

The Mechs

Operation Timus Preem, August 2008

Sean M. Maloney

Tanks were first used by the Canadian Army in Afghanistan in the fall of 2006 during Operation Medusa. Simplistic criticism in public venues focused on the argument that tanks were unsuited to counterinsurgency operations because of the amount of damage to the infrastructure they caused moving around or through use of the vehicles' weapons. Others viewed the deployment of tanks as a sign that the coalition was "losing" the war because the insurgents had "escalated" to conventional operations and, in the Maoist schema, victory for the insurgents had to be near because they supposedly transitioned from guerilla to conventional operations. Deployment of "conventional" forces like tanks to counter this "transition" was therefore problematic. Comments like "The Soviets used tanks and failed, Canada is now using tanks, therefore Canada will fail" made the rounds. The presence of Canadian tanks in Afghanistan assumed political as well as practical dimensions.

By 2008, these arguments had all but died away in the mediasphere and the punditocracy. Tanks were no longer a novelty in the Canadian area of operations. The Leopard C-2s of 2006 were replaced by Leopard 2A6Ms by the summer of 2007, though many Leo C2s stayed on to push anti-mine and anti-IED implements that could not be mounted on the new vehicles

Operation Timus Preem, led by Lieutenant-Colonel David Corbould and conducted by the 2 Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) Battlegroup in August 2008 was a mechanized assault involving nearly two battalion-sized units of Canadian and Afghan forces, with armour leading the main effort. Overall, Operation Timus Preem was a successful operation. It forced the enemy to re-organize their command structure and replace leaders. It wiped out their "forward" IED production capacity and transit base to the Sangeray area and the operation also most likely took out some of the people involved in killing the three Canadian engineers on the eve of the operation.

because of their armour's modular construction.¹ What became evident to Canadian battlegroup commanders very quickly once they got on the ground was the diversity of the terrain in Kandahar province. That diversity dictated that a variety of forces be employed to meet coalition objectives. In this case, tanks would be unsuited for operations in Kandahar City, or say, the mountainous Maruf or upper Shah Wali Kot districts. In the open terrain in Maywand, however, there were advantages to using armour. Tanks could be used even in the built up green belts around the city. The Howz-e Madad incursion of June 2007² was one example. There was also Arghandab 1 in October-November 2007 during which a troop of Leopard C-2s covered open high ground to screen a battalion-sized assault into a built

up area – right out of Canadian Cold War FIBUA³ doctrine. Armoured columns were used to resupply isolated strongpoints like Mushan.⁴

Operation Timus Preem, led by Lieutenant-Colonel David Corbould and conducted by the 2 Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) Battlegroup in August was a mechanized assault involving nearly two battalion-sized units of Canadian and Afghan forces, with armour leading the main effort. Operation Timus Preem resembled Operation Totalize, or Tractable, the Canadian offensives in Normandy in 1944, on a smaller scale: the terrain is extremely restricted and similar to bocage in Normandy and the operation involved the use of armoured breaching columns.⁵

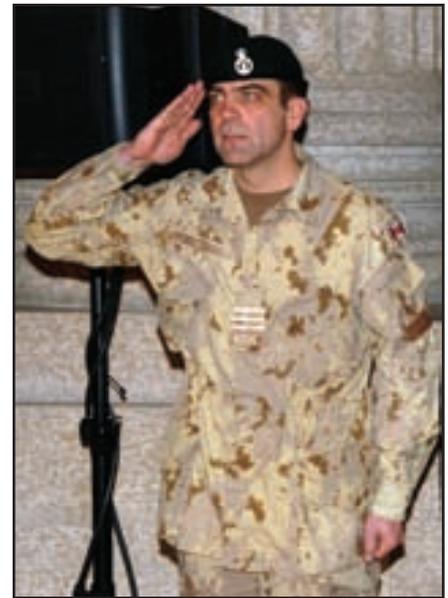
The Origins of the Operation

The 2008 iteration of Joint Task Force Afghanistan, led by Brigadier-General Denis Thompson, planned to create a "stability box" in eastern Zharey District in Kandahar province. The idea was to select a key area and apply serious resources to it. Operations in the box would, in theory, dislocate insurgents, convince the "fence sitters" to support the government, deny the enemy the ability to influence the population in the box, and prepare the area for a high-profile development projects.

Stability Box Juno was established in June-July 2008. It encompassed



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Above: Brigadier-General Denis Thompson (left) was the commander of Joint Task Force Afghanistan. Right: Lieutenant-Colonel David Corbould was the commanding officer of the 2 Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Battlegroup.

Route Summit from Highway 1 down to Bazaar-e Panjwayi in Panjwayi district. Stability Box Juno was also supposed to give focus to Canadian development efforts: CIDA, DFAIT, and other government departments now had a specific area in which to establish a joint interagency team to work together on a series of projects. The intention was that a second stability box would be established in Panjwayi district once Juno was up and running. Juno was limited to part of Zharey district because there were not enough resources to project Afghan governance and security throughout the whole district.

Several factors militated against the effective operation of Juno. The primary reason was the Sarposa prison break and the subsequent diversion of forces to conduct the Arghandab 2 operation in June 2008. The secondary factor was the ongoing demand for the 2 PPCLI Battlegroup's infantry companies to occupy legacy tactical infrastructure positions along Route Fosters. As usual, the dearth of Afghan police and the continuing build-up of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and its occasional diversion to Helmand province were impediments to establishing security in the stability box, as were

the ongoing problems between the Afghans as to who constituted legitimate governance in the two districts. The Canadian interagency piece was still evolving. If Juno was supposed to be a showcase, there was not much under the glass by the high summer of 2008. That did not prevent continuing efforts to jump start the process, however, and consequent enemy disruptive activities.

Indeed, a series of operations along Highway 1 near Sanjeray assumed priority status. The enemy had conducted a series of high-profile IED attacks on the highway which threatened to cut off this vital east-west commercial and logistic route. Operation Asp-e-Janoubi, (aka "Ass Pain Janoubi" to the staff) was a complex operation involving the transport of a huge turbine from Kandahar Air Field all the way to the Kajaki Dam in Helmand province. The Kajaki Dam was the key hydroelectric producer in the region and, after years of neglect, it was failing. The logistics of moving such a piece of equipment over such a distance and then protecting it from enemy action were immense. Keep in mind that the information operations effects of failure for Asp-e-Janoubi were potentially catastrophic and

overshadowed Canadian operations in Kandahar Province.

Over the course of the summer, the battlegroup planning staff, led by Major Jay Adair, developed a series of plans designed to "protect and enable" Stability Box Juno. ISTAR resources were focused on the area west of Juno, specifically on a suspected enemy command node in a large compound complex dubbed Objective Weasel. This node had some relationship to the IED cells operating along Highway 1 but it also was connected to the rocket attacks on Forward Operating Base (FOB) Mas'um Ghar. Another cell and command and control node from Nahlgam to the southwest operated against Afghan National Police in western Zharey, while another cell harassed Strong Point Mushan over in western Panjwayi district.

