

CANSOFCOM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

CHAOS IN KANDAHAR:

THE BATTLE FOR BUILDING 4

COLONEL BERND HORN



THE CANSOFCOM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

MISSION

The mission of the Canadian Forces Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) Professional Development Centre (PDC) is to enable professional development within the Command in order to continually develop and enhance the cognitive capacity of CANSOFCOM personnel.

VISION

The vision of the CANSOFCOM PDC is to be a key enabler to CANSOFCOM headquarters, units and Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs) as an intellectual centre of excellence for special operations forces (SOF) professional development (PD).

ROLE

The CANSOFCOM PDC is designed to provide additional capacity to:

1. develop the cognitive capacity of CANSOFCOM personnel;
2. access subject matter advice on diverse subjects from the widest possible network of scholars, researchers, subject matter experts (SMEs), institutions and organizations;
3. provide additional research capacity;
4. develop educational opportunities and SOF specific courses and professional development materials;
5. record the classified history of CANSOFCOM;
6. develop CANSOF publications that provide both PD and educational materials to CANSOF personnel and external audiences;
7. maintain a website that provides up-to-date information on PD opportunities and research materials; and
8. assist with the research of SOF best practices and concepts to ensure that CANSOFCOM remains relevant and progressive so that it maintains its position as the domestic force of last resort and the international force of choice for the Government of Canada.

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce the tenth monograph produced by the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) Professional Development Centre (PDC). This series remains an important tool to expand the growing body of literature on Special Operations Forces (SOF) in general and Canadian Special Operations Forces (CANSOF) in particular. In this manner, those in the Command, as well as those external to it, can continue to learn more about SOF, particularly our contribution to the Canadian Forces and the Government of Canada.

This monograph, *Chaos in Kandahar: The Battle for Building 4*, is especially important as it recounts a specific operation conducted by elements of our Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) in Afghanistan. It provides an important case study that we can use to analyze actual operations and expand our collective leadership and operational knowledge. In this instance, members from the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR), acting as mentors for the Afghan Provincial Response Company – Kandahar, conducted a very difficult operation that highlighted their professionalism, tactical prowess and warrior spirit. Leading their Afghan colleagues through a complex compound clearance that ended in close quarter combat, their tenacity and mission focus set a high example for their Afghan partners and built on the Command's reputation for reliability and mission accomplishment.

Overall, this volume is an important addition to the body of SOF literature as it provides a window on one of the many important missions CANSOF has performed in Afghanistan as part of the CF team. More importantly, it provides a solid case study to ensure we can share knowledge and reinforce that, as a learning organization, we maximize its effect in preparing others for operations in

an ever complex and chaotic security environment. After all, as we move forward and the war in Afghanistan becomes a memory, it is important that we begin to capture the history, the lessons and the accomplishments of our contribution to the fight. As always, we hope this publication is both informative and sparks discussion and reflection. Please do not hesitate to contact the PDC should you have comments or topics that you would like to see addressed as part of the CANSOFCOM monograph series.

D.W. Thompson
Brigadier-General
Commander
CANSOFCOM

CHAOS IN KANDAHAR: THE BATTLE FOR BUILDING 4

The hot Afghan sun poured into the forward operating base (FOB) on the edge of Kandahar City with a relentless tenacity. Even shade provided but a temporary respite. However, for the Canadian Special Operations Forces deployed in FOB Graceland, the heat, much like the complex, ambiguous and ever-changing environment they worked in, was taken in stride. Then, single shots cracked in the distance, piercing the relative midday tranquility of the FOB. Commencing like a faltering engine, the shots started in spurts and soon increased in frequency until there was a consistent rhythm. At one point tracer arced over the FOB, prompting some to believe it may be their camp that was under attack.

The commander of Operation (OP) Legion, Roto 1-11, Special Operations Task Force 58 and his Ground Force Commander (GFC), Captain David S,¹ quickly moved to the tactical operations centre (TOC) to discern what was transpiring in the city. Shots fired within the environs of the sprawling urban mass were not unusual, particularly as a result of the insurgency, but clearly something significant was occurring. The volume and pattern of the exchange of fire, punctuated by sporadic explosions, clearly indicated trouble. Moreover, the widespread and persisting nature of the violence seemed to indicate it was not localized to one specific area.

As the CANSOF officers and their staff were busy contacting higher headquarters and other sources to determine what exactly was occurring, a runner from the Afghan Provincial Response Company – Kandahar (PRC-K) arrived with a message from his commander. The PRC-K, which was colocated with the CANSOF forces at FOB Graceland, had been called out by their Afghan

National Police (ANP) chain of command. In fact, they were told to get the PRC-K downtown to the Governor's Palace as quickly as possible. The Canadians were now intimately drawn into the drama unravelling in Kandahar City on 7 May 2011. With no information, and with indications that an attack was occurring close to their FOB, and with the knowledge that the current fighting season had already proven to be one of the most violent of the insurgency, SOTF-58 was rapidly being pulled into the chaos and crisis that had already gripped the city.

The hook dragging SOTF-58 into the fray was the PRC-K. It was an Afghan National Special Police unit consisting of approximately 135 personnel, organized in three special response teams (SRT), roughly platoon size, of 35 personnel each. It was SOTF-58's Green Team that was responsible for both training and mentoring their Afghan partners. Therefore, CANSOF attempted to assign a readiness cycle to the three SRTs to allow for stability in training, operations and personnel management. As such, the three SRTs would be in one of the three designated cycles: Green (ready to deploy on operations); Amber (reinforcement if required but undergoing training); and Red (on leave and/or out of area courses).²

However, when the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) or ANP chain of command called for the PRC-K they expected all available troops to respond. Moreover, there was an implicit understanding that the PRC-K, and its mentors, deploy immediately, much akin to a quick reaction unit. This, however, was problematic for CANSOF, who preferred to deal with any request for deployment more along a domestic counter-terrorist (CT) model, which allowed for a careful assessment of the situation, a leader reconnaissance to determine a plan and then a deliberate execution of that plan. Rushing to the sound of gunfire was always fraught with risk. The SOTF-58 commander explained:

Our concern was that we would get sucked into something we didn't want to be part of; that we would get hit and get sucked in with the PRC. Specifically, that they would run to the sound of gunfire and we would get drawn in and not have the opportunity to adhere to our tactics – our TTPs [tactics, techniques and procedures]. We wanted to examine the actual situation with the mentors and the SOTF and determine whether this should be a mentor assist or whether we would just make the situation worse (e.g. during the riots in the aftermath of the Quran burning).

CANSOF's concerns in this regard had been borne out in February 2011, when an insurgent attack on ANP headquarters in the city prompted the Chief of Police (CoP) to call out the PRC-K. However, SOTF-58 held them back until they could better define the threat, confirm friend and foe identification, and plan out the required response. Meanwhile, as the ANP rushed in to respond, the Taliban detonated improvised explosive devices (IED). However, the worst was yet to come. As the ANP and other first responders assembled outside the objective after the attack, a vehicle IED (VIED) cut down the assembled government forces much like a scythe in a field of wheat. Casualties were horrific.

Although vindicated by the February events, the desired outcome by Afghan officials was no different. They still wanted the PRC-K available when they called for them. In addition, the perceived slow response by the PRC-K and their mentors during the February incident created tension between the Afghans and the coalition. As a result of this incident SOTF-58 and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Regional Command – South (RC(S)), in coordination with the Afghan government, established OP Response, which laid out the contingency plan, responsibilities

and process for calling out the PRC-K.³ The Deputy Commander of RC(S) directed that the PRC-K must be able to respond to their national chain of command. He also stated they must go with mentors.⁴

Complicating matters was the fact that when SOTF-58 took on the responsibility for training and mentoring the PRC-K, it was not yet at Initial Operating Capability (IOC). In fact, many personnel had not been trained. Some were still missing Basic ANP qualifications and the Basic PRC training. Captain David, the GFC and officer commanding (OC) the Green Team was specifically responsible for developing and executing a training plan that would take the PRC from IOC to Full Operating Capability (FOC) in four months.⁵ His team was also responsible for mentoring the PRC-K on operations, as well as conducting liaison with ANP intelligence organizations. This entailed a weekly coordination with senior Afghan officials and senior coalition military personnel to enhance situational awareness and develop an Afghan employment mechanism (i.e. analysis of intelligence, development of the necessary warrants issued by legitimate Afghan authorities and execution of subject warrants within a framework of the “rule of law”) for the PRC-K.⁶

In any case, since the PRC-K was colocated in a tented camp in FOB Graceland, the activation of the PRC-K was fairly simple. Normally, the Provincial Chief of Police (PCoP) and/or the Kandahar Chief of Security (KCoS) would task the PRC-K. The ANP liaison officer at FOB Graceland would receive the call by cell phone and this would trigger OP Response, the mutually agreed upon contingency plan to activate the PRC-K and mentors for an operation. On notification, the Green Team would prepare the PRC-K, as well as themselves, to deploy, while SOTF-58 headquarters would immediately coordinate battlefield deconfliction with the battle space owners (BSO) and notify its chain of command (Joint Task Force – Afghanistan (JTF-A)) and RC(S) that OP Response was being executed.

