

US SPECIAL FORCES HELO RAID ON A MOUNTAIN TOP

TAKUR GHAR

In October 2001, the United States and its allies had launched an invasion into Afghanistan, backing the Northern Alliance who opposed the Taliban. Operation Enduring Freedom met with success after success, driving the enemy out of the major cities and destroying major enemy strongholds, such as Tora Bora. However, the Taliban were far from being a spent force; they had simply retreated into the mountains.

By Brig. Gen.(ret) Otto van Wigen & Guy Bowers

Early in March 2002, the US detected a build-up of al-Qaeda forces in and around the Shah-i-Kot Valley (the 'Place of Kings'). This area had traditionally been a place where guerrilla fighters had retreated from foreign powers, and it had seen several battles in the Soviet invasion era. To counter this move, the US decided to launch Operation Anaconda, the largest airborne insertion of troops by helicopter since Vietnam.

An observation post (OP) would be established on top of the moun-

tain of Takur Ghar. This peak on the eastern side of the Shah-i-Kot Valley overlooked both the valley and the rest of the mountain range. The plan was to use it as a base to report on enemy troop movements.

THE MISSION BRIEFING

Occupy an observation post on top of mountain Takur Ghar with a six-men-strong Special Forces team. They will infiltrate into enemy-held territory and report all enemy movements in the Shah-i-Kot Valley (northwest).



Own forces

A Special Forces team of 6x pax including comms, weapons, and ammo for three days. To be infiltrated by MH-47 at night-time. They are to be supported by a Quick Reaction Force of 24x rangers with notice to move in 60 minutes, an AC-130 Spectre gunship, and a MQ1 Predator UAV drone during infiltration, plus on-call close air support.

Enemy forces

A militia of approximately 300 fighters is operating in Shah-i-Kot Valley. According to their usual modus operandi they man OPs in the mountains. The militia is supported by foreign fighters coming from Chechnya, Uzbekistan, and Bosnia. The enemy's morale is extremely high.

The Special Forces commander has two courses of action:

COA 1 – Infiltration

- Infiltrate by MH-47, drop off some kilometres from the mountain to avoid detection, and cover last kilometres on foot.

September of 2003 – After completing an operation in the Daychopan district, soldiers from the US 10th Mountain Division march toward a Chinook that will return them to Kandahar.

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Move, move, move! The Rangers emerge from the downed Chinook.



The al-Qaeda fighters hunker in sangars. Their snow cover had prevented detection.



No-one gets left behind when retreating. The wounded are carried to the MH-47.

Advantage: Maintain stealth.
Disadvantage: Limited equipment can be carried.

COA 2 – Insertion by helicopter

- Scan and reconnoitre mountain top by UAV. If no enemy detected on top, infiltrate by MH-47 and drop off on the mountain.
Advantage: More combat load can be carried. No loss of time and less vulnerable for detection during infiltration.
Disadvantage: Loss of surprise. Potential hot LZ if enemy on top of the mountain is not detected.

(hard cover) at the US starting positions (in blue) and several outcrops in the enemy's deployment area (marked in red). They also have two sangar bunkers (bunker cover) plus a communication trench running between them.

Scenario 1 – Infiltration

In this scenario, the Special Forces have hiked up from their landing zone and have so far been undetected by the enemy at the summit. The mission starts as a stealth mission with one fire team and one support weapon

on sentry duty. The rest are in the two bunkers until the alarm is raised.

The US starting positions are as per the map; ignore the Chinook as it does not appear in this scenario.

