

OPERATION ANACONDA CASE STUDY



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Written By:

Major Edgar Fleri, USAF
Colonel Ernest Howard, USAF
Jeffrey Hukill, Doctrine Analyst
Thomas R. Searle, Military Defense Analyst

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College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research and Education
Maxwell AFB Alabama

Organization Before Anaconda

The rapid evolution of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan resulted in unusual organizational structures. The CENTCOM commander was designated the overall supported commander and coalition/joint force commander for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM on September 12, 2001. Due to various political issues, CENTCOM maintained its headquarters at MacDill AFB, FL. On September 11, 2001, CENTCOM's Air Force component already had a forward deployed headquarters at Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia led by the Combined Force Air Component Commander (CFACC), and CENTCOM's Naval component had its headquarters in Bahrain so as ENDURING FREEDOM developed, these two components already had the infrastructure to play their roles in accordance with joint doctrine. However, the Land Component and the SOF component were not already deployed into CENTCOM's Area of Responsibility (AOR.) CENTCOM's Army component deployed into Kuwait from Egypt (Bright Star) in November but by the time they were up and running, the main conventional force on the ground in Afghanistan was TF 58 from the USMC and combat had already tapered off. The SOF component did not suffer from a lack of forces, but the early insertion of SOF forces and the extremely high visibility of their operations meant that CENTCOM and the CAOC quickly grew accustomed to bypassing the Joint Force Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC) and talking directly to the JSOTFs. JFSOCC deployed forward into Qatar in early November (See Chart 2). However, JFSOCC took some time taking over its doctrinal role because of the shortcuts everyone had gotten used to using, and the use of the

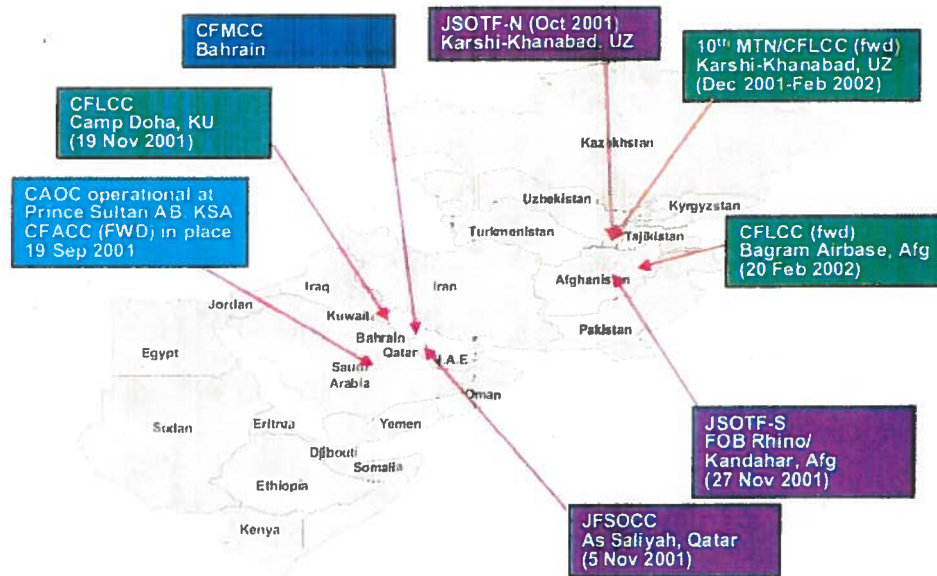


Chart 2: Theater Arrival Dates for Key Service and Joint Headquarters Involved in Operation ANACONDA

JFSOCC commander for various special missions on behalf of the theater commander. By the time the Combined Forces Land Component Commander (CFLCC) and JFSOCC were able to take control of their operations in Afghanistan, the focus was on SSE missions. These missions worked best under decentralized planning and decentralized execution and ran quite smoothly with little planning effort by the CFLCC or JFSOCC staff. This planning style worked effectively for the SSE missions, but is contrary to doctrinal planning concepts taught in other services, such as the USAF. Instead of detailed functional component planning, JFSOCC relied heavily on its JSOTFs, and CFLCC established a CFLCC forward element in Uzbekistan commanded by the 10th Mountain Division Commander and consisting of some elements of his division staff (the bulk of the division staff was in the Balkans supporting operations there). The initial focus of the CFLCC forward was getting logistical activities in Afghanistan under control.

Nevertheless, by January, there was very little for the CFLCC forward to do and there was talk about rotating them back to the U.S.

The key to success in early combat operations in Afghanistan was the lash-up between U.S. SOF on the ground with friendly Afghan forces and U.S. air and space power. Initially this was a challenge. Due to the non-linear, unconventional battlespace the routinely practiced standard joint fires concept of operations was not followed. Without the presence of designated maneuver forces, classic forward line of own troops (FLOT) deconfliction measures were rarely used to define ground commander's area of influence.¹

In Joint doctrine, SOF as a stand-alone force is not as well integrated into the Theater Air Control System (TACS)/Army Air Ground System (AAGS) as are conventional forces. SOF units have Tactical Air Control Parties (TACPs) but no Air Liaison Officers (ALO) and nothing comparable to the Air Support Operations Center (ASOC.) The SOF representative at the CAOC, the Special Operations Liaison Element (SOLE), is typically much smaller than the Army's Battlefield Coordination Detachment (BCD) that would coordinate conventional ground and air operations.