Notwithstanding the significant gap in training, the PCoP insisted on employing the PRC-K in security operations within Kandahar City. For the Afghans, the PRC-K, regardless of their state of readiness, was an integral part of the Kandahar City security plan. This was not hard to understand. The SOTF-58 commander explained, “Although we thought they required additional training they were competent and capable. They were the best of the Afghan units.”⁷

And so, despite the complete absence of information on the events that had seized the city, SOTF-58 prepared to deploy the PRC-K. The SOTF commander acknowledged, “The Afghans were upset the PRC-K wasn’t sent out [in February] so we knew we had to go out. We followed as close as possible.” The SOTF commander was clearly between a rock and a hard place. He understood the Afghan concern and dependence on PRC-K and their mentors. However, he also shouldered the burden of command. He was responsible for ensuring that Canadian lives were not recklessly put at risk. What made the situation worse was the fact that the SOTF commander, a veteran of multiple Afghan tours, observed that “Spring 2011 was markedly different than other tours [he had] served in Afghanistan.”

He was not mistaken. Strategic analysts stated violence in Afghanistan in 2010 had reached its worst levels since 2001. With the end of the poppy season, the 2011 fighting season continued the trend. Significantly, much of the insurgent focus appeared to be in Kandahar City itself. Haiji Atta Mohammed, a former police general who was the head of the Kandahar council of former mujahedeen commanders assessed, “The Taliban are more active in the city than at any time since 2001. They’ve taken the war inside Kandahar.”⁸

His assessment was not hard to understand. On 2-3 April, the Taliban joined protests over the burning of a Quran by Pastor

Terry Jones in Florida and attacked the governor's compound. The protests left nine dead and more than 90 injured.⁹ Less than a week later on 7 April, the Taliban attacked a police training centre leaving six dead. On 15 April, they infiltrated ANP headquarters and killed the chief of police and nine days later on 24 April, the Taliban tunneled 500 militants out of Saraposa Prison. Significantly, the last two operations were accomplished with support from the inside.¹⁰ This only perpetuated the growing vulnerability of government and coalition forces as insurgents increasingly committed attacks and ambushes dressed in ANP and Afghan National Army (ANA) uniforms. Moreover, the Taliban had vowed to kill anyone working for the government. As a result, the Kandahar municipal administration was able to fill only 52 out of 119 budgeted positions.¹¹

In the end, Kandahar City had begun to spiral into chaos presenting even greater risk to Coalition forces. Increasing attacks and social unrest within the city made normal operations exponentially more difficult. Exacerbating the already difficult and complex urban operations was the fact that it was becoming increasingly difficult to tell friend from foe. Between Taliban fighters dressed in government uniforms, sympathizers and active "agents" ready to turn on their former colleagues and allies, the battlespace was as difficult as it gets.

Then, at approximately 1230 hours on 7 May 2011, Taliban insurgents conducted a massive coordinated attack in the city. They hit multiple objectives including: the Governor's Palace; the old ANA Corps headquarters; a police substation (close to FOB Graceland) as well as three other police substations, ANP headquarters; the mayor's office; and two high schools. The attacks involved direct fire from small arms, machine guns, rocket propelled grenades (RPG), as well as suicide vehicle IEDs (SVIED) and VIEDs. Taliban forces also attempted to block major roads leading into the city.

The Taliban offensive was a major operation. Insurgent commanders declared their objective was nothing short of “taking control of the city.”¹² The attack was part of the Taliban spring offensive, which they codenamed Operation Badar. It was intended to turn Kandahar City into a “scene of bloody fighting.”¹³ As always, numbers vary between NATO’s assessment of 60 insurgents participating in the attacks and the Taliban claims of 100. In addition, there were reports that the Taliban also deployed up to 20 suicide bombers.¹⁴ Significantly, some insurgents were in ANP uniforms.

The attack on Kandahar City and its estimated one million people was a deliberate strategy to turn the insurgency in the Kandahar region more to an urban focus as the American surge in the rural outlying regions had pushed the Taliban out of their strongholds in the surrounding districts. American officials confirmed the trend. US Army Major-General James Terry, the commander of coalition forces in South Afghanistan and of the 10th Mountain Division at the time confirmed, “Whereas last year it was worse in the districts than it was in the city...the paradigm has reversed now. Now we have to put more effort in the city.”¹⁵ Haiji Toorjan a former senior Taliban commander who reconciled with the government revealed, “The Taliban have made a deliberate decision to centre their war effort on Kandahar City after finding it hard to counter the US military onslaught in the rural districts.”¹⁶

Having learned from years of fighting, the Taliban carefully chose their tactics. The Taliban commander responsible for attacking the governor’s compound claimed 40 men were assigned to the task. He also acknowledged that the plan to attack multiple targets was designed to overwhelm security forces. “We know,” he explained, “that if we attack one place all the security people will come and surround us; this way they can’t stop us.”¹⁷

The devious strategy held some truth. The battle opened with an explosion outside the provincial governor’s compound, followed

by gunfire from the upper levels of a multi-story commercial shopping centre. Interior ministry spokesman Zemari Bashary stated eight suicide bombers had blown themselves up during the simultaneous attacks on the governor's compound, an office of Afghanistan's intelligence agency and police outposts.¹⁸ Haji Pacha, an influential elder from the Alokozai tribe, said Kandahar was "completely empty. There is still fighting going on in at least three districts of the city and all the shops are closed, the people completely terrified."¹⁹

And so, at 1330 hours on 7 May 2011, the Afghan authorities activated OP Response. With one insurgent attack a mere 400 metres from FOB Graceland, the commander of SOTF-58 had some major decisions to make. He remembered:

We heard shots. They sounded like they were coming right into camp. It was evident things were going on in the city. We were trying to figure out what was going on. So was the battlespace owner. In the northern part of [FOB] Graceland we could see out where the canal and school were situated. Insurgents were holed up there. We watched the drama unfold on the Graceland cameras. With the multiple attacks in the city I ratcheted up the camp to full stand-to as we tried to figure out what was going on. It was very chaotic. We figured the PRC-K would be called out so we increased our notice to move. No-one knew what was going on. Between the BSO and us, no-one knew. Shortly thereafter the PRC-K was called out to defend the Governor's Palace. Initially I figured Graceland was the only safe stronghold so we didn't send mentors.

With that decision, David and his Green Team, which was on a perpetual 30 minutes notice to move (NTM), focused on assisting the PRC-K to get out the door. However, they too began to prepare to deploy knowing the inevitable call would be made. The

PRC-K were eager as they drew their weapons, ammunition and marshalled their vehicles. Once assembled, all, with the exception of one section kept back in reserve, quickly raced off to the sound of gunfire only a short distance away.²⁰

The PRC-K arrived shortly at the Governor's Palace and the senior ANP commander on the ground quickly put them to use. Initially, they were deployed as part of the cordon around the Palace compound. However, insurgents had seized the two storey "Blue Building" north of the Palace grounds and were firing at the governor's residence and surrounding buildings with small arms and RPGs. The PCoP and KCoS quickly employed the PRC-K in the attack. A prolonged firefight and assault ensued and the PRC-K requested an ammo resupply of AK-47 ammunition and RPG rounds at approximately 1505 hours. The Green Team mentors then dispatched the PRC-K reserve section, which had been left at FOB Graceland, to deliver the ammunition so that the assault against the Blue Building could continue.

Meanwhile, CANSOF personnel at FOB Graceland were on a one hundred percent "stand-to." Fortuitously, some information began to dribble in from JTF-A headquarters as the situation began to crystallize. By now the Taliban objectives were identified and mostly isolated. One of the major targets was a large three storey commercial shopping complex (designated as Building 4) south of the Governor's Palace. Insurgents had barricaded themselves inside and were pouring fire into the governor's compound and adjacent buildings. Even before the PRC-K had completed their assault on the Blue Building to the north, the Afghan MoI demanded they attack the new objective.

