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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
TASK FORCE MOUNTAIN WARRIOR
HEADQUARTERS, 4TH INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM
4TH INFANTRY DIVISION (MECHANIZED)
FORWARD OPERATING BASE FENTY, AFGHANISTAN
APO AE 09310

AFZC-BCT-AD 21 September 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: AR 15-6 Investigation into the Combat Deaths of 1stLt Michael E. Johnson, GySgt Edwin W. Johnson, SSgt Aaron M. Kenefick, and PO3 James R. Layton

(U) 1. Appointment. I was appointed on 9 September 2009 by COL (b)(3), (b)(6) to investigate the small arms fire (SAF) attack on an Embedded Training Team (ETT) and Afghan National Army (ANA) Soldiers and Afghan Border Police (ABP) in the vicinity of Ganjgal, Konar Province, Afghanistan on 8 September 2009 which resulted in the deaths of 1stLt Michael E. Johnson, GySgt Edwin W. Johnson, SSgt Aaron M. Kenefick, and PO3 James R. Layton and the wounding of (b)(3), (b)(6) and SFC Kenneth Westbrook.

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2. Factual Findings.

a. 1stLt Michael E. Johnson, a 25 year-old male assigned to ETT 2-8, was fatally wounded by small arms fire while conducting a dismounted patrol in support of the ANA in the town of Ganjgal (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High , Kunar Province, Afghanistan. 1stLt Johnson was deceased at the time he was located (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High (b)(2)High

b. GySgt Edwin W. Johnson, a 31 year-old male assigned to ETT 2-8, was fatally wounded by small arms fire while conducting a dismounted patrol in support of the ANA in the town of Ganjgal (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High Kunar Province, Afghanistan. GySgt Johnson was deceased at the time he was located (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High (b)(2)High

c. SSgt Aaron M. Kenefick, a 30 year-old male assigned to ETT 2-8, was fatally wounded by small arms fire while conducting a dismounted patrol in support of the ANA in the town of Ganjgal (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High Kunar Province, Afghanistan. SSgt Johnson was deceased at the time he was located (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High (b)(2)High

d. PO3 James R. Layton, a 22 year-old male assigned to ETT 2-8, was fatally wounded by small arms fire while conducting a dismounted patrol in support of the ANA in the town of Ganjgal (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High , Kunar Province, Afghanistan. PO3

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Lavton was deceased at the time he was located (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High (b)(2)High

e. (b)(3), (b)(6) a 37 year-old male assigned to ETT 2-8, was wounded by small arms fire while conducting a dismounted patrol in support of the ANA in the town of Ganjgal (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High , Kunar Province, Afghanistan. He was medically treated initially at FOB Joyce, with follow-on treatment at Bagram Airfield. (b)(3), (b)(6) returned to duty on 11 September 2009. (Exhibit AO)

f. (b)(3), (b)(6) a 34 year-old male assigned to ETT 2-8, was wounded by rocket propelled grenade (RPG) fire while conducting a dismounted patrol in support of the ANA in the town of Ganjgal (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High , Kunar Province, Afghanistan. He was medically treated initially at FOB Joyce, with follow-on treatment at Bagram Airfield. (b)(3), (b)(6) is currently at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC), Germany, for further treatment and evaluation. (Exhibit AO)

g. SFC Kenneth Westbrook, a 41 year-old male assigned to ERF 10540, class 55, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, was wounded by small arms fire while conducting a dismounted patrol in support of the ABP in the town of Ganjgal (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High , Kunar Province, Afghanistan. He was medically treated initially at the scene with follow-on treatment at Bagram Airfield. He is currently at Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) for further treatment and evaluation. (Exhibit AO)

h. **What are the facts and circumstances surrounding the attack on the ETT and ANA Soldiers? (5Ws) Describe the nature of the attack and the response from the ETT and ANA forces. Was terrain a factor in the attack? What was the size of the enemy element?**

The impetus for the mission to the Ganjal village stemmed from a mission on 3 September 2009 in which (b)(2)High ANA and (b)(2)High ABP personnel, along with six (b)(2)High ETT and two (2) U.S. Border Mentor Team (BMT) personnel, conducted a cordon and search and Key Leader Engagement (KLE) at the village of Dam Dara, which was located a few kilometers from Ganjgal village. During the mission to Dam Dara, an outer cordon was established by the ANA in Ganjgal village and was met with a cordial response from the local villagers. During their departure from the area, the ANA and ABP were engaged with harassing small arms fire from a three to five (3-5) enemy element located on the ridge south of Ganjgal village. Following the