The non-linear battlespace issue and doctrinal weakness of the SOF/TACS lashup was solved fairly quickly. SOF units attached Ground Forward Air Controllers (GFACs) to virtually every unit operating in Afghanistan. In addition, the 18th Air Support Operations Group (ASOG) commander established an Air Control Element (ACE) at each SOF Task Force with forces mainly drawn from personnel normally assigned to work with 10th Mountain Division. Finally, the SOLE at the CAOC was reinforced until it became a very robust organization with over forty

¹ Operation SWIFT FREEDOM, the seizure of forward operating base Rhino by TF 58 was a notable exception due to the conventional nature of this operation.

personnel. This GFAC to ACE to SOLE/CAOC air request structure worked extremely well for these types of small geographically dispersed operations (See Figure 1.)

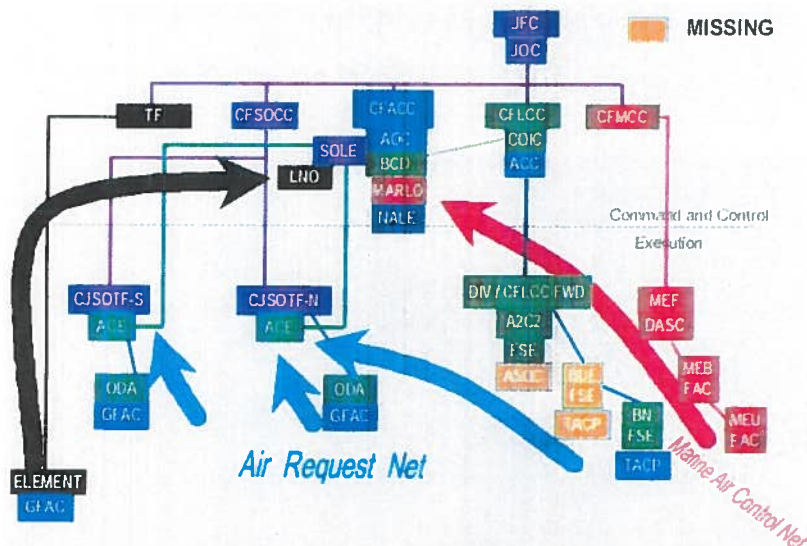
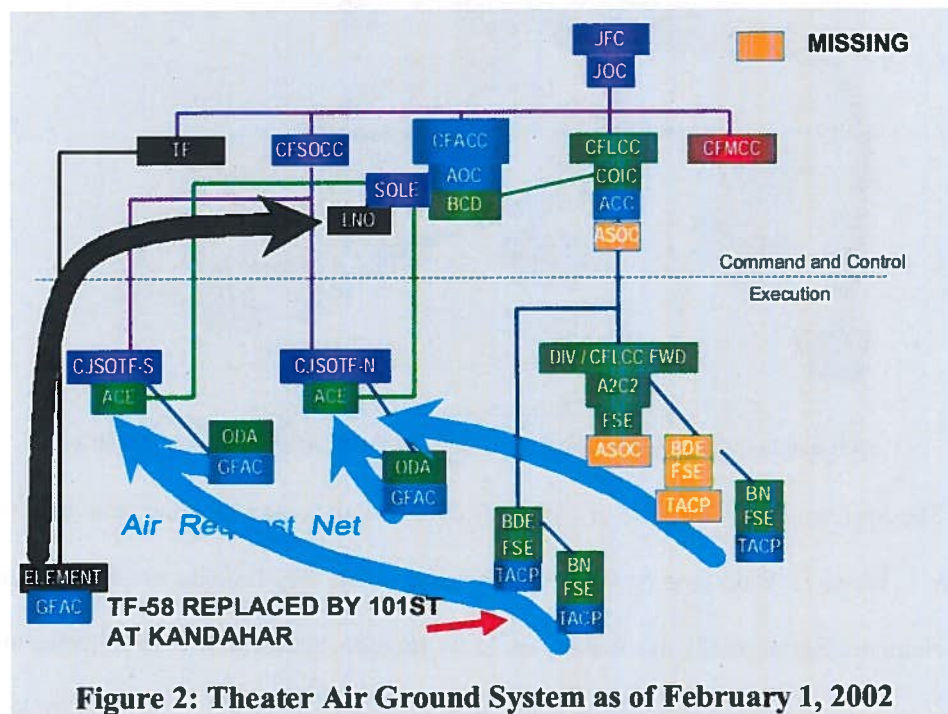


Figure 1: Ad hoc Theater Air Ground System (TAGS) January 1, 2002

The Marines of TF 58 came in with their doctrinal air to ground command and control structure.² When TF Rakkasan replaced TF 58 at Kandahar, they brought the doctrinal air liaison elements that normally accompany an Army brigade, but these liaison elements are designed on the assumption that brigades only operate under a Division, which in turn only operates under a Corps. Without the Air Liaison of a Division and the ASOC of a Corps, the brigade (TF Rakkasan) had plenty of GFACs but lacked the higher staff personnel and equipment to prioritize and coordinate all the requests that those GFACs could generate.

When the 1-87 IN and elements of 10th Mtn Div staff deployed into the CENTCOM AOR, they requested to deploy their air liaison elements. These requests for forces were denied by CENTCOM in an effort to keep down the number of personnel deployed and likely due to the

fact that the force protection and headquarters missions assigned to the units did not seem to require air liaisons.³ Since 10th Mtn Division did not have its Air Liaison element and no part of the 101st Abn Div structure was present, CFLCC Forward and TF Rakkasan utilized the ACEs established with the northern and southern JSOTFs, respectively (See Figure 2.)⁴ This setup was



not a hindrance as long as the type of operations being conducted was support of small geographically separated SOF teams. However, it would prove to be a challenge in a normal conventional ground operation in a small geographic area.