Objective Weasel was a physical location but the pattern of activity in that area varied. Enemy leaders came and went, including the notorious Jabber Agha,⁶ and there were an estimated 40 to 50 enemy fighters in the vicinity. Zangabad boasted another 40 or 50 fighters, as did Nahlgam. A number of enemy IED specialists, based in Sia Choy and Nahlgam, used Weasel as a

transit point when they moved to and from Sanjeray. Adair and his staff discussed the possibility that Objective Weasel also served as part of the enemy's early warning system. If coalition forces started to move west from Juno, the forces around Weasel would conduct some form of covering force fight until the "deep" forces in western Zharey could be mobilized and deployed.

The planners struggled to identify objectives. There were not enough Afghan security forces to establish an enduring presence in the area cleared by coalition forces, so extending Stability Box Juno was out. However, a major operation against these enemy forward positions could accomplish multiple objectives. First, it would probably interfere with enemy operations in Sanjeray and his IED operations in Highway 1. That would draw off heat from the turbine move. Second, 3 Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) Battlegroup was arriving in September to affect a relief in place (or RIP) with 2 PPCLI Battlegroup. One lesson from 2006 was that the enemy would use every means available to exploit the lack of acclimatization of the incoming forces. A major operation that put the enemy back on his heels right before the RIP would positively contribute to the process and protect the incoming forces. Finally, an operation like this would force the enemy away from Juno and give the interagency and governance process some breathing room.

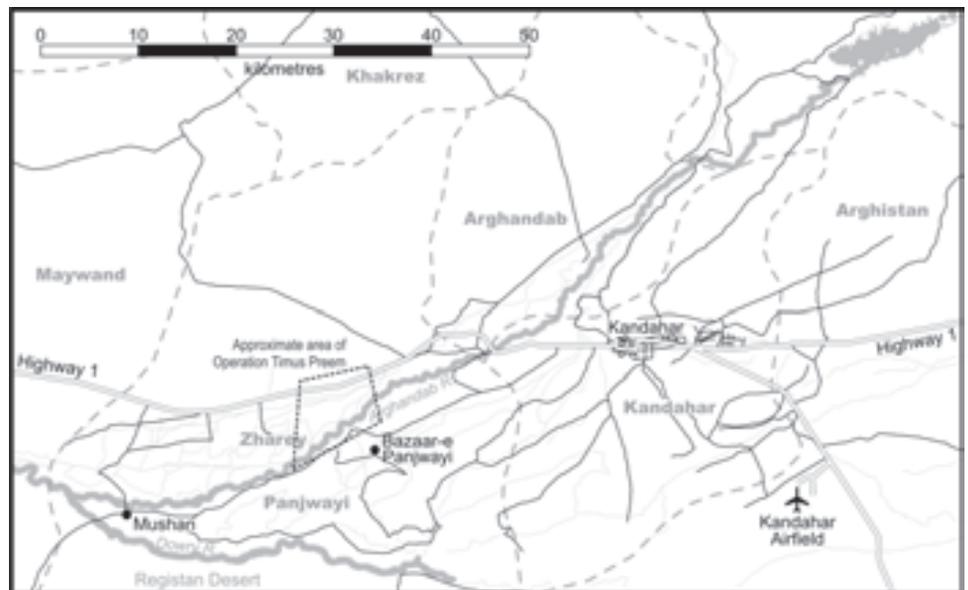
This was only a contingency operation as of 8 August and there was no inevitability about its execution. Were there enough forces available to mount it if Task Force Kandahar said "go"? This was a serious problem. A combination of the leave plan, the protection of tactical infrastructure, a quick reaction force task, and the siphoning off of infantry platoons to guard bridges in northeastern Kandahar province near Zabol

meant that 2 PPCLI battlegroup had less than 50 percent of its forces available for planning purposes. The planners had four infantry platoons in LAV-IIIs; two tank troops; a Coyote recon troop; two engineer platoons; and the M-777 artillery battery available. For command and control, there were two infantry company headquarters, a tank squadron headquarters and the recon squadron headquarters. This was not going to be enough. The planners looked at Afghan National Security Force availability. After consultation with the Canadian Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT), there was the possibility that an ANA company and an ANA platoon, with their Canadian mentors, could be cut loose for the operation. Perhaps more. Perhaps not.

Between 8 August and 16 August, the concept of operations (CONOP) continued to evolve. In a general sense, there would be a main effort in the centre against the western area of Pashmul, with two supporting attacks, one to the northwest down from Highway 1, and the other moving east to west south of Pashmul. In the CONOP plan, planners used phase lines named after characters from the movie "Transformers," a DVD that was popular among the

armoured soldiers. The CONOP was thus formally designated Operation Timus Preem. Regional Command (South), which consisted of older staff officers not au fait with popular culture, asked what Timus Preem was – Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould told everybody it meant "lawn mower" in Pashto.

On 16 August, Operation Timus Preem was formalized by Task Force Kandahar. Coincidentally, there was more and more ISTAR reports of enemy leadership in and around Objective Weasel, including Jabber Agha and two other senior commanders. Structurally, the plan remained the same: a main effort directed against three successive objective areas, with two disrupt operations in the flanks, and aerial screens provided by US Army OH-58D helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). The only real debate at this point was how to hit Objective Weasel, with what, and when. One planner wanted to use a particular missile system, but that was not available so the idea of unloading a B-1B bomber onto Weasel at the start of the operation emerged. Weasel's elimination at the start of the operation would, in theory, have a significant disruptive effect.



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold © 2010



Photo by author

Badger Armoured Engineering Vehicles carried improvised fascines that were deployed via the bucket boom during the operation.

FOB Mas'um Ghar: "B" Squadron, Lord Strathcona's Horse

Canadian operations in eastern Zharey district had evolved significantly over the course of three years. During the summer operations in 2006, Task Force Orion relied on deception, night operations, and stealth to infiltrate the Pashmul area with LAV-III-mounted infantry. The mass deployment of improvised explosive devices altered that approach and in 2007 2 RCR Battlegroup conducted daytime tank-led mechanized incursions into the district coupled with early morning dismounted infantry insertions. In 2008, 2 PPCLI mounted

several company-sized dismounted incursions supported by tanks. Operation Timus Preem would be the first battlegroup-sized operation of the 2008 rotation where the tanks led.

The three designated objective areas in Operation Timus Preem require some explanation. Each objective area was a collection of compound complexes, almost like islands. Each cluster of complexes was surrounded by grape growing trenches, drying huts, tree-covered irrigation systems, and because it was August, lush and dense vegetation (corn and marijuana, mostly). The only roads into and out of these areas were one-lane unpaved routes with multiple irregular twists and turns and innumerable culverts. That is,

these routes were perfect for IED emplacement.

The only way to avoid IED attack and subsequent canalization and delay was, in effect, to create unpredictably new roads as the operation progressed. This is where the armoured vehicles came in. The Badger Armoured Engineer Vehicle or AEV employed at this time was a Leopard 1 hull with engineering modifications, including a durable dozer blade. The armoured engineers were also experimenting with fascines carried not only on the AEV but by armoured trucks, the Mercedes AHSVS, as the Beaver AVLB vehicle was too unwieldy to use in the Zharey environment. The AEV boom or any vehicle crane could lift fascines off of the truck's cargo area and emplace it. Then there were the older Leopard C-1s equipped with dozer blades.