As such, at 1700 hours, the BSO, an American battle group under Combined Task Force (CTF) Raider codenamed Phoenix 6, requested that SOTF-58's Green Team and their mentored

PRC-K, begin planning for a deliberate assault on the shopping mall complex that contained in excess of 100 different rooms. Knowing the complexity of the task was beyond the PRC-K, Captain David and his men left FOB Graceland to link-up with Chantu, the PRC-K commander, and the BSO, to begin conducting planning for a deliberate assault on the new objective.²¹

The drive to the Governor's Palace seemed surreal. "The city overall was eerily calm," voiced Warrant Officer (WO) Scott H, the Ground Force Warrant Officer, who was on his third Afghan tour. He reinforced, "we were hyper vigilant because we knew the whole city was under attack." In the distance could be heard gunfire and the occasional explosion.

As they neared the rendezvous point (RV), David tried to establish communications with Phoenix 6 but was unable. Then suddenly, as they rounded the corner to their designated geographic location for the RV, they were met by a scene of devastation. In the midst of all the destruction an American mine resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle, which had just hit an IED, was limping backwards. "That whole area was obliterated," described Sergeant Clifford F, "you could tell a lot of bombs had gone off. The entire area was a complete mess," Sergeant Caleb M recalled, "the Governor's Palace was shot to shit." Warned that there were additional IEDs planted in the road ahead, the Green Team convoy backed-up and established an alternate vehicle drop off point (VDO). WO Scott noted, "everything became extremely real."

Captain David and his team arrived at the RV point at approximately 1800 hours. By this time the PRC-K had just secured the Blue Building. Their successful assault netted two insurgents killed, as well as one of their own wounded. Although tired, the PRC-K soon appeared at the RV prepared to take on their second assault of the day.

The objective had been cordoned off by the American battle group that provided force protection by keeping any new insurgents from approaching from different areas and attacking the assembled PRC-K and mentors. However, the Americans were clearly played-out. They had been stretched thin throughout the city with multiple incidents throughout the day. Moreover, the threat of suicide bombers and IEDs remained extremely high. Everyone was on edge.

Phoenix 6 now provided guides to take the PRC-K and their mentors through the Palace grounds to allow them to reach the objective building from a less exposed approach. Exiting the governor's residence they were able to move to a low concrete wall that stood between the Palace grounds and the target building. David used this as his assembly area. From here he conducted a leader's recce to confirm the point of entry. Meanwhile his snipers and joint tactical air controller (JTAC) moved into an adjacent building to the west of the objective where the Americans and ANP had already established a vantage point. The snipers quickly placed themselves and began to observe the objective for movement.

The task before the Green Team and their assigned PRC-K was daunting. The building was massive in sheer scale. Adding to this was its complexity. It was a kaleidoscope of shops and bazaars, one more overflowing with goods and wares than the other. Rugs, tapestry, burlap bags full of goods of every description littered the shops, hallways and entrances. Anyone and anything could be hidden from view. It was nothing short of a death trap.

The challenge and risk did not escape the CANSOF personnel. "I was immediately struck by the size of the building," conceded Captain David. Sergeant Justin C assessed immediately, "we don't have enough guys." Sergeant Caleb gasped, "it was huge – a CQB [close quarter battle] nightmare." The SOTF-58 commander

exclaimed, “the Building was one large danger area. There were no hard walls within the building. Someone could fire from one floor to the next.”²²

Despite the scale and scope of the objective, which could easily suck in a number of highly trained conventional infantry companies, David had only 25 SOTF-58 personnel, as well as approximately 55 members of the PRC-K to conduct his assault. With a plan in place, after notifying his chain-of-command and allowing the team leaders to brief their respective detachments, David commenced the clearance operation at 1830 hours.²³

The US cordon force indicated that enemy was last seen in the building 10 minutes earlier. However, they had no idea how many insurgents occupied the building or where they might be at this point in time. Up until this juncture the Americans and Afghan ANSF had only exchanged fire with the building occupants. No-one had dared to enter the gigantic complex. The assault group were now ready to begin their search, commencing in the basement since it was the safest point to start. The OC reasoned that the building was so large and his force so small that he had to keep the plan simple. Moreover, he was concerned about separation and the risk of “blue-on-blue” engagements. At every control point (e.g. at each floor, at one of the three stairwells), the mentors were to leave a PRC-K member.²⁴ David also tried to leave one of his CSOR personnel at strategic points so that they could control a number of PRC-K members, who, as a general rule, tended to be easily distracted and leave their post if not carefully supervised.²⁵

With approval in hand and night rapidly descending, the assault detachments rushed across the open ground and raced to the entry point. As they moved into the open they observed a number of civilians on a balcony.²⁶ The Afghan civilians were ordered to come down and taken into custody. Sergeant Sebastien C, who was on his fourth combat tour in Afghanistan, remembered, “It surprised

us. We weren't expecting to see that many 'friendlies' still there." This now raised the potential level of complexity. Were there additional non-combatant civilians still in the building?

With this concern in their minds, Sergeant Clifford and his team secured the entry point and north staircase. He quickly realized that the south end stairs also allowed access to the basement so he was forced to "lock them down as well eating up the limited valuable manpower before the clearance actually began." Sergeant Sebastien and his assault detachment then proceeded to clear the basement. The shopping complex was the nightmare the CANSOF operators dreaded it would be. There were gaps in the floor that allowed one to see into the basement, or conversely see up. The PRC-K and mentors began the clearance of the basement using a clockwise zig-zag methodology.²⁷ It was huge with many locked doors. It took considerable time and effort. As the mission was to find the insurgents, the search was not overly detailed. Doors locked from the outside were left for a later follow-on search. Nonetheless, it was far from simple. The large, dark, garbage strewn basement was also cluttered with a large number of big bags of powder and various boxes.

With the basement cleared, Sergeant Clifford now leap-frogged his assault detachment through that of Sergeant Sebastien and cleared the first floor. Once again there was no contact. Sergeant Sebastien's detachment now moved to the second floor. They quickly found an individual and took him under control. However, he was slowing down the search so Sebastien passed him to Sergeant Clifford's team to escort him down to the "Persons Under Control" (PUC) holding area. During the remainder of the sweep they found an additional four people, one of them wounded. As there was no way at this point to determine their status (i.e. combatant or non-combatant) they too were taken into custody and temporarily "controlled" by the PRC-K. However, the

PUC guard detail, as well as the requirement to post sentries on all the stairwells, ate into the number of troops the detachment commander had available for clearance operations. As a result Sebastien's assault detachment pushed through and carried on to clear the third and final floor.

By the time the assault force reached the third floor the mission seemed to be anticlimactic. Complacency began to set in with the PRC-K. Despite the fact that Sergeant Sebastien warned his Afghan PRC-K troops "to keep their eyes open" since any remaining insurgents had to be on the third floor, the Afghans began to simply trail their weapons and their attention to the task became lackadaisical. It became increasingly difficult for the mentors to focus their Afghan partners. The final level appeared to be just more of the same. The third floor, similar to the others had a bank of shops, one running into the next, along the exterior wall. Some doors were locked, others were not. In the centre was a large atrium, which appeared simply as another solid block of shops. Cut through each level were empty columns that ran from open skylights in the roof to the first floor. Connecting everything was a corridor or walkway that ran like a race track around the entire floor connecting the staircases and inner atrium to the bank of shops on the exterior wall.

As Sergeant Malcolm ran up the staircase to join his detachment commander on the third floor, he emerged on the landing just in time to meet some of the PRC-K personnel who had just begun sweeping the upper floor. Sergeant Sebastien who was leading the PRC-K through the clearance of the shopping mall building also appeared. Then, without warning, shots that sounded like miniature explosions in the confined space, rang out. Immediately, the mentors and some of the PRC-K members returned fire turning the narrow walkway into a virtual shooting gallery. Shots thudded into beams and supports and splintered the thin walls. One Afghan

was shot in the hand through his pistol grip, a finger dangling, held only by tissue.

Sebastien now pulled everyone back so they could assess the situation. It appeared at least one or more insurgents were barricaded in a series of shops at the corner of the atrium. With night setting in, it was difficult to see the exact location of the shooters, or in fact the layout of the actual block of shops. What did appear evident was that they had selected their barricaded position very carefully. The storefront they were holed up in was encased in a series of iron bars with glass, which not only made it difficult to approach without being seen but also nearly impossible to determine where the door was actually located. Moreover, the metal grill exterior made it difficult to enter since it would require an explosive breach or a power saw. But most importantly, the shooters had a dominating position of fire. From their den, they could sweep the walkway with a deadly fire that would make approaching from any direction a virtual death wish.

