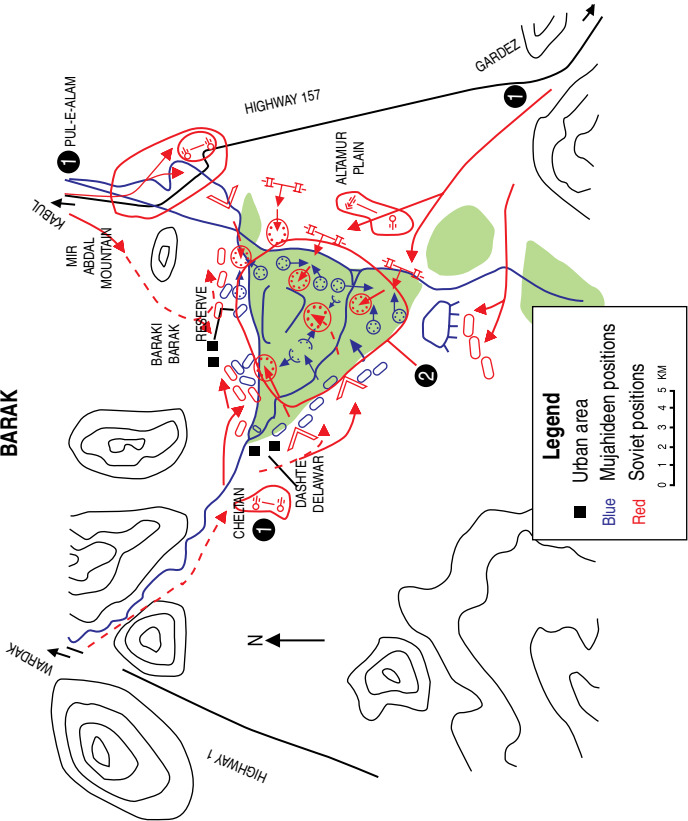
The defeat was due to:

- Lack of security patrols
 - Only close-in protection
 - No early warning
- Lack of contingency plans in case of surprise attack
- Lack of command and control
 - The commander failed to lead his group, which blundered into two ambushes
 - He did not assign a leader when he sent the group ahead
- Overconfidence and bravado in staying overnight so close to Bagram, a major Soviet garrison
- Soviet raiders' ability to approach/deploy undetected
- Soviet use of local collaborators

Mujahideen local security was often lax in areas where they felt safe, even in areas close to major enemy garrisons:

- Afghan secret police infiltrators and informants often were able to provide information leading to successful raids against the Mujahideen
- The Mujahideen often failed to post security at a sufficient distance to provide adequate warning, relying instead on the local population to alert them
 - Mujahideen were blind in areas where people had fled or were tired of war
- Factional nature of Mujahideen discouraged timely distribution of information to all forces in an area

DEFENDING AGAINST A CORDON AND SEARCH
June 1982
BARAKI BARAK



Battle of Baraki Barak

Vignette 9: Defending Against a Cordon and Search

Battle of Baraki Barak

June 1982

A 20,000-man Soviet and Afghan Army offensive against Mujahideen in the Baraki Barak district, south of Kabul failed in its objectives. The insurgents split the Soviet/Afghan Army force into isolated pockets they were able to contain. After 3 days of fighting, the Soviets and Afghan Army began to withdraw from the district. The June 1982 offensive was meant to deprive the Mujahideen of an area that had been seized from the Afghan government in 1979 and that provided a base for attacks against Soviet lines of communication and neighboring districts. The Soviets had also hoped to capture Mujahideen leaders and their air defense weapons that were hindering Soviet raids.

The Mujahideen had learned of the upcoming offensive and prepared for it. They assigned defensive areas to different insurgent groups, organized their forces into small groups to insure their ability to maneuver, and occupied positions in the perimeter villages of the district. They also organized mobile interior reserves and kept them available to react to enemy actions.

Among the weapons carried by the Mujahideen were a number of .303 bolt-action Enfield rifles, which was the British Army's standard rifle from 1895 until 1957. Mujahideen found the Enfields effective against dismounted Soviets. They had a maximum effective range of 800 meters compared to 400 meters for the AK assault rifle. Furthermore, the .303 round would penetrate Soviet flak jackets, while the AK round would not. Soviet troops generally carried AK-74s, while Afghan Army troops had the older model AK-47.

Three columns of Soviet/Afghan Army troops attacked from separate directions, establishing a cordon around the Mujahideen area (Map Point 1). Escape routes were blocked. They hit suspected insurgent positions with airstrikes and entered villages. The Mujahideen fought them from their forward positions and then fell back to backup positions. Although surrounded, the insurgents took advantage of cover provided by the villages and terrain to move freely within the 10-kilometer area (Map Point 2). They began to launch small-group counterattacks, fighting at close quarters and encircling the Soviet forces. The Mujahideen also reinforced their forces. They intermingled with the Soviets, preventing the Soviet artillery from firing into the area for fear of hitting their own troops.

The Soviets responded by moving overwhelming force into the area. The Mujahideen reacted by moving out of their positions to attack the Soviets on their flanks. They forced the Soviets into scattered defensive pockets, causing their attack to break down and their forces to withdrawal.

Learning Points

The Soviet offensive was turned back by an aggressive defense by the Mujahideen:

- The Mujahideen knew the offensive was coming, planned their defense thoroughly, their actions were centrally coordinated, and they developed contingency plans
- They conducted an active defense with tactical maneuver and took advantage of terrain, splitting the Soviet/Afghan Army forces into isolated groups and stopping their advance.
- They built well-constructed redundant field fortifications to slow the Soviet/Afghan Army advance
- They maintained a central reserve

Vignette 10: Defending Against a Cordon and Search

Battle for Kama

February 1983

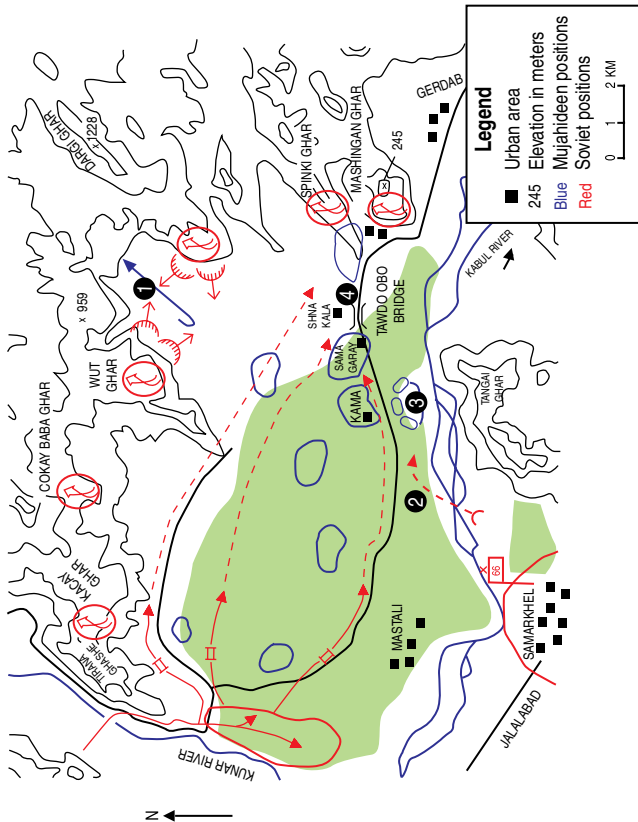
A disorganized band of Mujahideen put up little effective resistance during a Soviet operation in eastern Afghanistan. The Soviets effectively sealed the area and swept it to root out the Mujahideen.

The 35-man insurgent band did not have a base in the nearby mountains, but rather lived in a village east of Kama. There were similar units in other villages in the Kama District. The groups were fragmented, with primitive communications, and little contact with one another. They were poorly armed—never able to launch more than hit-and-run attacks—and without a common contingency plan to deal with a Soviet attack in force.

At dawn, 20 to 25 helicopters landed Soviet troops in the mountains north and northeast of Kama (Map Point 1). While the troops on the high ground sealed off the escape into the mountains, another detachment established the southern part of the cordon (Map Point 2). The Mujahideen leader, armed only with light weapons and one rocket-propelled grenade launcher, took his group to a bushy area south of Kama, where they hid (Map Point 3). They were scattered throughout the wooded area, which was also full of civilians hiding from the Soviets. The Mujahideen commander received word that the Soviets intended to set the area on fire to flush his men out. As Soviet armored personnel carriers approached, he was prepared to defend the area to protect the civilians, but the Soviets bypassed it on their way toward the town.

The Mujahideen then moved to take positions on both sides of a bridge they thought the Soviets coming from the high ground

DEFENDING AGAINST A CORDON AND SEARCH
February 1983
KAMA



Battle for Kama

would have to cross (Map Point 4). As they did so, they began taking fire. During the firefight, a close friend of the Mujahideen commander stood up and began cursing the Soviets and demanding their surrender. He was shot in the stomach and killed. As tanks were approaching, the Mujahideen commander fired a rocket in their direction, stopping the tanks and infantry long enough to break contact and take the body out of the area. He rented a pack animal at a nearby village to take his friend's body to his family at a refugee camp in Pakistan.

