

Ambrosia

Chapter 11

by Maj Victor Ruble

“Overwatch, overwatch! This is Apache 1!” Aidan called into his wrist mounted PDA, simultaneously manipulating the holographic 3D imagery being projected above his left arm by the same device. “Apache 1” was the call sign Aidan used when communicating outside of the company task force instead of his more popularly used “Hollywood.” The former is the approved call sign that higher headquarters recognizes; the latter is just something used “in house.” With as many call signs as the FSCC (fire support coordination center) has to keep track of and monitor, if everyone were allowed to use whatever nickname their units had given them, the FSCC would be taking fire support requests from a thousand “Boners,” “Satan’s,” and “Gators” a day—they would have no idea who was actually calling in for support. By using “Apache 1,” the FSCC knew that it was Company A, 1st Platoon.

“Stand by for fire mission,” he continued as he focused intently on the overlay hovering in front of him.

“Standing by,” replied the FSCC radio operator.

“Immediate suppression. Sending the fire support overlay now.” As Aidan completed the fire support graphics, a “send attachment” button appeared in front of him. Pressing it, the hologram disappeared back into his PDA.

“Roger, Apache 1.” The FSCC radio operator stated, confirming that he received the overlay. “TOT (time on target) 10 mikes (minutes).”

“Roger. Apache 1 out.”

Ten minutes was a long time, but Aidan needed to get his platoon ready to roll and be in place before rounds started falling from the sky. But at the same time, he needed to make sure that

>Maj Ruble is an Assault Amphibious Vehicle officer. He is currently serving in the United Arab Emirates.

his hasty fire support plan was also synchronized with Capt Prophet’s landing so that the majority of his company wasn’t either danger close to the impact area or so far out that the enemy had time to recover from the hail storm to reconsolidate and execute their ambush on the main body.

Aidan still had yet to inform his company commander of any of the developments since his last transmission sending the updated tactical overlay.

“Razorback 6, this is Hollywood.” After a few moments of silence, Aidan tried again with the same result. “Razorback 6, this is Hollywood! Do you copy?”

Nothing.

Aidan conducted a very brief and hasty troubleshoot of both his PDA and his troop compartment. All diagnostics showed that he had full power and transmission capability. He then tried resending his operations graphics through his PDA to all parties, but the “received” indication light remained red.

We’re being jammed, he thought to himself.

“Birch, this is Hollywood,” Aidan blared into his PDA once again. The fact that he still could still transmit and receive within his platoon meant that the focus on the signal jamming wasn’t on his position but on the main body’s. “Get everyone ready to roll! We need to be Oscar Mike (on the move) in five mikes. I’ll brief you underway.” What this meant was that Aidan would be giving the scheme of maneuver to his platoon enroute. Not the preferred method, but given the situation, it was going to have to suffice as a planning process.



Aidan needed to see what was going on. (Photo by LCpl Melanye Martinez.)

As Aidan was racing back toward his vehicle, he realized that he had been so focused on getting the fire support overlay done that he failed to notice that he was still holding the arm of one of the synthetics. Throwing it down, he once again peered upon the very unit insignia painted on its shoulder that prompted this increase in urgency. Although the color and clarity of the emblems was tarnished and weathered due to a combination of wear and tear, not to mention the 30mm API (armor piercing incendiary) round that tore through its clavicle, the Standard of Cyrus the Great was still clearly visible. This flag, a crimson square bordered by golden triangles with a golden falcon centered with outstretched wings—known in ancient times as the *Derafsh-e Shabhbaze-Talayi*, or “The Golden Falcon”—was easily recognized and feared thousands of years ago as the standard that was carried at the head of the army of the Persian King. Today, it was adopted by the Jaysh al Shanameh, more commonly known as the JAS.

