

Re-examining the battle of Ganjgal

On Sept. 8, 2009, U.S. and Afghan forces were trapped in an ambush by Taliban forces in a remote valley in eastern Afghanistan. Because of his courageous actions, Marine Cpl. Dakota Meyer was awarded a Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military award. A McClatchy investigation shows that sworn witness statements and other documents contradict key points of Meyer's medal citation and the narrative read by President Barack Obama at the medal ceremony for Meyer. A look at the ambush and the inconsistencies:



The ambush

- At 5:30 a.m. local time, U.S. and Afghan forces walk up this rutted track, the only way into the village; insurgents begin a fierce ambush, firing from three sides; the U.S. and Afghan forces run for cover
- Williams, Fabayo, Garza and McClatchy reporter are pinned behind wall of a terraced field; later, Swenson, Westbrook, translator join this group; the group calls repeatedly for air and artillery support
- Marines, M. Johnson, E. Johnson, Kenefick and Navy Corpsman Layton become trapped in this house; they and an Afghan soldier are later found dead in a nearby trench
- Ninety minutes into the ambush, U.S. helicopters arrive and begin firing down at the attackers, suppressing the insurgents' fire; those who have been pinned down begin to move out of the ambush site
- Meyer and Rodriguez-Chavez ask to drive into valley to help; Garza radios to stay put; a later request goes unanswered; staff sergeants Valadez and Rodriguez-Chavez then agree that Rodriguez-Chavez and Meyer should go

The original mission

As part of the U.S. effort to weaken Taliban-led insurgency, Afghan troops with U.S. military trainers were to do a routine search of Ganjgal village, then meet with tribal elders about improving the mosque, building a police post

Who was ambushed

- About 60 Afghan troops
- 30 Afghan border police
- 11 U.S. Marine, Army trainers
- 1 McClatchy reporter

Outside valley guarding vehicles; helped rescue wounded

- Marine Cpl. Dakota Meyer
- Marine SSgt. Juan Rodriguez-Chavez

Trapped behind terrace wall

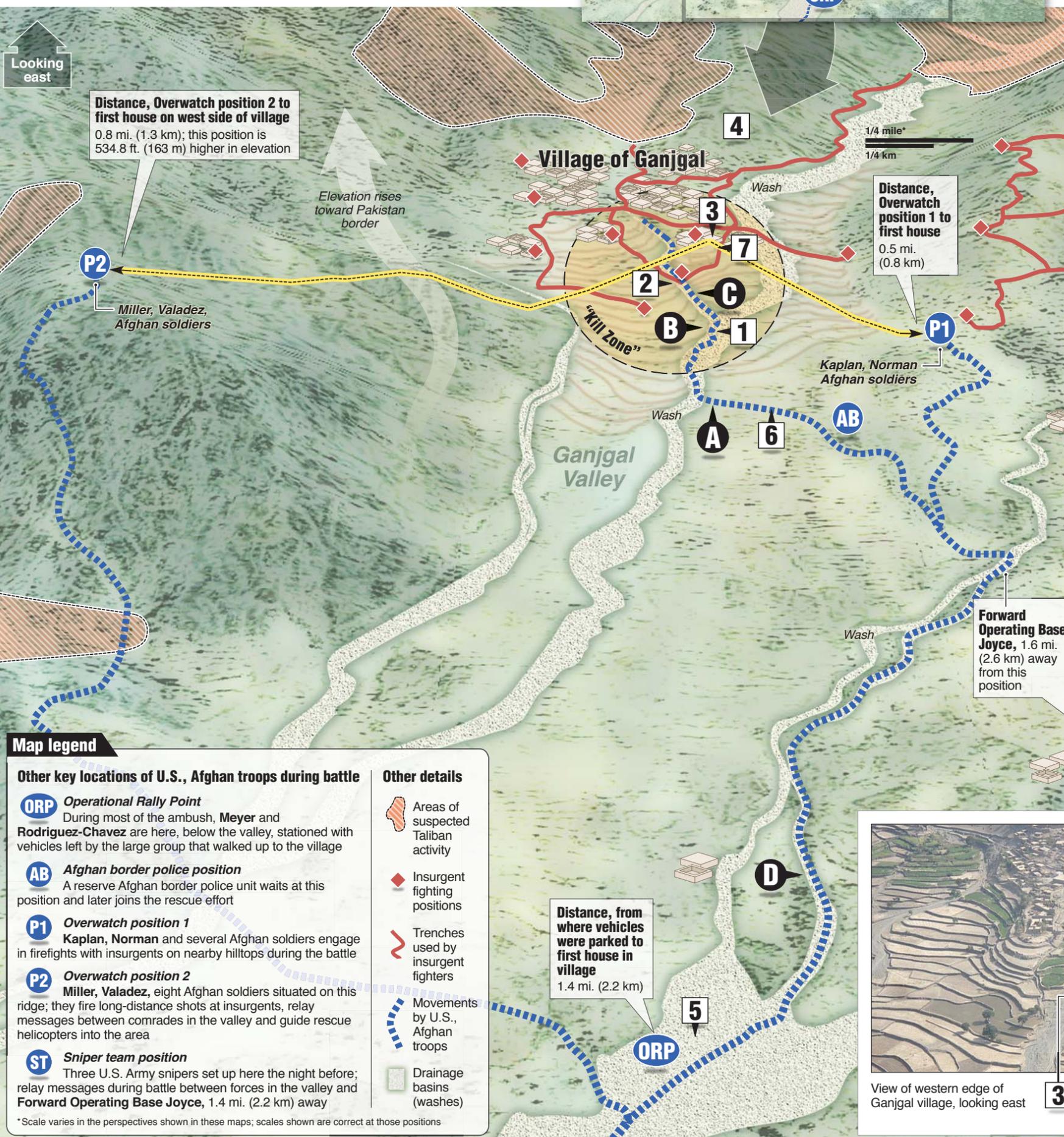
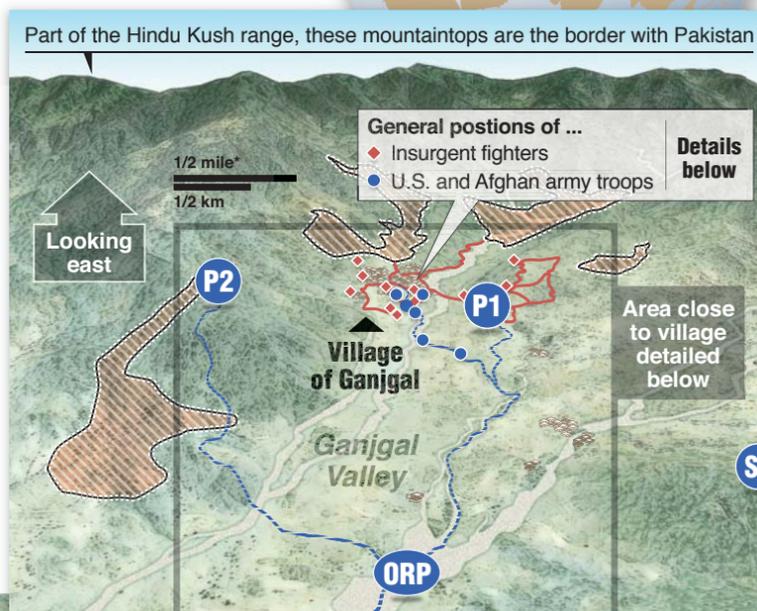
- Marine Lt. Col. Kevin Williams
- U.S. Army Capt. William Swenson
- Marine Capt. Ademola Fabayo
- Marine 1st Sgt. Christopher Garza
- Army SSgt. Kenneth Westbrook
- A McClatchy reporter
- Swenson, Fabayo

