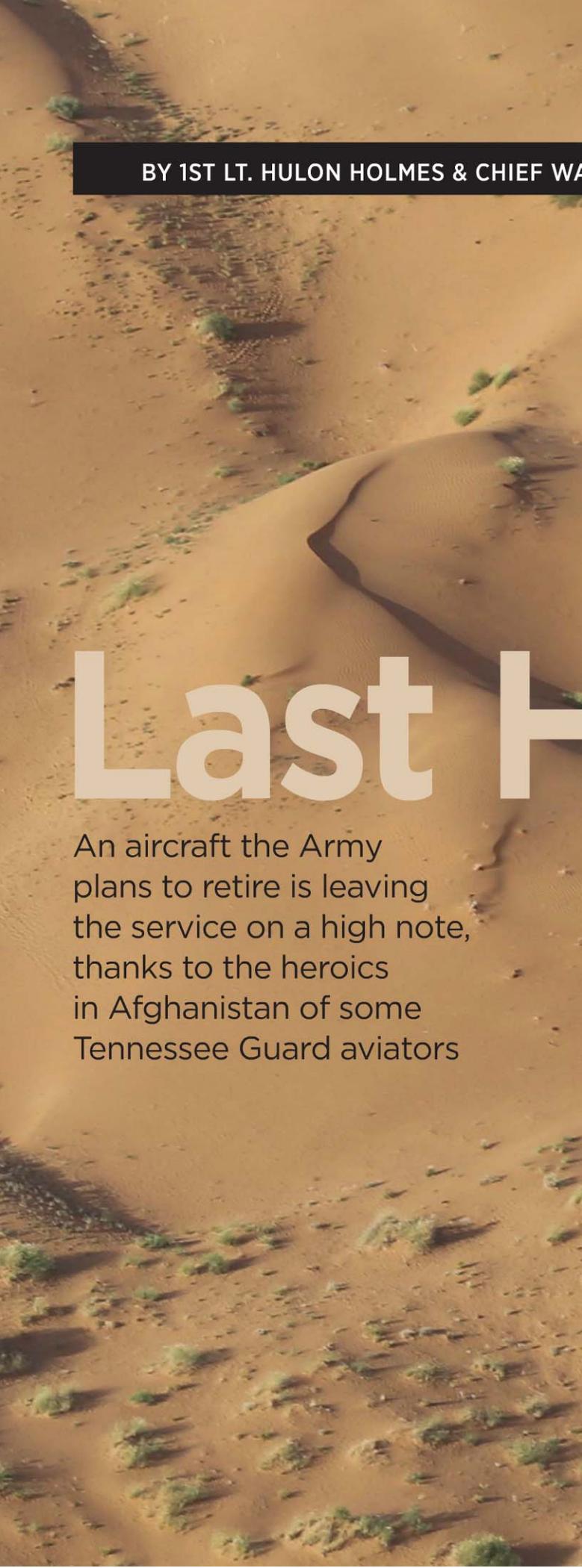




THE SANDBOX An OH-58D Kiowa Warrior belonging to 1st Squadron, 230th Air Cavalry, flies over the Registan Desert, a few miles south of Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan.



BY 1ST LT. HULON HOLMES & CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 MATTHEW JAGGERS

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan

The mission was familiar. Ground troops in contact with the enemy in the rugged landscape of Afghanistan. Called to help were members of the Tennessee Army National Guard's 1st Squadron, 230th Air Cavalry.

Deployed since April to Kandahar Airfield in southern Afghanistan, the aviators and their OH-58D Kiowa Warrior armed-reconnaissance helicopters are not strangers to combat. Most of them had been on at least one previous deployment. This particular mission in July included much of what they had seen before, but, like all missions, it had its unique challenges.

It also may be one of their last in the aircraft. The Army plans to begin retiring its entire Kiowa Warrior fleet (sidebar, page 27) this fiscal year as part of the service's Aviation Restructure Initiative. First Squadron is the only Guard unit that flies the OH-58D.

Last Hurrah

An aircraft the Army plans to retire is leaving the service on a high note, thanks to the heroics in Afghanistan of some Tennessee Guard aviators

Here is the story of the mission as told by two of the aviators. First up is Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matthew Jaggars. He was flying with Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brian Borkowski in Omega 01. In Omega 02 were Chief Warrant Officer 3 Blake Hardison and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jacob Jadoobirsingh.