Scenario 2 – Insertion by helicopter

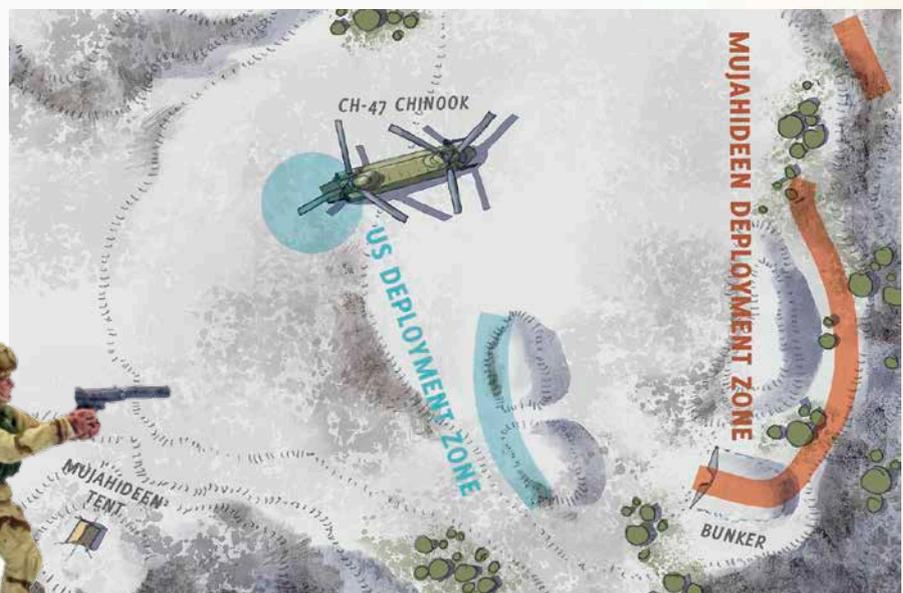
As the Chinook approaches, it takes fire from concealed enemy on the hill. The scenario starts at the moment the helicopter is fired at and makes an emergency landing. The alarm is raised, so this is a straight fight with no stealth rules.

PLAYING TAKUR GHAR

The actual events of Takur Ghar are relayed in Osprey's *Raid 39, Takur Ghar: The SEALs and Rangers on Roberts Ridge*. What we present here are the two possible scenarios and a summary of what actually happened. The following has been written with Osprey's *Black Ops* in mind, although as scenario 2 is a straightforward firefight, any ultramodern set can be used.

Terrain

The table should be open terrain bar a few rocky outcrops



Obviously, the UAV hasn't noticed enemy fighters on top of the mountain – the reliance on infrared failed as the enemy were in snow-covered bunkers. During the crash landing, the helicopter crew are either incapacitated or dead and the electric power fails so none of the miniguns onboard can be used. There are two specialist medics onboard (professionals, activated with a Queen card) who are taking care of the pilots and can tend to the Special Forces operators if they're wounded.

Reinforcements

Both sides can call on reinforcements (see page 32 of *Black Ops*), rolling a D6 at the end of each full turn. All

off-table fire should count as veteran and at extreme range. US reinforcements can enter from their edge. Al-Qaeda reinforcements can enter from either their edge or the US table edge (representing fighters making their way to the mountain top).

US	AL-QAEDA	POINTS
Strafing run	Al-Qaeda reinforcements	6
Air strike	Mortar fire	12
Special Forces reinforcements		18

Al-Qaeda reinforcements – a conscript fire team (3 men) or heavy weapon team (2 men with RPG or PK).

Strafing run (from an F-16 or AC-130) – counts as fire from two autocannons.

Air strike – 105 mm cannon or 500-pound bomb. Counts as a mortar with +1 save and 2D6 hits.

Mortar fire – a turn (2 activations) of off-table mortar fire.

Special Forces reinforcements – an additional six-man team, equipped as the original team.

Victory

Either side wins if they wipe out the other from the tabletop. The US Special Forces can choose to withdraw once if they take 50% casualties and have the option of playing the game again (Scenario 2) with a second team. The al-Qaeda get to reinforce their position with new troops up to full strength.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

Chinook helicopter RAZOR 03 flew towards Takur Ghar with a SEAL team on board. The initial landing point 1 km away was ignored, as infrared surveillance had shown no heat sources on the mountain top. The decision was made to land on the mountain top to keep the speed in the offensive, even though this was against the Advanced Force Operatives (AFO) procedure.