Sebastien posted security on the barricaded shooters and ensured the wounded PRC-K member was moved to the casualty collection point (CCP) at the entrance of the building. After discussing the situation with the OC, he then attempted to manoeuvre around the third floor from the opposite direction in an attempt to better define and engage the threat.²⁸ Meanwhile, the snipers had been cleared to fire into the shooter's den if they detected movement.

Sebastien now looked for an alternate approach. As they skirted some shops they came across a number of wounded fighting age males (FAM) in adjacent shops. They were evacuated to the CCP. Having verified the ground, Sebastien's group was now in a position to attempt a second assault. This time he decided to try an approach from the opposite direction. He told his interpreter to stay close behind him so that he could pass instructions to his PRC-K

assault force. A major concern was the fact that the PRC-K preferred not to use night vision goggles (NVG), had no lasers and relied on flashlights. Not surprisingly, as the assault force stepped off, the crunching glass and bobbing flashlights warned off the insurgents who reacted violently and unleashed a torrent of fire. Sergeant Sebastien went to turn back and fell over the interpreter who was literally directly behind him. Sebastien fell to the ground. As he crawled back to cover the concrete wall directly above him was brewed-up by machine gun fire spraying him with shards of metal and concrete. Some bullets actually passed through his uniform.²⁹ The close combat quarters and heavy enemy fire now caused the Afghan PRC-K members to scatter in panic.

It was evident to Sebastien that the barricaded position was well chosen. It commanded a dominating position of observation and fire that swept all approaches with deadly fire. The nature of the building was such that it did not allow easy access to the barricaded shooter's den. Moreover, it funnelled anyone attempting to assault the position into a deadly killing zone.

The second attempt had failed. Captain David revealed the complexity he had to deal with. "It was not just the enemy," he explained. He described:

We had to spend time confirming where the Afghan PRC-K members were. Some went to the stairway and others to the entry point. We had to send guys looking for them to confirm whether there were any wounded or missing. We also had to get flashlights for them since they didn't like using their night vision goggles. As a result, we lost a lot of time.

In the end, Sergeant Sebastien managed to reassemble a force and imbue them with a will to fight. He then led yet a third attempt against the insurgents.³⁰ The detachment commander now

planned to hug the wall of stores and attempt a stealthy approach to the target area. Sebastien fired two 40 mm rounds from a stand-alone M203 into the insurgent's position. He then led his assault team forward. Once again, as they crunched through the glass and debris, and the moment the PRC-K troops turned on their flashlights, the insurgents opened up a deluge of fire. The Afghans panicked and immediately scattered. Problematically, as they ran they also continued to fire, unfortunately, not aimed shots. Very quickly the CSOR mentors found themselves caught in a vicious cross-fire.

During the latest attempt, one Afghan soldier was wounded in the eye by shrapnel and he was evacuated to the CCP. Time was lost as the mentors accounted for all their PRC-K charges, many who simply decided they were done for the day. Sebastien realized there was no way they could stack-up by the door because of the layout of the objective. After discussing the next approach with the OC, they decided on an "old-school" assault using covering fire as they moved down along the frontage of the shops. Sergeant Matt S recalled, "it was surreal going up and down the stairs hearing shots and grenades going off, hoping it was not one of our guys who were hit."

As they were discussing the next assault, Sergeant Andy M, positioned in the VDO, informed the OC that they had eyes on and could use the .50 heavy machine gun (HMG) to pound the shooter's den. Andy then used his laser to paint the target. The snipers then "walked" him directly onto the insurgent's barricaded location. The air quickly vibrated with the staccato of the "boom, boom, boom" as the HMG pounded the insurgent's lair. However, it would later be determined that the angle from the VDO to the target was too great and the rounds impacted high in the actual shop occupied by the insurgents. Fatefully, however, the tracer rounds

ignited a fire in an adjacent shop that quickly grew in intensity and created a witch's brew of black, toxic smoke.

David ordered the VDO to cease fire and then, in coordination with his snipers in the adjacent building, he laid down covering fire for the fourth assault as Sebastien and his team began to move down the atrium clearing shops on the way to their target. With thick black smoke billowing along the ceiling like angry clouds rolling-in warning of an impending storm, the assault group inched forward posting grenades into each room as they slowly moved down towards the objective. Repeatedly, Sebastien was forced to step into the open to lead and mentor his Afghan charges, as well as his own men. Although this meant exposing himself to the deadly enemy fire, he felt compelled to take the risk to spur the PRC-K members into action.

His continued bravery impressed Captain David. "Sergeant Sebastien never hesitated to lead the assault against insurgents and exposed himself to intense close range fire each time," lauded the OC, "He showed incredible skill in his ability to motivate his wavering Afghan force for each assault." Sergeant Malcolm, the detachment second-in-command (2IC) described, "I witnessed Sergeant Sebastien lead the assaults, placing himself under large amounts of small arms fire while maintaining coherent, concise control and leadership with our Afghan partner force." Yet another detachment member, Corporal Zachary H stated, "After many attempts on the assault of the barricaded insurgents, Sergeant Sebastien would re-motivate and reassure the PRC-K, keeping them calm." His courageous action and continual verbal communications kept his PRC personnel engaged.

Progress was slow, but the assault force made headway. Sebastien detonated two distraction devices (DD) to signal the firebases to stop their covering fire. As they prepared to close with the

objective, one of Sebastien's biggest concerns was that the gunmen were rigged with explosives and would blow themselves up once the assault force was close. Despite his trepidation he pushed forward. However, as they neared the den, one of the Afghan police continued on past the safe area and into the actual target frontage. The insurgents came to life once again and showered the hallway with lead hitting the unfortunate PRC-K member in the throat.

It was 2305 hours, and the building clearance had to this point taken four and one half hours. The majority of the PRC-K members now attempted to break contact on their own, however, Corporal Zachary, who was positioned at the back of the assault group, held them in place. Meanwhile, Sebastien and an Afghan crawled out to rescue their wounded colleague. They crawled as far as possible under a stream of gunfire. Stretching out their hands they were able to lock onto the wounded policeman and drag him back to cover. "CSOR pulled a wounded Afghan out of line of fire," recounted the SOTF-58 commander, "that built credibility – shoulder to shoulder – the relationship was solid after that."

Sebastien realized the wound was bad. Corporal Zachary, the detachment's tactical care provider, who himself to this point had constantly put himself in danger to mentor, encourage and lead PRC-K personnel, now quickly came to the aid of the seriously wounded policeman.³¹ He ignored the hail of gunfire perforating the walls all around him and provided immediate medical care, which saved the life of his Afghan colleague. He then assisted in the evacuation of the wounded individual to the CCP.

Captain David revealed that "Other PRC-K were visibly shaken by the wound and the wounded PRC member was initially non-compliant with treatment." In the CCP, Sergeant Colin R, assisted by Master Corporal Justin M, worked hard at controlling the

bleeding and stabilizing the patient. Sergeant Colin recalled, “the patient became combative, his face and lips turned white and his eyes began to bulge.” The patient could not breathe. Sergeant Colin now performed a battlefield tracheotomy under very dire conditions. They then called for an immediate CASEVAC. Amazingly, all the wounded during the operation were saved.³²

The process had been draining. Sergeant Caleb explained, “We tried to ensure they did their drills but it was a nightmarish situation.” Sergeant Clifford noted it was extremely chaotic. “We were constantly trying to figure out where our people were,” he explained, “because we were concerned someone could be hurt, lying unknown somewhere.” Almost blind to the myriad of dangers in the smoldering death trap, the CSOR mentors focused on the mission and their Afghan charges.

Undeterred by fatigue, or the extended close combat and with the fire in the adjacent room raging out of control, the heat searing anything and anyone in the area, Sebastien now led a fifth attack. This time he placed himself and two mentors at the very front of the assault. Using a firebase for covering fire and hugging the wall of shops they once again moved forward. Once they reached the target area Sergeant Clifford posted a grenade and Corporal Zachary tossed in a DD. As the PRC-K detachment approached, however, incredulously, the insurgents sprang to life again and opened fire. Chaos now ensued. The PRC-K police broke, the whole time spraying fire in an undisciplined manner as they withdrew to safety, jeopardizing the lives of the mentors who were once again caught in the middle of hail of fire.