BEGINNING JUST AFTER MIDNIGHT, our Scout Weapons Team took off to support several Afghan National Army blocking positions that had been deemed key to the success of the assault on the objective. These blocking positions were at the main avenues of egress that would be utilized by enemy personnel trying to escape an attack.

We had just completed our reconnaissance when U.S. and Afghan forces landed in CH-47 Chinook helicopters supported by AH-64 Apache attack helicopters just before daybreak. The Chinooks dropped the ground troops off at two locations.

Almost immediately after daybreak, we began our close-air support of friendly forces after the arrival of the ground troops and their movement into their designated positions. There were two positions: the main assault force staged on higher ground approximately 500 meters north of the objective, and a support-by-fire position on the other side of the valley on top of a cliff adjacent to the objective area.

The location was a holding area for insurgents, weapons and explosives moving into Afghanistan. The terrain was treach-

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 4 BRADLEY HUTSELL



At a Glance

**OH-58D
Kiowa
Warrior**

MISSION: Armed reconnaissance

ENTERED ARMY SERVICE: 1985

MANUFACTURER: Bell Helicopter

POWER PLANT: One 458 kilowatt (650 shaft horsepower) Allison turbine

LENGTH: 41 feet, 2 inches

HEIGHT: 12 feet, 11 inches

ROTOR DIAMETER: 35 feet

MAXIMUM TAKEOFF WEIGHT: 5,500 pounds

MAX SPEED: 150 mph

CRUISE SPEED: 127 mph

ENDURANCE: 2 hours

ARMAMENT: .50 caliber machine gun, 2.75-inch rocket pods and laser-guided Hellfire missiles

Source: Army & Bell Helicopter

OVER AFGHANISTAN A Tennessee Army National Guard OH-58D Kiowa Warrior flies at dusk. A typical Afghan compound (*right*) as seen from the air.

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER Z KEVIN DISHNER

erous. The objective was an overhang in the face of a 600-foot cliff with protective terrain on all sides except one, giving us one way in or out and making this both a desirable area for the insurgents to defend and a difficult one for the ground forces to assault. The overhang opened to a dried-up riverbed that had more jagged, mountainous terrain on both sides, creating a difficult environment for us due to the flight hazards, the inability to see the entire battlefield at one time, and the limited routes of ingress and egress.

As the ground troops set up their positions, the sun started to come up. Our SWT was providing close-air support to both positions and maintaining eyes on the objective and the surrounding areas. The UAV overhead informed us of three confirmed heavy machine gun positions at the objective as well as several insurgents.

Shortly after daybreak, the fire support officer, who was controlling us from his ground position, informed us that they were taking effective small-arms fire from the overhang. The FSO also said the Afghan National Security Forces and the U.S. forces had begun to assault the enemy position and were pinned down by enemy fire. They were having a difficult time withdrawing their formation.

At this time, due to the low-light situation at the low-lying areas, we were having a difficult time establishing the exact front-line trace of the friendlies and the posi-

tion of the enemy. Our SWT decided to make several low passes near the objective area in order to drop smoke grenades.

This maneuver, while risky, accomplished two important things. First, it allowed us to get better situational awareness as to the exact orientation of the overhang. Second, it allowed us to have a fixed point on the ground where the FSO could talk us on to the friendly position and the enemy location.

Danger Close

After dropping the smoke, I received instructions from the FSO as to the position of the friendly forces using the smoke as a reference point, as well as the location of the enemy. The FSO then cleared us to engage danger close.

We had identified one of the previously reported heavy machine-gun positions manned by several insurgents on elevated terrain that was not in view of the ground troops. We were able to confirm the enemy position by the gun's continuous muzzle flash as the insurgents engaged both our aircraft. Omega 02 immediately engaged that enemy position with one Hellfire missile, producing good effects and eliminating that position's effectiveness.

At this time, our SWT began to turn in to engage





CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER ZELANA SMITH

with other weapon systems. Due to the terrain and close proximity to ground troops, we were forced to engage at a much lower altitude and much closer range than was ideal. This kept us within the enemy's small-arms range, but was necessary in order for us to provide timely and accurate fire to facilitate the friendly withdrawal from the engagement area and to prevent fratricide of friendly forces.