Learning Points

The Mujahideen were generally unsuccessful in defeating a cordon and search operation when:

- They were in separate groups with little or no ties to a central Mujahideen planning authority
- They had no contingency plans
- They failed to fortify the area

While uncoordinated and poorly trained, the Mujahideen turned the entire area into a defensive zone:

- They slowed the Soviet sweep, but their effort put villagers at risk and reduced local support for the insurgents
- While the Soviets were able to seal the area, the cordon was too large to effectively sweep
 - The Mujahideen were able to hide in the villages and fields
 - The Soviets needed to break the cordoned area into manageable segments and sweep those in turn

Local Knowledge

- The Mujahideen commander had a fatalistic view of the day's probable outcome, assigning lives to God's hand rather than to Russian operations
- Villagers provided intelligence to the Mujahideen, who were prepared to defend them from the Soviets
- A great deal of effort went toward recovering and transporting a body to its family for burial

Vignette 11: Defending Against a Cordon and Search

Operation in Parwan

January 1984

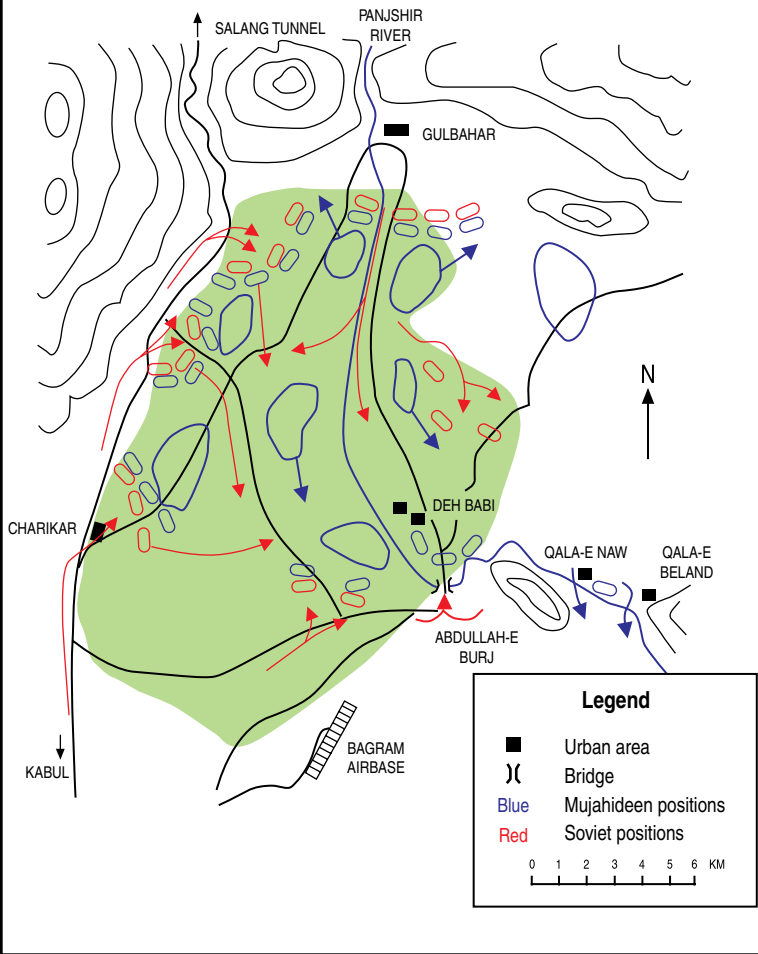
A multi-divisional Soviet/Afghan Army cordon and search operation was launched to trap Mujahideen in two provinces north of Kabul. In action near the Soviet Bagram airbase, the attackers repeatedly failed to take a Mujahideen position, allowing the insurgents to slip away.

Two Mujahideen units, with 350 men, defended a line north of the main road from Bagram between the villages of Abdullah-e Burj and Qala-e Beland. They prepared blocking positions with anti-tank weapons forward and heavy machine guns on high ground behind the front line.

The night before the attack, artillery pounded Mujahideen positions. It intensified at dawn and was accompanied by air strikes and runs by helicopter gunships. The insurgents did not expose themselves during the fire strikes, staying down inside covered bunkers. However, Mujahideen communications were seriously disrupted, and their tactical coordination dropped off dramatically.

After sunrise, Soviet/Afghan Army infantry backed by tanks and armored personnel carriers launched their attack. They were forced back by the Mujahideen's massed anti-tank weapons and machine guns. The scenario was repeated several times over 2 days; artillery fire and air strikes would precede an advance by infantry followed by tanks, until they were stopped by withering Mujahideen fire at close quarters. The attackers were not very aggressive. Tanks were very slow to advance, particularly when some tanks were hit, and the infantry suffered casualties. At the same

DEFENDING AGAINST A CORDON AND SEARCH
24 January 1984
PARWAN



Operation in Parwan

time, infantry would fall back to take cover behind the tanks, after being hit by heavy defensive fire.

The Mujahideen were forced to withdraw on the 3rd day to a planned second line of defense on high ground, when some adjacent insurgent units, fearing encirclement, left their forward positions to escape the enemy cordon. For three more days, the Mujahideen continued to hold off the Soviet force, which continued the same method of assault. They then joined other insurgents who escaped to mountain bases in the south. They lost 7 killed and 18 wounded and claimed to have destroyed 11 tanks and armored personnel carriers and inflicted dozens of casualties. Thousands of Mujahideen throughout the two provinces escaped the Soviet operation.

Learning Points

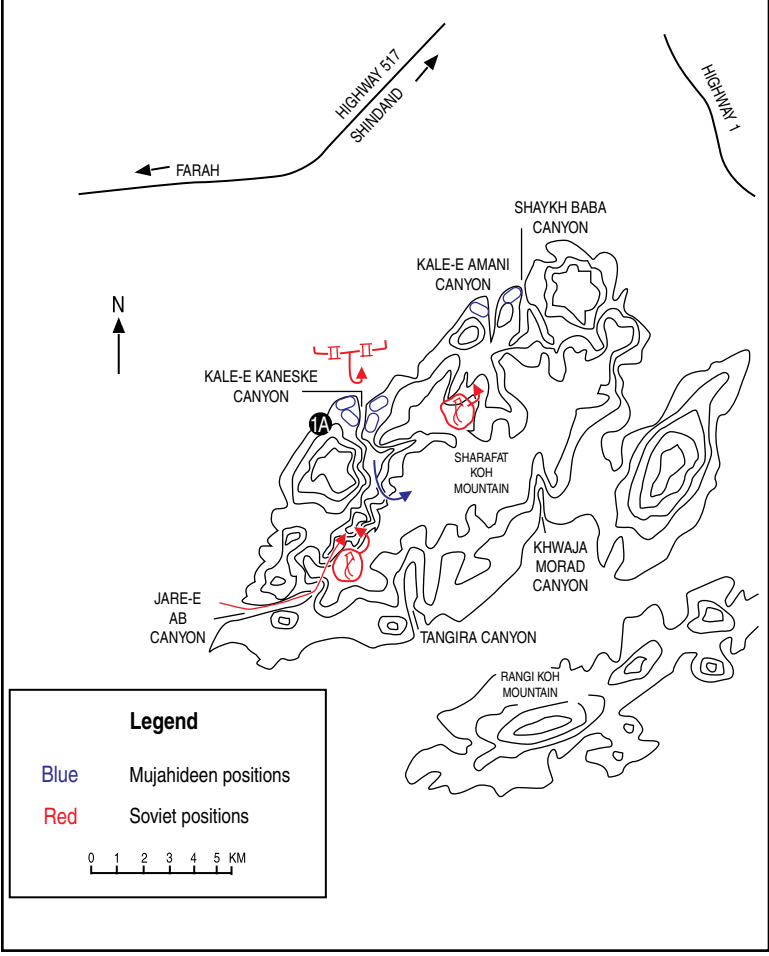
The Mujahideen were able to inflict casualties and escape the cordon because:

- They survived the bombardment in nearby bunkers
- They enjoyed freedom of movement until the Soviets finally penetrated the area
- They effectively used massed anti-tank weapons and heavy machine guns
- The Soviet forces lacked coordinated infantry tank assaults

Lack of operational coordination among Mujahideen groups and their focus on escaping the cordon cost the insurgents the opportunity to inflict heavy Soviet losses:

- They failed to resist on consecutive defensive positions
- They failed to cut the Soviet withdrawal routes

**DEFENDING BASE CAMPS A
1982-1983
SHARAFAT**



Legend

- Mujahideen positions
- Soviet positions

0 1 2 3 4 5 KM

Battles for Sharafat Kof Mountain Fortress

Vignette 12: Defending Base Camps

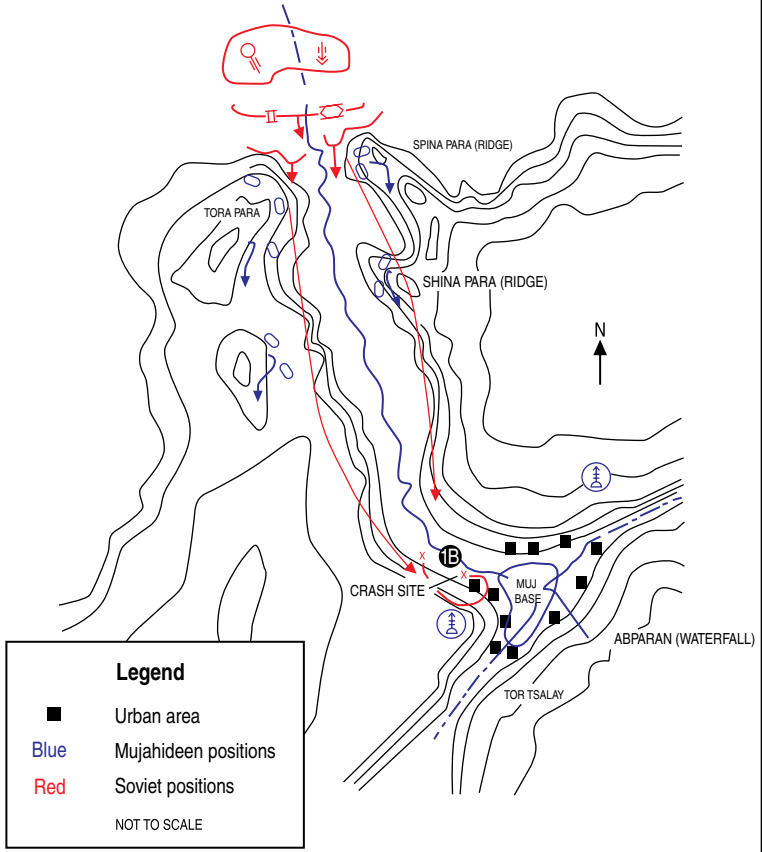
Battles for Sharafat Kof Mountain Fortress