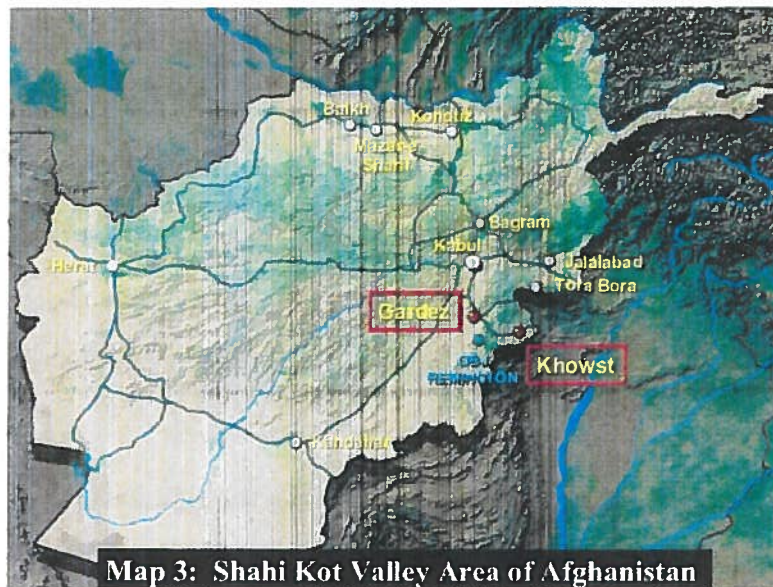
² Forward Air Controllers at Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) level and a Direct Air Support Center (DASC) at the task force level reporting up to the Marine Liaison (MARLO) at the CAOC.

³ 1-87 IN was assigned force protection of air base at Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan and elements of 10th Mtn Div staff created CFLCC forward headquarters.

⁴ 18th ASOG Commander who supports both the 10th Mtn Div and the 101st Abn Div was aggressive in getting his personnel deployed into the AOR despite CENTCOM's denial during the request for forces process. This effort resulted in many of the USAF personnel normally associated with 10th Mtn Div being in the AOR even though they had not been able to deploy with the 1-87 IN or the elements of the division staff.

ANACONDA Planning

In early January 2002, the CFLCC reported that the largest concentration of al Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan appeared to be in the area between the towns of Kowst and Gardez in southeastern Afghanistan (See Map 3.) On further study it appeared that the Shahi Kot Valley,



an area about 9 kilometers long and 5 kilometers wide, was the hub of enemy activity with a significant number of hard-core enemy fighters hiding in caves and among the civilians in the villages of Marzak, Babukhel, and Serkhankhel (See Map 4.)



Over time, intelligence estimates of actual enemy strength varied significantly and the numbers did not seem to be adjudicated during planning. Like the Tora Bora region, the Shahi Kot area was one where the Afghan guerrillas enjoyed significant success against the Soviets back in the 1980s, and it was still dotted with improved caves, bunkers and entrenchments. Based on the above considerations, JSOTF DAGGER was working to develop friendly Afghan forces.

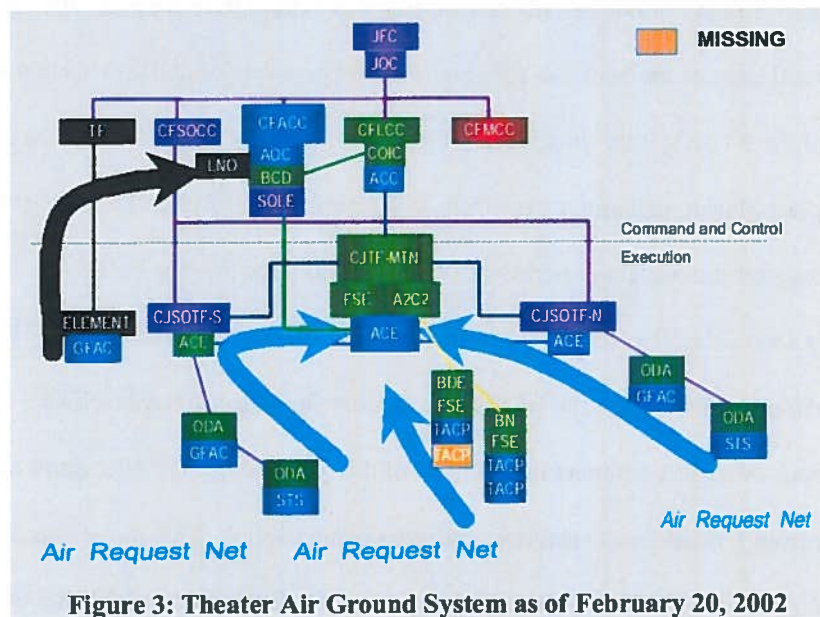
In keeping with the U.S. intention to keep the footprint in Afghanistan small and allow the Afghans to do as much of the fighting as possible, TF DAGGER was directed to develop plans for an operation to clear out the Shahi Kot valley. TF DAGGER developed a plan that used General Zia Lodin's Afghan forces as the main offensive punch driving into the valley supported by preparatory air strikes and significant CAS. This attack would force the enemy forces to flee the valley and friendly Afghan troops, led by Kamal Khan and Zakin Khan, along with U.S. conventional infantry forces would hold key blocking positions.