Omega 01 was in first, engaging with 2.75-inch flechette rockets with good effects. Omega 02 followed with more flechette rockets, also hitting accurately. At this time, the FSO reported that the ground forces were no longer taking effective fire and had been able to retrograde to a covered position. Our SWT was released to rearm and refuel at the forward arming and refueling point.

Upon returning to the objective, we learned that a fixed-wing aircraft that was in support of the operation had been cleared to engage the enemy objective with munitions in our absence. Up to this point in the battle, the fixed-wing assets could not engage for fear of fratricide of friendly forces, based on the type of munitions that they were employing.

The FSO called us in to provide close-air support again and to assist with battle damage assessment. The engagements produced a significant number of enemy insurgents killed. A number of small arms, heavy weapons, and rocket-propelled grenades were confiscated. And

a large amount of home-made explosives material was discovered. We were cleared to return to base to complete a crew change as we had reached the end of our duty day and extended flight time.

Upon our return, we were thanked by the ground-force com-

We had to come down significantly in altitude to engage, which placed us in enemy small-arms range.

mander and the unit's staff and later by the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command commander. Our crew was presented with unit coins, which was a true honor.

We were informed later that this was potentially the most significant engagement in the area of operations in 18 months due to the number of insurgents eliminated from the battlefield coupled with the confiscation of a large number of weapons, explosives and supplies, which caused an immediate and lasting disruption in an organized network of insurgents.



CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 MATT JAGGERS

HIDING PLACE

The entrance to one of the countless cave systems in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan as seen from the air.

The following description comes from 1st Lt. Hulon Holmes. He was flying with Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kyle Malone in Omega 01. In another aircraft were Chief Warrant Officer 3 Andrew Farrell and Chief Warrant Officer 2 James King in Omega 02.

AT NOON, WE RELIEVED THE PREVIOUS OH-58D team. When we arrived at the tactical operations center, my team was notified of troops in contact and told to launch as soon as possible.

The objective was a cave set back in a narrow draw in a 600-foot cliff. This objective offered just one avenue of approach in very canalizing terrain.

Our first scout team had already engaged and killed several insurgents, and fixed-wing assets had dropped several munitions on the objective. Assuming the area clear, the ground forces sent a squad to occupy the objective. More than a few insurgents were still alive and concealed themselves in the cave and in the draw's many large boulders. They allowed the squad to make it to the entrance to the narrow draw before ambushing them.

The lieutenant leading the squad was shot through the leg, and the squad members immediately sought what little cover they could acquire amongst the rocks at the entrance to the draw, 30 meters from the cave opening. The FSO also had support from an AH-64E attack helicopter and a Navy F/A-18 fighter, but was having issues walking them onto the enemy positions. It was at this juncture in the battle that we arrived.

We moved on the objective as the Apaches moved off to the east. When we were given the description of the target, we were initially uncertain of the location of the insurgent overhang. The FSO was rattled and struggled giving us a description of where the squad was taking fire. We described the overhang that we initially expected to be the intended target. We attempted to mark the suspected overhang with 50-cal rounds, but our weapon system fired one round and jammed.

We then attempted to drop smoke at the base of the overhang. When we were unable to get the desired visual effects, we were

cleared by the FSO to mark the target with one flechette per aircraft. The FSO said we didn't have the right target. Due to our failure to acquire the right target and the FSO's increasing panic, he pushed us back as he attempted to bring in an F/A-18 for suppression.

Had we failed, the final plan was an all-out frontal assault on the overhang by the remaining soldiers, all of whom were black on ammo.

Deteriorating Situation

The fighter failed to engage either due to weapons failure or unwillingness to place rounds within the close proximity of the squad. The FSO brought us back for a Hellfire shot. He was becoming increasingly desperate. The squad was still dealing with a wounded soldier. The entire ground force was running low on ammunition, and the pinned-down squad was completely out.

We were eventually able to gain positive identification of the target site along with the friendly forces that were pinned down. The overhang was difficult to see. Only by descending in altitude were we able to identify it. I believe this is why the Apaches and the F/A-18 were unable to identify and engage the insurgents.

