



UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
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by U.S. Central Command. See
Norgrove Investigation.

9 November 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR Commander, United States Central Command, 7115 South Boundary Boulevard, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida 33621

SUBJECT: Executive Summary (8 October 2010 Hostage Rescue Operation in Konar Province, Afghanistan)

1. *Investigation.* On 11 October 2010, Commander, United States Central Command appointed Major General Joseph L. Votel to conduct an investigation into the events surrounding the death of Ms. Linda Norgrove, a United Kingdom citizen who died during a hostage rescue attempt on 8 October 2010 in Afghanistan. Major General Votel assembled a combined team of officers drawn from both the United States and the United Kingdom with expertise in all aspects of hostage rescue operations to assist in the investigation. Over thirty hours of witness interviews were conducted. Hundreds of pages of documentary and hours of video evidence were compiled to support the investigation findings and recommendations. In keeping with the open and inclusive nature of this investigation, all of this material was made available to the United Kingdom team members throughout this investigation. Major General Votel is grateful for the positive assistance and involvement of Brigadier General Nitsch, Deputy National Contingent Commander and his supporting subject matter experts, during this detailed investigation. This investigation may be seen as an example of best practice in the conduct of combined investigations. The final report of investigation was provided to the Commander, United States Central Command for his consideration and approval on 9 November 2010.

2. *Background.* Ms. Norgrove was working for a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) subcontractor called Development Alternative Incorporated (DAI), as the regional director of the Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives –North, East, and West (IDEA-NEW) program that was a community based alternative development program that focused on agricultural initiatives. Ms. Norgrove was well known throughout the Dewagal and Tsowkey District villages and communities where she worked. On 26 September 2010, Ms. Norgrove was travelling with three Afghan colleagues and a private security detail to attend an opening ceremony for the Salar Canal in the Tsowkey District, Konar Province. Between 0930 and 1030 hours local time, Ms. Norgrove and her Afghan colleagues were kidnapped by Taliban insurgents. The four hostages were moved from the point of capture west into the Dewagal valley, Konar Province, Afghanistan.

3. *Pre-Mission Search Activities.* Within two hours following reports of her disappearance, United States and Afghan units began emplacing a cordon around the area where Ms. Norgrove was thought to have been taken. Locating and rescuing Ms. Norgrove became the sole mission of approximately 1000 US and Afghan forces. These forces were inserted into the rugged Dewagal valley in eight blocking positions with five separate maneuver forces that coordinated and reacted to large scale surveillance and intelligence gathering efforts in the region. During the eleven days leading up to the hostage rescue operation, intelligence reports indicated that Ms.

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Norgrove's captors wanted to move her and/or transfer custody to regional Taliban leaders. As the days progressed, so did indications that Ms. Norgrove's captors wanted to kill her and/or move her to more inaccessible location in the region. United States and United Kingdom authorities with Afghan concurrence assessed the reports as credible and determined that there was a significant likelihood that Ms. Norgrove would be moved to a less accessible location and/or killed if no immediate action was taken. On 7 October 2010, the position of what was thought to be one of Ms. Norgrove's captors was located and a hostage rescue operation was planned for the following evening while additional information on the target area was developed.

4. *Pre-Mission Planning and Approval.* The target compound was observed for twenty four hours to establish patterns of life and determine if Ms. Norgrove was located at the compound. Despite intense observation of the compound, Ms. Norgrove's presence at the target location was not confirmed. A hostage rescue operation was planned for the evening of 8 October 2010, based on intelligence reports regarding the captors desire to move and/or kill Ms. Norgrove and increased fidelity on the exact location of the compound. The hostage rescue mission was tasked to the most appropriate unit selected for its operational knowledge of the specific area, its specialized training, and experience conducting hostage rescue operations. It was acknowledged that this was a high risk operation; however this risk had to be balanced with the immediate risk to Ms Norgrove's life. United States and United Kingdom authorities in Afghanistan approved the operation prior to execution.

5. *The Operation.* Two helicopters conducted a night insertion of the assault force in the mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan where the target compound was located. The northern assault force was inserted close to the northern most building in the target compound. The southern assault force was inserted further down the mountain side to the south due to the terrain and encountered a challenging ascent to the target compound. During the initial moments of the assault, the northern assault force engaged and killed a number of insurgents including one who was subsequently identified as moving with Ms. Norgrove down a path towards the assault forces. Fearing for his own life and those of his team on a narrow and exposed terrace, an operator inadvisably employed a fragmentation grenade towards a blind spot from which he had seen three enemy insurgents emerge in quick succession. At no time during the engagements did anyone on the assault force observe or hear Ms. Norgrove. Ms. Norgrove was later discovered when the assault force began consolidating on the target compound. Ms. Norgrove was found lying next to a building in the compound, dressed in dark clothing and covered in debris. Ms. Norgrove was medically assessed and no vital signs were identified. Medical personnel assessed her condition to be "expectant" which meant that her wounds were so extensive that her survival was unlikely. In the absence of a medical doctor's examination, death could not be confirmed. She was evacuated from the target compound and pronounced deceased by a medical doctor upon arrival at Jalalabad Airfield. The assault force subsequently extracted from the target compound. On 14 October 2010, Ms. Norgrove's body was repatriated to the United Kingdom.