Killed in trench by insurgents

- Marine 1st Lt. Michael E. Johnson
- Marine GnySgt. Edwin W. Johnson
- Marine SSgt. Aaron M. Kenefick
- Navy Corpsman James R. Layton

Overwatch 1

- Army Capt. Raymond Kaplan
- Marine Cpl. Steven Norman
- Marine SSgt. Guillermo Valadez
- Marine SSgt. Chad Miller



- Swenson, Fabayo, riding in a Ford Ranger, join Rodriguez-Chavez and Meyer, riding in a Humvee, in rescue effort; braving intense fire, they make multiple runs to drive wounded to safety
- On final run, with all four men now in the same Humvee, they reach the four Americans' bodies; with Fabayo providing cover, Swenson and Meyer reach bodies; Meyer and Afghan troops carry them out as Swenson provides support

Discrepancies with the official narrative

Letters show locations on the map relevant to discrepancies, revealed by sworn witness statements

- A CLAIM:** Meyer rescued 13 U.S. Marines and soldiers. Only 12 Americans, including a reporter, were ambushed; four died; the eventual arrival of long-delayed helicopters saved the U.S. survivors by suppressing insurgent positions and making evacuation possible
- B CLAIM:** Meyer personally killed at least eight Taliban. The driver of Meyer's vehicle, Rodriguez-Chavez, says he saw one Taliban fighter get shot; no second witness supports the claim
- C CLAIM:** Meyer twice leapt from Humvee turret on the first two of five runs and rescued 24 wounded Afghan soldiers. Rodriguez-Chavez said a total of nine Afghan soldiers got into their Humvee by themselves; Meyer stayed in turret, firing a grenade launcher; the Humvee stopped just short of the kill zone when picking up the Afghan soldiers
- D CLAIM:** Meyer drove into Ganjgal Valley against orders to rescue stranded U.S. and Afghan troops. Sworn statements by Garza, Miller, Rodriguez-Chavez, and Valadez raise questions about this claim

Map legend

Other key locations of U.S., Afghan troops during battle

- ORP** Operational Rally Point. During most of the ambush, Meyer and Rodriguez-Chavez are here, below the valley, stationed with vehicles left by the large group that walked up to the village
- AB** Afghan border police position. A reserve Afghan border police unit waits at this position and later joins the rescue effort
- P1** Overwatch position 1. Kaplan, Norman and several Afghan soldiers engage in firefights with insurgents on nearby hilltops during the battle
- P2** Overwatch position 2. Miller, Valadez, eight Afghan soldiers situated on this ridge; they fire long-distance shots at insurgents, relay messages between comrades in the valley and guide rescue helicopters into the area
- ST** Sniper team position. Three U.S. Army snipers set up here the night before; relay messages during battle between forces in the valley and Forward Operating Base Joyce, 1.4 mi. (2.2 km) away

Other details

- Areas of suspected Taliban activity
- Insurgent fighting positions
- Trenches used by insurgent fighters
- Movements by U.S., Afghan troops
- Drainage basins (washes)

Distance, from where vehicles were parked to first house in village
1.4 mi. (2.2 km)

Distance, Overwatch position 2 to first house on west side of village
0.8 mi. (1.3 km); this position is 534.8 ft. (163 m) higher in elevation

Distance, Overwatch position 1 to first house
0.5 mi. (0.8 km)

Forward Operating Base Joyce, 1.6 mi. (2.6 km) away from this position

*Scale varies in the perspectives shown in these maps; scales shown are correct at those positions



View of western edge of Ganjgal village, looking east

- House where four Americans came under attack
- Their bodies were later found here