In early February JSOTF DAGGER began holding planning meetings with other task forces and CFLCC Forward to coordinate the details of the plan. As the plan grew to include the conventional U.S. Infantry of TF Rakkasan, U.S. and Coalition SOF from TF K-BAR, and Australian SOF from TF 64, CFLCC decided that it was too big for the TF DAGGER planning staff and instead put CFLCC Forward and his staff in charge of the operation around 13 Feb. (See Appendix A for complete planning timeline)

Initially Task Force Mountain was not designated a joint task force which led to joint planning problems. This lack of detailed joint service development of the CONOPS was evident by the late involvement of the CFACC/CAOC who were notified 20 Feb by email OPORD. A further indicator was the departure of one of the Navy's carriers. This reduction in carrier

coverage (which was the first time only one carrier was available to support OEF operations) lasted for several days of the heaviest fighting until the new carrier and its air wing arrived on station around the 9th of March. In addition, after Operation ANACONDA had begun, a request was made for the Marine helicopter carrier the USS BonHomme Richard to change its current mission and support the ongoing operation. After several days into the battle, the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) gave Operational Control (OPCON) of 5 AH-1s and 3 CH-53s from the USS BonHomme Richard to the CFLCC to support Operation ANACONDA.

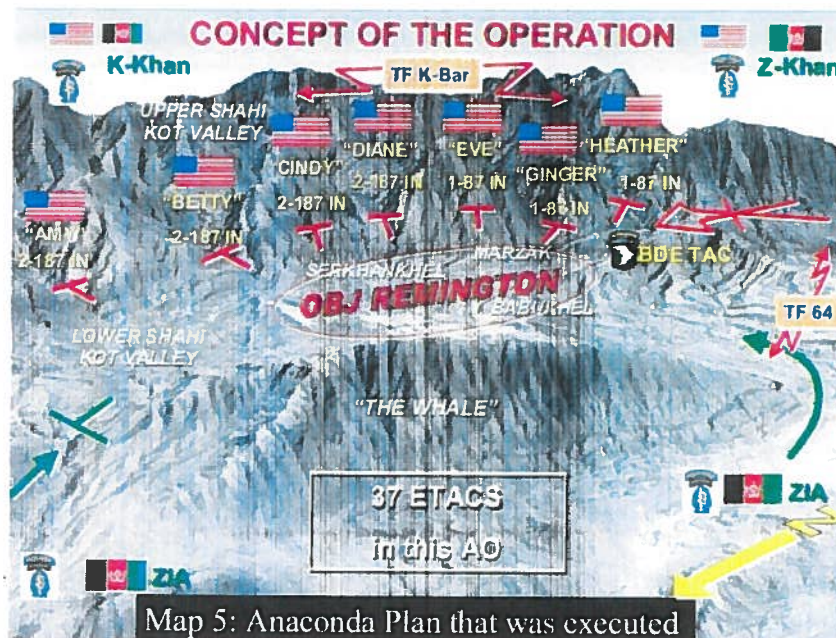
To better exercise command and control of the operation, CJTF Mountain headquarters moved down from Uzbekistan to Bagram Airbase outside Kabul. This move was accomplished between 13-20 February 2002 and disrupted planning. On 20 February 2002 the BCD at the CAOC received the OPORD for what was now called Operation ANACONDA along with further elaboration in the form of a lengthy Power Point presentation. Based on what he knew about the upcoming operation, the 18th ASOG Commander, who was an Air Force liaison on the CFLCC's staff, saw that CJTF Mountain would need an air planning and deconfliction element. He dispatched a small team from the CFLCC staff at Camp Doha in Kuwait and the CAOC in Saudi Arabia to link up with CJTF Mountain at Bagram. The team, led by a USAF Major who normally worked with 10th Mtn Div, was working with the CJTF Mountain Fire Support Element (FSE) by the time the move to Bagram was complete on 20 February 2002 (See Figure 3.)



CJTF Mountain's plan was based on several key assumptions. The first key assumption was that the enemy forces in the Shahi Kot valley consisted of only several hundred personnel. Second, enemy forces could be warned by the local population or even by agents within the friendly Afghan forces so details of the actual operation were kept close hold from friendly Afghan forces. Finally, the CJTF Mountain plan was designed for the enemy to flee the area through the mountain passes in front of the friendly Afghan troops where U.S. and coalition forces would be waiting to catch them.

These beliefs about enemy strength and likely enemy course of action later proved to be incorrect. Throughout the Afghan campaign, U.S. forces received numerous reports concerning "thousands" of enemy troops in a wide variety of locations throughout Afghanistan, but they turned out to be grossly exaggerated when friendly forces investigated. Flagrant exaggerations of this nature had made commanders and staffs at all levels highly skeptical of all reports of very large enemy forces. In addition, no enemy force had tried to stand and fight for several months.

CJTF Mountain's plan for trapping and destroying enemy forces in the Shahi Kot valley, now designated as Objective Remington, was to infiltrate small special reconnaissance (SR) teams two days prior to the attack (See Map 5.) Teams from TF K-Bar would take up positions



in the mountains east of the valley and teams from TF 64 would establish positions south of the valley in order to enhance situational awareness before the attack began. The task forces' additional responsibility was to direct air strikes against enemy elements that might attempt to flee before the attack began. On D-Day, General Zia's forces accompanied by SOF teams from TF DAGGER would attack enemy forces in the valley from the north and south in a classic double envelopment maneuver. Meanwhile, TF Rakkasan would air-assault its tactical headquarters (the Brigade TAC) and U.S. conventional infantry forces into blocking positions in the mountains on the east side of the valley to prevent any possibility of escape. Further east, behind the blocking positions established by the U.S. infantry, friendly Afghan forces under

Zakim-Khan (Z-Khan) and Kamal Khan (K-Khan) would attempt to catch any “leakers” before they could escape and evade into Pakistan.

