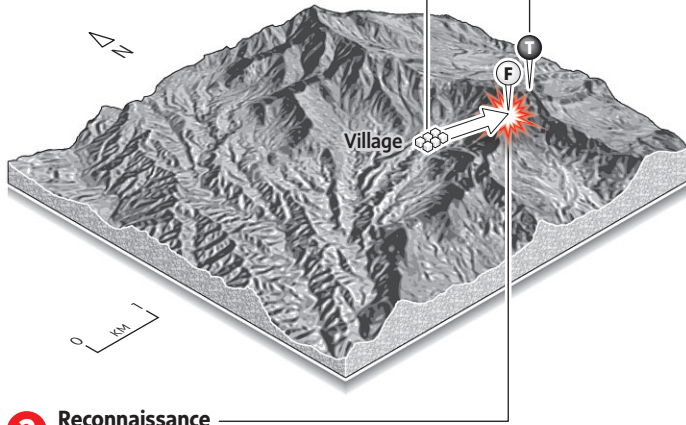


Deadliest ambush on NATO

A deadly ambush against international forces in Afghanistan provides the latest sign that the Taliban are mastering the art of guerrilla war.

1 Spur Kunday village

Aug. 18: a patrol of French, U.S. and Afghan forces visits Spur Kunday to investigate reports of 40 suspected Pakistani insurgents hiding in the village. None are discovered.

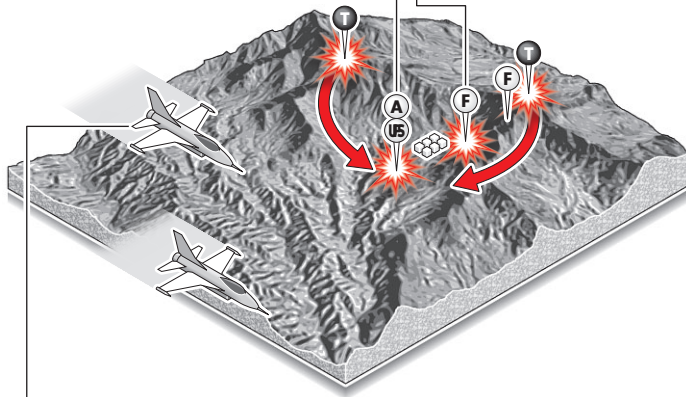


2 Reconnaissance

While other soldiers stay around the village, a platoon of 30 French paratroopers climbs on foot up the mountain slope for reconnaissance. The group is spread out, covering roughly 300 metres by 300 metres. It is a vulnerable position, surrounded by higher ground to the north, south, and east. It's where the French will suffer most of their casualties.

3 Attack

Taliban fighters attack from this ridge above the French platoon, with sporadic firing that quickly intensifies.

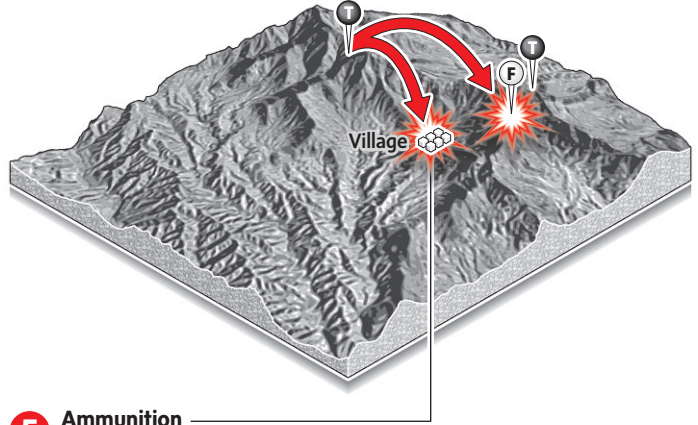


4 Reinforcements

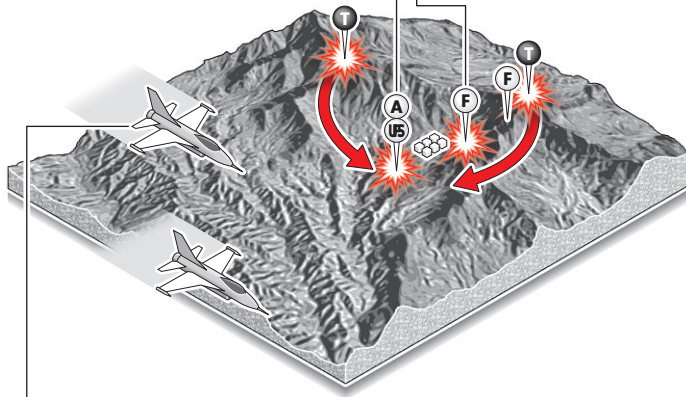
Soon other bullets and rocket-propelled grenades come from this ridge to the north looking down on the foreign troops a few hundred metres below. Soldiers around the village start getting hit with accurate fire. Military investigators later find evidence the insurgents had snipers, which is highly unusual.

5 Ammunition

Troops around the village try to move into a better position to counterattack, but they run out of bullets for their vehicle-mounted guns and are forced to abandon the effort. The investigation will later reveal only 600 bullets stocked for most of the vehicle-mounted guns, a number described by military sources as dangerously low.



The troops around the village split into two groups and make a second unsuccessful attempt to break out of their position. U.S. and Afghan forces drive west along the road but get bogged down by insurgents' crossfire.

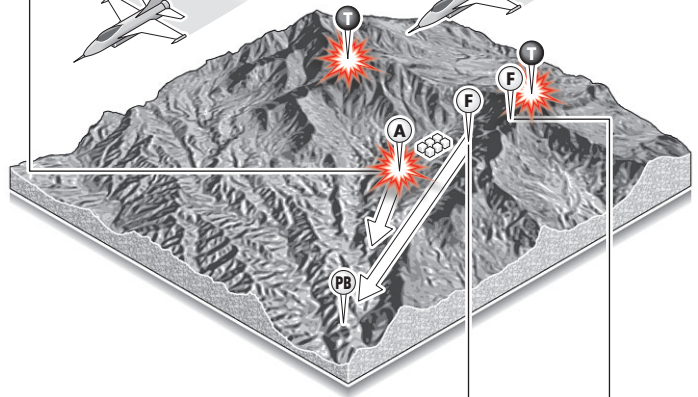


6 Out-gunned

French forces push east toward the trapped platoon but come under heavy fire and are only able to retrieve seven of the 30 stranded soldiers.

7 Aerial bombardment

The insurgents seem to try to encircle the foreign troops, sweeping down from the north and westward from the eastern ridge. They are hampered by a barrage of aerial attacks from an unmanned aerial vehicle, OH-58 Kiowascout helicopters, A-10 Thunderbolt planes, F-15 fighter jets, AH-64 attack helicopters, AC-130 gunships, and B-1B bombers.



8 Retreat

Insurgent machinegun fire disables two Afghan army vehicles, prompting the Afghans to flee back toward the nearest patrol base, leaving behind vehicles, weapons, equipment and ID badges.



9 Medics

U.S. medics struggle to help two of the French soldiers. One dies, while the other has a bleeding artery in his arm that needs urgent care. Intense air attacks allow a U.S. vehicle to ferry the wounded soldier back to the patrol base.

Help arrives. A large quick-reaction force from military bases near Kabul and the Surobi district centre sweep up the valley from the west, and push east to the stranded platoon. For some of the French soldiers, it is their first communications with comrades since the battle started because the platoon had only one radio. It takes until the middle of the next day to finish the battle and retrieve the dead. Some of the slain soldiers "were stripped and showed signs of being killed at close range," the NATO investigation concludes.