Once we established positive identification, the FSO requested a "Hellfire mission danger close." We told him we needed his commander's initials before we delivered munitions within that proximity to friendlies. He very quickly responded with his initials and his commander's.

While we were setting up for an inbound run, the trail aircraft recognized that its multifunction display showed a laser re-boresight message and we decided to break off our run to take time to re-boresight the laser to maximize the accuracy of the Hellfire. The FSO became distraught and had us hold in a desperate attempt to

suppress the enemy with 80mm mortars. It proved ineffective and the squad continued to take accurate and effective fire.

We turned inbound and observed final verification of the target area while re-verifying clearance to release the missile. Again, due to the overhang location and the surrounding terrain, we had to come down significantly in altitude to engage, which placed us within enemy small-arms range.

Omega 02 fired from approximately 1 kilometer to maximize the low trajectory of the Hellfire allowing the missile to go underneath the overhang and impact behind the boulders from which the insurgents were firing.

The FSO ecstatically responded with “good hit on target” and requested “immediate re-attack with rockets” as the pinned squad began to withdraw under our covering fire. The engagement was again at low altitude and, because of the close proximity of friendlies, was conducted at and inside 1 kilometer of the target. Both lead and trail aircraft engaged with two 10-pound high-explosive rockets each.

Again, the FSO announced good hits and requested immediate re-attack with all additional rockets. Both aircraft had one flechette rocket remaining. We engaged with our remaining rockets. At this point the squad had successfully withdrawn and we broke station as relieving aircraft arrived.

We were later informed that we were the last asset available to rescue the pinned-down soldiers. Had we failed, the final plan was an all-out frontal assault on the overhang by the remaining soldiers, all of whom were black on ammo. They most likely would’ve taken significant casualties.



Sgt. JOSE CRUZ

JUST HONOR Members the 1st squadron, 230th Air Cavalry receive their combat patches during a special ceremony at Kandahar Airfield.

Our team was personally thanked by the battalion commander and awarded battalion coins. Our troop commander put us in for Air Medals with Valor for our actions. After the entire operation was over, the ground force battle damage assessment was 27 insurgents killed in action in and around the cave. 🙏

FIRST LT. HULON HOLMES and CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 MATTHEW JAGGERS are members of the Tennessee Army National Guard's 1st Squadron, 230th Air Cavalry. They can be reached via magazine@ngaus.org.



ARMED SCOUT

An OH-58D Kiowa Warrior hovers over the tarmac at Kandahar Airfield.

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 4 BRADLEY HUTSELL

The Bill-Payer for ARI

THE OH-58D KIOWA WARRIOR IS THE ODD AIRCRAFT out in the Aviation Restructure Initiative, the Army's controversial strategy to cut costs and reset its helicopter fleet for the future.

Army officials say ARI will save \$12 billion. About \$10 billion is from retiring all 368 Kiowa Warriors. That savings, however, isn't from reduced operational costs. It's from scrapping modernization programs designed to keep the aircraft in the fight until at least 2025.

Age is the justification for the retirement. The original OH-58 Kiowa did enter Army service in 1969, but the Kiowa Warrior is a different helicopter and most were built in the 1990s. Many other helicopters in the fleet are older.

Aviators do say Kiowa Warrior modernization lapsed while the Army tried to develop a new armed-scout helicopter. The Pentagon cancelled the first two attempts due to cost overruns. The recent Armed Aerial Scout (AAS) program appears to be a budget casualty.

The Army plans to fill the armed-scout role with the AH-64 Apache, a helicopter never intended for the mission. Service leaders rejected the same idea in the early 1990s in favor of the ill-fated Comanche program, and expressed doubts about it again in 2011.

The December 2011 analysis of alternatives for the AAS program said fielding the AH-64D Block III to replace the Kiowa Warrior would be “at least 50 percent more expensive than the currently programmed [recon squadrons].”

Army officials say retiring the Kiowa Warriors will enable the service to modernize the Apache fleet to the E-model Guardian. But Kiowa Warrior pilots say their helicopter will still be the more capable aerial scout. They also wonder if the Army will have enough Apaches to cover both the attack and scout missions.

ARI retires the Kiowa Warriors by fiscal 2018. NGAUS believes the Army will be looking for a new scout helicopter not long after.

—NGAUS staff report