1982–1983

Mujahideen used base camps in the canyons of the Lor Kor (known as Sharafat Koh by the Mujahideen) mountain in western Afghanistan to attack Soviet convoys on two major highways nearby. They maintained bases there from 1979 to 1985, until they were ousted by Soviet forces. The strongest base was in the Kale-e-Kaneske Canyon (Map Point 1A). It had a narrow mouth in solid rock only 2–3 meters wide, a water reservoir, supply dump, and 16 caves for supporting 60 people. It was defended with heavy anti-aircraft machine guns on the high ground on both sides of the canyon.

In the early days of the war, the Mujahideen had bases around two major cities in the province, but they were forced into the mountains by Soviet and Afghan Army pressure. As a result, they lost contact with the urban population. The city population was not tribal and looked down on the Mujahideen as rustics, while the Mujahideen looked down on the city dwellers for their easy life.

**DEFENDING BASE CAMPS B
1982
KALE-E KANESKE CANYON**



Sky Warriors Strike the Canyon

Sky Warriors Strike the Canyon (1982)

An Afghan Army officer who was from the same tribe as the Mujahideen commander and pretending to be a Mujahideen collaborator was given a tour of the Kale-e Kaneske Canyon base where he stole a map showing the base's defenses. The Soviets attacked a month later. Three Soviet helicopter gunships flew down the canyon and fired at the caves and structures of the Mujahideen base, causing severe damage. The positioning of the machine guns prevented them from engaging aircraft flying below them in the canyon. One of the gunners took his weapon off its mount, placed it on his shoulder, and fired down, damaging two helicopters. One crashed (Map Point 1A), the other escaped. The gunner was killed by fire from the third helicopter.

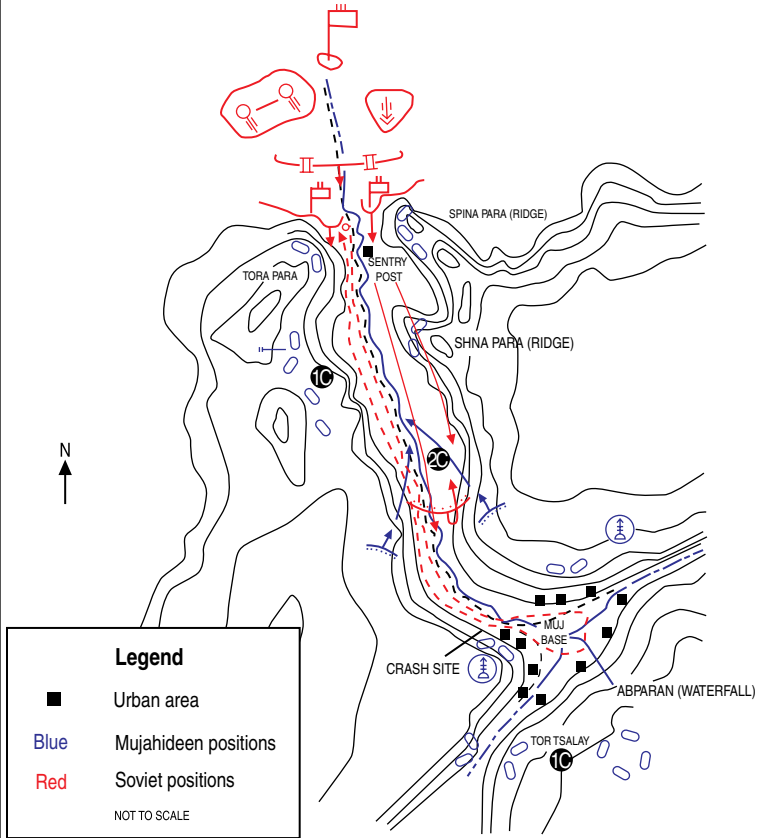
The attack was followed by bombing from Soviet fighter bombers. Soviet transport helicopters landed troops 3 kilometers from the canyon mouth (Map Point 1B). The following day, Soviet armored vehicles arrived, and the infantry, supported by armor, pushed forward on the high ground toward the crash site. Some moved along the canyon floor and the opposite canyon wall. As the Soviets advanced, they marked boulders and rocks for orientation. After 7 days of fighting, they reached the crash site, took their dead, and left.

Learning Points

The Mujahideen employment of air defense was weak:

- Machine guns were not dug into caves and canyon walls where they would have been more protected from helicopter attack
- Machine guns were not positioned to deliver mass fire on the helicopters
- The Soviets painted numbers on boulders and rocks to adjust air and artillery fire and to keep track of advancing units

**DEFENDING BASE CAMPS C
1983
KALE-E KANESKE CANYON**



A Successful Defense

A Successful Defense (1983)

Mujahideen were alerted to an impending Soviet attack on their base by the sound of helicopters and tanks. Their forces were depleted by a recent failed operation against a border post near the Iranian border, and they had only 25 men in the camp. Another Mujahideen contingent, noting the Soviet preparations and guessing that the Kale-e Kaneske Canyon was the target, came across the desert to join them.

The Mujahideen took up positions on the high ground on ridges on both sides of the canyon at the north end, as well as at the rear approach (Map Point 1C). The attack began with heavy aircraft and artillery bombardment that lasted through the night, depriving the Mujahideen of sleep. Before sunrise, the Soviets launched a ground assault from the north, with two battalions of tanks and dismounted infantry. They tried to approach the canyon, but failed.

Under the cover of smoke on the 3rd day, the Soviets were successful in moving far into the canyon. The Mujahideen fired blindly into the smoke from the high ground until they saw the Soviets signaling each other with flares and fired at the flares. The insurgents on the heights abandoned their positions and charged down the canyon walls (Map Point 2C). Fighting was heavy, and the Soviets withdrew in the late afternoon, taking their dead and wounded with them, but leaving many RPG-18 rocket launchers behind.

On the 4th day of the battle, the Soviets advanced with tank-led infantry. The infantry were reluctant to leave the shelter of the armored vehicles, but finally moved into some folds on the canyon wall and took cover there while the armor withdrew. However, they would not move out from their protection until the armor came forward again, and the infantry retreated behind them. At 1200, they quit firing, and the Soviets broke camp and withdrew.

Learning Points

The Soviet frontal attacks, while first unsuccessful, managed to penetrate the canyon when aided by smoke:

- They failed to clear their flanks as they advanced
- They withdrew after they began to take casualties

An Unsuccessful Defense (1985)

In 1985, disputes over leadership and distribution of spoils prompted the Mujahideen to split into tribal units and move into the various canyons of Sharafat Koh. One prominent leader stayed in the Kale-e Kaneske Canyon where the Soviets concentrated their attack.

Facing Soviet troop columns, which surrounded the area with as many as 200 tanks and armored personnel carriers, Mohammad Shah's Mujahideen had 7 heavy machine guns, 3 82 mm recoilless rifles, 25 RPG-7s, and some medium machine guns. The Soviets spent the 1st day bombarding the Mujahideen with airstrikes and artillery fire.

On the 2nd day, they launched an attack against the canyon with tank-supported infantry, but the Mujahideen repulsed the assault. On the 3rd day, the Soviets attacked the canyon mouth again, but they also snuck up an adjacent canyon and landed forces on the mountain top (Map Point 1D). The Soviets crossed over into the Kale-e Kaneske Canyon and took the insurgent force from the rear, pinning the Mujahideen between the two Soviet forces as night fell (Map Point 2D).