Sebastien conceded, “I really thought we would make entry this time, but when I looked around it was only Canadians up there.” He did conclude, however, that it was impossible to make entry from the front due to the metal bars and the fact that in order to

stack by the door meant exposing the detachment a mere metre or two from the shooters.³³ To this point it had been a constantly increasing mix of fatigue and stress with a constant rotation of assault, regrouping, new plan and back into the fray. Command Chief Warrant Officer John Graham commented, “The substantial enemy lanes of fire turned the normal high risk of the assault into just plain dangerous; it wasn’t even calculated risk anymore.”

The risk, however, was shared by all. Throughout the ordeal, Sergeant Caleb held a tenuous position at the northern stairwell for an extended period of time within the arcs of insurgent fire. However, Caleb, remaining calm and committed, ignored the enemy fusillade and supported each assault with well aimed covering fire and target definition. At one point, a large fire spewing a witch’s brew of toxic smoke and incredible heat ignited in a room a mere 10-15 metres from his position. Shortly after, a large explosion rocked the building. Undeterred by the fire or the subsequent explosion, Caleb continued to provide covering fire and security for the assault element. Captain David described, “Sergeant Caleb was unfazed by this detonation and continued to provide effective covering fire throughout.” It was not until the OC pulled back all his assets to allow for a heavy ordnance strike on the stronghold that Sergeant Caleb was able to withdraw from his position.

Sergeant Justin M was in a similar position at the southern stairwell. With the PRC-K disappearing in large numbers, Justin deployed his Afghan partners to assist with assaults, leaving himself in a very tenuous position with virtually no support.

With the latest attempt, fatigued by the extended period of combat including their previous action at the Governor’s Palace and now distracted by the casualties they had taken, the PRC-K became increasingly unreliable and difficult to mobilize. Many suffered from dehydration as they had a tendency not to bring

water on operations. Many simply returned to the CCP, or VDO, and completely shut down and went to sleep. “The PRC-K was extremely fatigued,” noted the SOTF-58 commander, “they had been fighting since early afternoon. Our guys got frustrated because the Afghans ran out of steam. The mentors were no longer coordinating and coaching the Afghans – they were leading them and in some cases dragging them forward.” For example in the fifth assault, the mentors were able to assemble only six PRC-K members to participate. After that effort, Sergeant Sebastien revealed, “it was impossible to get any PRC-K to assist.”

With the fire raging out of control and the PRC-K played out, Captain David now called a pause in the action and gathered his detachment commanders to discuss alternate solutions. He was “shocked at how much ammunition we put into the room and they were still firing back.” They would later discover that the insurgents had planned and staged the attack carefully, prepositioning weapons, explosive and equipment. In addition, they had created “mouse holes” between some of the walls, which allowed them to retreat deeper into the atrium behind protective barriers and only come out once the assault force came close to their barred stronghold. In any case, the OC kept the insurgents under observation and pulled back to reconsider options. He called back to FOB Graceland for a resupply, specifically ammunition, demolitions, water and rockets. Based on the current state of the PRC-K, he also requested reinforcements, specifically the Black Team, which referred to the SOTF-58 integral JTF 2 detachment.

The Black Team Assault Element leader was Lieutenant (Navy) James R. In order to deploy his team he had to borrow vehicles from the Americans (i.e. Omega 50) since there were no military pattern armoured/protected vehicles left in FOB Graceland. They arrived at approximately midnight. After a briefing, James, David and their detachment commanders conducted another leader’s

recce to reassess the situation. Then suddenly, at 0055 hours, the darkness transformed to day as a huge orange fireball erupted, followed almost immediately by a huge reverberating boom as a VIED, assessed as being on a timer, detonated inside of the cordon almost directly beneath the position being used by the snipers in the adjacent building.

The enormous explosion rocked both building and knocked down a large number of individuals. "All of a sudden it was loud and orange," recalled WO Scott, "I remember an orange flash and then it was all black and I was on the ground and I could hear someone saying, 'stay down, stay down.'" Scott had been slammed into the wall by the explosion. For the next 30 minutes he remained dizzy and groggy. He was not the only one to suffer injury. In the adjacent building a wall partially collapsed on the JTAC. The SOTF commander observed, "The Taliban picked the site carefully. It showed the amount of preparation. They had pre-positioned vehicle IED where they expected first responders to be." In fact, the VIED was in the proximity of the originally planned VDO.

With the stubborn defence ongoing, RC(S) headquarters had authorized AH 64 Attack Helicopter gun runs on the target. However, David had resisted for fear of excessive collateral damage. But, the idea of overwhelming precision firepower to hit the insurgent stronghold had taken root with the Canadians. At 0207 hours, with the fire dying down, David now took another approach. Using an external firebase, he coordinated a volley fire of 66mm M72 rocket launchers in a precision strike against the barricade. An M48 grenade launcher was used to punch a hole in the wall that provided a direct line of fire into the insurgent barricade. It allowed the more effective use of 7.62mm and .50 calibre fire as well. The tactic had great effect and hit the enemy den. However, it also ignited yet another fire. Thick black toxic smoke soon billowed from the doomed shopping mall as building materials and

plastics melted in the intense heat. Stockpiled insurgent ammunition stocks began to cook off and visibility within the building became extremely limited. Sergeant Clifford reasoned, “unleash Hell on that room and let it burn until morning.”

The American BSO Phoenix 6 was kept apprised throughout. He was vocally thankful that they did not have to do the task. WO Scott remembered, “the American colonel came over and said, ‘we can hear it; we know what’s going on and we appreciate it.’”

Between 0215-0230 hours, the snipers believed that they saw movement inside the barricaded stronghold and they unleashed a second volley into the insurgent position. By 0300 hours, the fire was still burning. The danger and stress to this point had been unending for the OC who had now been under the gun for over eight hours. One report noted, “Captain David was instrumental in providing calm and professional leadership to motivate both his own personnel and the PRC-K in attempting to clear the barricaded shooters.” Throughout Captain David supervised the escalation of engagements in an attempt to neutralize the insurgents. His resources, however, were limited as he had only a few SOTF-58 and PRC-K members to conduct the assault since others were tied down securing vital points of the building that had been cleared.

Moreover, David himself was immersed in the close fight. Repeatedly, he exposed himself to enemy fire to provide covering fire to manoeuvring forces and to provide target indication in the confined cordite filled hallway using white light. Sergeant Caleb noted, “As I was preparing 40mm grenade rounds he provided me with the white light needed to place the munitions into the correct room thereby seriously divulging his position to the insurgents.” Sergeant Sebastien lauded, “I witnessed Captain David exposing himself to small arms fire on many occasions to provide suppressing fire support, enabling my section to close in with the enemy.

Even with the intense fire fight, IEDs exploding , the proximity of the enemy and the multiple casualties, Captain David demonstrated on many occasions his leadership and warrior skills by making quick, rational and aggressive decisions while always adapting quickly to the ever-changing situation.”

The brief respite was welcomed. By 0343 hours, the fire was almost out and David, guided by advice from the SOTF-58 commander, decided to reassess the situation. Extreme fatigue within the small team now started to show itself. Members of the PRC-K had been fighting since early afternoon in oppressive heat. The mentors, who had also been on stand-by since early afternoon, had not eaten since that time as they had been caught up in deploying the PRC-K and then preparing themselves. Moreover, they had been immersed in extremely stressful circumstances, leading and supervising their partner force who increasingly began to pull out of the fight, thereby placing not only the burden of leadership and command on the mentors but also the actual fighting. Added to this the extreme heat, exacerbated by raging fires, darkness, an enveloping smoke and tenacious insurgents all fuelled an extremely dangerous situation. Not surprisingly, Captain David now decided to contain the situation and to allow for some rest and regrouping.

Throughout, the personnel at FOB Graceland remained on heightened alert status. Everyone left at the camp, from intelligence operators, cooks, to material technicians, were on a rotation to take positions on the walls to augment the guard force manning the observation towers. Quite simply, the situation in the city still remained tenuous.

As light began to sneak across the Afghan horizon, the Ground Force Commander was ready to renew the operation. At 0515 hours, David issued orders for the final clearance. Once again, the

assault force began from the basement. Reinforced with the Black Team who had not yet been engaged in direct clearance operations, David designated them to lead the PRC-K in the renewed assault. They quickly swept up through the first and second floors, to ensure the insurgents had not relocated during the night. Then, they emerged on the third floor and pushed through the labyrinth of destroyed shops. This time there was no resistance. In the enemy position they found the badly charred remains of two dead insurgents, along with several weapons, ammunition and IED components. They also discovered that the insurgents had burrowed through the walls to connect several stores to their main position. For some of the mentors this accounted for how the insurgents could have survived the barrage of fire. They surmised that the shooters would retreat to the protection of the other rooms and only appear when they heard or saw the approach of another assault. Amazingly, they also found an old man, who was wounded in the leg, covered by rugs in a room close by. How he had survived surprised everyone. In any case, the objective was secured at 0612 hours.