Unfortunately, the top of Takur Ghar was occupied by enemy in snow covered mountain caves. As RAZOR 03 approached at 02.50 hours, they opened up, scoring several hits on the aircraft from RPGs, small arms and with a 12.7mm DShK machinegun. To avoid further damage, the pilot jinked the aircraft just as the SEALs were readying to disembark. One SEAL, Petty Officer Neil Roberts, fell from the aircraft despite the best efforts of his comrades. The hits on RAZOR 03 had disabled navigation and the onboard miniguns.

RAZOR 03 limped to safety, putting down seven kilometres away but with one SEAL left on the moun-

ORDER OF BATTLE

United States

All are elite Special Forces (ACC 3, DED 3). They wear body armour, have NODs and are 'tough'. Each member has suppressors to their weapons, which can fire single shots without raising any noise (noise tokens). They are in desert uniforms so do not have the right camouflage for the terrain (which will affect observation tests by the enemy). Each member also has a SIG Sauer P226 pistol and a mix of fragmentation and smoke grenades.

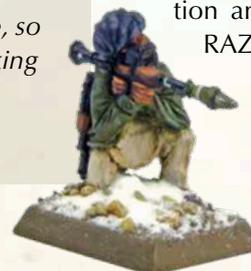
UNIT	ACTIVATION CARD	EQUIPMENT
Leader	Ace	M4 carbine
Fire team (three-man)	Jack	2x M4 carbine, M4 carbine with 40 mm UGL
Support	King	2x M249 SAW

Al-Qaeda

All are fanatics (DED 3). They are conscripts (ACC 5) with the exception of the named veterans (ACC 4).

UNIT	ACTIVATION CARD	EQUIPMENT
Veteran leader	Ace	AK-74
Veteran fire team (two-man)	Jack	2x AK-74
Fire team (three-man)	Jack	3x AK-74
Fire team (three-man)	Jack	3x AK-74
Veteran support	King	1x PK machine gun team (two-man)
Support	King	1x DShK heavy machine gun (two-man)
Support	King	1x RPG team (2 man)

1. The DShK heavy machine gun is mounted on the top of the ridge, so it will need to be repositioned to fire down on the Americans, taking two turns (four activations).





The US SF advance on the enemy. Thanks to Empress Miniatures for providing the correct heads for this scenario.

tain. In the meantime, Roberts fought for his life. He killed two enemy fighters before becoming wounded and captured. The enemy executed him at approximately 04.30 hours.

The SEAL team requested a second helicopter to return them to the summit to rescue Roberts. RAZOR 04 arrived, but it took until 04.55 to reach the mountain. They were not aware that their teammate was already dead. RAZOR 04 put down safely on the summit and dropped the SEAL team. They were not immediately spotted by the fighters, but were then beaten back by heavy enemy fire and, with mounting casualties, became combat ineffective.

The US Rangers stand-by team was activated and two Chinooks, RAZOR 01 and RAZOR 02, headed for Takur Ghar. US Command ordered RAZOR 02 to be on standby, so only RAZOR 01 approached the summit. Due to a miscommunication, they were not informed of the enemy on the mountain-top and RAZOR 01 took heavy fire as the helicopter approached. The al-Qaeda fighters could not believe their luck having a third enemy aircraft to attack in one night. RAZOR 01 was badly hit and forced to crash land close to the

summit. The eight-man Ranger team had been reduced to six by enemy fire as they clambered out of the Chinook to engage the enemy. They too were beaten back and had to deal with enemy reinforcements coming up behind them. Eventually the second team of Rangers in RAZOR 02 landed nearby and joined its fellow Rangers. Their combined might was enough to eventually overrun the enemy on top of Takur Ghar.

Many lessons were learned from this battle. Poor intelligence and a lack of

coordination led to the helicopters attempting repeated landings on the summit, against the AFO guidelines. The M4 carbines and M249 SAWs were outranged by the enemy's machineguns. Henceforth, teams would have at least one long-range weapon. The Chinook helicopters were also fitted with batteries to allow their miniguns to still fire in the event of a power failure. **WS&S**

This article is dedicated to the brave servicemen who were killed or wounded at Takur Ghar.



Insurgents have set up a well-armed OP with a DShK machinegun to protect their position from airborne attacks.