"B" Squadron, led by Major Chris Adams and Squadron Sergeant Major Tony Batty, experimented with these and other measures throughout their tour. They built on tactical ideas that their predecessors used in previous rotations, particularly the employment (and recovery) of tanks in mobility restricted environments. The vehicles themselves were fine-tuned as much as possible by Tango Maintenance at FOB Mas'um Ghar. "B" Squadron's proficiency level was at its peak in August 2008 and it would all contribute to the success of Operation Timus Preem.

In terms of structure, "B" Squadron had three troops, each consisting of a mix of vehicles. As



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A Canadian Forces Leopard 1C2 Main Battle Tank (left) sits side-by-side with its newly-acquired cousin, the Leopard 2A6M.

a rule, there were four Leopard 2 A6Ms, plus one or two Leopard C-2s equipped with either anti-mine plows, rollers, or dozer blades in each troop. The make up of each troop depended on the mission type – River Run, incursion, or Quick Reaction Force. There was also a mechanized infantry platoon on rotation from one of the 2 PPCLI companies, an artillery FOO and his LAV-III, a troop of armoured combat engineers with AEVs, an Explosive Ordinance Disposal team, plus armoured recovery vehicle assets and armoured ambulances. The Leopard 2 A6Ms with their 120 mm smoothbore guns were capable of firing canister or HEAT rounds. The “M” on the designation stood for “mine resistant” as the Canadian vehicles had a variety of modifications designed to mitigate the effects of IED and mine strikes.

At the same time “B” Squadron was responsible for supporting development efforts in the Panjwayi and Zharey districts. This took many forms but usually meant attempts to coordinate efforts between the Canadian government departments, the Provincial Reconstruction Team, the Operational Mentor and Liaison

team, the Police OMLT, and the Afghan security and governance people. “B” Squadron staff referred to themselves as the “Panjwayi East Combined Operations Centre” or the home of the “Whole of Panjwayi Programme for Enhanced Reconstruction.” “B” Squadron also handled FOB MSG security, which included counter-rocket operations. Leopard 2s emplaced in overwatch positions regularly engaged Taliban rocket teams at night in Operations Box Elton as they prepared to fire at the FOB.⁷

FOB MSG was also home to the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team supporting 1st Kandak, 1/205 Brigade of the Afghan National Army. Led by Major Dave Proctor, the OMLT had its headquarters and support facilities co-located but not under the command of “B” Squadron. There was also a Combat Service Support detachment led by Lieutenant Alison Lucas. The CSS detachment forward, consisting of vehicle techs, electro-optical equipment techs, weapons techs, and supply techs were responsible for non-tank maintenance and supply distribution at the FOB. The detachment had tracked light

armoured vehicle (TLAV) personnel carriers, an armoured heavy support vehicle wrecker (AHSVS), a heavy logistics vehicle wheeled (HLVW) with a crane, and heavy equipment (i.e., vehicle) transporters (HET). Importantly in this environment, the detachment had the ability to deploy a fire control system repair team, under armour, into the field. Tango Maintenance was a separate organization and included the Leopard 1 and -2 Armoured Recovery Vehicles.

The Enemy Draws First Blood

At 0730 hours on 19 August the shock wave from an explosion rocked FOB MSG. The FOB’s occupants initially thought a rocket had hit the camp, but in time the crews from the Quick Reaction Force, consisting of Leopard 1 and Leopard 2s, plus an ARV and Bison ambulance, moved quickly to their vehicles and started up. The Tactical Operations Centre staff was trying to ascertain what happened. It turned out that an enemy suicide bomber attacked a Canadian-mentored Afghan national police patrol on the Bazaar-e Panjwayi-Kandahar City

An example of the complex terrain encountered in Zharey District during Op Timus Preem. This is a collection of grape drying huts surrounded by vineyard trenches that are four to five feet deep and choked with vegetation.



road. One interpreter was killed and a Canadian Police-OMLT mentor wounded. A local national child was also wounded and a medical evacuation chopper was called in.

This did not stop planning for Operation Timus Preem. Captain Edgetar Manoucheri, the battle captain and the "B" Squadron staff fine-tuned their part of the plan. A confirmatory drill held later that day revealed that "C" Company, 2 PPCLI, plus "B" Squadron would handle the main effort. The northwestern supporting effort would be done by the OMLT with two ANA companies, while "B" Company and an ANA company would handle the southern supporting effort. Knowing full well that the enemy kept close observation on FOB MSG, Major Adams pre-positioned his vehicles inside the FOB as he normally would for a River Run down to Strong Point Mushan so that the enemy would think the upcoming operations was directed west, not north. Hopefully the enemy would also re-position his forces which in turn would be detected by ISTAR resources – and then other coalition resources could be directed from higher headquarters to interfere with the enemy's activities.

Enemy forces in and around the objective areas were estimated to be around 325 fighters, of which 100 were assessed to be skilled. They knew how to exploit cover to protect themselves from ISTAR assets and were well versed in how to exploit the limitations on the Canadian forces imposed by NATO rules of engagement. Enemy morale,

however, was not high and there was some internal debate between the Zahrey-based commanders as to the future direction of operations. In terms of leadership, Jabber Agha was estimated to be around Pashmul planning more suicide bomber and IED attacks, while Khaliq and Razaq, two of the Zharey district commanders, had been seen near Objective Weasel.

Once Operation Timus Preem was detected, the staff anticipated that the enemy would use his early warning system to determine what axis of advance the coalition forces were using, and then lay multiple IEDs to delay the Canadians and Afghans while reinforcements were brought in from the west, married up with their weapons caches, and then deployed to fighting positions. The dissenting opinion was that the enemy would drop their weapons and walk away to the west and not engage. Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould believed that in either case there would be a significant disruptive effect on enemy operations in eastern Zharey and this would meet the operation's objectives.

The main effort, consisting of "B" Squadron and "C" Company, was to conduct a rapid breach and isolate each objective area with a "ring of steel." The tanks and infantry were divided up into Breach Teams, BT-1 and BT-2:

BT-1:

"B" Squadron HQ (2 X Leopard 2)

"C" Company HQ (1 X LAV-III)

SLAYER (2 X LAV-III with forward observation officer (FOO)/forward air controller (FAC)/JTAC)

1 Troop (4 X Leopard 2, 2 X Leopard 1)

Badger Armoured Engineer Vehicle

Leopard 2 Armoured Recovery Vehicle

Fuel truck (AHVSS)

Ammo truck (AHVSS)

Fascine truck (AHVSS)

1 X infantry platoon in LAV-III

BT-2:

3 Troop (4 X Leopard 2, 2 X Leopard 1)

Badger Armoured Engineer Vehicle

Leopard 2 Armoured Recovery Vehicle

1 X Leo 2 detached from "B" Squadron HQ for command and control

1 X infantry platoon in LAV-III

Four M-777 155mm guns and eight 81 mm mortars on call.