Captain David then conducted a physical battle space hand-over (BSH) with Phoenix 6, at which time all fighting age males that had been detained were handed-over from the PRC-K to the BSO. Final resolution was thus achieved at 0747 hours, 8 May 2011.

On completion of the BSH, the ground force redeployed to FOB Graceland arriving without incident at 1000 hours. In the end, the results were two enemy killed in action, one enemy wounded, six FAMs detained and passed to the BSO, as well as four PRC-K wounded. In the end, Captain David acknowledged, "It boggles the mind how difficult it can be to deal with a few bad guys."³⁴

SOTF-58 and their Afghan partners had earned a well-deserved rest. However, it was not in the cards. One of the other major

attacks as part of the Taliban Operation Badar, was the Kandahar Hotel. The attack began at 1309 hours, 7 May 2011. The BSO and ANP cordoned the site and returned fire. For the for next 41 hours, ANP and insurgents battled for control of the hotel, exchanging fire for protracted periods of time. At one point, the coalition forces brought US SEALs and Afghan commandos, who used AH 64 attack helicopter 30mm gun runs and other ground level strikes with heavy precision ordnance to subdue the enemy. However, they failed to reduce the insurgents inside and at the end of 8 May, the SEALs and their Afghan commando partner force left.

The ANSF that were leading the assault on the building were able to clear the first floor and portions of the second but were unable to advance any further through the building. As such, with the battle still ongoing on the morning of 9 May 2011, the ANP chain of command once again called on the PRC-K and its mentors to assist with the resolution of the problem.

With OP Response activated, the SOTF-58 commander issued a simple mission statement – “PRC-K partnered with SOTF-58 will conduct crisis response to assist BSO with clearance of insurgents at the Kandahar Hotel, in sub-district two.” The news was not uplifting. As Sergeant Sebastien admitted, “it was stressful just thinking of doing that all over again.”

Based on the previous day and the enormity of the new task, the SOTF commander decided, even though FOB Graceland was still on 100 percent stand-to, to send the mentors, both Green and Black Teams, to accompany PRC-K. However, this time they would do so in a deliberate manner. First, they sent an advance party at 0500 hours 9 May 2011, consisting of 1 PRC-K officer and 20 SOTF-58 personnel, in two HMMVWs and three low visibility vehicles. The main body, consisting of 45 PRC-K personnel, 29 SOTF-58 members, and two canine units, in three HMMVWs,

five low visibility vehicles and three PRC-K Ford Rangers, were ready to depart on call.

On arrival, the PRC-K and mentor command element met with the KCoS and the Afghan Border Police commander who were both on the scene. The SOTF-58 commander revealed, "It was very awkward for my subordinate commanders on the ground with so much Afghan brass present." He also believed, "When the PRC-K showed up it created some shame with the other Afghans." Nonetheless, the advance party began deliberate planning with the on scene commander. At least the building was not as complex as the shopping mall the day prior. As the PRC-K Green and Black Team commanders went to give orders to their men, the SOTF-58 snipers who had deployed and had the objective under surveillance noted movement and requested permission to engage. The ground force commander then confirmed with the on-site commander the location of friendly troops only to find out that unbeknownst to them, Afghan Border troops had gone in to clear the rest of the Kandahar Hotel. Apparently, spurred on by the arrival of the PRC-K, the ANSF units originally on scene were able to gain enough momentum to complete the clearance of the building. The SOTF-58 personnel felt that either the arrival of the PRC-K had shamed the other Afghans into action, or the Afghan commanders wanted to ensure they and their organizations received the glory for resolving the event. In any case, the PRC-K was dismissed from duty without any involvement and returned to FOB Graceland at 0710 hours, 9 May 2011, without incident.

With the resolution of the Kandahar Hotel attack, the city could now begin the cleaning-up process. Like the onset of a tornado, the Taliban had exploded onto the city in a swirl of death and destruction. Ahmed Wali Karzai, the head of Kandahar's Provincial Council, stated, "Everyone knows that these types of attacks, with suicide bombers and a few people hiding and shooting, are difficult

to stop and can happen anywhere.” He insisted, “The Taliban are desperate. They cannot do anything else but try to create news.”³⁵ However, the impact had been significant. The Taliban had once again paralyzed and traumatized the city’s population. In the end, NATO spokesman Major-General James Laster described the Kandahar raid as a “spring offensive spectacular attack which was thwarted.”³⁶ In its wake, a minimum of 18 fighters, many of them suicide bombers, were killed and four insurgents were captured. Another 40 people were wounded, including 14 ANP policemen.³⁷

Emerging from the chaos and crisis, however, was the great efforts of the PRC-K and SOTF-58. CANSOF made a conscious decision to ensure that the accolades for the hard won fight went to the PRC-K. In turn, the Afghan partner force was duly recognized by both their own government and ISAF. In fact, General David Petraeus, the ISAF commander at the time, noted on 10 May 2011, “It is too bad they [Afghans] don’t have the equivalent of the Presidential Unit Citation for Afghan Police units because that PRC-K down there [Kandahar] probably deserves it.”³⁸ The PRC-K was later awarded a National Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Medal of Recognition.



PHOTO CREDIT: DND



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HONOURS & AWARDS

STAR OF MILITARY VALOUR

Sergeant Sebastien C

On 7/8 May 2011, Sergeant Sebastien demonstrated exceptional valour and devotion to duty while mentoring an assault element from the Provincial Response Company – Kandahar during a spectacular attack in Kandahar City. During a particularly intense portion of the prolonged firefight, Sergeant Sebastien assisted in pulling a critically wounded Afghan partner from the line of fire, ultimately saving his life. The courageous and self-sacrificing actions of Sergeant Sebastien have brought great credibility to the Afghan National Police and the Canadian Forces.

Captain David S

On 7/8 May 2011, Captain David demonstrated exceptional valour while mentoring an assault element from the Provincial Response Company – Kandahar during a spectacular attack in Kandahar City. He bravely led and mentored his team through a close quarter clearance operation of a multi-storied building. Under intense fire and at great personal risk, he valiantly coordinated multiple assaults and successfully neutralized the insurgent threat. Captain David demonstrated distinguished leadership, courageous service and self-sacrifice in the presence of an armed enemy.

MEDAL OF MILITARY VALOUR

Corporal Zachary H

On 7/8 May 2011, Corporal Zachary displayed exceptional bravery and devotion to duty while supporting an assault element from the Provincial Response Company – Kandahar during a close quarter, complex insurgent attack in Kandahar City. For 12 continuous hours, Corporal Zachary was involved in treating and transporting casualties, all while fighting a heavily armed enemy. Corporal Zachary's outstanding courage and quick thinking under fire were instrumental in saving lives and significantly contributed to the overall success of the operation.

MENTION IN DISPATCHES

Sergeant Malcom M

On 7/8 May 2011, Sergeant Malcolm showed great courage and devotion to duty while mentoring an assault element from the Provincial Response Company fighting insurgents within Kandahar City. Throughout a difficult operation and under effective enemy fire, he actively mentored and provided cover fire, security and directed the movement of an injured Afghan soldier to the casualty collection point. Sergeant Malcom's skills and dedication have brought credit to the Provincial Response Company and the Canadian Forces.

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF COMMENDATION

Master Corporal Justin M

Master Corporal Justin served as mentor for the Provincial Response Company in Kandahar. On 7 and 8 May 2011, he demonstrated devotion to duty when he moved a wounded soldier down two flights of stairs to a casualty collection point. He then expertly assisted the Platoon Medic in the treatment of various casualties. Master Corporal Justin's skills and actions directly contributed to the survival and recovery of all casualties and his dedication brought credit to the partnered force and the Canadian Forces.

Sergeant Colin R

On 7 and 8 May 2011, while serving as a Medical Assistant with the Provincial Response Company – Kandahar, Sergeant Colin demonstrated outstanding devotion to duty as he provided life-saving medical treatment during a fierce and protracted firefight in Kandahar City, Afghanistan. His ability to apply his skill in austere and difficult conditions saved at least one life and contributed to the well-being of several others. Sergeant Colin's actions earned the respect of his Afghan allies and brought great credit to the Canadian Forces.