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engagement, tribal elders from Ganjgal village met with the ANA and ABP where they renounced the Taliban and expressed their support for the Coalition. This support was recorded and broadcasted on local radio; and was seen as a further sign of good faith. The tribal elders invited the ANA and ABP back to Ganjgal village to discuss renovation plans for their Mosque and agreed to allow a census of all military-aged males. The date for this meeting was not formally established or announced to the elders. The communications for the mission to Dam Dara on 3 September 2009 involved the use of (b)(2)High as the primary means with a scout element located on the ridge at the western end of the valley. (b)(2)High was planned as an alternate means but was not utilized. During the mission to Dam Dara, ground elements didn't experience any problems with (b)(2)High communications either in the valley or with the (b)(2)High . (Exhibits F, G, L, O, P, S, T, BH)

The date planned for the follow-on engagement to the Ganjgal village was tentatively scheduled for 7 September 2009 with the ANA taking the lead in planning the mission with ABP support. Several coordination and planning meetings were conducted on the days prior to include a combined operations brief on 6 September 09 with TF Chosin, ANA, ABP, ETT and BMT personnel present. The enemy threat situation was expected to follow the historical pattern, consisting of a squad-sized anti-Afghan Forces' (AAF) element using small arms, PKM machine guns, RPGs, and, possibly, 82mm mortars. The pattern normally consisted of a squad-sized AAF element conducting ambushes from far away using the high ground at prepared fighting positions usually from the east of Ganjgal village. The AAF never showed any interest in attacking from within Ganjgal village and normally required about an hour to occupy their positions and initiate their attack. (Exhibits P, S)

The ABP requested to shift the operation to 8 September 2009 due to other competing mission requirements. Dedicated (b)(2)High was scheduled for the mission on 7 September 2009. However, dedicated air support was unavailable on 8 September 2009. The ANA and ABP were briefed on this resourcing constraint, but agreed that the mission should go forward as planned without the dedicated air support. They deemed that artillery support would be sufficient. The (b)(2)High also briefed that TF Lethal had a dedicated Scout Weapons Team (SWT) consisting of (b)(2)High helicopters in support of their mission on 8 September 2009, which could probably be redirected to act as a local (b)(2)High (b)(2)High if needed, with a (b)(2)High response time. However, the response time briefed by (b)(3), (b)(6) was inaccurate. The response time for a dynamically re-tasked SWT

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actually requires (b)(2)High assuming coordination is properly requested and approved by TF Mountain Warrior. (Exhibits O, P, S, K, BK, BL)

On 7 September 2009, an (b)(2)High was issued stating that several Taliban leaders conducted a meeting in Ganjgal village to plan an ambush of U.S., ANA and ABP forces that were expected to visit Ganjgal village the following day. At the time of the (b)(2)High, twenty (20) Taliban fighters were reported to be in Ganjgal village with an additional twenty (20) fighters expected to arrive later. A total of five (5) ambush fighting positions were planned around the north, south and east sides of Ganjgal village. (Exhibit P, S, AX, AY, BH, BI)

The U.S., ANA and ABP personnel involved in the mission planning received and acknowledged the (b)(2)High but the plan for the mission was not altered as the village elders assured security for the mission and the historical threat did not support the (b)(2)High (b)(2)High The ANA and ABP were eager to execute this mission and both commanders agreed to execute this mission even without dedicated air support. Given the ANA and ABP initiative for this mission, any further delays would be perceived as stifling their initiative. (Exhibit G, O, P, S, BH, BI)

(b)(2)High

contact had been briefed initially by the (b)(2)High, (b)(3), (b)(6) on 4 September 2009 during the planned mission to Dam Dara, but there was confusion about what constituted a (b)(2)High For example, (b)(2)High