The ANA, the OMLT mentors, and ANP with Canadian Engineer Exploitation Teams would then sweep the compounds and exploit any material or personnel found. The force would then move to the next objective and do the same thing. Any defensive works would be destroyed through demolition. Aerial overwatch would observe any "squirters" and track them. There were three objective areas for the operation, which was estimated to

A Leopard 2 A6M advances through a field on day one of Op Timus Preem. The decision to avoid existing roads by the advancing forces resulted in no IED strikes during the operation.



Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry advance along a track during OP Timus Preem.



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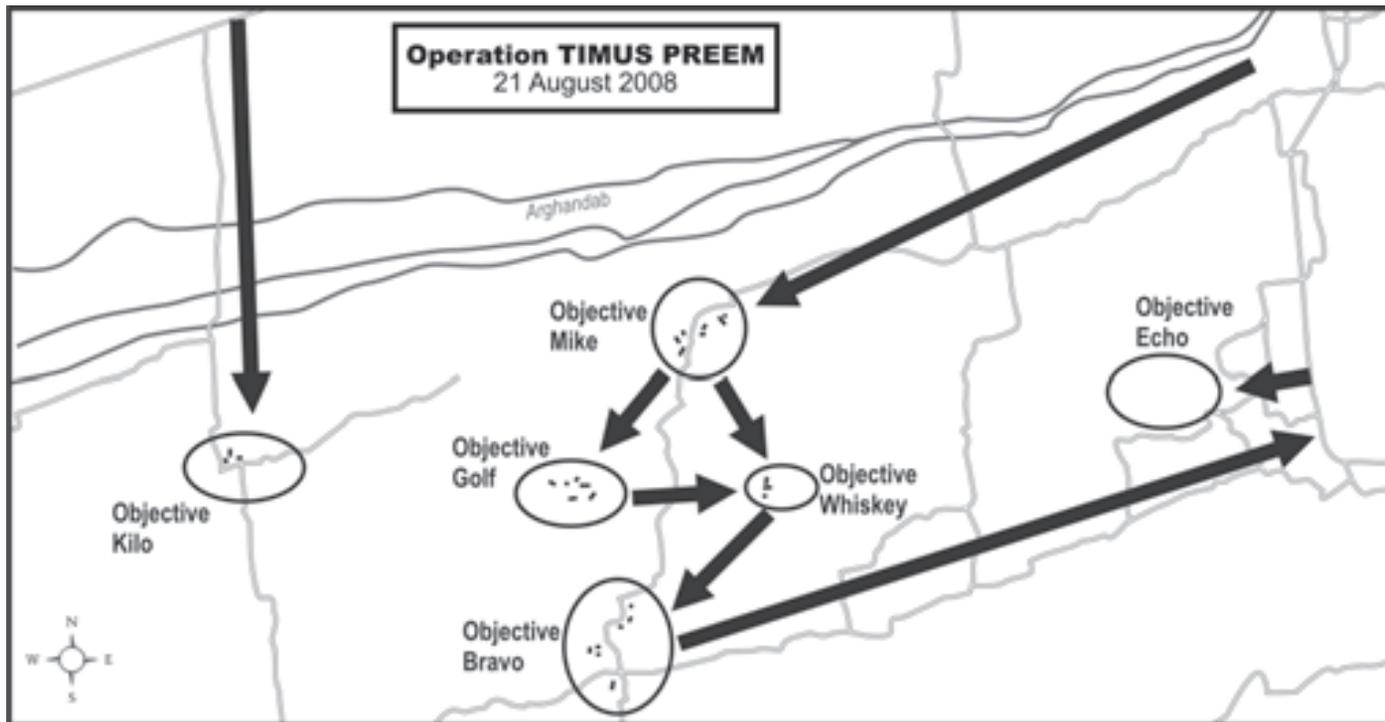
take three days. Of note, Operation Timus Preem would also have psychological operations (PSYOPS) and civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) detachments in support of the effort.

While preparations for Operation Timus Preem continued, the Red Phone in the "B" Squadron tactical operations centre rang to the theme from the movie "In Like Flint." A massive explosion occurred on Highway 1 around 1040 hours on 20 August. A Canadian engineer recon party supporting Operation Aspy Janoubi consisting of an engineer section and recon platoon from 2 PPCLI were subjected to IED attack. As the quick reaction force rolled out the gate, ISTAR reports warned that an enemy commander in western Zahrey was preparing to send forces to attack those responding to assist.

The drama continued all morning. The stricken vehicle had flipped over, the turret wrenched off and the surviving crew was trapped

inside. Then the vehicle started to burn. An armoured recovery vehicle and a Bison ambulance approached the site to right the wreck and extract the crew, but there was no protected fire-fighting capability to stop the fire. Then ISTAR reports noted that six to ten insurgents with a significant enemy leader were nearing the blast site. Medical evacuation helicopters were called in, but there were now concerns that the enemy might have laid IEDs on the nearest open space – the American task force wanted engineers to clear a helicopter landing site before they would go in.

There were an estimated four casualties, but their status was in some doubt. One Canadian was outside of the vehicle but three were still inside. Then ammunition in the stricken LAV started to cook off, which slowed the recovery team's efforts. Back in the battlegroup tactical operations centre, the JTAC and intelligence staff were trying to track the inbound enemy commander with the intent of using a MQ-1 Predator or MQ-9 Reaper to kill him. Artillery could not be used because of a rules of engagement issue. Fortunately for him, when the



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2010



Operation Timus Preem was initiated by nine bombs dropped by a B-1B on Objective Weasel, an enemy command and control compound.

UAVs became available he could not be engaged because of another rules of engagement issue.

The staff discovered that there was in fact a firefighter vehicle available but they had not been told it existed – it was to suppress aircraft fires at the landing zone and “belonged” to another organization at Kandahar Air Field. Major Steve Davies from the OMLT volunteered to lead this virtually unarmoured recovery “package” through Zharey district to the strike site. This included the firefighting vehicle, a dump truck (to fill in the crater) and a low-bed heavy equipment transporter, escorted by OMLT RG-31 patrol vehicles. Another threat warning from ISTAR reports came in – the enemy was deploying a mortar team to attack the IED strike site. Resources were deployed to look for it. The flat screen television in the tactical operations centre, set to a news channel, surreally announced that Christina Applegate was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was quickly shut off. The mortar team, it turned out, directed its efforts at Strong Point Mushan, not the strike site. After two mortar rounds landed near the strong

point, M-777 guns were called in to suppress the weapon.

Tragically, the quick reaction force reported in that there were three Canadian dead and one wounded.⁸ The belief at FOB Mas’um Ghar was that Commander Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, who was in theatre at this time, might put a hold on Operation Timus Preem, anticipating domestic political sensitivities. This proved to be unfounded, however, and the enraged Canadians made their final preparations late into the night of 20 August. The crew of T-23, a Leopard C-2, spray-painted the visage of a grim reaper and his scythe onto the dozer blade of their vehicle.



