

Executive Summary – AR 15-6 Investigation re: Complex Attack on COP Keating - 3 Oct 09

On 3 October 2009, Soldiers of Bravo Troop, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 61<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, repelled an enemy force of 300 Anti-Afghan Forces (AAF) fighters, preserving their combat outpost and killing approximately 150 of the enemy fighters. US forces sustained eight killed in action and 22 wounded, all but three of whom returned to duty after the attack. The Soldiers distinguished themselves with conspicuous gallantry, courage, and bravery under the heavy enemy fire that surrounded them.

Combat Outpost (COP) Keating, originally established as a base for a Provincial Reconstruction Team in 2006, was located deep in a bowl in Nuristan Province, surrounded by high ground, with limited overwatch protection from nearby Observation Post (OP) Fritsche. The mission for COP Keating during the rotation of B Troop was unclear to the Soldiers of B Troop who understood counterinsurgency doctrine and the need to engage with and protect the local population. But owing to limited manpower and tactical reach off of the compound, the mission devolved into one of base defense and by mid-2009 there was no tactical or strategic value to holding the ground occupied by COP Keating. As a result, the chain of command decided to close the remote outpost as soon as it could. Originally scheduled for closure in July-August 2009, COP Keating's withdrawal was delayed when the assets required to backhaul base supplies were diverted to support intense brigade-level operations in Barg-e Matal in support of ANSF forces. Similarly, ISR assets that could have given the Soldiers at COP Keating better situational awareness of their operational environment were reprioritized to support Barge-e Matal as well as the search for a missing US Soldier in the south.

The delayed closing of COP Keating is important as it contributed to a mindset of imminent closure that served to impede improvements in force protection on the COP. There were inadequate measures taken by the chain of command, resulting in an attractive target for enemy fighters. Over time, and without raising undue concern within the US intelligence system, the enemy conducted numerous probing attacks, learning the tactics, techniques and procedures of B Troop, and pinpointing location of weapons systems and key infrastructure and material, such as generators and barracks.

Compounding the situation for the Soldiers on COP Keating, intelligence assessments became desensitized to enemy actions over several months. During the five months of B Troop's deployment to COP Keating, the enemy launched approximately 47 attacks – three times the rate of attacks experienced by their predecessors. On several occasions intelligence reports in advance of an attack indicated there was a large enemy force that would strike, but the attack that followed generally consisted of a few number of fighters who used indirect and small arms fire for an engagement that averaged five to ten minutes in duration. Owing to this experience with the enemy in vicinity of COP Keating, the perception prevailed that reports of massing enemy forces were exaggerated and improbable. The focus became the enemy's most likely, rather than his most dangerous course of action.

On 3 October 2009, the Soldiers of B Troop awoke to a previously unseen volume of enemy fire, commencing at approximately 0558 hours, and coming from the high ground surrounding the COP. A simultaneous enemy attack against OP Fritsche limited mortar fire support from that location. Enemy fighters applied the information gathered from probing attacks and immediately inflicted casualties on the COP's guard force and suppressed COP Keating's primary means of fire support, its 60mm and

120mm mortars. Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers on the eastern side of the compound failed to hold their position, and enemy AAF fighters penetrated the COP Keating perimeter at three locations.

Continuing to fight under the heavy enemy indirect and direct fire from superior tactical positions, and suffering a loss of power to the tactical operations center (TOC) when enemy forces destroyed the main power generator, B Troop withdrew to a tight internal perimeter. With critical supporting fires from USAF close air support (CAS) and AH-64 Apache helicopter close combat aviation (CCA) fires, the junior officers and NCOs regained the initiative and fought back during the afternoon hours to regain control of COP Keating. The Soldiers, aided now by continuous fires from supporting aviation units, engaged the enemy fighters who had breached the compound, killing at least four of them, and reestablished control of key buildings. B Troop and the air support neutralized AAF positions in the local Afghan National Police (ANP) station and mosque in the nearby village of Urmol, as well as in the surrounding hills.

The Soldiers of B Troop demonstrated courage, bravery, and heroism as they inflicted over 150 casualties on enemy forces and reestablished their perimeter. In the process, the Soldiers embodied the Warrior Ethos and recovered all friendly casualties. As evening fell on the night of 3 October 2009, COP Keating remained solidly under US control and enemy forces had suffered a severe tactical defeat. Eight American Soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice defending their outpost and their fellow Soldiers.

Over the following days B Troop withdrew its forces from COP Keating, pursuant to the TF Mountain Warrior plan to evacuate tactically untenable COPs and OPs, and destroyed what remained of the camp on 6 October 2009 to prevent enemy use.