6. *Post Operation Actions.* The initial post operation assessment reported that the explosion on the objective was likely caused by an enemy suicide vest due to the massive wounds observed on the enemy insurgent killed near Ms. Norgrove and the fact that none of the assault force had

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mentioned using explosive munitions on the objective reinforced this impression. Numerous members of the same assault force also had a similar experience with a suicide vest on a previous operation. Members of the command drew a reasonable conclusion that a similar event had occurred on this objective and because there was no other indication otherwise, the cause of the explosion was determined to be an enemy suicide vest or grenade. As a result inaccurate information was provided to higher headquarters and transmitted more widely regarding the likely cause of Ms. Norgrove's death. Subsequent examination of the operation raised concerns that the initial assessment was incorrect and that the determination of the source of the explosion, as released, was wrong. Inquiries of the assault force confirmed that a member of the northern assault force had used a fragmentation hand grenade during the operation and that this information had been withheld by a team member. This raised immediate concerns that this hand grenade may have been the cause of death rather than a suicide vest as initially reported. This reassessment was passed directly to Commander ISAF and was immediately relayed to the United Kingdom authorities. United States authorities initiated a joint investigation into the incident that examined the planning and preparation for the rescue operation, the execution of the mission and subsequent post operation actions.

7. *Cause of Death.* As a result of the detailed investigation conducted in Afghanistan by a combined team of officers from the United States and the United Kingdom and a post mortem carried out in the United Kingdom, it is believed that Ms. Norgrove died as a result of fragmentation grenade wounds incurred during the rescue operation. A coroner from the United Kingdom will provide the final determination on Ms. Norgrove's cause of death at the conclusion of his inquest.

8. *Findings.* The findings of the investigation fall into four main areas.

a. *Pre-Operation Activities.* Pre-operation decision making, approvals and force selection were appropriate given the significance of this mission – with extensive United States and United Kingdom coordination throughout the process. The risks associated with this operation including the conduct of an insertion at aircraft performance limits, incredibly rugged terrain, almost no illumination, and little margin for error, and the necessity for speed and precision on the objective combined to make this operation high risk. These risk factors were taken into account by United States and United Kingdom authorities who determine that the risks to Ms. Norgrove's life outweighed the operational risks.

b. *Actions on the Objective.* Actions on the objective were as rapid and intense as any previously encountered in Afghanistan – with the assault force coming under direct contact as they landed on the objective. Within 59 seconds of landing on the objective, the assault force engaged three armed insurgents in rapid succession. Given the intensity of the contact and the perceived threat to the assault force a fragmentation grenade was utilized. While the employment of a grenade would have been warranted in a combat clearance operation, it was not appropriate in this hostage rescue operation. The fact that a team member had made a poor tactical decision and actually thrown a fragmentation grenade on an objective at which a hostage

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might be located was anathema to the established and well practiced hostage rescue techniques that the unit constantly drilled and practiced.

c. *Post Operation Activities.* Certain post-operation processes lacked sufficient rigor to facilitate an immediate or follow-up critical and detailed discussion of the events that actually occurred on the objective. However, given the strategic significance of this operation – characterized by the high risk to force being accepted by the command, and the fact that it had been a hostage rescue attempt involving a citizen of our principal Coalition partner – stronger consideration should have been given at all levels to a more formalized and swifter attempt to review the action in detail – particularly in instances of mission failure or strategic significance. Time and opportunity for this existed and should have resulted in uncovering the true facts earlier.

d. *Leadership Failure.* There was a personal failure by a leader who possessed the correct information to come forward in a timely manner to correct the initial reports. This failure resulted in the perpetuation of the inaccurate conclusions drawn from initial reports that Ms. Norgrove had most likely perished as a result of a suicide vest or sympathetic detonation, for a day and a half following the operation.

9. *Post Investigation Requirements.* The investigation report has been provided to Commander United States Central Command for his further consideration and evaluation. Once he approves the investigation, national level coordination will be conducted between the United States and the United Kingdom to inform relevant authorities and provide a detailed brief to Ms. Norgrove's family.

10. The point of contact for this action is the undersigned.

Encls.

1. Storyboard
2. Recovery Chronology


JOSEPH L. VOTEL
Major General, U.S. Army
Investigating Officer