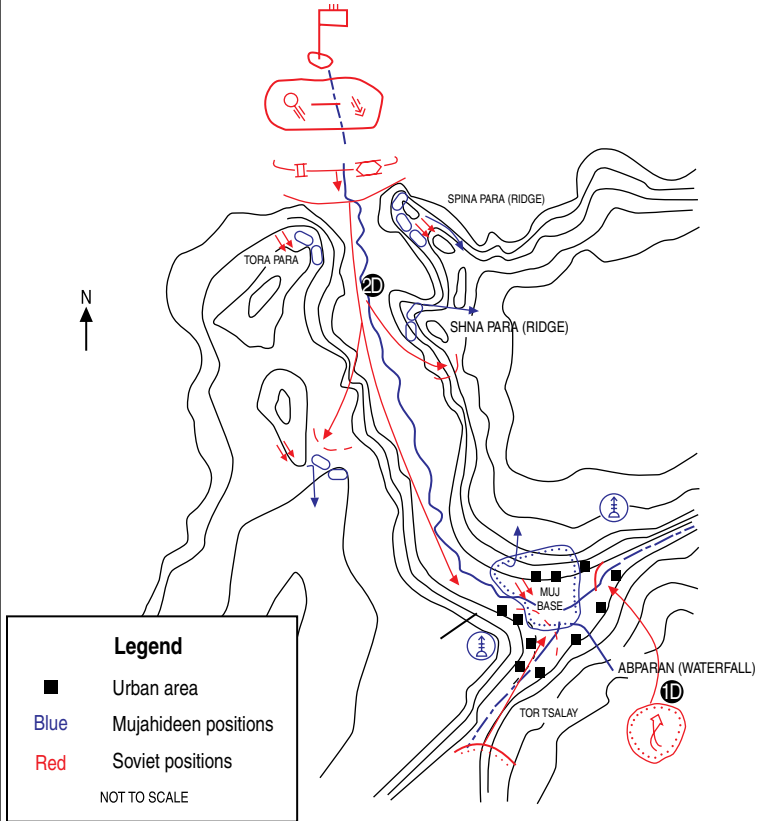
Mohammad Shah gathered his men and told them their choice was to stand and die to the last man or to try to break out as a group. The Mujahideen agreed to leave together, and some 70 slipped out between the Soviet forces, up the canyon, and into the mountains. Only a few old men remained. After pounding the canyon with artillery for another day—not knowing that most of the Mujahideen had already escaped—the Soviets entered the base. After mining the caves and looting what they could, Soviet forces turned their attention to the Mujahideen bases in the other canyons. Using assault troops to attack down into the canyons, they forced the Mujahideen to abandon their strongholds.

The Mujahideen also realized they could not hold large bases in Afghanistan indefinitely against the Soviets and moved bases, staging areas, and rest areas across the border into Iran.

Learning Points

- The Soviets were successful when they began to attack simultaneously from the heights and the desert floor:
 - They landed troops on the mountain tops and attacked down to link up with ascending forces
 - Some heliborne forces were isolated and destroyed in the mountains
- Once split up into several canyons, the Mujahideen lacked communications between groups and were unable to provide warning or coordinate actions, allowing the Soviets to defeat each group piecemeal
- Maintaining permanent bases forced the Mujahideen to maintain sufficient defenders at their camps, limiting the number of insurgents available for attacks against the Soviets and Afghan Army

**DEFENDING BASE CAMPS D
1985
KALE-E KANESKE CANYON**



An Unsuccessful Defense

Vignette 13: Defending Base Camps

The Fall of Chaghni Base Camp

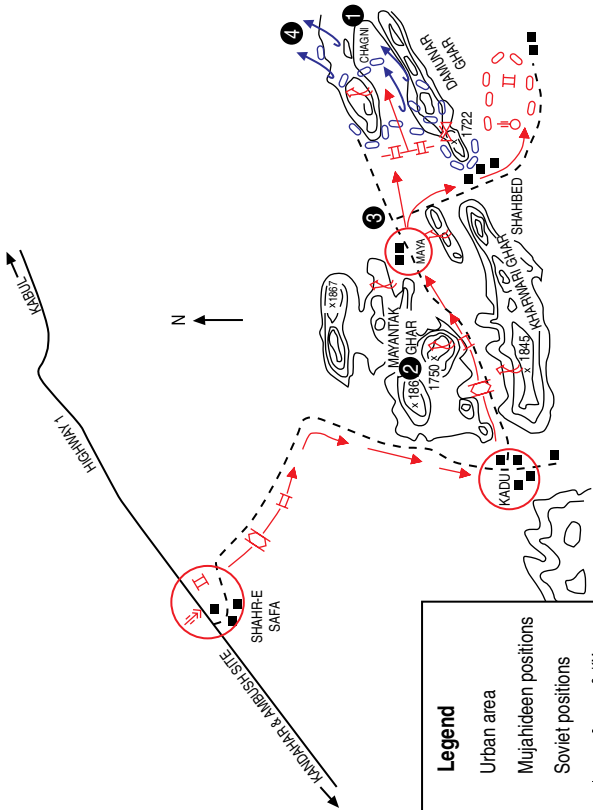
October 1986

Repeated successful ambushes of Soviet convoys at Shahr-e Safa, on the main road from Kabul to Kandahar, prompted a coordinated Soviet attack that overwhelmed Mujahideen defending their nearby base camp. The base was destroyed, 21 of 220 Mujahideen in the camp were killed, but the rest escaped.

The Chaghni base camp (Map Point 1) was in a saddle between two mountains 10 kilometers from Highway 1, where the ambushes occurred. With the exception of sentries, most of the insurgents were asleep when the attack began at 0400. The Soviets dropped illumination flares, followed by a heavy air and multiple-launched rocket bombardment. Helicopter-borne air assault forces secured high ground to protect a slow-moving column of tanks and mechanized infantry that had earlier traveled from Kandahar to Shahr-e Safa and then headed south and east toward the Mujahideen base (Map Point 2). The column split in two (Map Point 3), with a flanking detachment sent to the southwest to fire at the base and to attempt to block the insurgents' escape. Soviet tanks reached the camp in the afternoon.

The insurgents were without their commander during the attack. He had left the camp earlier to meet with other Mujahideen. The insurgents were armed with seven 82-mm recoilless rifles, five ZGU-1 heavy machine guns, six DShK heavy machine guns, some mortars, and many RPG-7s. They found the mortars ineffective against moving targets. Most of the fighting was at close range, and was between Soviet armored vehicles and the Mujahideen's recoilless rifles and RPGs. The insurgents claimed seven tanks, destroyed armored per-

DEFENDING BASE CAMPS
October 1986
CHAGHNI



The Fall of Chaghni Base Camp

sonnel carriers, and shot a jet down. The Mujahideen's situation became confused and chaotic as night fell, as they lost command and control. They continued fighting until 0300, then began to slip away to the northeast (Map Point 4) as they ran out of ammunition. The Soviets stayed for 24 hours and booby-trapped and mined the area. Although surviving Mujahideen later returned to the camp, the commander determined it was unsafe as a permanent base.

Learning Points

The Mujahideen lost their base camp because they took few precautions and were not aggressive in fighting the Soviet advance:

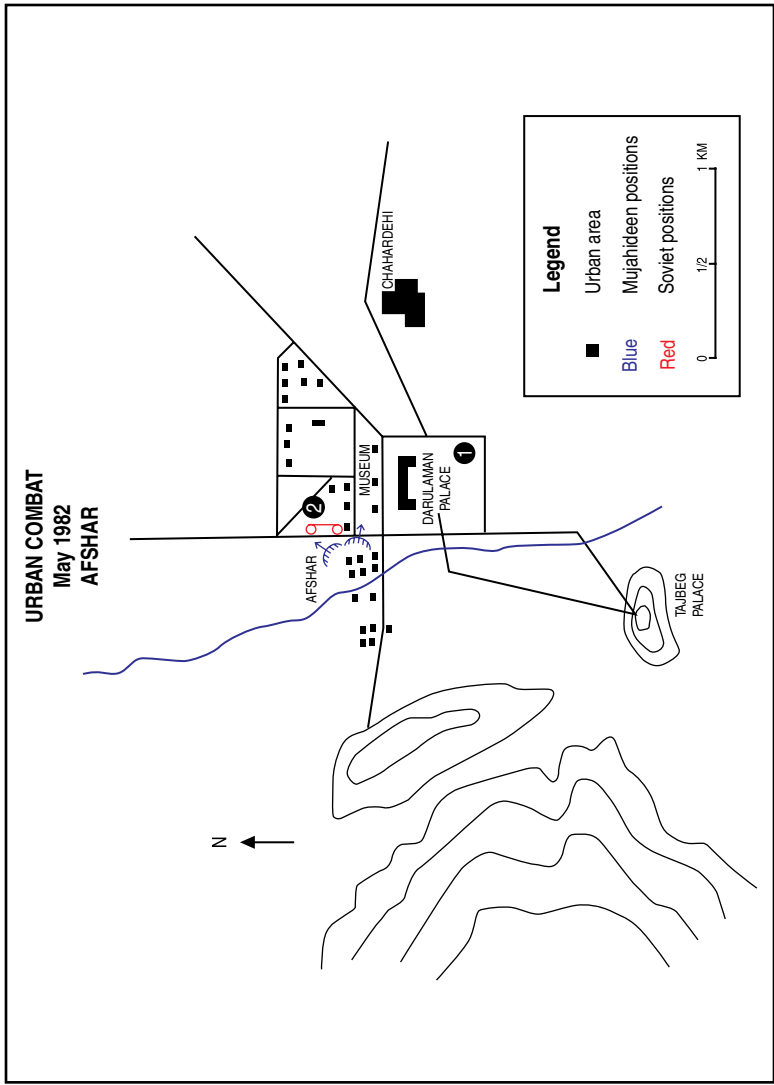
- They did not conduct reconnaissance
- They failed to hit the column or evacuate their base during the slow Soviet advance
- The mortar crews lacked sufficient training in engaging moving targets
- The failure of command and control reflected the lack of a chain of command in the absence of their leader

Soviet assaults on Mujahideen defenses earlier in the war were hampered by these factors:

- Reluctance to fight at night
- Over-reliance on firepower at the expense of maneuver
- Reluctance to operate far from armored vehicles.

As the war progressed the Soviets made significant changes:

- Development of better light infantry (though continually hampered by insufficient infantry forces)
- More night combat
- More skillful use of joint air assault and ground combat tactical elements



Afsar Ambush

Vignette 14: Urban Combat

Afshar Ambush

May 1982

Four Mujahideen ambushed a Soviet truck in front of a bazaar frequented by Soviet soldiers, killing one and capturing another. The insurgents suffered no casualties.

