

Blocking, sweeping and destroying the *mujahideen* in the Varduj Valley

by Major S. V. Krutyakov²³

At the beginning of June 1985, the Najmuddin guerrilla force set up its headquarters near the village of Jurm in the Varduj Valley. This guerrilla force consisted of approximately 500 men and were well-armed and equipped—to include three mountain guns, eight-to-ten mortars, and communications systems. The local populace strongly supported Najmuddin and disliked the Afghan government. We received intelligence reports that a caravan had arrived at the village. The authorities decided to destroy the guerrilla headquarters, capture the caravan and seize supply caches.

My 1st Motorized Rifle Battalion was assigned the mission to insert two companies and a mortar battery on the night of 4-5 June to establish blocking positions on the east and west walls of the valley.²⁴ Then, my remaining company would join the 2nd Infantry Battalion of the Afghan Army and conduct a sweep north up the valley. The sweep would seize supply caches and draft young men on the spot into the Afghan army. My battalion was supported by a D-30 122mm howitzer battery and a battery of BM-21 "GRAD" multiple rocket launchers.

I supervised pre-battle preparations in our base camp. At midnight on the night of 4-5 June, my 2nd and 3rd Companies and the mortar battery moved out. The 2nd Company's mission was to take one mortar platoon and block the west wall of the valley by 0400 hours. My 3rd Company, with the other mortar platoon, was to block all exits along the east wall of the valley by 0400 hours.

My 2nd Company completed its mission and moved into position by 0300 on 5 June. The *mujahideen* did not detect their arrival. At 0345 hours, as my 3rd Company was closing onto its positions, the enemy discovered it and fired on it from the hill north of hill 246.0. Our mortar platoon returned fire and killed the enemy. Fifteen minutes later, the 3rd Company established its blocking posi-

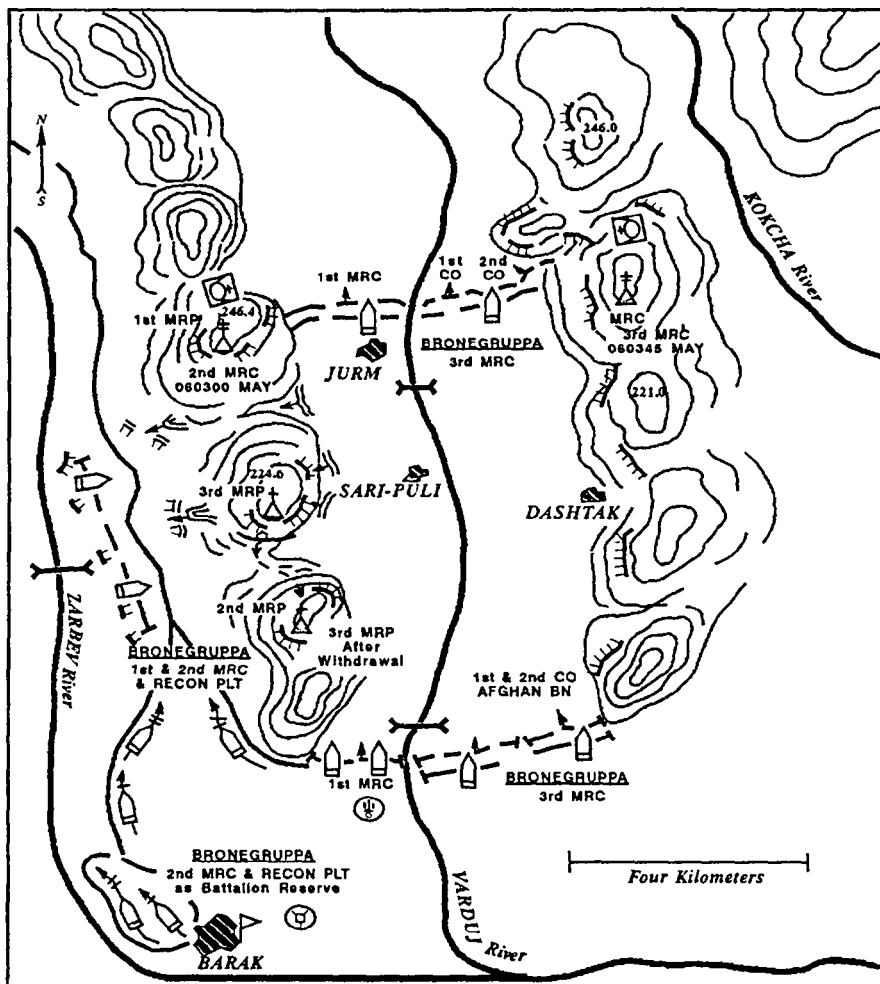
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At 0400 hours, the 3rd Platoon of my 2nd Company was attacked by 25 *mujahideen* supported by a mortar. The enemy attacked from the east and the platoon was blinded by the rising sun. The platoon withdrew from its position on hill 224.6 and moved south to join the 2nd Platoon. At the same time, my 2nd Company command post (located on hill 246.4 with the 1st Platoon) came under attack.

As soon as I understood the situation, I ordered the 2nd Company's *bronegruppa* (which was under my control) and the *bronegruppa* of the 1st Company (my sweeping company) to join forces



Map 10: Combat actions in Varduj Valley.

with my reserve (my reconnaissance platoon). I directed them to retake the 3rd Platoon's position on Hill 224.6, destroy the *mujahideen* who were supporting the enemy withdrawal and seal off the *mujahideen* escape route to the west. They accomplished their mission, killing seven *mujahideen*, capturing six prisoners and seizing 11 weapons. Our forces swept the valley, but made no further contact. The enemy had "melted" into the population. During the sweep we found a food cache with 90 tons of grain.

FRUNZE COMMENTARY: The following points should be noted from this action:

- the battalion commander's skillful control of the battle manifested by his rapid transfer of reserve forces and forces from inactive areas to the threatened sector;
- the lack of mutual fire support and coordination between platoons operating on the same axis;
- the inability of the junior commanders to rapidly organize and lay in a defensive fire plan;
- the lack of skill displayed by the personnel in quickly creating fighting positions and tying in their defenses with mortar fires;
- the lack of FSCs accompanying the subunits to adjust artillery fire, which lessened the effectiveness of the attached artillery.

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY: The *bronegruppa* concept is excellent for providing a quick reaction reserve and for moving fire power into a threatened sector. Mechanized infantry must train to function away from their personnel carriers.