Photo by author

Day 1 – 21 August

At 0415 the battlegroup’s TAC forward at FOB MSG was fully manned and at 0426 hours, a pair of US Army AH-64 Apaches arrived on station and checked in. Inside FOB MSG, long lines of armoured vehicles from the breach teams with their engines off sat in the dark, their crews cupping their cigarettes. Foot patrols swept suspected rocket launch locations sites outside the camp. Operation Timus Preem was cocked and ready, awaiting clearance to engage Objective Weasel. ISTAR assets were now closely observing the site, checking the pattern of life. When a control link failed between an allied ground station and an allied UAV that was operating on the flanks, a Canadian Sperwer was brought on station to check a “deep” target in western Zharey district. Nothing. No movement. ISTAR reports – enemy quiet.

The breach team columns roared to life at 0445 hours and headed out the gate, down the road and into the Arghandab River wadi. Instead of turning left and heading down the river to Mushan, the Badgers,

Leopards, and LAVs proceeded north on Route Summit. No contact. The sun was just starting to come up at 0515 hours revealing dusty mountains in the distance. ISTAR resources still had observation on Objective Weasel, waiting for the enemy commanders to arrive. Breach Team 1 reported in – the first breach is in. Unfortunately a traffic jam developed on Route Summit which slowed down the second breach team’s movements. The ANA and the OMLT moved on to their objectives south of the breaches.

At this point the enemy’s early warning network was not reporting anything using any means, nor was the enemy activating reinforcements. Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould believed that the presence of the AH-64s was deterring enemy movement, so he ordered them to orbit elsewhere for the time being, hoping the enemy would come out and play. By 0605 hours, there was still no detected enemy movement.

The Badgers, with their blades down, turned west off of Route Summit ploughing tracks across the grape trenches and smashing through high mud walls. Then a Leo 1 with a dozer blade followed behind, ploughing four or five small paths off the main track. The Leo 1 dozer then backed up and the paths were occupied by the Leopard 2s. This “herring bone” formation was repeated as necessary, with the infantry following in LAV-IIIIs. The tracks allowed the columns to completely bypass the roads which were assumed to have pre-positioned IEDs on them.

At 0634 hours, the enemy finally reacted and their whole communications system erupted in an aural blur. Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould could not wait any longer and decided to engage Objective Weasel. The battlegroup tactical headquarters chatted with a B-1B that was orbiting high overhead. The staff filed out of the bunker with their binoculars to watch.



Photos by author



A cloud of smoke and dust billows from the target of a Canadian M-777 155 mm gun which fired a mission to discourage enemy withdrawal from an objective compound.

LAV-III and RG-31 with mounted infantry advance along a lane plowed through the grape fields.

A dozer-equipped Leopard 1 moves up to plow run-ups for the LAV-IIIs. The lack of air conditioning in the older vehicles resulted in the manufacture of heat reflective umbrellas which significantly reduced temperatures for the crews.



Photos by author



Top: Pre-positioned chambers for improvised explosive devices were discovered along the roads. Combat engineers cleared the roads behind the advance forces to permit resupply.

Middle: Soldiers from the Afghan National Army and their Canadian Army operational mentors advance to search a compound complex. The ANA were responsible for all compound searches, while the Canadians handled cut-off security.

Bottom: A Leopard 2 in a cut-off position.

It was now a dusty, hot dawn. Objective Weasel was barely perceptible from FOB MSG. A loud “CRUUUMMMPPPP!”, the shock wave of nine guided bomb units smashing into Weasel, hit the FOB and a plume of black smoke could be seen several kilometers away.

“B” Squadron got the first contact at 0637 hours. A volley of rocket-propelled grenade and small arms fire was directed at the lead vehicles. Leopards from 2 Troop returned fire. Then a US police mentoring team triggered some form of anti-personnel device as the vehicle manoeuvred, wounding one of its crew. By 0654 hours there were several contacts underway – the OMLT and their Afghan troops were engaged in two locations on the two supporting efforts; “B” Squadron was shooting it out with insurgents on their axis of advance, and “C” Company, moving in behind “B” Squadron, was engaging enemy in a compound. ISTAR detected four, maybe more, enemy moving to a compound to engage “C” Company, but the FOO called in a fire mission and 155 mm rounds crashed onto the compound they occupied. A second fire mission was called in to take out a similar attempt by the enemy to move up and engage.

The first objective was designated Mike. It consisted of numerous compound complexes and was separated into Mike 1 through Mike 3. Breach Team 1 ploughed its way to Mike, and then ploughed a “ring road” around Mike. The dozer tanks then ploughed run ups and paths off of the “ring road.” Leopard 2s and LAV-IIIIs then moved in. The idea was to isolate Mike by having 360 degree observation and fire around the whole area – anything trying to get into Mike would be engaged, as would anything trying to get out. Once the 360 degree cut off was established, the Afghans, their OMLT mentors, plus the Engineer Exploitation Team

moved in to sweep the Mike 1, 2, and 3 compound complexes. PSYOPS and CIMIC teams assisted as required if there were civilians in the area.

Searching one compound complex, let alone three, was arduous. Wearing body armour and carrying ammunition and water in the nearly 45 degree heat was taxing for all involved. Indeed, it took all day to sweep and clear Mike.

ISTAR detected enemy movement near Kilo as the second wave of ANA deployed. Over in Panjwayi, two IEDs exploded on Route Fosters, but apparently not against coalition targets. As they had in the past, the enemy was trying to distract attention from the main effort over in Zharey.

Around 0800 hours, an OMLT vehicle observed and engaged enemy moving around Objective Echo. The two AH-64s were called in and unleashed their rocket pods on them. Another unit, 3 Platoon, identified enemy movement south of Mike and started to engage. The JTAC accompanying Breach Team 1 cleared in a Harrier which dropped a guided bomb unit, obliterating the enemy in the open. The ANA and the OMLT worked quickly in the Kilo complexes – they declared the first three clear by 0950 hours.

In an effort to speed up the opening of resupply and casualty extraction routes, combat engineers using counter-IED equipment cleared the roads parallel to the breaches. They found numerous pre-positioned IED components, including a massive culvert bomb. They also discovered multiple fighting positions with interlocking field of fire. These were destroyed with explosives. In a disturbing development, an OH-58D from the Banshees saw a suspected IED from the air on Route Summit. Engineers were diverted to examine the site and remove the device. Then a vehicle from the American Police Mentoring Team accompanying

the Afghan police in Objective Kilo struck an IED. It was a mobility kill with no casualties.

The Afghans and the OMLT continued to get contact, particularly in and around Objective Kilo to the west. An ANA platoon had a short but sharp engagement with a small group of insurgents who appeared to be trying to infiltrate into Objective Mike. Another small group was driven off by the cut-off force surrounding Mike. Even the battlegroup tactical air controller got involved at 1115 hours, a 9'r TAC LAV-III observed and engaged six enemy fighters with rocket-propelled grenade launchers trying to skirt Mike to the south and get in behind the cut-off force from the east. Heavy-calibre weapons were fired from the RG-31s and LAV-IIIs, and an AH-64 came in to finish off what was left with 25 mm cannon fire. The backpacks these insurgents were carrying went up in a series of secondary explosions. The AH-64s were then diverted to drop a Hellfire on a grape hut into which several insurgents were seen to flee. Another estimated four insurgents were taken out in that strike. By 1155 hours, Breach Team 1 remained in position around Objective Mike, while Breach Team 2 passed through Mike heading south.