The Jaysh al Shanameh, or The Army of the Book of Kings, is an Iranian nationalist insurgent group whose goal is to return Iran to the glory days of the Persian Empire before the Muslim conquest of the 7th century. The name—based on Ferdowsi’s epic poem *Shanameh*—attempts to attract all of those who strive for the glory of Iran. Although their ideology is rooted in Zoroastrianism, their membership includes nationalities and religions spanning from Tajiks, Armenian and Persian Christians, Afghan polytheists, and even Persian Muslims. Early on, their diverse “constituency” made them very palatable for nations and state-sponsored actors looking to treat with anyone willing to stand against the Ayatollah. Resigned to junior varsity tactics over the past decade during the recent rise in regional Iranian influence, with the fall of the central regime, they have become power players in the regions far removed from Tehran’s limited reach. Control of Bandar Abbas, the most significant port in the south at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, makes anyone a regional power overnight. It was here that JAS had found a home

and, through the control of supply and material throughput, they flourished by receiving subversive and discrete arms, financial, and political support from those state and non-state actors who want a chair when the music stops but want to avoid aligning themselves with religious extremists.

But Synthetics and multi-band (multiple bandwidth) jamming capabilities? Aidan knew that JAS had grown and evolved throughout the Iranian conflict, benefitting from backwater deals and secretive pacts, but if JAS had this kind of tech at their disposal and were massing in an assault position preparing to repel Razorback 6’s landing, then not only was there a formidable force awaiting his company’s arrival, but there was significant interest in keeping U.S. forces from interfering in the mainland’s conflict. Whether backed by the Chinese, the Russians, a mega-corporation, or all three, the opposition they were about to face was far better trained than just some maligning organization looking to make a name for itself by harassing the Americans. And as the synthetic arm hit the sand with a “thud,” Aidan knew they were far better funded as well.

Birch was as solid a platoon sergeant as any lieutenant could ask for, so as Aidan reached his ACV, the last of the platoons’ vehicles was moving into formation, ready to roll. Looking down at his PDA, he saw the TOT countdown timer tick away.

7:10

7:09

7:08

Transferring communications back to the ACV’s much more powerful communications suite, Aidan gave a simple, “Are we up?” over the net. Without missing a beat, each of the troop commanders aboard each of the ACV’s responded.

“One, up.”

“Two, up.”

And so it went down the line until all six of his platoon’s vehicles confirmed that all personnel were on board and ready to roll. Just shy of the six minute mark, Aidan let the platoon know they were in the attack with a short but to-the-point phrase ...

“We’re Oscar Mike.”

The illumination of the holographic imagery of the tactical overlay made Capt Prophet’s face look even more intense as he stared attentively at it from the darkness of his ACV’s troop compartment. *It’s a good plan.* He thought to himself. *But I need to know what Hollywood’s seeing? Why is he diverting from the original LZ? If he can see them and he knows that they’re there, why the need for a flanking maneuver? Something’s up. We’re d... near about to make our landing and I haven’t heard squat from either him or his platoon.* After a few punches of his holo-screen, he cues 1st Platoon’s radio frequency into his comm.

“Hollywood, this is Apache 6.”

No reply.

“Hollywood, this is Apache 6, do you read me?”

Normally, if the transmission were received, even if broken and unreadable, there would be a response in the affirmative followed by a description of the quality of the transmission, such as “read you, but broken,” “broken and unreadable,” or ever communicator’s favorite, “Lickin’ Chicken.” But there was nothing.

“Comm guy!” Capt Prophet yelled back into the ACV’s troop compartment.

“Sir!” was the response, the location unidentifiable from the darkness of the “dungeon.”

After a few moments without movement, Mack turned around in his chair and shouted, “Well, get up here! I’m not over here yelling cause I wanna to talk about who’s gonna win the championship!”

“Roger, sir.” Was all that was heard, which was quickly followed by a series of grunts, moans, and expletives as the company commander’s radio operator attempted to make his way from the insides of the mechanized beast, climbing and snaking over his sleeping and disgruntled comrades.

“So the comm is showing I’ve got full signal, but I can’t transmit.” Mack said as the young Marine squeezed next to the company commander in the narrow confines of the troop commander’s station.

“Can I take a look, sir?” the Marine asked. “I’ll need to ‘wire in,’ if that’s ok?”

Wiring in was another term carried over from the time before advance technological integration, where it was derived from the user’s reliance on having to actually use a wire or cable to interface with the radios and communications suites. But in this era, what the Marine was requesting was permission to synchronize his PDA and comm helmet with Macks’ work station via a Bluetooth connection, giving the junior Marine access to the full array of Capt Prophet’s classified and unclassified servers. Thus his need to get permission first.