(b)(2)High

(b)(2)High During the planning on 6 and 7 September 2009 for the mission to Ganjgal village, the discussion of a fire plan involved the use of (b)(2)High mm mortars from (b)(2)High and (b)(2)High mm artillery from (b)(2)High but there was no mention of the type of rounds available. (b)(2)High In reality, only (b)(2)High rounds were available for this mission. (b)(2)High Kunar were located at (b)(2)High and (b)(2)High, but both were out of range and unable to support the operation in Ganjgal village on 8 September 2009. TF Mountain Warrior forwarded a request for (b)(2)High mm mortar and (b)(2)High mm artillery (b)(2)High on 1 September 2009 to CJTF-82, but there are currently none available in theater. Another complicating factor was that the (b)(2)High

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(b)(2)High Fire Support Officer and NCO were not consulted regarding the fires support plan, which may have alleviated this confusion early in the planning process. The same communication plan was used from the previous mission. (Exhibit P, AX, AY)

On the morning of 8 September 2009, (b)(2)High ANA personnel from (b)(2)High Kandak, (b)(2)High U.S. ETT (b)(2)High ABP personnel from (b)(2)High Kandak, (b)(2)High and (b)(2)High (b)(2)High BMT personnel conducted the mission to Ganjgal village (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High (b)(2)High to search and clear the village and conduct a KLE with village elders. (Exhibits G, H, K, O, P, R, AM, AL, AK, AQ)

(b)(2)High **hours local time:** Scout elements from (b)(2)High and 2-8 ETT were in place to the south and west of the village to observe the general activity (b)(2)High (b)(2)High in Ganjgal village. (Exhibits H, L, T, AK)

(b)(2)High **hours local time:** A vehicle Objective Rally Point (ORP) was established (in the vicinity of grid (b)(2)High . All vehicles were staged at the ORP given the rocky and narrow terrain restrictions. (b)(2)High (b)(2)High (HMMWVs) and small trucks. Therefore, all personnel dismounted from this location for movement to Ganjgal village. Since no vehicles were taken beyond the ORP, they could not use crew-served weapons at the village when enemy contact started. (Exhibits L, V, AP, AV, AW)

Between (b)(2)High **hours local time:** Lights in Ganjgal village simultaneously turned off to potentially signal the advance of Coalition forces and a blocking obstacle was located on the washout road to the west of Ganjgal village. (Exhibit L, P)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** As the U.S., ANA and ABP personnel reached the southwestern portion of Ganjgal village they were engaged by enemy small arms, PKM, and RPG fire from three to five (3-5) anti-Afghan Forces (AAF) enemy fighters from the northern ridge of the village. This was quickly followed by increasingly accurate fire from several locations both in the village and surrounding foothills. U.S., ANA and ABP forces immediately returned fire and sought cover behind buildings or in the dirt and rock terraces on the western side of the village. (Exhibits G, H, L, N, K, P, T, V, AM, AL, AK, AQ, AU, AT, BH)

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Between (b)(2)High **hours local time:** A (b)(2)High (b)(2)High is reported to be transiting through airspace above (b)(2)High in support of TF Lethal operations, which limits the potential employment of th(b)(2)Highm artillery. (Exhibit K)

Between (b)(2)High **hours local time:** 1stLt Johnson, GySgt Johnson, SSgt Kenefick and PO3 Layton, along with a squad of ANA Soldiers, consolidated in a trench (in the vicinity of grid location (b)(2)High about fifty (50) meters west of the village. SSgt Kenefick and (b)(3), (b)(6) repeatedly called for (b)(2)High conceal their movement away from the enemy, but were told that (b)(2)High are not available. (Exhibit H, P, V, AJ, AL, BI)

Of note, on 8 September 2009, grounds units were unable to communicate directly with the (b)(2)High as had been the case with the mission a few days prior to Dam Dara. Why they were unable to directly communicate with the (b)(2)High is unclear especially since the two (2) villages are less than two (2) kilometers apart and surrounded by similar ridges. The scout team (b)(2)High became the single point of communications relay for information flow in and out of the valley. Even though it does not appear that communications became saturated at any point with the scout element, friendly ground forces were under such heavy enemy contact that they stopped providing situation reports to the scouts and, thus, the (b)(2)High (b)(2)High began to lose situational awareness of the battlefield. (Exhibit L,O,P)

(b)(2)High

(Exhibits G, H, K, L, O, Q, T, V, AC, AJ, AK, AL, AM, AS, BH)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** (b)(2)High requested air support from (b)(2)High (both fixed wing aviation close air support (CAS) and rotary wing close combat aviation support (CCA)). (b)(2)High acknowledged the request and informed the scouts that CCA support is unlikely due to the three to five (3-5) AAF threat, but potential wait time would be (b)(2)High