Normally, the enemy commanders in Zharey would be assembling and deploying reinforcements from communities in the west. This was not happening to the extent that some hoped. Was the enemy discombobulated by the novelty of the operation? Or was the enemy choosing not to react and then flow back in later? Were there other reasons? Was this slow response an effect of the strike on Weasel? It was not clear. What was clear was that ISTAR reports indicated the enemy commanders were having problems activating a single suicide bomber to infiltrate Mike, let alone mount

a coordinated assault on the Timus Preem forces.

By 1215 hours, the ANA and OMLT were consolidating Objective Kilo, and then found two IEDs. Objective Mike was being swept, but was not yet clear. The initial battle damage assessment of Objective Weasel was that 90 percent of the target was damaged. ISTAR reports suggested but did not confirm that there were 40 enemy killed in the strike, including some medium-value leadership targets.

Breach Team 2 moved south of Mike and started clearing leaguer areas for the assault force in the fields. The Badgers and dozers cleared three parallel lanes for each assault force. While this was happening, 4 Platoon got a contact inside Mike: three insurgents were positively identified and engaged in the late afternoon.

Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould's assessment of the situation in the waning hours of 21 August was that the breaching operations were much slower than anticipated, the operations on Objective Kilo were a successful block with positive effects, and the deep strikes were successful at engaging reinforcing fighters. He now had a decision: should the force go after Objective Golf or Objective Whiskey? It was unfortunate that the coalition did not have the resources permanently to garrison Objectives Mike, Golf, and Whiskey. The battlegroup had temporarily expanded the "security bubble" west of Stability Box Juno. It was too bad that this situation could not be exploited.

The CIMIC teams were now reporting that there were some annoyed farmers. It could take years, even decades in some cases, to grow the huge grape vines in these trenches. Chunks of these fields were being obliterated by the dozer blades. The message from the battlegroup was less than conciliatory: "If you told us where the IEDs were on the

roads, we wouldn't have to make our own," they were told. That is, you locals are "fence sitting." You want us to stop, come off the fence.

At 1830 hours, 120 mm and 25 mm fire erupted west of Mike, and artillery started to land on targets. There were contacts all over the place and it appeared as though small groups were trying to infiltrate at dusk. They were unsuccessful. By 1845 hours, both breach teams were lined up in their lanes south of Mike when cries of "Stand To!" were called out. The lead tanks on the lanes then engaged targets 300 to 400 metres to the south in the direction of Objective Golf. Three groups of fighting age males pretending to be labourers during the day recovered cached weapons at night and advanced on the leaguer. They were all taken out.

ISTAR resources reported that the enemy was bringing in an "82" in a vehicle. Was it a mortar or a recoilless rifle? Nobody was sure. "Crash harbour" was not an option given the restrictive terrain. Four civilian vehicles and some 20 personnel were spotted moving in from the south west, but weapons were not evident. Various systems continued to track them. Then coalition forces over in Objective Kilo started tracking night movements, up to 50 personnel. ISTAR picked up that a significant enemy commander from Zharey was present, but the conditions were not

right to engage. It may have been a funeral.

It was a cool night as the crews bedded down behind their vehicles. Captain Tom Neil and his PSYOPS crews in their RG-31s turned on their loudspeakers. Interpreters read out messages and letters to the Taliban in Pashto, trying to convince them to quit the fighting: "Taliban, if you want to use the children for suicide attacks that is not good. They are innocents. If you are ready to fight grown-ups, we are here." "Taliban, if you drank your mother's milk, then come out to the fighting place and fight us. If you don't, then you are a bastard." A Scan Eagle MUAV buzzed the leaguer, and orbited the perimeter.

Day 2 – 22 August

The troops put away their sleeping gear after they awoke in the morning cool. Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould decided to move on objectives Whiskey and Golf simultaneously. His decision was in part based on overnight ISTAR reports. The enemy, apparently, believed that this incursion was payback for the three Canadians killed on Highway 1. They also were surprised that the force did not pull out at noon and remained in the field. They were confused as to what the next move was going

to be. They knew the force was aligned south in its leaguers – but that could mean it was headed to the compound complexes in Golf or Whiskey. Therefore, Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould concluded, hit both objectives. Breach Team 1 would move on Golf, while Breach Team 2 would move on Whiskey. Then, depending on how things went, the forces would proceed onto Bravo.

Again it took the enemy several hours to make any moves. ISTAR reports had an 82 mm mortar preparing to fire at coalition forces, while over in Objective Bravo 14 insurgents with what looked like a heavy weapon were seen moving around but could not be engaged. There was no movement around Kilo.

There was now talk that JTF-A or Canadian Expeditionary Force Command might order Operation Timus Preem terminated so that the engineers from 1 Combat Engineer Regiment that were in the field on the operation could go to Kandahar Air Field to participate in the ramp ceremony for their three dead comrades. There was additional talk that this was related to increased political pressure to avoid more casualties and that was also an argument to finish the operation early. The idea that the combat engineers could extract separately from the operation was also floated and rejected. Ultimately, the operation

RG-31's, LAV-III's, a Bison, and a fascine carrier establish themselves in the centre of a night leaguer.



continued at the behest of Brigadier-General Dennis Thompson, who rejected the notion that Operation Timus Preem should be prematurely ended.

Breach Team 2 had eyes-on Objective Whiskey-2, where Objective Weasel was located. There was no pattern of life. The breach was launched. To get at Weasel, the breach team had to traverse complex terrain. The Badger AEV went first. Its blade, ploughed through a marijuana field, took down a hardened five-foot high mud wall, and cut a path through a square corn field, then took down the next wall, which was nearly eight feet high. This put the AEV into a second square walled field, where the process was repeated. When the last wall was down, the AEV was in sight of Objective Whiskey. This route was selected because the ground was relatively flat. The walled fields to the east were full of grape growing trenches, and the west there was a wooded stream with a wall paralleling it.

The Leopard 2 troop followed the AEV, burst out of the last breach, and moved in open ground to isolate Objective Whiskey. The Leopard C-2 with the dozer followed and ploughed out the "herring bone" run-ups in the first field, which was occupied by the battalion tactical air controller. The tank then moved to the second field and did the same for the infantry LAV-III's

By 0837 hours, Objective Whiskey was isolated by the cut-off forces and the exploitation started. Major Dave Proctor's OMLT, with Warrant Officer Chuck Côte accompanying the lead Afghan infantry company, dismounted, marched through the breaches, deployed, and prepared to move on Whiskey. A pair of AH-64s orbited the proceedings, looking for targets. In the initial search the Afghans and the OMLT found a large mortar cache and a pile of artillery

rounds that were probably destined to become IEDs. A small bunker was found adjacent to the strike site and the exploitation continued. A report came in that the stench of rotting flesh was noticeable around the Objective Weasel strike site. Further explorations uncovered large amounts of material to make IEDs. Another interesting discovery made by the engineers was that the enemy was re-using Canadian construction materials that had been used to build Afghan National Police Sub Stations in Zharey district to shore up their bunkers and fighting positions.