At the time of Operation ANACONDA there was no U.S. artillery or armored vehicles in Afghanistan. U.S. firepower consisted of the small-arms and mortars the infantry brought with them, TF Rakkasan’s eight AH-64 Apache helicopters, and CAS/Interdiction by fixed-wing aircraft. Due to the lack of artillery, both the small ACE at CJTF Mountain and the CFACC recommended that extensive airstrikes begin hitting the valley well before the attack began. Based on previous experience, the CJTF Mountain Commander and his staff, however, were more worried about the enemy escaping, as the enemy had repeatedly done, than about encountering stiff enemy resistance, which had not been seen for months. To achieve tactical surprise, CJTF Mountain insisted that the pre-infiltration airstrikes begin as late as possible. There was also concern that heavy strikes on caves would destroy documents that could otherwise be exploited to facilitate the capture of other terrorists. To preserve these caves for later SSE missions and to maintain tactical surprise, CJTF Mountain was reluctant to strike any more caves than was absolutely necessary. The compromise CJTF Mountain worked out with the CFACC called for less than 20 targets to be hit beginning about thirty minutes before the helicopters landed.⁵

Overall the final organizational structure designated for Operation ANACONDA addressed most command authority issues (See Figure 4 below.) For ANACONDA, CJTF Mountain had Tactical Control (TACON) of JSOTFs DAGGER, K BAR, and TF 64 and

⁵ Briefing by Col. Longario at Maxwell AFB, AL, Jan 2003 and OPORD 02-001, 201930ZFEB02, COMCJTF AFGHANISTAN.

Second, based upon the command relationships established prior to ANACONDA and the command relationships designated in OPORD 02-001, it was clear that TF-DAGGER and TF-K BAR retained OPCON of their associated aviation assets. However, there was confusion as to who actually had TACON of the AC-130s. The ANACONDA task organization chart did not reflect which commander, either JSOTF or CJTF Mountain, retained TACON execution authority of the Joint Special Operations Air Component (JSOAC.) This led to confusion as to who prioritized and tasked AC-130s. CJTF Mountain, through the ACE, wanted to prioritize and task these assets as the tactical commander, but the SOF ground forces assumed AC-130s were SOF only assets. These conflicts were worked out during the plan's execution but clearer command relationship guidance would have saved a lot of wasted time when firepower was desperately needed on enemy forces and positions.

Finally, the newly established command relationships drastically changed how the military forces had been operating the previous five months in Afghanistan. Operations changed from a geographically dispersed SOF centric force with decentralized planning of most ground operations at the JSOTF level, to a geographically concentrated large conventional ground force with operations requiring detailed functional component planning. These major operational changes along with the relatively short period of time between the publishing of the OPORD (February 20, 2002) and execution (planned D-Day February 28, 2002; actual March 2, 2002) did not allow much time for the forces to adjust from how they had been conducting operations to how Operation ANACONDA would be executed.

Execution

By late February airlift had been supplying U.S. conventional forces in Afghanistan for three months. These resupply flights routinely landed at Bagram Airbase, where the helicopters

were based, and Kandahar airfield, where the main ground elements of TF Rakkasan were based. The ANACONDA plan called for a dramatic increase in the level of U.S. activity in Afghanistan and hence a dramatic increase in the quantities of supplies consumed, particularly aviation fuel for the helicopters that would carry the U.S. infantrymen to their blocking positions. Limited storage capacity, uncleared landmines around Bagram airfield, and other challenges had prevented U.S. forces from accumulating large contingency stockpiles of fuel and other supplies in Afghanistan in early February 2002. As a result, the supplies to support Operation ANACONDA would have to be amassed after the plan was published. The original OPORD was published on 20 February and the first airlift requests arrived at the CAOC's Air Mobility Division (AMD) on 23 February. This was only five days before the planned D-Day and seven days before the actual D-Day. The AMD scrambled to get all the supplies in place before D-Day and they found innovative solutions to the challenges they faced and logistics shortfalls did not hinder the execution of Operation ANACONDA. Even though the lack of logistical foresight did not negatively impact the plan's execution, airlift requirements should have been identified much earlier.

D-Day for ANACONDA was originally set for 28 February. The final weather decision had to be made on 26 February to allow the SR teams to get into place. At that time the weather forecasts were bad, so the CJTF Mountain Commander postponed D-Day to 2 March. The bulk of the SR teams successfully infiltrated on the night of 28 February/1 March 2002. The SR teams did not report large enemy movements out of the area so it appeared that Operation ANACONDA would succeed in catching the enemy but, there was still confusion among various service components concerning the exact time the operation would actually occur. Before dawn on 2 March, F-15Es, B-1s, and B-52s began dropping JDAMs, conventional and thermobaric

bombs on the small number of approved preplanned targets. Unfortunately, the SR teams did not know that the strikes were coming in and one of the extremely powerful thermobaric bombs came in fairly close to an SR team already on the ground. One of the SR teams called “knock it off” and halted the preplanned air strikes after only approximately half of the targets were hit.

As the U.S. helicopters entered the valley, some of them came under heavy ground fire but they managed to successfully land and dismount the U.S. infantry. At several of the blocking positions, the U.S. troops quickly came under heavy fire and were often outgunned by the heavy machineguns, mortars, and artillery the enemy employed from fortified positions. Rather than running or hiding, the enemy troops were exploiting their strong defensive positions and making excellent use of the large stores of weapons and ammunition they had hidden in nearby caves. Unlike previous operations the enemy was not looking for a chance to flee and the effectiveness of the enemy fire indicated that these troops were more numerous, better-trained, better-prepared, better-equipped, and more highly motivated than some of the original planners had believed.