The leader of the small Mujahideen unit chose the ambush site after surveillance revealed a pattern in Soviet vehicle movement along the road from Kabul. Soviet soldiers would stop their vehicles at the bazaar in the village of Afshar, just north of the Soviet headquarters at the Darulaman palace (Map Point 1). They felt secure in the village because they often shopped there for food, cigarettes, and vodka.

Afshar was a good ambush site because there was room to set up the assault. The path to and from the ambush was mostly concealed, and the insurgents could easily reach Mujahideen bases and safe houses in the local district. Since the ambush was in the immediate vicinity of a Soviet base, the Mujahideen leader decided to conduct a quick attack on a single Soviet vehicle and to take prisoners, if possible.

The Mujahideen were led by the son of the regional front commander. They were armed with four Soviet assault rifles and a non-Soviet manufactured light anti-tank grenade launcher. They traveled to their objective at sunset; it was Ramadan, so most Muslims would be home eating after sunset. Around 1930, a Soviet light utility truck, carrying five soldiers, approached the ambush site from the east on its way to the military camp. When the truck was in the kill zone, the insurgent commander told his anti-tank gunner to fire, but the round narrowly missed. The truck stopped

(Map Point 2). The Soviet soldiers dismounted, took up positions, and started firing at random. During the brief firefight, one Soviet soldier was killed, two ran away to the southwest toward their camp, one crawled underneath the vehicle, and one rushed into an open grocery store and hid there.

The commander ordered one of his men to follow the man into the front of the shop, while he entered from the store's back door. They captured the Soviet soldier, tied his hands, and fearing a counterattack, quickly fled with the rest of the team, under the cover of darkness. The entire action lasted only a few minutes.

Learning Points

The Mujahideen ambush accomplished its objective due to:

- Detailed reconnaissance and knowledge of the enemy's movements and security arrangements
- Good selection of an ambush site
- Use of a small group of fighters with an effective mix of weapons
- Soviet negligence or overconfidence in not posting a sentry at a vulnerable point (Map Point 1)

Local Knowledge

- Ramadan celebrations factored in ambush timing
- The Mujahideen commanders and subcommanders were relatives

VIGNETTES FROM RECENT COALITION OPERATIONS

Vignette 15: Ambush

Hasty Ambush in Shewan, Farah Province

July 2007

Convoy Clears Shia Jangal, Moves onto Shewan

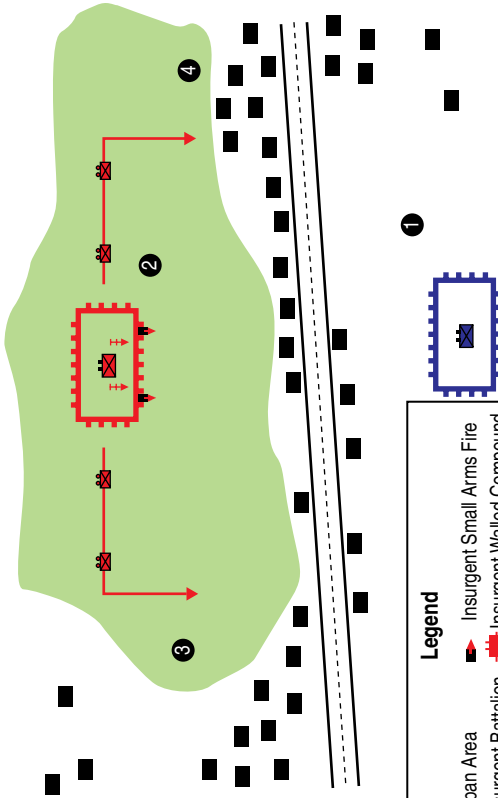
At about 0400 on 6 July 2007, about 35 U.S. Special Forces and police and army trainers moved out of Forward Operating Base Farah (Map Point 1, Shewan Map) to meet up with 400 Afghan soldiers from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Brigades of the Afghan Army's (ANA) 207 Corps—based at Farah, Shindand, and Herat—and led by the 1/207 ANA Brigade Commander. There were also some 200 police commanded by the provincial police chief.

Their mission was to conduct a cordon-and-search in the small village of Shia Jangal in Bala Baluk district in north-central Farah. There had been many IEDs, including a recent car bomb attack, along Highway 517, which ran by Shia Jangal. It was to be the largest Afghan-led operation since the new army stood up in 2003.

Some time after 0600, the convoy arrived at Shia Jangal, about 58 kilometers northeast of Farah city. The Afghan Army and police cordoned off the village and searched many of the houses. They found some weapons and IED-making materials.

There were few military-age males in the village or its surrounding area. Most had heard of the approaching convoy and left the area. The insurgents among them joined with several hundred others to the north. Shia Jangal would have been difficult to defend

HASTY AMBUSH
 July 2007
 Shewan, Farah



Legend	
■	Urban Area
■ (with red cross)	Insurgent Small Arms Fire
■ (with red dashed border)	Insurgent Walled Compound
■ (with blue dashed border)	Coalition Walled Compound
■ (with red cross and arrows)	Insurgent Squad Sized Element
→ (red)	Insurgent Fire and Maneuver
↑ (red)	Insurgent RPG Fire

Hasty Ambush in Shewan, Farah Province

against such a large Afghan and U.S. force. It was a small village of scattered farms in an open area. It was also not a major insurgent stronghold.

By 1100, the operation had ended; it was dubbed a great success as not a shot had been fired. The Afghan Army and police commanders phoned their superiors, the Farah governor, and other leaders. They then set up camp near the town and cooked a goat.

As they ate their lunch, they heard that the local Taliban were telling people that the Afghan Army was cowardly for not marching on Shewan, a larger town about 10 kilometers to the west. The ANA brigade commander decided to move on Shewan in the afternoon to maintain momentum. The police chief concurred, and so did the 207 ANA Corps commander in Herat and the Farah provincial governor.

The ANA commander then made some phone calls to leaders of two rival tribes in Shewan—the Noorzai and the Barakzai—to organize a *shura*. The purpose of the meeting was to get the area's tribal chiefs to agree to support the government and to allow a permanent Afghan Army garrison in the town. At the time, there were no soldiers or police inside Shewan; there were only two police checkpoints on the town's outskirts. A meeting place was agreed upon near a mosque by the side of the highway, near the center of town.

The U.S. training team and Special Forces commanders advised against going any further. They had not planned for an operation on Shewan, a relatively large, densely populated town with virtually no government presence and a long history of insurgent activity and resistance to outsiders. The ANA brigade commander and police chief refused to back down.

It is likely that once the ANA commander set a place and time for the *shura*, that some of the tribal leaders informed a group of insurgents based in Shewan. Others camped in the northern part of the district may have come into the town once word spread that the convoy was continuing on to Shewan. In all, as many as 200 insurgents massed in the town.

Most of them set up in a fortified compound in a small orchard over-looking the location where the *shura* was to take place. The compound was well-concealed with a clear field of fire and good exit routes north to the river. There they waited as the convoy moved slowly west along Highway 517.

Ambush at Shewan

Some time in the early afternoon, the convoy arrived on the outskirts of Shewan. A company of police moved in first, while the rest of the police set up positions around the town. The police company pushed deep into the town, turning north off the main road where they reportedly looted several houses.

The Special Forces team stayed outside the town along with some Afghan Army personnel. The ANA and ANP commanders, accompanied by the U.S. trainers and several companies of Afghan soldiers and police, drove into the town and left their vehicles on the highway near a mosque where the *shura* was to take place.

There they waited for the tribal chiefs and other elders to arrive, but few did. The only locals who turned up were four or five old men with little or no apparent authority. These men began talking with the ANA and ANP commanders. As they did, the U.S. police and army trainers noticed that civilians, including women and children, were trickling out of the town.

An interpreter then told the commander of the U.S. Army training team that he had overheard insurgents on their radios saying: “Now we have got them. They can’t escape.”

Almost immediately, the insurgents opened fire with automatic weapons and RPGs on the ANA, ANP, and their trainers (Map Point 2). Most managed to take cover inside the compound of a mosque south of the highway, but a small group that included the police chief were pinned down north of the road, where there was less protection.

Most of the fire was coming from a walled compound 200 meters north of the road, which was hidden behind a small orchard. The trees prevented the soldiers from determining the exact source of the fire.

The ANA’s embedded training team launched a heavy volley of suppressive fire as the rest of the group moved south of the road. A member of the police mentor team accompanying the police chief was shot in the leg as he crossed the highway.

Around the same time, insurgents carrying small arms and RPGs ambushed a company of Afghan police on a side-street, somewhere north of the highway about 500 meters northwest of the mosque, where the rest of the force was clustered. Insurgents killed about 16 police, wounded several others, and destroyed as many as six police vehicles. Those who survived abandoned their trucks and fled south of the highway where they joined the rest of the force.

The Special Forces team outside the town called for air support. They were told that since no air support had been scheduled for the second operation on Shewan in the afternoon, it would take as long as 90 minutes for the planes to arrive.

In the meantime, the volume of insurgent fire directed at the mosque became heavier and more accurate. The U.S. embedded trainers saw that many of the insurgents were leaving their compound north of the highway and moving east and west in an attempt to flank the soldiers' position (Map Point 3). The ANA and their trainers reportedly shot several of them. There were also reports coming in that an additional 100 or more insurgents were coming in from the north to join the ambush.