Objective Kilo then started to take mortar fire; four rounds landed near the OMLT and ANA leaguer. These rounds bracketed the force, and indicated that an experienced or at least trained enemy mortarman was in play. The ANA and the OMLT engaged enemy spotters, while a quick analysis determined the firing point for the mortar base plate. A distant explosion signalled the abrupt end of enemy mortar team; it was engaged with a guided bomb unit from a Harrier, killing the whole team. ISTAR reports indicated that the enemy commanders kept trying to contact the team throughout the afternoon, to no avail.

Breach Team 1 followed Breach Team 2 through its breach, and then turned west south of Objective Golf. The Badgers and Leopard 2s swung north to isolate Golf from the west, while keeping an eye on Bravo to the south. The shortage of Afghans meant that the Canadian infantry platoon with Breach Team 1 and the Engineer Exploitation Team had their hands full with Golf.

Echelon elements carrying fuel, ammunition, water and food followed the Breach Team 2 Badger, which scraped out leaguer rows in a large open field south of Objective Weasel. The battalion TAC and the echelon moved into these positions.

Around 1625 hours, the enemy was able to get off a round or two of either mortar or rocket-propelled grenade airburst which exploded near the battalion TAC just as the Leopard 2 Armoured Recovery Vehicle nicknamed "Calgary" hooked up a Leopard 2 that was having power pack problems. The turret crews could see spotting pop ups along walls, but they could not tell if they were enemy spotters or curious children, or both. Then an orbiting MQ-1 spotted a pair of men with binoculars observing the leaguers and started to track them.

Major Chris Adams observed six insurgents in a nearby compound, while the JTAC spotted two more carrying what looked like a heavy weapon, possibly an 82 mm recoilless rifle. The orbiting Predator was cleared to engage. At the same time, the Afghans engaged a target with small arms fire, and then a Leopard 2 fired a 120 mm cannister round at a group of insurgents who were probing the leaguer positions.

Almost all Canadian groups in all of the objective areas reported people equipped with binoculars observing the new positions. Orders were given to engage anyone involved in this activity. An unknown vehicle crew commander whispered onto the net: "I seeeee you!" right before his gunner fired. A total of three enemy spotter teams were taken out using 25 mm and 120 mm fire.

Objective Whiskey was now 100 percent clear. Additional searches uncovered mortar, rocket-propelled grenade and IED material caches (the mortar rounds had Chinese markings on them). A number of radios were found, plus some cell phones and a significant quantity of medical supplies. A detainee was taken and whisked away to Kandahar Air Field via UH-60 helicopter. Objective Golf, however, was not cleared yet, so there was no update on material found. At



At dusk a Leopard 2 tracks suspected spotters from the night leaguer. After the sun went down, this vehicle engaged and destroyed an enemy anti-tank team.

1645 hours, the enemy ineffectively engaged the leaguer with rocket-propelled grenade and small arms fire from the west.

Information from Afghan sources indicated that the enemy had moved back in on the initial breach routes from Summit to Objective Mike and laid eight IEDs on them. They also determined that 15 wounded enemy fighters were evacuated to one field hospital, and eight to another. For the most part, the bulk of the insurgents in the objectives areas retreated west, south west, and south to get out of the way of the armoured onslaught. The results of the airstrike on Objective Weasel were in some dispute. The numbers of enemy killed were revised down. The best estimate at this point was 25 killed, 15 wounded, including a small number of Arabs, Pakistanis, and possibly Chechyns. Further information came in that the enemy had 15 fighters placing mines on routes south of the leaguer, trying to anticipate the force's movement. Again, reports of more inbound mortar teams came in. The Badger AEVs were tasked to dig shell scrapes throughout the leaguer. The engineers used plastic explosives to take down large Ironwood trees that blocked the tanks' arcs of fire.

Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould assessed the situation. The enemy was reacting in a more coordinated fashion than the day before, but still not strongly. The options were to move onto Bravo, continue to "muck out" Golf, both, or withdraw. Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould was also prepared to use the leaguer as a "hedgehog" and rack up the kills – if the enemy chose to take it on. The enemy, on the other hand, seemed to be slowly reinforcing the area near Objective Bravo with small groups. Small groups of young men on motorcycles were also seen entering the now-abandoned Objective Mike; there was word that the two enemy commanders for western Zharey were on the scene.

Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould decided to clear Objective Bravo. The night leaguer was oriented south, while Objective Bravo was to the west. It was probable that the enemy would think the axis of advance would be south and not west, so some surprise might be achieved. The move on Bravo would also avoid the mines the enemy placed to the south. Both breach teams would isolate the rather elongated Bravo objective area, then the ANA and OMLT would clear south to

north to throw off anybody still in their positions. The only issue was a pair of small wadis, but the fascines would be put to good use there. The Canadian and Afghan forces pulled into their night leaguers, dismounted and made supper. As the night closed in the PSYOPS teams played Blue Oyster Cult's "Don't Fear the Reaper," followed by a succession of distorted tunes from Blink-182, Limp Bizkit, and Linkin Park. There was no contact that night.

Day 3 – 23 August

At 0630 hours, observers saw a group of women and children leaving Objective Bravo and heading north. An enemy observer with a cell phone was seen in the midst of the women and children, so the Leopard 2 tank crew that was tracking him refrained from firing its 120 mm gun. Another group of insurgents were, however, seen to be signalling their compatriots, and they had no human shield, so a 120 mm HEAT round took them out.

At 0655 hours the Badger AEVs with their fascines moved out of the leaguer, heading west southwest. The two wadis were filled in with the fascines and crossing points

established for the follow-on forces. A motorcycle was seen to leave Bravo heading west at high speed. This was probably a "Paul Revere," a backup early warning fighter headed off to alert his commanders that the coalition forces were not moving as anticipated. Indeed, crew commanders and gunners started to see signalling mirrors blinking in the morning light. Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould was informed through ISTAR reports that the enemy was having serious problems communicating with their early warning networks, particularly after they had been targeted.

Breach Teams 1 and 2 ploughed on through the rich soil of the tall cornfields. The Badgers put in the "ring road" and by 0725 hours the Leopard 2s and LAV-III's had isolated Objective Bravo. The Afghans and the OMLT commenced their sweep in the south. Many fighting age males were seen but it was difficult to determine whether they were "moving with intent" or if they were conducting "agriculturally-related activities." A CIMIC team working with the Afghan soldiers conducted a Key Leadership Engagement in one of the Bravo compounds, as engineers found a locked trap door elsewhere. The local nationals told the Afghan soldiers that the insurgents rounded up everybody in the area and put them under guard in a grape hut, and told them not to leave or look out. The enemy did not want them telling coalition forces what direction they went in. The engineers then found IED equipment, while an orbiting UAV saw a man on a motorcycle headed west stopping and talking to small groups of fighting age males that were conducting "agriculturally-related activities." Nobody seemed to be in a hurry to go anywhere near Bravo.

