

# The use of Depleted Uranium Munitions in Afghanistan

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The use of DU munitions by the US and its allies in the war in Afghanistan remains unclear. Claims about the use of DU munitions in Afghanistan have neither been confirmed by the US military, nor verified by independent investigations. Nonetheless, it appears likely that US forces may have used some DU munitions, and the Taliban and/or al Qaeda may have possessed DU rounds.

According to news reports, several US weapons that shoot DU rounds have been used in combat in Afghanistan. The Air Force A-10 aircraft has shot 30mm ammunition while attacking ground targets in Afghanistan on at least eight occasions between March 2002 and April 2003.<sup>1</sup> The Marine Corps AV-8B aircraft, another DU shooter, reportedly fired its cannons at combatants in April 2003.<sup>2</sup>

Several light armored vehicles (LAVs) were involved in a nighttime gunfight on 7 December 2001 near Kandahar,<sup>3</sup> but it is not clear whether DU rounds were used in this battle. There is no credible evidence to substantiate claims that US forces have used missiles and/or bombs in Afghanistan that contain DU<sup>4</sup> or natural uranium,<sup>5</sup> although these claims occasionally appear in press stories.<sup>6</sup>

The use of DU munitions by Al Qaeda, Taliban, Northern Alliance or other Afghan forces is unknown given currently available public information, although the US Department of Defence has stated that DU munitions were found in December 2001 among captured al Qaeda weapons near Kandahar. On three occasions, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld confirmed the discovery of DU ammunition,<sup>7</sup> although the quantity, caliber, and origin of the rounds remain unclear.

<sup>1</sup> The reported dates of A-10 attacks are March 3-6, May 21, August 25, September 20, November 15, and December 20, 2002, and February 12, 2003. U.S. Department of Defense News Transcript, "DoD News Briefing - ASD PA Clarke and Brig. Gen. Rosa," (5 March 2002)

[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2002/t03052002\\_t0305asd.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2002/t03052002_t0305asd.html). Evan Thomas, "'Leave No Man Behind,'" Newsweek (18 March 2002) 26; Thom Shanker, "U.S. tells how rescue turned into fatal firefight," The New York Times (6 March 2002) A1; Peter Baker, "Afghans Strengthen U.S. Force," The Washington Post (8 March 2002) A1. Eric Schmitt, "American Planes Foil an Attack on an Airfield in Afghanistan," The New York Times (22 May 2002) A9. Cesar G. Soriano, "U.S. to stay in Afghanistan indefinitely," USA Today (25 August 2002). Associated Press, "U.S. base in Afghanistan attacked," (20 September 2002). Associated Press, "U.S. Bases Under Fire," (15 November 2002). Eric Schmitt, "Paratrooper from New Jersey dies in Afghan firefight near Pakistan border," The New York Times (22 December 2002). Carlotta Gall, "Afghans report 17 civilian deaths in US-led bombing," The New York Times (12 February 2003). Associated Press, "Green Berets, Allies Fight Afghan Taliban," (2 April 2003). In the April 2, 2003 attack on Sikai Lashki, Afghanistan, "two A-10 fighter jets fired seven white phosphorus rockets and 520 30 mm rounds."

<sup>2</sup> Carlotta Gall, "American air attack mistakenly kills 11 Afghans," The New York Times (10 April 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See Jeanette Steele, "Red Platoon's light armor passes the test," The San Diego Union-Tribune (20 December 2001) A5.

<sup>4</sup> Dai Williams, "Mystery Metal Nightmare in Afghanistan?" (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Uranium Medical Research Centre, "Afghan Field Trip #2 Report," undated, p. 4, [http://www.umrc.net/downloads/destruction\\_effects.pdf](http://www.umrc.net/downloads/destruction_effects.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> See Dan Fahey, "Science or Science Fiction? Facts, Myths and Propaganda in the Debate Over Depleted Uranium Munitions," 12 March 2003, <http://www.wise-uranium.org/diss.html#DUMYTHS>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Defense News Briefing, "Sec. Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers," (16 January 2002)

[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2002/t01162002\\_t0116sd.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2002/t01162002_t0116sd.html);

U.S. Department of Defense News Transcript, "Secretary Rumsfeld Roundtable with Radio Media," (15 January 2002)

[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2002/t01152002\\_t0115sdr.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2002/t01152002_t0115sdr.html); U.S. Department of Defense News Transcript, "Secretary Rumsfeld Interview with Baltimore Sun," (27 December 2001)

[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2001/t12282001\\_t1227sun.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2001/t12282001_t1227sun.html); See also "Current Issues - Depleted Uranium Weapons in Afghanistan," (10 February 2002)

<http://www.wise-uranium.org/dissaf.html>.