“I’ll have to read you in first.” Mack said very matter of factly. The surprised look on the Marine’s face proved to him that he had achieved his desired intent.

“I’m just messing with you!” Mack said with a boisterous laugh. “Yes, please. Wire in. Do what you have to do, but fix my comm!”

After a few key strokes of his PDA, the radio operator was “in.” Rapidly switching between his PDA, the commander’s holo-screen and his own comm helmet with the focus of a heart surgeon, the Marine began to trouble-shoot.

“There’s nothing wrong with your suite, sir.” The Marine finally said with exasperation. “Let me try something else.”

Mack gave a “be my guest” nod, but the notification was clearly a formality as the Marine was already at work.

“Pak-man. Pak-man. This is Radio. Radio check, over.” The Marine said, turning on the comm helmet’s intercom system.

Mack could hear a muffled response coming from the radio operator’s helmet, affirming that at least the intercom was working. “Got you same,” was “Radio’s” immediate response.

Turning his focus back to his PDA and the TC (troop commander) holo-screen, the radio operator pushed a few more buttons and then putting his hand to the comm helmet said, “Any victor, any victor. This is Apache 6. Radio check over.”

This time his transmission was followed by silence.



The company would be relying on rotary-wing CAS. (Photo by SSgt Artur Shvartsberg.)

“I say again,” he continued. “Any victor, any victor. This is Apache 6. Radio check over.”

After a few moments with no reply, the radio operator, with no regard for personal space, leaned over Capt Prophet’s lap to stare into the holographic display, as if a closer perspective would present the answer to his conundrum.

“I’m not sure what’s going on, sir” he said to Mack, practically draped over his lap at this point.

“Well, I doubt that giving me a lap dance is the answer there, Devil.” He said, prompting the Marine to slink back to the small piece of real estate he was able to carve out of the passageway between the TC station and the troop compartment.

“Pak-man.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Can you transmit?”

“Wait one.”

After a few short moments, Mack’s suspicions grew.

“Negative, sir. Not sure what’s going on. Is Radio there next to you?”

“Let’s just say he’s ‘on top’ of the situation.” Mack replied, giving the radio operator a steely-eyed glare in jest.

We’re being jammed!

“Pak-man, you still know you’re hand-and-arms signals, right?”

“Sir?”

“_____ it! I need you to ‘pop up’ and

start flapping those toothpicks you call arms and get this formation on-line.”

“Sir?”

“Wrong answer, partner.” Mack was now yelling as he was pushing Radio back in the troop compartment, hoping he would take his cue and get strapped in. “We’re being freaking jammed! They know we’re coming! And I have no idea where Hollywood is, and I have no idea if these dudes are just waiting in fully prepared positions with full combat power. But the one thing I do know is that they know we’re coming! And since we can’t call BATTLE SPEED over the net, your goofy mug popping out of the hatch should definitely send the signal that something ain’t right and that they need to be ready for anything.”

Not able to rely on the ACV’s external camera’s while in the water, Mack popped his hatch so he could get better situational awareness of the battle that was about to unfold. Sitting waist high in his hatch, he could see vehicles in front and behind begin to break from their column formation and span out in a wide frontage in response to Lt Pak’s “on-line formation” arm signals. Mentally breaking from the urgency of the situation for a brief moment, Mack mildly chuckled at the irony. Here they were, embarked on the world’s premier amphibious assault vehicle—loaded out with as much advanced technol-

ogy that a mechanized “water tank” could handle and still remain afloat—reduced to having to communicate by some poor lieutenant, practically standing on top of the vehicle, flapping his arms and punching the air, because of a simple, yet focused, broad-frequency blocker.

“Make sure in all of this confusion that those vics are maintaining their dispersion. We’re getting close to the beach.” Mack instructed his ACV platoon commander.

Andre didn’t respond verbally, but Mack knew that he was on it based on the movement of Andre’s arms—clasped together in front of his chest and then expanding out wide—signaling that the vehicle commanders needed to increase the distance between each other. *I guess keeping hand-and-arm signals in the ACV school house POI (program of instruction) wasn’t a complete waste of time after all, he thought to himself.*

Mack turned back to face the beach, only to have his brief respite from the stressors of battle quickly interrupted. As the first wave of the main body approached the surf zone, what seemed like a hoard of enemy combatants revealed themselves from hidden positions along the cliffs and, within an instant, had occupied fortified positions concealed by the topography of the rocky bluffs.