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minutes. (b)(2)High also told his Air Force Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) that they did not need to request CAS for the troops in contact (TIC), because he did not think it was justified given the threat and the other missions ongoing in the area. At the time, only two (2) SWTs were available to support TF Mountain Warrior's area of operations (AO): SWT #1, consisting of (b)(2)High helicopters, was dedicated for a TF Lethal operation and was currently responding to a TIC in the TF Lethal's AO, which was approximately twenty to thirty (20-30) kilometers to the northwest. The SWT #2 was on a (b)(2)High minute standby as a (b)(2)High for the entire TF Mountain Warrior AO. TF Chosin TOC does not request CCA from TF Mountain Warrior. (Exhibits K, P, T, BM)

Approximately (b)(2)High hours local time: Well-coordinated, heavy enemy SAF and RPG fire was reported from the north, south and east of Ganjgal village. U.S., ANA and ABP personnel were pinned down and could not continue their movement away from the enemy. The estimated AAF size at this point was between thirty to sixty (30-60) enemy fighters engaging from well concealed and protected locations within the village and surrounding high ground. Some enemy fighters wore military style body armor and helmets indicating that these were more hardened and better trained fighters than had been seen in previous engagements in the region. This updated threat was reported from the scouts to the TF Chosin TOC along with a second request for CCA. (b)(2)High (b)(2)High preemptively informed the scouts that CCA would be available in (b)(2)High minutes, directly contacted the (b)(2)High and asked if there was a SWT currently at (b)(2)High (b)(2)High stated that SWT #1 was currently refueling at that location. mistakenly believed that they now have permission to retask SWT #1 in support of events in Ganjgal. (Exhibits K, N, O, P, BJ, BM)

Approximately (b)(2)High hours local time: (b)(2)High were requested and fired to the southeast of Ganjgal village to allow the U.S., ANA and ABP personnel to break contact with AAF. These rounds were requested at least twice before, but had been denied because (b)(2)High had difficulty with maintaining situational awareness and did not have confidence in the current location and disposition of friendly, enemy and civilian positions in and around Ganjgal village. (Exhibit K, O, P, Q, T) [Note: some witness statements seemingly blame perceived limitations from the (b)(2)High Tactical Directives for why rounds were not fired near the village. My assessment is that the directives did not limit the responses to the TIC. Instead, the lack of situational awareness is why the fire missions were initially denied twice.]

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Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** TF Chosin TOC sent SWT #1 a message via (b)(2)High (b)(2)High informing them that they were re-tasked to support events in Ganjgal village instead of TF Lethal's operation. TF Mountain Warrior is the tasking authority for all (b)(2)High (b)(2)High but they were not informed of this direct coordination. (Exhibits BJ, BM)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** (b)(2)High

(b)(2)High

(b)(2)High (Exhibit BJ, BM)

Between (b)(2)High **hours local time:** AAF enemy fighters began to maneuver west along high ground to increase their field of fire. (b)(3), (b)(6) ordered a tactical withdrawal with covering fire as U.S., ANA and ABP personnel began bounding west from one terrace to the next. SFC Westbrook sustained a gunshot wound to the head and neck, and was medically treated by (b)(3), (b)(6) sustained a gunshot wound to his arm and (b)(3), (b)(6) sustained a concussion from an RPG blast. (Exhibits P, S, G, AL, AJ, AK, BH, BI)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** (b)(2)High (b)(3), (b)(6) directly, requesting CCA, which was approved. (b)(3), (b)(6) was not informed of the current threat of thirty to sixty (30-60) AAF enemy fighters. (b)(2)High informed the scouts that CCA will arrive in (b)(2)High minutes. (Exhibits K, BM)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** SWT #2 (Call signs: (b)(2)High took off from (b)(2)High to provide combat air support for (b)(2)High The situational awareness and reporting challenges experienced by the (b)(2)High directly resulted in delays with obtaining TF Mountain Warrior support because of an unclear understanding of the ground situation around Ganjgal village. There was no clear understanding of the immediate CCA request process by the (b)(2)High or the urgency of the ground situation around Ganjgal village. (Exhibit K, AQ, BM)