A coalition airplane arrived later and strafed the area north of the highway, killing many of the insurgents attempting to encircle the mosque. It then dropped a bomb that destroyed part of the walled compound where most of the insurgents had amassed. Approximately 25 were killed, but most survived unscathed.

The firing abruptly stopped. It appeared to the Afghan soldiers and their commanders that the bomb had destroyed the compound and killed most of the insurgents. The soldiers waited for nearly 30 minutes, but all was quiet.

In the meantime, the insurgents, most of whom had survived the bombing, held their fire—waiting either for the aircraft to fly away or for the soldiers to leave the cover of the mosque compound and enter the field of fire. One of the ANA battalion commanders assembled about 35 soldiers and 15 police under the command of a company commander and sent them to check on the damage to the insurgents' position, which was about 350 meters away.

The team walked across the road and marched into a large open area south of the insurgents' compound. They got about half-way there when the remaining insurgents opened fire, killing about five ANA and ANP, and forcing the rest to retreat. The aircraft dropped three more bombs on the insurgents' compound, killing scores of them—including their leader, a respected and experi-

enced Mujahideen commander who had fought against the Soviets in the 1980s. Those who survived dropped or hid their weapons and fled north to the river.

The soldiers and police decided not to check the building a second time. Instead, they immediately put their wounded on a small convoy back to FOB Farah, while the rest moved out about 90 minutes later. The next day, a local tribal leader told the Afghan and U.S. press that more than 100 civilians had been killed in U.S. air strikes in Shewan. A Coalition spokesperson denied that so many civilians had been killed, but provided no further details.

About a month later, a brigade of ANA and their embedded training team went back into Shewan with three groups of Special Forces, Italian troops, and pre-arranged close-air support. The insurgents fled the town long before the convoy arrived.

Shewan would be the site of several future fire-fights and IED attacks. In late May 2008, a team of U.S. Special Forces were ambushed in Shewan. As before, the soldiers saw civilians fleeing the village minutes before coming under heavy small arms and RPG fire from both sides of the road.

Learning Points

This event is significant for several reasons. First, the insurgents held their fire after the first bomb was dropped; they played dead, lured a company of ANA and ANP into the kill zone, and opened fire again in a disciplined fashion.

Second, several hundred insurgents had amassed in a single location with apparently strong command-and-control. The group's leader was also able to call in reinforcements from other parts of the district.

Third, the insurgents employed fire-and-maneuver tactics in an aggressive and disciplined fashion when they attempted to flank and encircle the mosque in which the soldiers and police were positioned.

Fourth, the insurgents knew far in advance that the convoy was moving onto Shewan. They also knew the location of the planned *shura*, and set their ambush in an ideal location. Some of the tribal leaders asked to attend the *shura* probably informed the insurgents of the meeting's location. The tribal chiefs may have conspired with the insurgents to arrange the meeting near the insurgents' compound, where an ambush would be most effective.

Fifth, the insurgents set up firing positions in an easily defensible, fortified position on a hill surrounded by trees. The building was off the main road, with a clear path north to the river, where Coalition forces would not be able to pursue them except by foot.

Sixth, close-air support proved decisive. Had it not been available, the convoy might not have been able to get out of the town safely. The insurgents had the soldiers and police pinned down in the mosque compound. After more than an hour of fighting, it was four bombs dropped by Coalition aircraft that ultimately forced insurgents to break contact.

Finally, the sight of civilians fleeing the town in the moments before the engagement was a clear indication that a major ambush was in the offing. The size of the convoy, poor command and control among the Afghan forces, and the fact that they were scattered may have prevented the convoy from getting out of the area in time.

Vignette 16: Ambush

Series of Complex Ambushes Gulistan, Farah Province

October 2007

Insurgents Take District Centers, Ambush Reaction Force

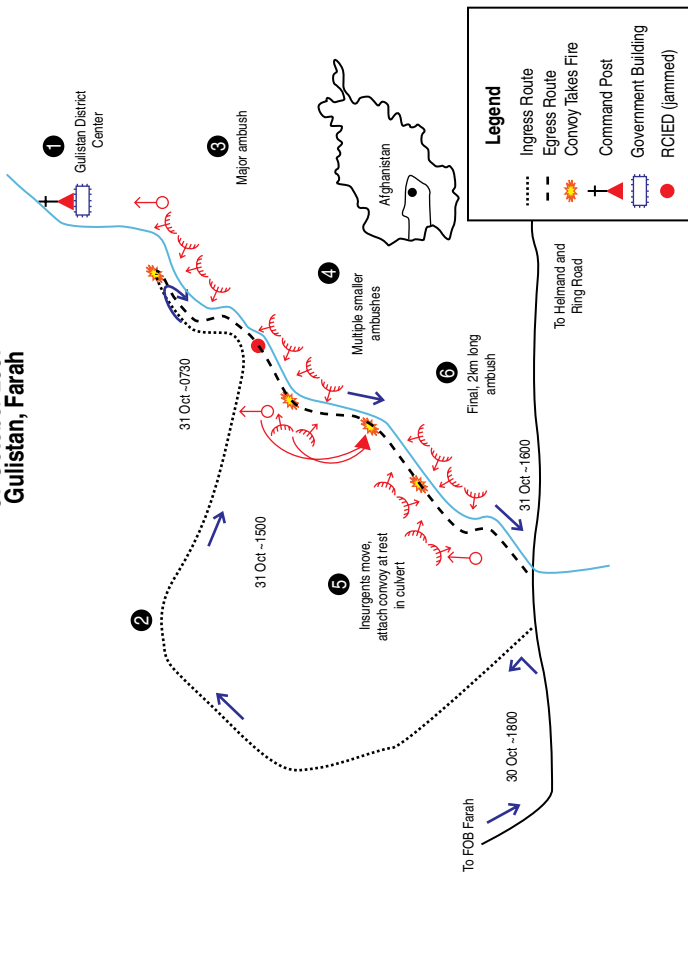
A large group of Taliban fighters over-ran the Gulistan District Center (Map Point 1) on 29 October 2007, reportedly killing more than 20 policemen. The rest fled, along with the district police chief and sub-governor. The Taliban reportedly beheaded 16 people after occupying the town.

On the next day, as U.S. and Afghan forces scrambled to respond, another group of insurgents over-ran the Bakwa district center. Both towns were in isolated areas known to be thoroughfares for insurgents and opium smugglers. Their defenses consisted of a small contingent of local police far from possible reinforcements.

In late 2007, many insurgents had reportedly flooded into Farah province after fleeing Coalition operations in Helmand and Kandahar provinces to the east. They may have amassed in Gulistan because it was a well-known transit area with very little Coalition or Afghan government presence. The insurgents most probably drove west down the Ring Road, turned north at Delaram near the border with Helmand and Nimruz, and followed the river up into the Gulistan valley.

As soon as the Gulistan district center fell, several hundred heavily armed insurgents took up ambush positions along the Gulistan River. Many took cover behind rocks along the face of a large mountain overlooking the northern-most entry point into the valley. There they set up mortar positions and pre-registered the mortars.

SERIES OF COMPLEX AMBUSHES 31 October 2007 Gulistan, Farah



Series of Complex Ambushes Gulistan, Farah Province

There were only two routes into Gulistan: from the south along the river and from the west through the mountains. The insurgents chose to attack just north of where the two routes converged, near the village of Ghoziney.

Another large group of fighters concentrated at a chokepoint in the southern part of the valley, at the tail end of the only viable egress route for a convoy under fire. The rest spread out in small groups along numerous points. Most took cover in small, concealed rock structures overlooking the river.

The insurgents had covered all the possible routes into and out of the valley. They knew the likely path the convoy would take, exactly when it left, and about what time it would arrive at the ambush site. They also knew the likely composition of the convoy, based on their knowledge of what forces were stationed in the area and how the Coalition had responded to similar attacks on district centers in the past.

On the evening of 30 October, a quick reaction force made up of some 70–80 Afghan Army troops and police, led by 20–30 U.S. trainers, left for Gulistan. Thinking that the insurgents may have planted mines on the main road along the river, the convoy approached from the west, using a long and difficult mountain path (Map Point 2). They drove all night and entered the valley in the early morning hours of 31 October.

They then drove north for about 2 hours toward the district center. At around 0730 they arrived at a chokepoint in the valley, with a large mountain on the eastern side, where a large group of insurgents were lying in wait with machine guns, RPGs, and preregistered mortars. With the sun rising directly ahead, the soldiers in the convoy could barely see (Map Point 3).

The insurgents opened fire with small arms from multiple locations on the mountain face. They then launched a carefully aimed mortar, which struck a police vehicle at the head of the convoy, killing most of its occupants. Four Afghan police died in the initial ambush. Several other Afghan Army and police vehicles—all unarmored Ford Ranger pickup trucks—were damaged or destroyed (Map Point 4).

The convoy then turned around and moved south about 200 meters where it ran into another, smaller ambush. The soldiers fired back, but could not see many of the insurgent positions. They decided to get off the main road and away from the open area around the river. They drove about 400–500 meters up a jagged mountain path and eventually found some cover beyond the range of the insurgents' weapons (Map Point 5).

There they stopped, briefly recuperated, and called FOB Farah to secure close air support, but none was available. As they did so, the insurgents moved out of their ambush positions to get within range (Map Point 5). The convoy commander then decided to move. He led the team back down to the river and sped down the main road at 35–40 MPH.

For almost another 1,000 meters, the convoy was under continuous fire from many small positions along the mountains overlooking the river, stretched in a long line down the valley. Many of these positions were small rock structures built days before. The convoy drove over at least one IED, which did not detonate. They met up with a small contingent of police trainers from Helmand moving in 3 or 4 HMMWVs.