“Button up!” Mack yelled as he dove back down into his TC’s hatch. The pain of what he was certain was a simultaneous tail bone fracture and sprained left knee were ignored as he frantically tried to lock the buckle of his five-point harness.

“Pak-man, you in?!” Mack asked over the intercom.

“In sir! Where the ... did those guys come from? And where the ... is Aidan?”

Mack ignored the inquiry as the location and disposition of Lt Rosado was inconsequential to their current plight. *Aidan was our vanguard, but I should have put Little Birds in the air as well.* Mack counseled himself. *But who knows, since we can’t talk, they probably had the EW stuff to knock those out so we wouldn’t be able to see either.* Blind and mute. Not a good way to begin a landing on a contested shore.

Loud “pings” began to emanate from his ACV as it began to be peppered from enemy heavy machine gun fire. Having taken small arms fire before, he noted that these rounds seemed to be much louder than what he could recall. Then he realized that in his haste to withdraw to the safety of the ACV’s armor protection, he forgot to close the hatch. The impacts were so loud because he had remained exposed from the top. Water splashed him from outside as impacts from larger caliber weaponry began to bracket his position. Looking up to the sky of his open hatch, he saw what no amphibious landing craft wants to see when it’s in the middle of its landing—SADARM.

Sense and Destroy Armor—or SADARM—was a project that began in the U.S. during the mid-late 20th century to be used in a 155mm artillery piece or MLRS (multiple launch rocket system) to deny an area to enemy mechanized forces. Conceptually, the round would be fired from artillery and once the round reached its maximum altitude, a sub-munition would be released, deploying a parachute to control its decent. As it descends, sensors on the munitions begin to sweep and triangulate any mechanized force, decreasing its target area to about 150m. Once the sensors have “locked in” on the target, it fires a shape charge or HEAT (high explosive anti-tank) round to exploit the topside vulnerability of most armored vehicles. Because of the range of the munition, and its ability to search and traverse a wide area for potential targets, it is considered a “fire and forget” weapon, effectively negating an enemy’s use of any key terrain or supply route while maintain effective safe distance from an armored forces’ main guns.

Whereas, these munitions were limited to their use in large artillery batteries in the past, today these weapons were small, light, and could be used in a mortar tube or even shoulder fired, depending on the strength of the soldier wielding it. As he watched the munition’s parachute unfurl and begin its slow decent to the ground, how it was delivered was not Mack’s concern. His entire main body being in the kill zone for these munitions was.

In what seemed like an eternity—but probably amounted to merely a few seconds—the munition acquired a target to the left flank of Capt Prophet’s vantage point, and with a BOOM and HISS, it fired its rocket into the water below. The deafening explosion that followed meant that it found its mark.

Blind, deaf, and dumb in the attack, Mack was not just going to sit in his TC seat and be a casual observer to what seemed to be the beginning of the massacre of his company. Ripping himself free from the five-point harness of his blast attenuating seat, Mack stood up tall in the hatch. From what he could tell, the smoldering hulk of the vehicle to his left was the only major casualty that they had taken so far, but the mobility kills experienced by a number of ACVs meant that there would soon be many to follow. Although the first wave of his landing force had still not gone “feet dry,” the 30mm chain guns from Lt Pak’s platoon were rocking the cliffs. Even though the volume of fire seemed overwhelming, depending on how long the enemy had to prepare those positions; they could easily weather this storm. The landing force needed something with a little more punch if they were going to dig these ticks out of the landing zone’s hide.

And then it came.

The cliffs overlooking the landing zone began to erupt as rockets and artillery shells rained down upon the fixed enemy positions. As smoke, fire, dirt, debris, and what looked like pieces of metal appendages were thrown into the air, Mack just smiled.

“Hollywood, you freaking beautiful b.....” Mack said to himself aloud.

Turning to Lt Pak, who had now also jumped from his VC (vehicle commander’s) hatch to see the fireworks show, he simply said ...

“Pak-man, get us on that beach.”



Reproduced with permission of copyright owner.
Further reproduction prohibited without
permission.