

**Battle of Wanat, 13 July 2008 AR 15-6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. ~~(FOUO)~~ In the early hours of 9 July 2008 the 2nd Platoon of Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion 503d Infantry (Airborne) established a vehicle patrol base (VPB) in the vicinity of the village of Wanat, in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. The platoon occupied the VPB with the intention of establishing a combat outpost near the Wanat District Center, which is the district center for the Waygal District, Nuristan Province. While this district had proven very costly and contentious, the people wanted development, security, and safeguards against corrupt local officials. The command made the decision to relocate Combat Outpost (OP) Bella to VPB Wanat for numerous reasons: the helicopter approach into Bella is far more dangerous than the one into Wanat; Bella is inaccessible by roads for up armored HMMWVs while Wanat is accessible on the ground; there are very few people in Bella while Wanat is a district center and is relatively populated. The decision to relocate the COP was subject to other competing priorities for scarce resources such as helicopters, ISR and land agreements from local land owners. Following the closure of COP Bella 8KM to the north of Wanat, the company co-located the VPB with the district center which had been a successful technique in other districts. This also followed counterinsurgency doctrine of connecting the people with their government and made imminent sense. Helping the people of Wanat was worth the risk to the Paratroopers—after all, ISAF's purpose is to act as a security and assistance force to the people of Afghanistan.
2. ~~(FOUO)~~ On 13 July 2008 at approximately 0420L the platoon was 20 minutes into stand to procedures with 100% of their forces on alert. The TOW missile crew observed five fighting age males carrying equipment roughly 1000m away, but did not engage because they could not (b)(2) High At that time Anti-Afghan Forces (AAF), numbering approximately 200 fighters initiated a coordinated and determined attack by firing numerous RPGs, machine guns and other small arms. The AAF initially targeted and destroyed the platoon's 120mm mortar firing position and the up armored HMMWV mounted TOW system using multiple RPGs fired from close range. SPC Abad was mortally wounded in the vicinity of the mortar firing position by small arms fire.
3. ~~(FOUO)~~ The focus of the enemy attack then shifted to the observation post (OP), named "OP Top Side", with a storm of grenades, RPGs and small arms fire only seconds after the attack was initiated. Of the nine Paratroopers who originally occupied the OP, SPC Bogars, SPC Ayers, SPC Zwilling, SPC Phillips and SPC Rainey were all killed by enemy fire in the first 15 to 20 minutes of intense fighting. The remaining four were immediately wounded, but continued to fight courageously. The initial volley wounded SGT (b)(3), (b)(6) and SPC (b)(3), (b)(6). Moments later, SPC Phillips was killed as he threw a grenade. SPC Ayers was shot and killed after laying down intense suppressive fire on the AAF with his M240B machine gun. SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) continued the fight from the same position as SPC Ayers until his weapon jammed. He then grabbed SPC Ayers' weapon but it wouldn't fire because it had a bullet hole in the receiver. He then continued to engage the enemy with hand grenades and two claymore mines. After expending all of his ammunition, SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) went to the next fighting position where he found SGT (b)(3), (b)(6) and SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) both who had been wounded. He dressed SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) leg and conducted a medical assessment of SGT (b)(3), (b)(6). The enemy was within 15-20m of the position and SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) engaged the enemy with the only available weapon remaining which was a LAW rocket. Enemy fighters came right up to the front wire of OP Top Side then fired RPG's into

the tree above the OP and tossed grenades. The AAF fighters in the hotel and bazaar area engaged the flank of OP Top Side from the second floor windows at distances of approximately 20 meters. SGT (b)(3), (b)(6) called over the radio that OP Top Side needed help.

4. ~~(FOUO)~~ In response to SGT (b)(3), (b)(6) message, the first of three waves of reinforcements maneuvered to the OP. The first reinforcements to arrive at the OP were 1LT Brostrom and SPC Hovater. They made it to the OP and communicated with those inside before being killed by enemy fighters. SPC Rainey was killed on the terrace just below the OP at approximately the same time. AAF fighters began throwing rocks into the OP, mimicking grenades and trying to draw Paratroopers out of their positions so they could be engaged. Out of ammunition with no one else believed to be alive, SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) directed SGT (b)(3), (b)(6) and SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) to make their way to the casualty collection point and left his position to find more ammunition.