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Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** The SWT #2 arrived on station at Ganjgal village to provide combat air support. (Exhibits E, K, AU, AT, AQ, AR)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** (b)(2)High received the first request for a medical evacuation helicopter, known as a 9-line MEDEVAC request, for SFC Westbrook and an unknown ANA Soldier. (Exhibits K, M, AM, AU, AT, AQ)

Between (b)(2)High **hours local time:** A medical evacuation landing zone was established. SFC Westbrook was carried there by (b)(3), (b)(6) moved to the landing zone. (b)(3), (b)(6) (b)(3), (b)(6) took a HMMWV and Ford Ranger truck west to begin extraction of ten to twelve (10-12) ANA wounded and dead personnel. (b)(3), (b)(6) attempted to establish radio communications with 1stLt Johnson, GySgt Johnson, SSgt Kenefick and PO3 Layton without success. (Exhibits H, AJ, AK, AG, BH, BI)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** SWT #2 left the Ganjgal village area to escort an inbound medical evacuation helicopter. An updated enemy situation report of thirty to sixty (30-60) AAF was sent from (b)(2)High (Exhibits AQ, AU, BM, BJ)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** A medical evacuation helicopter (MEDEVAC) (b)(2)High landed and evacuated SFC Westbrook to Jalalabad Airfield (JAF). Of note, the MEDEVAC pilot requested an additional attack weapons team (AWT) from (b)(2)High (b)(2)High SWT #2, who was the air mission commander for the area, denied the request because he assessed that the threat did not justify any additional aviation assets at that time. (b)(3), (b)(6) (b)(2)High, (b)(3), (b)(6) provided the primary ground communications for all MEDEVAC, CCA and eventual CAS aircraft. (Exhibits E, M, Z, AR).

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** Three (3) U.S. Marines, 1stLt Johnson, GySgt Johnson, and SSgt Kenefick, one (1) Navy Petty Officer, PO3 Layton, and a squad of ten (10) ANA Soldiers were reported as possibly missing. (Exhibits AT, AQ, AU)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** Fixed-wing air support for TIC opened by the (b)(2)High (b)(2)High

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Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** Close Air Support (CAS) (Callsign: (b)(2)High) aircraft consisting of (b)(2)High arrived in the area for support. (Exhibit AT, AQ, AU)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** (b)(2)High arrived on station and focused on search efforts to the east of Ganjgal village to identify any potential movement of missing personnel toward the Pakistani border. (Exhibits AQ, AU, AT)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** A duty status whereabouts unknown (b)(2)High report was declared for 1stLt Johnson, GySgt Johnson, SSgt Kenefick, PO3 Layton and one (1) ANA Soldier. (Exhibits AQ, AU, AT)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** (b)(3), (b)(6) and (b)(3), (b)(6) arrived via ground transport to FOB Joyce for medical care. (Exhibits AQ, AU, AT)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** CAS ((b)(2)High) conducted a low-level fly over of Ganjgal village, also known as a show of force. (Exhibits AQ, AU, AT)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** 1stLt Johnson, GySgt Johnson, SSgt Kenefick, PO3 Layton and one (1) ANA Soldier were found deceased to the west of Ganjgal village by (b)(3), (b)(6) (b)(3), (b)(6) (Exhibits H, G, AG, AJ, AQ, AU, AT, BH)

Approximately (b)(2)High **hours local time:** The deceased, 1stLt Johnson, GySgt Johnson, SSgt Kenefick, PO3 Layton and one (1) ANA Soldier, were recovered and transported back to FOB Joyce. (Exhibits G, H, AG, AQ, AU, AT)

i. **Identify the U.S. Service members killed or wounded in the attack and/or any subsequent engagement. Describe what the U.S. Service members were doing at the time they were killed or wounded. For the wounded U.S. Service members, provide the current status of their injuries and their prognosis for recovery.**

1stLt Michael E. Johnson, GySgt Edwin W. Johnson, SSgt Aaron M. Kenefick and PO3 James R. Layton were all killed outside Ganjgal village by enemy small arms fire. Based on the location and position of the deceased at the time of discovery, I find that PO3 Layton was likely treating 1stLt Johnson's shoulder wound while GySgt Johnson and SSgt Kenefick were providing flank security when they were fatally shot by enemy forces. (Exhibit G)

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