The local population in Bravo, it turned out, was extremely friendly.

Almost 60 people remained in their compounds when the sweep forces came through and they were quite helpful in describing enemy activity in their area. The people were adamant that most of the enemy they saw were Pakistanis from Balochistan, with some Arabs and, apparently, Chechyns. They forced local people to store vehicles, but did not force them to store weapons. For the most part, the insurgents stayed overnight in the fields, not in the compounds. They operated in groups no larger than eight, and usually carried a mix of small arms and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. Special two- and four-man teams carried the 82 mm recoilless rifles. Local nationals with military background told the ANA soldiers that the Taliban were low on ammunition this season and were probably incapable of sustained actions as they had been in 2006.

The CIMIC team decided to hold a formal shura. In that meeting they learned that the people in Bravo were mostly pro-government, so much so that the Taliban hung a kidnapped police officer from a tree earlier in the year to intimidate the people. More importantly, a local national with military experience confirmed that Objective Weasel was in fact some form of forward headquarters and depot. The enemy commanders apparently had two command "nodes" and rotated them through Weasel so both would not be killed at once – Bravo was a transit area for the backup command node. The enemy kept a small command team active in Weasel at all times and augmented when necessary from Bravo. If an operation was undertaken east in Sanjeray, the teams generally passed through Weasel on the way.

The insurgents interfered with education in the Bravo area. There was a school and a principal and the ANP had a checkpoint to protect it. The Taliban kidnapped and killed the

police and threatened the principal. He was forced to hide the small school library to prevent it from being burned. The PSYOPS team was concerned that the enemy would portray the withdrawal as a victory to the population. Discussions with local people confirmed that they understood that the coalition forces could not stay indefinitely and would be resistant to the Taliban's claims of victory. They had seen the Taliban driven away by the coalition forces and knew they would be back by nightfall.

Continued sweeps in Bravo turned up very little. There was confirmatory information from other local nationals. By 1100 hours, Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould decided to extract the force and head back to FOB Mas'um Ghar. The extraction plan was tricky. The enemy was alerted and no doubt would mine and IED the existing west-east routes between Bravo and Route Summit if they could. The enemy could not be sure, however, that the Operation Timus Preem force might not continue to move south or west, and they did not have an unlimited number of devices. Lieutenant-Colonel Corbould decided to take the most direct option. The two breach teams would plough two parallel routes along the single west-east road, and have the forces in Objective Echo clear the junction of that road and Summit and from Summit to FOB Mas'um Ghar so there were no surprises on the way home. Alertness was a priority. It was a long and hot operation, and thoughts of a shower and hot food could not be allowed to override vigilance.

Breach Team 1 headed south, while a Badger from Breach Team 2 ploughed a track and a "parking lot" pointing west while the forces assembled in lanes pointing west. ISTAR reports indicated there was enemy observation and they were

trying to figure out where to set up an ambush. Once Breach Team 1 was well on its way, Breach Team 2 peeled back and headed south too.

By 1350 hours, the lead Badger AEV in Breach Team 1 started to overheat as it tried to traverse a muddied wadi system and mechanics were brought up to repair it. Another Badger was pushed forward to maintain the momentum. A Scan Eagle MUAV flew ahead along the planned routes to check the tree lines for possible enemy ambushes. Nothing so far.

At 1407 hours a Leopard 2 crew spotted several insurgents in tall grass south of the breaches. There was some debate as to who was going to engage, artillery, Predator, or the tanks. The enemy dispersed and withdrew as the tanks readied their coaxial machine guns. Then Major Adams spotted three more insurgents manoeuvring to the south and let fly with a 120 mm canister round, killing all three. The orbiting Predator reacquired the first group, which was in the process of splitting into two teams. It was not clear whether they were running away or manoeuvring.

Breach Team 2, however, hit a wet wadi system and then ploughed into a wet cornfield. The Badgers and Leopards had to back up and find a route around this impasse. Could the vehicles now start using the road to speed things up? There was only 200 metres of it left before it hit the paved Route Summit. The answer was no: continue to avoid the road in case of IEDs. Major Adams, quoting the film "Back to the Future," said over the radio: "Roads? Where we're going we don't NEED roads!" It was just as well. When Breach Team 2 was forced closer to the road because of wet terrain, a sweep discovered an IED; it was blown in place by the engineers. The breach team swung north again into navigable terrain and continued east.

By this time, Canadian and Afghan forces cleared and secured the junction as the Badgers and Leopards bashed through the rich earth of the fields. As soon as the vehicles hit the junction, they headed south to FOB Mas'um Ghar. There were no incidents in the extraction. Operation Timus Preem was over, with no Canadian casualties.

Conclusions

Operation Timus Preem had a number of effects on the enemy in Zharey district. First, it forced them to re-organize their command structure and replace leaders. Second, it wiped out their "forward" IED production capacity and transit base to the Sangeray area. The cumulative effects contributed to the lack of IED activity directed at the Operation Aspe-Janoubi turbine transit operation that took place days afterwards.⁹ The operation also most likely took out some of the people involved in killing the three Canadian engineers on the eve of the operation. The operation also bought time for Stability Box Juno to consolidate. There may have been longer term effects but they were not measureable in August 2008. By spring 2009, Construction Management Team-2 was working with local Afghans to address volatile water diversion and irrigation issues in the "box" – without noticeable or significant enemy interference.

Operation Timus Preem, however, continued to highlight the problem of not being able to install an enduring Afghan government security and governance presence in an area subjected to a clearance operation. The enemy forces were swept from the area, many were killed and wounded, but without adequate security in place they returned the night after the Mechs left for home. It was noted by all involved in the operation, and understood

beforehand, that the populations in some of the objective areas were either pro-government or potentially pro-government and it is a tragedy for the Afghans and their Canadian allies that adequate forces were not available to expand the security "bubble" west from Stability Box Juno.

Notes

1. The Canadian Leopard 2s serving in Afghanistan now have the capability to mount such implements.
2. Sean M. Maloney, "Incursion at Howz-e Madad: An Afghanistan Vignette," *Canadian Military History* 17 no. 1 (Winter 2008), pp.
3. FIBUA: Fighting in Built Up Areas. Facetiously called FART or Fighting Around Town or FISH, Fighting in Somebody's House by UK forces.
4. Sean M. Maoney, "Panjwayi Alamo: The Defence of Strongpoint Mushan," *Canadian Military History* 18 no. 3 (Summer 2009), pp.
5. The author observed the planning process for Operation Timus Preem and accompanied the battlegroup for the duration of the operation in the field.
6. aka 'Jabba the Hut.'
7. As in, "The Rocket Man."
8. These were Sergeant Shawn Eades, Corporal Dustin Wasden, and Sapper Stephan Stock, all from 1 Combat Engineer Regiment.
9. The enemy's "rear" or depth IED production facilities were taken out the night after Op Timus Preem by special operations forces. I was told that it was the most successful SOF strike against Zharey IED cells in two years. This also contributed to the success of Op ASP-E-JANOUBI.

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