5. ~~(FOUO)~~ The second wave of reinforcements was led by SSG (b)(3), (b)(6) and included SGT (b)(3), (b)(6) SGT Garcia, and SPC (b)(3), (b)(6). These men heard the distress call and moved under fire to the OP on their own initiative. Upon arrival at the OP, they rendered aid to SGT (b)(3), (b)(6) before being hit by three RPGs in quick succession, mortally wounding SGT Garcia and seriously wounding the other three.

6. ~~(S/NF)~~ At approximately 0526L (66 minutes into the battle), the third reinforcement consisting of SFC (b)(3), (b)(6) and his element (SSG (b)(3), (b)(6) SSG (b)(3), (b)(6) SGT (b)(3), (b)(6), SSG (b)(3), (b)(6) SGT (b)(3), (b)(6) SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) and Marine CPL (b)(3), (b)(6) arrived at the OP, assisted by SPC (b)(3), (b)(6) who had showed them the route. SFC (b)(3), (b)(6) and SSG (b)(3), (b)(6) immediately split the OP into two and began sifting through equipment and casualties. Once this element arrived at OP Top Side, it was never again in serious danger of being overwhelmed, though the fighting there was still intense.

7. ~~(FOUO)~~ CPT (b)(3), (b)(6) the Chosen Company Commander maintained radio contact with each of his positions and the Battalion TOC. In addition to sending two successive elements (SSG (b)(3), (b)(6) reinforced on his own initiative) to reinforce the OP, he coordinated for indirect fire assets to include 155mm howitzer support as well as both fixed and rotary wing close air support. The heavy mortars were able to conduct one fire mission within the opening minutes of the fight before their position was destroyed. Within six minutes of the start of the battle 155mm artillery impacted enemy positions surrounding the VPB; within (b)(2) High close air support was on station, bombarding enemy locations; and within 59 minutes AH-64 Apache attack helicopters were strafing the enemy. Remaining calm under fire while managing the integration of danger close fire support assets, CPT (b)(3), (b)(6) ran from the command post (CP), through enemy fire at the north end of the bazaar, and up to OP Top Side at approximately 0458L. After assessing the situation at the OP and seeing that SFC (b)(3), (b)(6) was reconsolidating equipment and personnel, he ran back to the CP to coordinate medical evacuation support for the casualties. The first MEDEVAC began extracting casualties at 0555L which was the earliest the tactical situation would permit.

8. ~~(S/NF)~~ At 0608L the company (b)(2) High consisting of 1st Platoon, led by 1SG (b)(3), (b)(6) and 1LT (b)(3), (b)(6) arrived at the VPB with 19 paratroopers and four up armored HMMWVs. They were able to immediately defeat the enemy flanking movement that was materializing on the north side of the objective. Within eight hours two more platoons from TF Rock reinforced the VPB with one platoon arriving by ground attack

convoy and the other by rotary wing. The major fighting continued but shifted to pursuing the enemy with fires as he attempted to vacate the area and bringing in the Afghan 1st Commando Kandak, 201st Corps in order to clear and conduct sensitive site exploitation of the village areas surrounding the VPB.

9. ~~(FOUO)~~ On 15 July the decision was made to relocate the VPB. The people of Wanat would have to wait for their development projects and improved governance associated with the ISAF mission.

~~(FOUO)~~ **Additional Facts:**

- Fallen Heroes: 9. Wounded in Action: 27 (16 were evacuated of which 13 were treated and returned to duty)
- Number of MEDEVACs: 7
- Reinforcements:
 - 1st Platoon, Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion 503d Infantry (Airborne)
 - 3rd Platoon, Able Company, 2nd Battalion 503d Infantry (Airborne)
 - 3rd Platoon, Battle Company, 2nd Battalion 503d Infantry (Airborne)
- Indirect Fires:
 - 13 x 155mm missions (96 rounds)
 - Fixed Wing CAS: 4 x GBU-12's; 1 x Mk 82; 9 GBU-31s; 24 GBU-38s; 7 x shows of force (no ordnance dropped)
 - Rotary Wing CAS: 19 x 30mm gun runs; 137 x 2.75in rockets; 3 hellfire missiles
 - AC-130: 3 x 105mm rounds
- Enemy Killed in Action: between 21 and 52. Enemy Wounded in Action: upwards of 45 with many reported as dying of wounds
- Non-Combatant Casualties. In spite of searching over 100 homes and structures in the immediate area surrounding Wanat, the Afghan Commandos reported no evidence of civilian casualties. It is believed that the AAF directed all of the villagers to vacate not later than the night of 12 July.

