

# French Logistics Battalion Supports Coalition Special Forces

A French logistics battalion worked with special forces from several countries to remove insurgents from a building where they were hiding.

By Lieutenant Colonel Emmanuel Ruffat, French Army

On the night of 13 September 2011, a French logistics battalion conducted a very unusual operation in the center of Kabul, Afghanistan. That afternoon, insurgents had launched an attack on the International Security Assistance Force headquarters and the U.S. Embassy and had taken position in a building.

In response, the French logistics battalion commander received orders from the French National Contingent Command. The mission consisted of two main tasks:

- Provide armored protection to move British and Afghan special forces detachments as close as possible to the area of operations so that they could capture or neutralize the insurgents.
- Provide medical support and be prepared to evacuate any wounded soldiers to the French hospital at Kabul International Airport.

The logistics battalion knew the area well. However, night action was required, the enemy situation and local support to the enemy remained uncertain, and above all, the battalion had never worked with foreign special forces.

Time was short. It was important to have a tight liaison and to coordinate with allied units before issuing orders, so the International Joint Force/Special Operations Force cell appointed a French special forces officer to liaise with the British and Afghan special forces detachments.

The logistics battalion commander and the tactical operations center staff conducted a quick military decisionmaking process. The mission would rely mainly on the capabilities of a traffic and movement control platoon and a quick reaction medical support element that was mounted on an armored personnel carrier (APC).

At the hospital, an element was assigned to support this operation. Since it was not a simple transportation task, the S-3 chief led this operation on the ground and the battalion surgeon coordinated the medical support side. The special forces detachments assembled at

Warehouse Camp, and at 1900 hours, the mission was confirmed.

At 2000 hours, all parties gathered for an operation briefing. The detachment moved to the British area at Kabul airport. The operation was divided into three phases: reconnaissance, infiltration, and neutralization.

**Reconnaissance.** The first step was to reconnoiter the objective and liaise with special forces elements already deployed. At 2230 hours, a traffic and move-



ment control team moved the special forces mission command element to the vicinity of the insurgent's building. Under blackout conditions, using night-vision devices, the patrol approached the area secured by New Zealand special forces. The reconnaissance took about 45 minutes. While the reconnaissance was conducted, the logistics and special forces detachments waited on standby at the airport to start the next phase.

**Infiltration.** Just after midnight, the special forces detachment mounted the French APCs. After adjusting its plans based on the reconnaissance report, the traffic and movement control platoon and the medical support element started moving to the objective with great discretion. After the special forces troops disembarked, they secured the corridor heading to the building where the insurgents were entrenched. At 0200 hours on 14 September, the logistics battalion repositioned itself south of the building on Highway 7. The medical support team set up 50 yards away from the building to treat and evacuate casualties.

**Neutralization.** The third phase included neutralizing the resistance, covering the operation, and providing medical support. At 0230 hours, the special forces

detachments launched synchronized assaults. Some elements of the logistics battalion were engaged by harassment fire while covering the operation. This resulted in several casualties among the British and Afghan units.

From 0400 hours to 0600 hours, medical evacuations were conducted to the French medical hospital at the Kabul airport. The soldiers dismounted the APCs, and the traffic and movement control platoon secured the helicopter landing zone. At the same time, the medical support team picked up wounded soldiers under fire at the building exit.

At 0900 hours, the insurgents were neutralized. After quickly reassembling, the logistics battalion returned the British and Afghan special forces troops to the airport and then headed to Warehouse Camp. With its mission complete, the French logistics battalion returned to its core mission, supporting the French brigade in Regional Command East, in the Kapisa Valley.

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*A French Armored traffic and control platoon prepares for a combat patrol to support movement of British and Afghan special forces.*