Colonel Bernd Horn, OMM, MSM, CD, PhD is an experienced infantry officer who has held key command and staff appointments in the Canadian Forces, including Deputy Commander of CANSOFCOM, Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment and Officer Commanding 3 Commando, the Canadian Airborne Regiment. He is the Director of the CANSOFCOM Professional Development Centre. Dr. Horn is also an adjunct professor of history at the Royal Military College of Canada and Norwich University. He has authored, co-authored, edited or co-edited 35 books and over a hundred chapters / articles on military history, leadership and military affairs.

NOTES

1 First names only will be used throughout the monograph to protect the names of SOF personnel still serving.

2 Normally for crisis rapid reaction type tasks SOTF-58 would attempt to deploy the Amber Cycle SRT, thereby leaving the Green Cycle SRT available for more deliberate operations as the Afghan partner force for SOTF-58.

3 OP Response was in essence a crisis response contingency operation to protect the people of Kandahar City.

4 The ISAF command chain normally consisted of non-Canadians. As such, the Canadian SOTF commander could play the “national red card.” Although the standard operating procedure (SOP) was that the mentors would accompany the PRC-K, he would veto this requirement if he felt that the situation was too risky to deploy mentors without the necessary intelligence picture, planning and preparation.

5 “Green Team” refers to the Canadian Special Operations Regiment element within the SOTF. They were specifically tasked with training and mentoring assigned Afghan National Security Force organizations.

6 By the end of the tour of SOTF-58, the PRC-K had arrested a Taliban assassin and commander in Kandahar City based on Afghan intelligence and in accordance with the Rule of Law.

7 Commander SOTF-58 explained, “The PRC-K wore special uniforms with special fighting assault gear – old CANSOF tactical vests. They carried AK-47 rifles with modified laser modules and early generation NVGs. They didn’t always wear NVGs due to comfort. In any case, you could clearly differentiate the PRC-K from ANP. However, normally they wore ANP uniforms so they wouldn’t stand out and be targeted. During special missions they would wear their special uniforms.”

8 Yaroslav Trofimov, "Taliban Move into Kandahar City," *The Wall Street Journal*, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303654804576341271303806658.html>>, accessed 23 March 2012.

9 Pastor Terry Jones held a mock trial at his Dove World Outreach Center on 2 April 2011 in Gainesville, Florida. He originally intended to burn the Quran on the anniversary of 9/11 in response to plans to develop an Islamic center near the site of the September 2011 terrorist attack. The act sparked days of deadly protest worldwide. In Afghanistan, protests at the United Nations compound in Mazar-I-Sharif resulted in the killing of seven UN employees. As a result of the mock trial, the Church's membership plummeted. In addition, furniture sales on which the Church relied also steeply declined. Moreover, the Church's internet and insurance providers cancelled their services. Jones has since launched a new organization, "Stand up America," which plans to protest the Quran, Shariah law and radical Islam. Kevin Sieff, "Florida pastor Terry Jones's Koran burning has far-reaching effect," *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/florida-pastor-terry-jones-koran-burning-has-far-reaching-effect/2011/04/02/AFpiFoQC_story.html>, accessed 23 March 2012; and Adelle M. Banks, "Florida pastor oversees Quran burning," *USA Today*, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2011-03-21-quran-burning-florida_N.htm>, accessed 23 March 2012.

10 Trofimov. A government spokesman conceded the escape was a "disaster" for the government. Ismail Sameem, Reuters, "Afghan forces battle Kandahar insurgents for 2nd day," <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/08/us-afghanistan-violence-idUSTRE7460Q020110508>>, accessed 23 March 2012.

11 Trofimov.

12 Jon Boone, "Taliban launch multi-pronged attack on city of Kandahar," *The Guardian*, 8 May 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/08/taliban-launch-attack-kandahar-city>>, accessed 23 March 2012. Despite Afghanistan president Hamid Karzai's declaration that the attacks in Kandahar were in direct retribution for the American raid that killed Osama Bin Laden, Taliban commanders clearly proclaimed

the attacks were not in revenge for the killing of the Al-Qaeda leader. Sameem, “Afghan forces battle Kandahar insurgents for 2nd day.”

13 Boone.

14 As always, numbers vary depending on the source used. See Sameem, “Afghan forces battle Kandahar insurgents for 2nd day.” Other sources quoted in this work also have numbers within the range given in the text.

15 Trofimov.

16 Ibid.

17 Boone.

18 Sameem.

19 Boone.

20 Their rush to deploy created one accident. One of the Toyota Hilux pick-up trucks rolled when the driver attempted to negotiate a turn approximately 200 metres outside the rear gate of the FOB at too high a speed. The gravel road had steep embankments and the driver fell prey as he was unable to make the turn safely. CSOR members from the Green Team scrambled to conduct the vehicle recovery. No-one was seriously hurt.

21 Chantu, the Afghan-appointed PRC-K commander, was well connected on a personal basis with some of the higher echelon. The GFC felt he was motivated to accomplish missions, although he was not tactically skilled. As a result, he would always default to the mentors and let them conduct the operations.

22 Many of the mentors shook their heads when they arrived. Ironically, a number of CSOR personnel were sent to the Governor’s Palace the week prior and were told to park their vehicles in the area between the palace and the shopping complex. A number of them immediately noted the massive commercial building and evaluated it as a threat,

specifically because it could be used as a strongpoint due to its complexity, strategic location close to the Governor's Palace, and dominating position of fire and observation. Their concerns were ignored and they were assured by the security detail in the area that the building was kept under a close watch.

23 Complicating matters was the fact that the briefing of the teams on the plan had to go through a translator. This was ponderous and slow and increased the risk of misunderstanding or key details not being passed on correctly.

24 Due to the size of the building and the small assault force, Captain David had to be content with leaving only leaving a piquet at the major control points (i.e. stairwell access points at each floor level).

25 PRC-K members apparently did not seem to absorb the importance of securing the stairway access points. Left unsupervised even for the shortest time period they would wander off and leave the access points insecure.

26 It is difficult to ascertain exactly the nature of the civilians taken under control. Interview statements describe them as a family, four young males, an old man and a young child.

27 Normally there would be 4-5 PRC-K members, followed by 2 CSOR mentors and then another 4-5 PRC-K members. This was found to be the optimal stacking to ensure there was the requisite control. Mentors always tried to ensure they were at a minimum in pairs to ensure they had reliable mutual support should the Afghan partners melt away as happened throughout the assault.

28 Chantu, the PRC-K commander, did not participate in the clearance operation. Throughout he could be found at either the VDO or CCP.

29 At the end of the mission Sergeant Sebastien noticed a number of bullet holes in his uniform. In addition, he then also realized he had taken some small shrapnel fragments in the leg.

30 Adding to the leadership challenge was the fact that for each attack the CSOR mentors had to assemble a new group as some PRC-K members just disappeared while others would outright refuse to participate.

31 During the operation Corporal Zachary provided medical care to five wounded Afghans, one wounded insurgent and two wounded civilians.

32 Sergeant Colin required light to perform the procedure, which took him under three minutes, so he needed the PRC-K members (who had sought refuge in the CCP) to point their flashlights, which were attached to their weapons, at the site of the procedure. He conceded he was concerned having all those weapons pointed at him but had no choice. Meanwhile the wounded PRC-K member's fire team partner was "freaking out" and others had to restrain him from shooting all the Persons Under Control (PUC).