As the insurgent fire trailed off, the convoy took cover in a culvert with a mountain on one side and a village on the other. There, the group spent about two hours recuperating and planning to go back

north, launch a counter-attack, and retrieve the bodies of dead Afghan soldiers and police.

In the meantime, the insurgents moved out of their ambush positions and prepared to attack the convoy while it was at rest. They struck with mortars and heavy small-arm fire. The Afghan Army and police panicked, jumped out of their vehicles, and ran in different directions. The insurgents shot many of them down as they ran into the open. The U.S. trainers then followed them in their HMMWV and bundled the Afghans into their vehicles.

Seeing that the insurgents were amassing for another, even larger attack, the U.S. trainers jettisoned their plan to go back north. Instead, they pulled everyone together and pushed south along the river as fast as they could go on the narrow, dirt track. The road soon flattened out and the fire trailed off somewhat.

The convoy then passed through another chokepoint—a long gauntlet with high ground close on the right and the river on the left. There, the convoy came under heavy fire from reinforced positions as close as 75 meters. For nearly 2 kilometers, the soldiers were under unceasing, heavy fire from both sides. As soon as they drove out of range of one position, they came within range of another. Every vehicle in the convoy was hit several times (Map Point 6).

After some 20 minutes of driving, the convoy finally pushed through the ambush. At around 1600—after nearly 8 hours of fighting—the troops reached the highway at the mouth of the Gulistan valley, where they met with a larger relief column and returned to FOB Farah outside the provincial capital.

Learning Points

The attacks on the district centers had taken Coalition and Afghan forces by surprise in a region where there were very few combat forces. The nearest maneuver units were Italian troops in Herat several hours away. There was only one platoon plus of Afghan National Army (ANA) in Farah province at the time. The rest of the 207 ANA Corps was tied down in Baghdis province in the northwest.

The insurgents were evidently expecting a hasty response by a mostly Afghan convoy, and were lying in wait. The quick reaction force went out immediately without air support or dedicated U.S. combat forces, other than 20–30 U.S. trainers.

Informants in the Afghan Army and police may have told the insurgents that the convoy was coming and the route it planned to take. Even if the mission was not compromised, anyone watching the convoy from the road would know its composition, where it was going, by what route, and the likely time it would arrive.

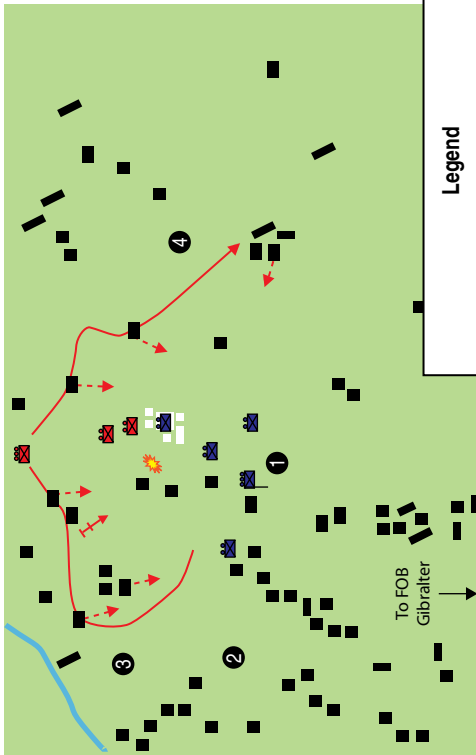
Though no attack of similar magnitude has occurred in Farah since, there have been numerous subsequent reports of insurgent activity in Gulistan and Bakwa districts. As they did in late 2007, insurgents have entered Farah from Helmand in large numbers—often fleeing Coalition operations to the east—where they have massed in large numbers to attack vulnerable checkpoints and convoys.

Gulistan is a major transit point for insurgents and opium smugglers moving to and from Afghanistan's southern and western provinces. As long as this route remains open, it is likely that anti-government forces will continue to mass there in large numbers, particularly during the poppy harvest. There they may attack iso-

lated checkpoints and convoys, over-run poorly guarded district centers, and set up IEDs and ambushes along major ingress and egress routes.

The 31 October ambush was noteworthy for several reasons. First, it involved multiple firing positions down a mountain valley from which the convoy could not escape. Second, the attack on the district center may have been a ruse to lure the convoy up the valley, where it would be vulnerable to attack. Third, at one point the insurgents moved out of their fixed positions, pursued the convoy to a culvert where it was hiding, and attacked again—causing the Afghan soldiers and police to panic and disperse. Finally, the attack involved several hundred insurgents moving in a well-coordinated fashion across a large area.

DISPERSED AMBUSH ON FOOT PATROL
 January 2008
 FOB Gibraltar, Helmand



Legend

■	Urban Area	☒	Platoon of Insurgents
□	Uninhabited Building	☒	Squad of Insurgents
☒	Platoon Commander	↗	Machine Gun
☒	Squad	☀	First Contact

Ambush of Foot Patrol Near FOB Gibraltar, Helmand Province

Vignette 17: Ambush

Ambush of Foot Patrol Near FOB Gibraltar, Helmand Province

January 2008

Presence Patrol Engaged from Multiple Locations

At about 1230 on 2 January 2008, members of Royal Marines 11 Troop, D Company, 40 Commando, Royal Marines marched north out of FOB Gibraltar. The Marines had arrived in the area only weeks before. Their purpose was to familiarize themselves with the heavily cultivated region to the north—an area that had seen little coalition presence, and where some British and Czech soldiers had been killed the previous year.

The platoon walked across open fields in diamond formation, with 24 Section in the lead, 22 and 23 Sections on the left and right flanks, and 21 in the rear (Map Point 1). About 2 kilometers north of the FOB, the sections split up: 21 remained behind as a support element, 22 Section occupied an over-watch position on a small hill dotted with buildings, 23 Section pushed east, and 24 Section marched north and passed through several occupied buildings (Map Point 2). Then, 24 Section walked toward a compound of uninhabited buildings on a small rise.

When the platoon was about 150 meters west of this compound, they saw three insurgents marching south toward the buildings carrying AK-47s and RPGs. The insurgents opened fire. The Marines fired back, killing all three.

Several insurgents then opened fire on 22 Section (with assault rifles and a heavy machine gun) from compounds to the northwest (Map Point 3), while others moved further west and south—

attempting to out-flank the patrol. A group of three insurgents then attempted to push south and occupy the compound of uninhabited buildings on the hill near 24 Section, but were killed before they could do so.

A group of insurgents then moved around to the east, occupying two separate compounds (Map Point 4). From there, they fired on 23 Section, pinning the Marines down in an irrigation ditch. In the meantime, a small group of insurgents to the far west managed to push south where they targeted the platoon commander and his mortar team.

At that time, 21 Section moved north to join 24, and both sections pushed into the cluster of uninhabited buildings that the insurgents had tried to occupy. As it did so, the section took fire from another position to the north. Once inside, the Marines took up elevated positions. From there, they could see some locals who continued to dig in their fields despite the shooting.

Two F-15 fighter jets then strafed one of the compounds to the east, killing four insurgents. As darkness fell around 1700, the platoon commander ordered the sections to withdraw. The Marines continued to take fire from several locations as they moved south. They eventually broke contact about 1 kilometer north of the base and returned to the FOB.

Subsequent Clearing Operation Takes Fire

Nine days later, D Company launched a clearing operation to the north involving artillery, air support, and two platoons—Troop and a platoon-sized reconnaissance force. 11 Troop moved along the east side of the Helmand River, and the recon unit a few hundred meters farther to the east.

As the force pushed north of the FOB, insurgents fired from some of the same buildings they used on 2 January—particularly, the compounds to the west near the river. In all, there were some 30–40 insurgents involved in the fighting.

The insurgents soon realized they were facing a much larger force with substantially greater firepower, and gradually withdrew north in a disciplined fashion—providing cover fire for others evacuating the dead and wounded. As the insurgents withdrew, they fired from one compound to slow the Marines’ advance, then moved to another building, and fired again before moving on. Apache helicopters fired on the insurgents as they moved across open fields.

When the Marines reached a point about 5 kilometers north of the FOB, they received reports of small cars and pickup trucks dropping off fresh fighters near the highway to the east in groups of 4–5. Many moved through an apparently hostile village to the north.

At about 1500, the Marines stopped their advance, broke contact, and pushed back south to FOB Gibraltar. Some 18 insurgents died in the operation—most of them killed by Apache helicopters.

After 11 January, 11 Troop and others from D Company conducted numerous patrols north of FOB Gibraltar, but saw little fighting other than small hit-and-run attacks and IEDs. The operation reportedly pushed most of the hardcore insurgents out of the area.

Learning Points

In the 2 January ambush, the insurgents made substantial use of fire and maneuver, constantly changing their firing positions. Upon first contact, they immediately moved to flank the Marines and move in behind them. Insurgents fired from fortified buildings—many of them houses with the people still inside—while

others moved. A small group of insurgents also tried to close with a squad of Marines, and may have gotten as close as 50 meters.

In the clearing operation on 11 January, the insurgents again made use of fire and maneuver—this time to cover their withdrawal. A forward element moved from building to building, firing at the advancing force, while the rest evacuated the dead and wounded. The Marines found some blood trails and discarded weapons, but no dead or wounded insurgents.

In both engagements, the insurgents had an easy escape available through cultivated areas to the north where there were no coalition forces to stop them. They could then hide their weapons, walk to the main road, and drive away in vehicles.

