Take the Fight to Them

September, 1985: Elements of the U.S. 2nd Armored Division, namely the battalions of the 66th Armored Regiment, are poised to strike into southeastern Afghanistan as part of a NATO effort to gain the initiative against the Warsaw Pact. As war rages in the Fulda Gap and North German Plain, military planners look to stab into the USSR from the south, advancing through Afghanistan into Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

66th Regimental Crest

They have their reasons. CIA reports maintain the readiness of Afghan military units, which have always been weakened by internal fighting between Khalki and Parchami officers, is at an all-time low[1]. Meanwhile, the insurgent bands prowling Afghanistan's eastern provinces are gaining strength. Even when their actions were disjointed, Mujahideen fighters cut traffic along the highway linking Kabul, Puli Khumri, Mazar-e Sharif, Andkhoy, Heart and Kandahar (the 2nd Armored's primary objective in these opening rounds).

Now as many as 40,00 of these same rebels, directed by a unified government-in-exile based in Pakistan, are ready to disrupt Soviet troops movements and besiege local garrisons until American armored units arrive[2]. Even if their efforts come up lacking, it's understood the Soviets have fielded second-rate kit in this theater. "Hell on Wheels" and its crews have recently transitioned from their aging M60 MBTs and M113 APCs to the Abrams and Bradleys their superiors promise will smash the Reds into the dust[3].

For now, all the frontline commanders need to know is their orders are to proceed from Chaman to the town of Spin Boldak, securing the railroad that will help ferry supplies as the 2nd Armored continues its push to Kandahar and its strategically important airport. HQ expects the shooting to start in earnest when the division hits the independent brigade of mechanized troops holding that city. Once Kandahar is secure, 2nd Battalion will take up defensive positions while the remainder of the division races across the southwestern plains from Delaram to Farah. There tankers will link up with airlifted elements of 10th Mountain before moving on Shindad. Rear security will be provided by follow-on Pakistani troops dispatched from Quetta.

What We're Facing

Intelligence (Human and Electronic) indicate the USSR has approximately four divisions – one air assault and three motor rifle – deployed in Afghanistan. Supplementing these units are as many as seven independent regiments and brigades operating from fixed garrison locations. Overall, approximately 100,000 personnel. These troops are in addition to the 40,000+ Afghan soldiers currently fighting for the Kabul regime.

Soviet formations include the typical conscripts, along with several Spetsnaz units deployed by helicopter gunship. The presence of so many air mobile infantry indicates the enemy has applied lessons learnt during 1980-1982. While Russian commanders were unprepared for conditions in Afghanistan during the opening years of the war, Soviet tactics have been modified to suit this particular theater. Afghanistan is dominated by mountain chains and suffers from a paucity of usable roads. Until the 66th reaches the Kandahar-Ghazni Plateau, American crews should recognize the threat posed by mines, enemy air power and ambushes conducted by small infantry units (often involving no more than a reinforced platoon of riflemen). There is precious little "tank country" in this corner of the world, and the nature of the terrain will negate many of the advantages normally associated with our firepower and onboard targeting systems. AFVs will often play a supporting role in upcoming operations, with the main emphasis being placed on the average rifleman's "foot mobility." Read the attached file on the Soviet employment of specialized *Bronegruppa*.

Regardless, AFVs do have a part to play in Afghanistan, and over the coming days 2nd Armored can expect to face the following platforms:

1. The **T-62** main battle tank with the 115 mm U-5TS "Molot" Rapira smoothbore gun.
2. The **BTR-70** wheeled armored personnel carrier.
3. The **BMP-1** infantry fighting vehicle with 73 mm 2A28 "Grom" low pressure smoothbore semi-automatic gun and AT-3 Sagger anti-tank missiles.
4. The **Mi 24 Hind E** helicopter gunship with rotary cannon and Sagger ATGMs.
5. The **ZSU-23-4** SP Anti-Aircraft vehicle.
6. **BM-21 MRLS** artillery
7. **2S1 SP 122mm** artillery
8. **Towed 122mm** artillery
9. Fixed wing aircraft

Deployment within our area of operations is as follows:

Footnotes

[1] The effectiveness/legitimacy of Afghanistan government forces is actually on the rise. While political bickering continues to hinder Babrak Karmal's military, intelligence operatives with the KHAD (*Khedemati-e-Dolati*) have cracked down on internal dissent. This, and the gradual hardening of the Mujahideen's stance against government troops has improved the performance of several field formations.

[2] The "government in exile" is, in fact, a fabrication. Leaders of the 'Islamic Unity of Afghanistan' have worked to convince foreign powers that they are unified in order to access funds that, until now, have been off-limits. This is because western powers, and even Saudi Arabia, have made the delivery of cash and munitions contingent on the formation of a single political entity. While groups such as the *Hizb-i-Islami Afghanistan* (HIA) and *Jamiat-i-Islami* (IA) are now saying what their backers want to hear, they will soon prove incapable of directing actions in the field.

[3] Wrong. Modern MBTs and infantry fighting vehicles are on their way, including upgraded T-72s, T-64s, BMP-2s and self-propelled artillery. Moscow will also make good use of its Air Assault divisions. Of course, hindsight is always 20-20.

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