

UK, French, US airborne forces train

British, French and American paratroopers have given a powerful demonstration of how they can go side-by-side into battle by air.

Some 20 helicopters carried the 1,300-strong 2 PARA Battlegroup into action on 4 December on Exercise Wessex Storm. Mounting at Keevil airfield on Salisbury Plain, troops, vehicles and stores were lifted by Royal Air Force Chinook and Puma support helicopters, protected by the sensors and weapons of Army Air Corps Wildcat reconnaissance helicopters and Apache attack helicopters. This was reported by the (UK) Ministry of Defence on 4 December.

The multinational force was dropped off to assault Imber village, capturing it to use as a base for further missions on the windswept training area.

The training is about confirming the UK's 2 PARA Battlegroup's skills and readiness to serve as the lead infantry unit within 16 Air Assault Brigade, the British Army's global response force. Some 150 troops from the French 2^e Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes and a 40-strong platoon from the US Army's 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment are taking part. Their involvement is about growing understanding of each other's capabilities and tactics, meaning our airborne forces are better prepared to operate together on future operations.

This mission – the largest British-led air assault since Operation Moshtarak in Afghanistan in February 2010 – comes as the six-week long manoeuvres (from 2 November to 12 December) reach their validation phase. The Battlegroup is being challenged to beat back the invasion of an ally by a hostile neighbour, fighting both conventional military units and militia-type forces. Before launching the air assault, troops had parachuted in to capture Keevil, with additional personnel, stores and vehicles delivered by RAF and French Armée de l'Air A400M transport aircraft.

The 2 PARA Battlegroup is built around the paratroopers of Colchester-based 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, supported by signallers, engineers, artillery, medics and logistics specialists from 16 Air Assault Brigade. It is training to be ready to deploy at short notice on operations around the world.

The British Army's contribution

16 Air Assault Brigade is the British Army's global response force, specially trained and equipped to deploy by parachute, helicopter and air landing. Its core role is to maintain the Air Assault Task Force (AATF), a battlegroup held at very high readiness to deploy anywhere in the world to carry out the full spectrum of missions, from non-combatant evacuation operations to war fighting. It is at the forefront of developing interoperability with the US Army's 82nd Airborne Division and the French Army's 2^e Brigade Parachutiste.

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