General Zia Lodin’s force, conducting the main attack which began several hours prior to the insertion of the blocking forces, had no better luck. Their trucks got stuck on the bad roads and came under heavy and accurate mortar fire before they got to their starting positions. When the U.S. SOF elements requested support from an AC-130, the AC-130 crew lost situational awareness and fired on friendly forces, killing one U.S. soldier that was under TACON of CJTF Mountain and several Afghans. It was not immediately clear that these were fratricide cases, but the losses along with the enemy’s strong resistance stalled Zia Lodin’s attack. The first several CAS calls directly supported Zia Lodin. However, the friendly Afghan forces had been deliberately left out of planning for the battle and informed of the operation only at the last

possible moment in order to enhance operational security. Feeling rushed into the fight, finding themselves under heavy enemy fire and suffering casualties, Afghan morale began to sag. The main attack made little progress and heavy CAS might have enabled them to push forward but all the CAS was supporting the embattled U.S. blocking positions which was in accordance with the established priority of fires. Just as the attack was supposed to be underway, Zia Lodin and his U.S. SOF advisors fell back.

With most of the Operation ANACONDA forces in heavy combat, command and control became a major challenge. The TF Rakkasan commander and his Brigade FAC had landed in the area shortly after the blocking forces (See Map 5) but they found themselves in heavy fighting almost immediately. They had to move several times during the day and had difficulty performing all of their command and control functions. The helicopters from the Army's 7-101 AVN unit had only line-of-sight radios so these critical assets often lost contact with each other and with the ground elements in the extremely rugged terrain. The CJTF Mountain Headquarters at Bagram was about 100 miles away and could only communicate with forces in the Shahi Kot valley by limited satellite communications (SATCOM.) With limited communications and so many forces in heavy contact, the level of high-priority radio traffic exploded with spot reports, CAS requests, and MEDEVAC requests, saturating the network.

The USAF Major and his small team in the ACE at CJTF Mountain performing ASOC duties were nearly overwhelmed and the lack of ABCCC and airborne Forward Air Controllers (FAC-As) over the battlefield further compounded the air challenges.⁶ Deconfliction was enormously challenging for two reasons. First, the 37 Enlisted Terminal Air Controllers (ETACs) were all looking into the same valley and so multiple observers often requested strikes

⁶ Operation ANACONDA took place after EC-130-type ABCCC aircraft had been phased out, but before E-3 AWACS and E-8 JSTARS aircraft had been fully re-configured to perform the ABCCC functions.

on the same enemy position. Second, the need to bring several airstrikes into the small valley simultaneously created a high risk of mid-air collisions between both friendly strike aircraft, and between the bombs dropped from high altitude B-52s and strike aircraft. During the first couple of days, a good deal of the deconfliction was the result of the “big sky, small airplane” concept (i.e. luck), rather than precise command and control measures.

The performance of U.S. troops was exemplary. They found themselves in a much bigger fight than any of them had expected, but they also gave the enemy all the fight he could handle. Effective U.S. small-arms and mortar fire and effective and timely CAS from Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force aircraft ensured that none of the small, isolated forces were overrun, even though they were inserted in the midst of much larger enemy forces. The timeliness of fixed wing CAS has been a point of discussion largely due to the misunderstanding of the differences in the SPINS between CAS targets and TST/National Mission targets. CAS and Engagement Zone strikes (troops in contact, positive ID by FAC or ground controller) did not require vetting and could be authorized by local controllers producing timely air support. Striking emerging targets outside an engagement zone (troops not in contact) required vetting through CENTCOM, which could take minutes to hours to never depending on the sensitivity of the target request. This confusion between actual troops in contact (CAS) and attacking emerging targets along with the different SPINS for each type of attack lead to the perception air power was not responsive to ground requests. The bottomline to the timeliness issue is no friendly positions were overrun due to the bravery of the soldiers on the ground and the support from the air.

Several soldiers and airmen serving as ground forward air controllers were later awarded Silver Stars for their performance under fire. All aircrews performed heroically. Every request

for fixed wing aircraft to fly below the mandated minimum ceiling to conduct troops in contact. CAS was approved by the CFACC/CAOC. In addition to USAF F-15Es, USAF F-16s and Navy F-18s flying low to strafe enemy positions, Army Apache pilots demonstrated extreme bravery in the face of withering enemy fire. Apache pilots encountered enemy fire so intense that every aircraft received multiple hits and by the end of that first day, only two of the seven Apaches that flew into the Shahi Kot valley were still flyable. The U.S. troops did not just fight hard, they fought smart. The frantic pace of CAS operations in a very small area did not produce any mid-air collisions. In spite of the heavy fighting, no U.S. aircraft were shot down (partly a reflection of the toughness of the Apache airframes) and the AC-130 friendly fire incident was the only U.S. fatality that first day.

By the end of the first day, however, the outstanding performance of U.S. forces could not obscure the fact that the ANACONDA plan had not survived its first contact with the enemy. Enemy resistance and the need for multiple immediate and simultaneous CAS to protect isolated U.S. forces had stripped the momentum from the main attack and essentially put CJTF Mountain on the defensive, trying to hold its positions rather than drive the enemy out of the valley. U.S. casualties were so severe that some of the blocking forces had to be pulled out shortly after dark on the first day. For all the great work they had done that day, the fact that only two AH-64s were available for the second day's fight created a large hole in CJTF Mountain's already limited firepower.

The situation had suddenly become very difficult in Afghanistan and almost immediately the question became how quickly and how extensively CENTCOM and its components could reinforce CJTF Mountain. Over the two weeks of fighting that followed D-Day, all the components extensively reinforced their contributions to Operation ANACONDA. The day-one

Apache helicopter losses posed an obvious and immediate problem. USMC AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters from the USS Bonhomme Richard were quickly re-deployed back into Afghanistan to fill the gap, more Apaches were rushed in from Ft. Campbell, Kentucky and the damaged aircraft were quickly returned to the fight. The aircraft carrier, John F. Kennedy, replaced the carrier Theodore Roosevelt which was released prior to Operation ANACONDA, arrived in theater ready to fight. The ACE at CJTF Mountain was quickly reinforced and a Colonel arrived to enhance air planning but they were still operating extremely undermanned and with a fraction of the equipment usually used for an air operation of this size. To help deconflict the heavy CAS requirements, FAC-A qualified A-10 crews arrived in the C/JOA and began combat operations. The CFLCC added a Canadian Infantry Battalion to CJTF Mountain's forces and these Canadians participated in final assaults on enemy positions in and around the Shahi Kot valley.