33 Sebastien noted, "mentally, being a few metres away from someone who desperately wanted to kill you was very weird."

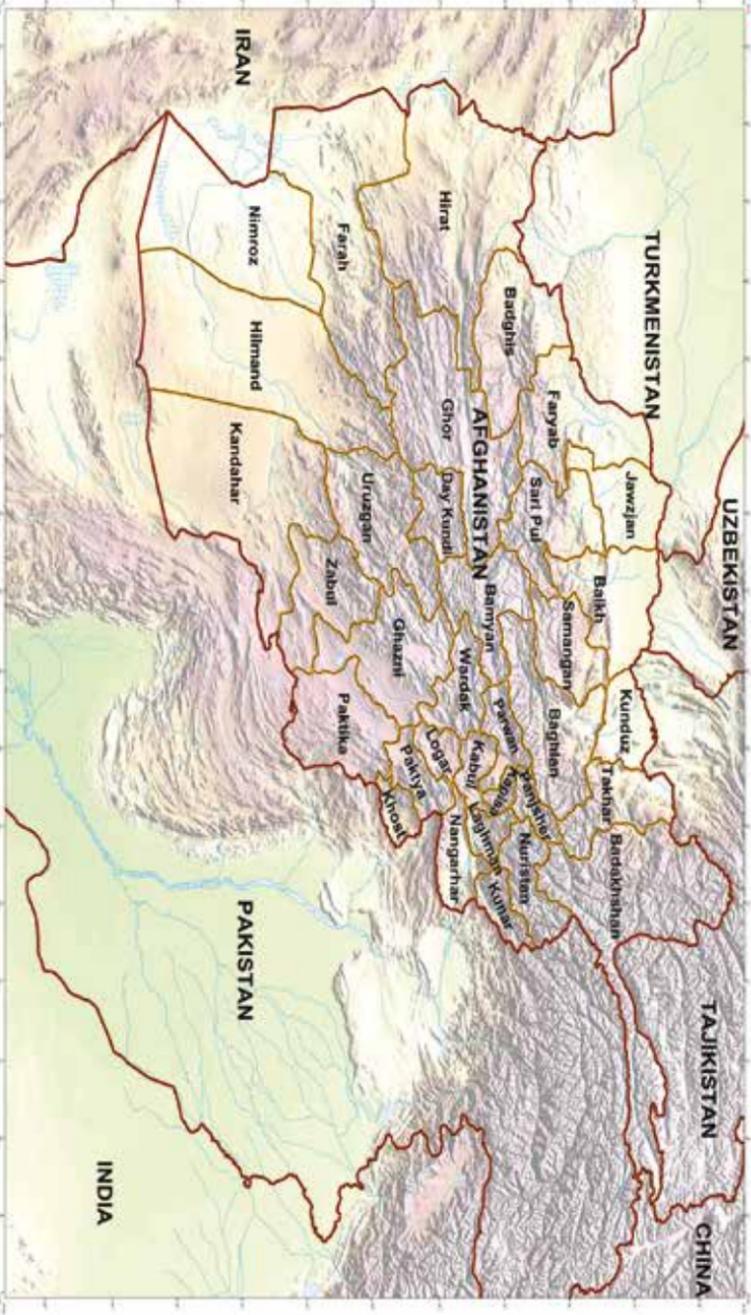
34 The OC also noted that Clausewitzian "friction" is always at play, meaning that there are always compounding small problems (e.g. fire, darkness, lack of flashlights, accounting for/finding individuals who scatter) making the task more difficult.

35 Boone.

36 "Afghanistan: Kandahar Taliban attackers 'defeated'," *BBC News*, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13325855>>, accessed 23 March 2012.

37 Sameem.

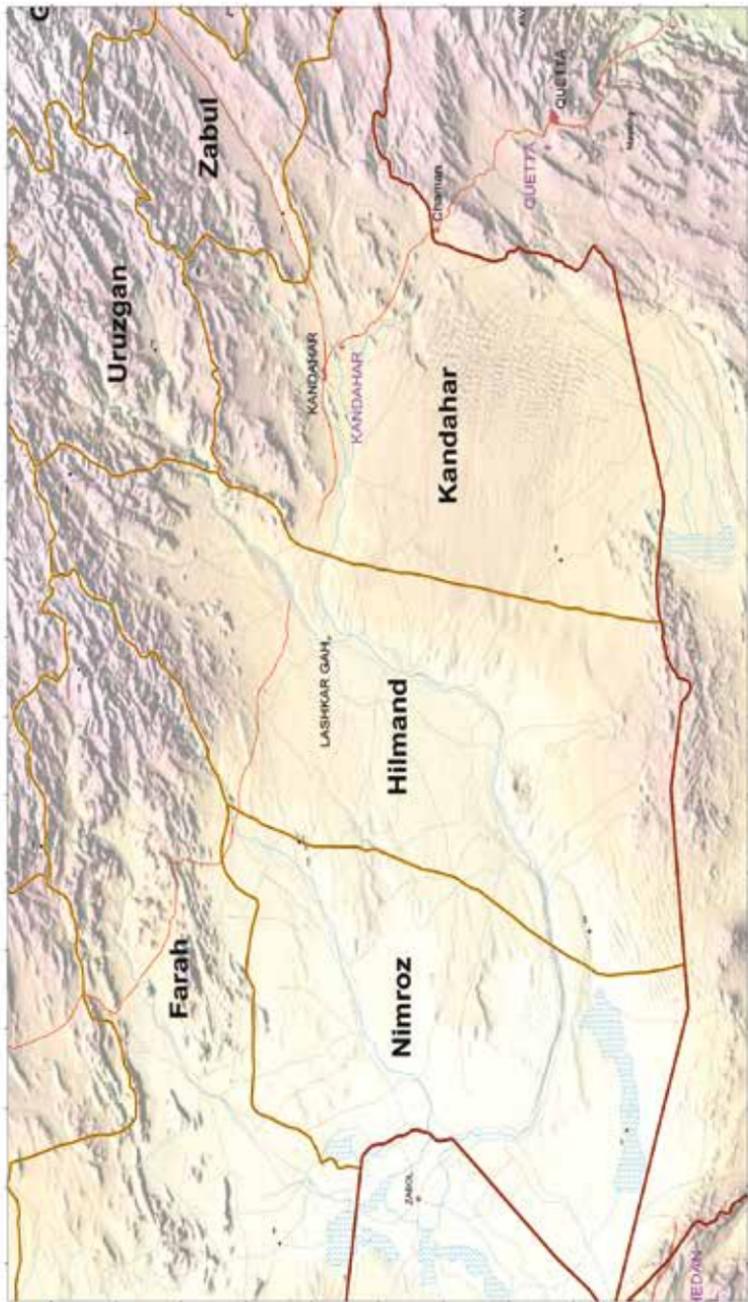
38 Commander ISAF (COMISAF) Morning Stand-Up, 10 May 2011.



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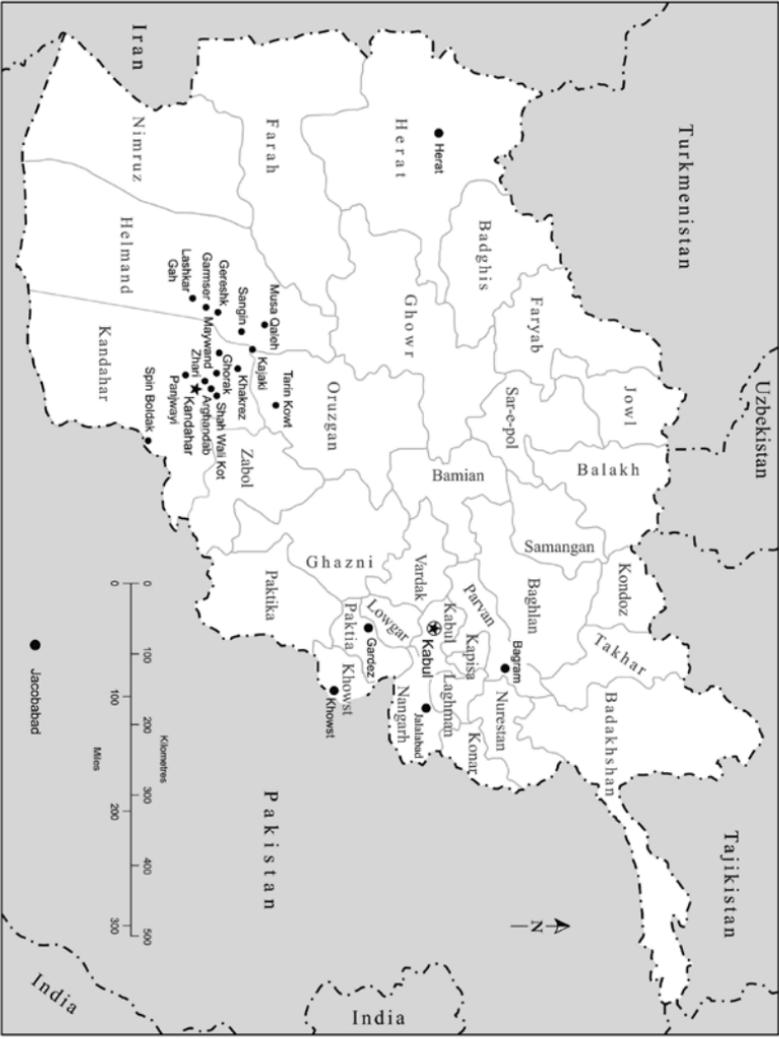


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