CONCLUSION

Afghan insurgents understand that guerrilla warfare is a contest of endurance and national will. While many of the battles in this guide occurred more than 20 years ago, these stories offer important lessons about current Afghan insurgent tactics.

Technology has added range and accuracy, but the terrain still dictates tactics, and the Mujahideen were quite comfortable applying their time-honored tactics against a modern foe. Much more innovation was required from the Soviet forces. The helicopter and the antipersonnel mine created severe tactical problems that were outside the Mujahideen historical experience. The Mujahideen eventually found ways to work around these new technologies. Where innovation was not required, the Mujahideen stayed with the tried and true. Thus, the basic Mujahideen ambush and pursuit were little changed from last century, whereas their actions against an air assault or a fortified security post were quickly developed out of necessity.

Technology

The Soviets and Afghan Army tried to stay at least 300 meters away from the Mujahideen—out of Kalashnikov and RPG-7 range. This tactical timidity led to the Mujahideen acquiring crew-served weapons. Over time, heavy machine guns, recoilless rifles, mortars, and portable multiple rocket launcher systems became an essential part of the Mujahideen arsenal, which the Mujahideen used to pin their enemy in place to get close enough to use their Kalashnikovs and RPGs. Crew-served weapons also limited guerrilla mobility.

Disunity of Command

During the 1980s, the Mujahideen were nominally divided into seven main factions, but the disunity was much greater. There were factions within factions. Old disputes and disagreements were not always put aside for the duration of the war. There were frequent armed clashes between Mujahideen of different factions. The reputation of certain factions was that they were more interested in fighting other Mujahideen than in fighting Soviets. In some combat zones, such as Kandahar, the Mujahideen of different factions cooperated readily, despite the politics of their factions.

The Mujahideen structure would be difficult to fit into a line-and-block chart, and there was never a central leadership that was critical to the cause. Yet, this inefficient disunity may have been a strength of the Mujahideen. Regardless of which commanders or leaders were killed, the Mujahideen effort would continue, and the Soviets would never be short of enemies.

On the tactical level, the Mujahideen were prepared for a long war. Their goal was to hit, survive, and fight again. Thus, the Mujahideen could not exploit success. After a victory, they went home. Group leaders, let alone loose coalitions, could not hold a force together for long after a fight. Thus, tactical victory could not be converted into operational gain.

Logistics

Initially, the Mujahideen lived in the villages they defended, and the villagers provided food and shelter. Ammunition, weapons, and other materiel came from the local bazaar or Iran or Pakistan. Soviet air and artillery attacked villages, crops, orchards, livestock herds, granaries, water mills, and irrigation systems. With the agricultural system destroyed, the Mujahideen had to transport

their food and forage. The Mujahideen factions responded to this crisis by establishing fixed supply bases within Afghanistan. The larger supply bases were in the mountains near the Pakistan border. Smaller supply bases were caches hidden outside towns and villages. The Mujahideen dependence on large fixed supply bases meant that they had to defend them. This provided a viable target set for Soviet air and artillery.

Tactics

The Mujahideen were natural light infantry. They were hardy, tough, courageous, and local. They had high morale, a warrior spirit, and excellent tactical intelligence. They were naturals at the ambush and pursuit. They were raised from childhood with weapons, but they lacked unit training and discipline. Training varied from valley to valley and force to force. The Mujahideen were not trained to a standard, and the quality of individual groups was a function of their leadership.

The Mujahideen had warrior spirit, and their focus was on battle, not easy line-of-communication targets. They wanted noise, excitement, personal glory, and the spoils of war. It was difficult to persuade the Mujahideen to attack the lucrative and easy oil pipelines when security outposts were available. The Mujahideen had some distinct tactical faults. If they were in their own area, they tended to ignore local security and could be surprised. They were predictable in their selection of ambush sites and shelling sites.

Finally, the Mujahideen were a tactical force with a tactical focus, but, when the occasion demanded, they were capable of operational-level actions. Such actions as Operation Gashay demonstrated this capability. These actions were usually under the planning or leadership of former officers of the Afghan Army. The Mujahideen were not capable of transitioning quickly into a conventional force.

APPENDIX A: VIGNETTE CROSS-REFERENCE GUIDE

Field Guide Vignette	Operation	Vignette Title from The Other Side of The Mountain
1	Ambush	1-8 Ambush Near Abdullah-e Burj
2	Raid	2-5 Raid on Pul-E Charkhi Radio Transmitter Station
3	Shelling Attack	3-2 A New Year's Present for the Soviets
4	Attacking a Strong Point	4-1 Taking Alingar District Capital
5	Blocking Lines of Communication	6-1 Carving Up Regiments on the Approach to Wazi
6		6-6 Operation Ghashey (Arrow in Pashto)
7	Siege Warfare	7-2 Dehrawud Offensive
8	Defending Against Raids	8-1 Soviet Raid on Mujahideen Hideout Sayghani
9	Defending Against a Cordon and Search	10-1 Battle of Baraki Barak
10		10-3 Battle of Kama
11		10-4 Defending Against a Cordon and Search Operation in Parwan

Field Guide Vignette	Operation	Vignette Title from The Other Side of The Mountain
12	Defending Base Camps	11-5 Battles for Sharafat Koh Mountain Fortress
13		11-14 The Fall of Chaghni Base Camp
14	Urban Combat	14-4 Ahshar Ambush

The final three vignettes in this guide are from recent operations in Afghanistan and are not included in this table.

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

Air Assault - Helicopter borne assault into an area.

APC - Armored personnel carrier, any of the wheeled or tracked Soviet-manufactured combat vehicles used to transport soldiers.

Commander - During the war against the Soviets, the Mujahideen had no rank structure, so the term commander applied to all military commanders whether they led to 10 or 1,000 men.

DRA - Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. The communist government of Afghanistan.

DShK - Soviet-manufactured 12.7 mm heavy machine gun. It is a primary armament on Soviet-manufactured armored vehicles and is effective against ground and air defense firing. It has a rate of fire of 540 to 600 rounds per minute, a maximum range of 7,000 meters, and an effective range of 1,500 meters against ground targets and 1,000 meters against air targets.

Enfield - British manufactured .303 bolt-action rifle that was the standard British infantry weapon from 1895 through the Korean War. Its long range and powerful cartridge made it a favorite in India and Afghanistan. It has a maximum range of 2,550 meters and an effective range of 800 meters. It has a 10-round magazine and can carry an additional round in the chamber, so the Mujahideen called them 11-shooters.

Ghar - Pashto term for mountain

Kalashnikov - Soviet automatic assault rifle. The AK-47 and AKM Kalashnikovs fire a 7.62 mm round, while the AK-74 fires a 5.45 mm round.

Kandow - Pashto term for mountain pass.

KHAD - The secret police of the Afghan government responsible for detecting and eradicating domestic political opposition, subverting the Mujahideen, penetrating opposition groups abroad and providing military intelligence to the armed forces through its military wing. The KHAD was patterned after the Soviet KGB and GRU and apparently reported to the KGB.

Lashkar - A Pashto term for tribal armed force.

LZ - Landing zone.

Mullah - Islamic religious leader or Imam.

MRL - (Multiple rocket launcher) A ground-mounted or truck-mounted rocket artillery system capable of firing a salvo of rockets at a target.

Mujahideen - (holy warrior) A member of the Afghan resistance. This term was used to describe Afghan insurgents who fought against the Soviets during the 1980s.

Pashtun - The dominant ethnic group (nearly 50 percent) of Afghanistan who speak Pashto. The British historically referred to these people as Pathans.

Ramadan - The Islamic holy month of fasting.

RPG-7 - Soviet manufactured shoulder-fired antitank weapon that fires a shaped-charge rocket. Effective range is 300 meters.

RPG-18 - Soviet manufactured single-shot, shoulder-fired anti-tank weapon that fires a 66-mm shaped-charged rocket. The rocket is stored in an extendable storage tube that also functions as a

launcher. The launcher is thrown away after use. It has an effective range of 135 meters and is a copy of the USM72A2 LAW.

Shia - The minority Islamic community in Afghanistan following the Imami Shiism (the dominant faith in neighboring Iran) or Ismaili Shiism.

Sunni - The majority Islamic community in Afghanistan. More than two-thirds of the populace are Sunnis, followers of the Hanafi School.

ZGU - (Zenitnaya Gornaya Ustanovka) Mountain air defense weapons mount. Any Soviet air defense weapon that can disassemble for transport into the mountains by pack animals or porters. Usually this means that the weapons mount or pedestal has no wheels.

ZGU-1 - A ZPU-1 mounted on a ZGU mount.

ZPU-1 - A Soviet 14.5-mm ground-mounted antiaircraft machine gun that is towed on a light, two-wheeled carriage. The system is built around a single-barreled KPV heavy machine gun, which has a cyclic rate of fire of 600 rounds per minute and a practical rate of fire of 150 rounds per minute. The belt-fed machine gun feeds from a 150 round box and has a maximum horizontal range of 7,000 meters and a maximum effective antiaircraft range of 1,400 meters. It weighs 581 kilograms.

APPENDIX C: SYMBOLS

SYMBOLS LIBRARY



Ambush



Truck



Defensive Position



Command Post
Regiment



Tank



Command Post
Brigade



Observation
Post



Command Post
Battalion



Recoiless Rifle



Multiple Rocket
Launcher



RPG-7



Mortar



Attack



Heavy Anti Aircraft
Machine Gun



Helicopter Insertion



122 mm Howitzer



Infantry Fighting
Vehicle