One of these final assaults was on "the Whale", the large hill mass on the west side of the valley. It had been largely ignored in the original attack plan because it was assumed that the enemy would abandon any positions there and flee either north, east, or south toward Pakistan. Instead the enemy chose to stand and fight and used his positions on "the Whale" to facilitate his defense of the valley.

The enemy, however, was not intimidated by the arrival of U.S. and coalition troops. ISR assets reported that enemy forces were not fleeing from the battle but instead, additional enemy forces were flowing into the Shahi Kot area to intensify the fight. The steady flow of U.S. and coalition reinforcements into the Operation ANACONDA fight finally broke enemy resistance. On 16 March, D + 14, the CJTF Mountain Commander declared the end of Operation ANACONDA. By that time, coalition forces were firmly in control of the entire Shahi Kot valley and the surrounding area. Of the forces under CJTF Mountain tactical control 1 soldier

was killed in action (KIA) and about 40 were wounded in action (WIA) and friendly Afghan forces had suffered similar numbers of KIA and WIA, but had clearly won the battle.⁷ Exact enemy strength, intentions, and casualties remain unclear, but after the battle CJTF Mountain estimated that it encountered 1,000 enemy troops in the Shahi Kot valley and killed hundreds of them. The enemy made an effort to hold the valley, however, they clearly failed and the operation's stated end state was achieved.

Conclusion and Questions for Consideration

Operation ANACONDA was an enemy defeat by any estimate and for the next year no enemy force of more than a few dozen fighters attempted to engage U.S. or coalition forces. However, achieving such success required heroic fighting by U.S. servicemen and a mad scramble by commanders and staffs up and down the chain to assist and reinforce hard-pressed U.S. troops. All of the forces that were rushed into the fight after the shooting started such as additional attack helicopters, the A-10s, the reinforced ACE, etc. could have been on hand or on their way before the shooting started. Why weren't they? If all these forces turned out to be necessary, why didn't CJTF Mountain request them and delay the start until they arrived? Why didn't the components that subsequently provided all these forces anticipate these requirements and have them ready "just in case?"

It is easy to say "the enemy gets a vote" but it proved extremely difficult to anticipate that the enemy would vote differently in the Shahi Kot than he did anywhere else in Afghanistan for months before and after Operation ANACONDA. For U.S. forces, the fighting had been relatively easy before Operation ANACONDA. Based upon pre-ANACONDA experiences, one of the main challenges appeared to be whether U.S. and friendly Afghan forces could move

⁷ In addition to CJTF Mountain forces, U.S. forces suffered 7 KIA and 8 WIA in the Shahi Khot Valley area conducting missions that were *not* under the operational or tactical control of CJTF Mountain.

quickly enough to tightly cordon off an area to catch the enemy before they escaped. In the Shahi Kot valley, the enemy reacted differently. Should the prison uprising and the hard fighting at Qala-i-Jhangi have made U.S. planners more respectful of the determination and skill of enemy fighters, or where the planners right to focus instead on learning the “lessons” of Tora Bora?

At the operational level of war, the enemy finally did what U.S. forces wanted them to do: stand and fight. All of the vexing intelligence uncertainties and SPINS questions vanished when hundreds of men identified themselves as indisputably “hostile” by firing on U.S. troops. Finally, all the U.S. elements had plenty of enemy to shoot at and permission to do so. For many of the shooters at the tactical level, this came as an unwelcome surprise. At the operational level, the CENTCOM components did not push every available shooter into the Shahi Kot initially and the CJTF Mountain commander did not initially have the C2 structure to manage all those shooters if they had been available. But at every level, U.S. and coalition personnel quickly overcame their surprise and responded effectively to the new enemy challenge. Trying to hold terrain and stand-up to U.S. and coalition forces proved to be a very bad choice by the enemy and one they tried not to repeat.

APPENDIX A: OPERATION ANACONDA PLANNING TIMELINE

Timeline:

5 Jan	CFC Frago 03-007: identifies Khowst-Gardez (KG) as the most dangerous remaining pocket of resistance- estimates 1500-2000 enemy combatants
6 Jan	CFLCC Warning Order: initial planning guidance for operations in the KG area. CFLCC's estimate: 700-2100 enemy. One among a number of ongoing Sensitive Site Exploitations (SSEs)
4 Feb	Planning meeting held in Kabul. Led by TF Dagger (JSOTF element). TF Mountain is invited: no CFACC involvement --included JSOTF air only
11-13 Feb	TF Mountain (10 Mtn Div) assumes planning lead due to number of task forces involved
13-20 Feb	TF Mtn moves from Uzbekistan to Bagram: ASOC(-) in place at Bagram 20 Feb
18-28 Feb	18 ASOG/CC pulls planning details and builds TACS from in-theater resources (10 Mtn Div deployed without Div TACPs)
20 Feb	BCD in CAOC receives email OPORD and 128 PowerPoint slides from TF-Mtn. OPORD is 28 pages w/ 4 lines for the CFACC (CAS and airlift)
21 Feb	TF-Mtn briefs COAs to CFLCC and CJCS at Bagram
22 Feb	CAOC Plans begins work on MAAP
23 Feb	First airlift requests into AMD; first ANACONDA brief to Deputy CFACC and AOC Director
25 Feb	CFACC returns from AOR tour and is briefed on Anaconda for the first time. CFACC given a heads-up via the phone around the 23 Feb
26 Feb	In CINC's VTC CFACC asks for CAS orchestration details, pre-ground assault plan (wants a list of targets from the CFLCC for pre-strike, airlift and sustainment requirements)
28 Feb	Planned D-Day
2 Mar	Actual D-Day (delayed due to weather)
2-16 Mar	ANACONDA execution

