



British and French Paratroopers Ready for Joint Operations

British and French paratroopers are showing their readiness to deploy together on joint operations

Across two demanding weeks (12-21 Nov) in south west France, Exercise Falcon Amarante tested the Airborne Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (A-CJEF) – a partnership between 16 Air Assault Brigade and 11e Brigade Parachutiste. The two brigades provide the airborne rapid reaction forces for their respective armies, and the A-CJEF has been trained and ready since 2013 to deploy on short-notice operations ranging from war fighting to disaster relief.

Exercise Falcon Amarante is the A-CJEF's annual test exercise, taking place this year under 11e BP's command. Some 650 British troops and 170 vehicles of the 3 PARA Battlegroup - built around the airborne infantry of 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment bolstered by artillery, engineers, medics, signallers and logisticians – took part.

British troops were paired with the 3e Regiment de Parachutistes d'Infanterie de Marine as the A-CJEF, with US paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade working

alongside. After mission planning and reconnaissance, the exercises started in earnest on with some 600 British, French and US paratroopers jumping onto the Caylus training area near Toulouse. From there, a series of simulated missions tested the skills and capabilities of the 2,000-strong force.

General Patrick Collet, Commander of 11e BP and the A-CJEF for the exercise, said:

"We are working to develop a fine understanding and a real 'operational culture' between our units, with a mutual knowledge of equipment, procedures and language with a view to future joint commitments. The common state of mind and the powerful historic links between British and French paratroopers are a key factor in the success of A-CJEF, which is interoperable and ready to engage anywhere in the world."

Colonel Andrew Jackson, Deputy Commander of 16 Air Asslt Bde, served as the A-CJEF's deputy commander for the exercise. He said: "The A-CJEF is a mature partnership between British and French airborne forces, and with our



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shared role and ethos as paratroopers it is a natural fit. Exercise Falcon Amarante has been a great opportunity to work together on a demanding and realistic mission. It has refreshed and reinforced the links between us, demonstrating that we stand ready to deploy together now."

Lance Corporal Ruaidhri Bird, 28 from Edinburgh, said: "I've trained with French airborne forces a few times before and it's always been a good experience. They're pretty much the same as us in terms of their role, skills and approach and we get on well together. There is a bit of a language barrier, but we can work through it on the ground and paratroopers always manage a bit of banter!"

Lance Corporal Craig Vessey, 24 from Looe, Cornwall, said: "We can always benefit from training with other armies. It's very unlikely that we would ever go on an operation without

allies, so it's best to get to know each other beforehand. Also, as soldiers, we all do the same job but everyone has their own quirks. Working with other armies and looking at how they operate gives us a wider perspective and helps makes us better soldiers." ■



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