~~(FOUO)~~ **Key Findings and recommendations:**

- OP Topside was never over run/lost; the VPB perimeter wire was never breached; 2nd Platoon, Chosen Company had all intelligence available to the Battalion and Brigade Task Forces.
- While this investigation has been as detailed, comprehensive and as transparent as possible¹, the command should be aware that there is most likely an enemy video of this fight that the AAF will release to discredit this investigation, CF and CF governments especially in a presidential election year. Assuming that families will agree to non-disclosure, classified information contained in this report should be included in family presentations so that families have the best information available on how their sons died.
- The decision to occupy VPB Wanat was the right decision for the purpose of helping the Afghan people in a troubled district to connect with their government. Commanders should

¹ Over 70 sworn statements were provided; an equal number of interviews were given; over five hours of RW attack aviation gun tapes were reviewed; and telephonic interviews of the medical examiners for six of the nine remains were taken. Requested but did not receive permission to review fixed wing CAS tapes; requested copies of autopsies (pending); and requested ballistics testing of all fragments extracted from remains (pending).

not become risk averse about following counterinsurgency doctrine and remain in their FOBs a result of the unfortunate loss of nine Paratroopers. The risk of casualties is inherent in counterinsurgency operations. Commanders must focus on mitigating the risks rather than not taking the risks by allowing the fear of casualties to paralyze efforts to connect with the people and separate the insurgents from the populace.

- Post-attack intelligence confirms that both the District Police Chief and District Governor were complicit in supporting the AAF attack.
- The District Governor and Chief of Police need to be replaced as a minimum, if not arrested and tried from crimes against GIRoA.
- The AAF fired from the houses of the villagers as well as from the village mosque in violation of Afghan culture and international law. They could not have achieved surprise without at least the passive support of the villagers.
- The VPB was on land that was to be the COP; the land took ten months to coordinate and it was at a sub-optimal location at best. The incredible amount of time required to gain the land, allowed the AAF to begin planning an attack that only required refinement once the VPB was occupied. The GIRoA and ISAF need to negotiate a streamlined process for land compensation. Right now the system is broken and stalls friendly force momentum while allowing AAF to plan coordinated and complex attacks.
- The Police should attend Focused District Development, be vetted, and or replaced. Their tashkil (manning authorization) must be filled and the programmed ANP check points should be completed.
- The Nangalam to Wanat DBST road must be expedited. Completion of this road will allow the CF and ANSF greater and more routine access to the people of Wanat. It should be noted that the people 5-6 kilometers into the valley are very connected to and supportive of the GIRoA and ANSF (Wanat is at the 7.3 kilometer mark).
- The CF and ANSF must continue to patrol and conduct operations in the area, assess the human terrain, and have multiple shuras to set the conditions for a future presence. We must hold the population accountable if they are to [ever] benefit.
- In order to prevent AAF from pressing Nangalam or Camp Blessing, a large OP similar to the one that protects the Kunar PRT in Asadabad needs to be constructed on the ridgeline looking north up the Waygal Valley vicinity of Camp Blessing and manned with a reinforced squad with two heavy weapons, 1-2 LRAS-type systems, and a forward observer.
- In small shuras and in private the villagers of Wanat said that they wanted the US FOB in order to provide security, to assist with development projects, and to keep local government corruption in check by working closely with the district center. In larger shuras--which certainly had insurgent presence--locals were very careful about not publically supporting the patrol base for of retribution especially on families.
- The courage, valor and discipline of the Sky Soldiers of 173d ABCT is undisputed. At platoon through Brigade level, despite casualties, the unit has continued to press the fight and finish strong. TF Rock could have sat on protected Forward Operating Bases and prepared for redeployment but instead TF Rock chose to remain engaged, take the risk of connecting the people with their local government, and further set the conditions for the incoming unit.