APPENDIX B: ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

1-87 th Infantry Battalion (1-87 IN)	10 th Mountain Division Element
7-101 AVN	U.S. Army Helicopter Unit
18 th ASOG	Air Force organization that provides air to ground fire support to 10 th Mountain Division and 101 st Airborne
CENTCOM	Central Command MacDill AFB, FL
CAOC	Combined Air Operations Center Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB), Saudi Arabia
CFLCC	Combined Forces Land Component Commander Camp Doha Kuwait
CFLCC (FWD)	Forward Combined Force Land Component Commander Forward Uzbekistan and Bagram Airport, Afghanistan
JFSOCC	Joint Forces Special Operations Component Commander Qatar
JFMCC	Joint Forces Maritime Component Commander Bahrain
TF-58	USMC Task Force Camp Rhino and Kandahar
TF-64	Australian Special Operations Forces
TF Anvil	Friendly Afghan military forces that formed some of the blocking forces in the upper Shahi Kot valley. This task force was led by two Afghan commanders, Kamal Khan (K-Khan) and Zakim Khan (Z-Khan)
TF-Dagger	Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) North Uzbekistan
TF Hammer	Friendly Afghan forces with US SOF personnel that lead the push (hammer) forces in the Shahi Kot valley. The Afghan commander was Zia Lodin. Also known as Zia.
TF-K Bar	Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) South Kandahar, Afghanistan
TF-Rakkasan	Elements of the 101 st Airborne

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A2C2	Army Airspace Command and Control
AAGS	Army Air Ground System
ACE	Air Control Element
ALO	Air Liaison Officers
AMD	Air Mobility Division
AOC	Air Operations Center
AOR	Area of Responsibility
ASOC	Air Support Operations Center
ASOG	Air Support Operations Group
ATO	Air Tasking Order
BCD	Battlefield Coordination Detachment
BDE	Brigade
BN	Battalion
CAOC	Combined Air Operations Center
CAS	Close Air Support
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CFACC	Combined Force Air Component Commander
CFMCC	Combined Force Maritime Component Commander
CFSOCC	Combined Force Special Operations Component Commander
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
ETAC	Enlisted Terminal Air Controller
FAC-A	Airborne Forward Air Controllers
FSE	Fire Support Element
GFAC	Ground Forward Air Controller
HVT	High Value Target
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance
JFSOCC	Joint Force Special Operations Component Commander
JIPTL	Joint Integrated Prioritized Target List
JSOAC	Joint Special Operations Air Component
JSOTF	Joint Special Operations Task Force
LNO	Liaison Officer
MARLO	Marine Liaison Officer
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
NALE	Navy and Amphibious Liaison Element
ODA	Operational Detachment-Alpha
OPORD	Operations Order
ROE	Rules Of Engagement
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOLE	Special Operations Liaison Element
SPINS	Special Instructions
SR	Special Reconnaissance
SSE	Sensitive Sight Exploitation
TACON	Tactical Control
TACP	Tactical Air Control Parties
TACS	Theater Air Control System
TAGS	Theater Air Ground System
TCT	Time Critical Target

Holland, Charles R.	General, USAF	CFSOCC	General Holland served as Combined Force Special Operations Component Commander during Operation Anaconda.
Keating, Timothy J.	Vice Admiral, USN	CFMCC	V ADM Keating served as the Combined Force Maritime Component Commander during Operation Anaconda.
Khan, Zakim	General, AMF	TF ANVIL	Commander Assigned to TF DAGGER. Zakim Khan commanded TF Anvil and his Afghan Military Force of 200 troops to establish blocking positions near Naka Valley 20km south of Shahi Kowt during Operation Anaconda.
Khan, Kamal	General, AMF	TF ANVIL	Leader Assigned to TF Anvil. Kamal Khan, former Governor of Khowst, co-lead TF Anvil and his Afghan Military Force of 200 troops to establish blocking positions west of Khowst during Operation Anaconda.
Lodin, Zia	General, AMF	TF HAMMER	Commander Assigned to Task Force (TF) DAGGER. Gen Lodin lead TF Hammer and his Afghanistan Military Force (AMF) of 380-450 troops on the initial attack and subsequent attacks during Operation Anaconda. On 8 March 2002, he was reinforced by General Gul Haider.
Longoria, Michael A.	Colonel, USAF	ARCENT ALO	As the Air Combat Command's 18th Air Support Operations Group Commander, Col Longoria served as the US Army, Central Command's (ARCENT) Air Liaison Officer (ALO) during Operation Anaconda.
McKiernan, David D.	Lt General, USA	COMARCENT	LtGen McKiernan served as the Third Army Commanding General and Commander, US Army Central Command, during Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan and Operation Anaconda.
Mikolashuk, Paul T.	Lt General, USA	CFLCC	LtGen Mikolashuk served as the Combined Force Land Component Commander during Operation Anaconda.
Moseley, T. Michael	Lt General, USAF	CFACC/ COMAFFOR	As the 9th Air Force (9AF) Commander and the Commander of USAF Forces, Central Command (CENTAF), LtGen Moseley followed LtGen Wald as the CFACC to Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan. He served as the Combined Force Air Component Commander (CFACC) and Commander of Air Force Forces (COMAFFOR) during Operation Anaconda.