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Building 4 after the 7 May 2011 action.

CHAOS IN KANDAHAR: THE BATTLE FOR BUILDING 4

by Bernd Horn

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 (SOF) deployed in FOB Graceland, the heat, much like the complex, ambiguous, and ever-changing environment in which they worked, was taken in stride. Then, single shots cracked in the distance, piercing the relative mid-day tranquility of the FOB. Starting like a faltering engine, the shots started in spurts and soon increased in frequency until there was a consistent rhythm to them. At one point, tracer arced over the FOB, prompting some to believe it may have been their camp that was under attack.

The commander of Operation (OP) *Legion*, Roto 1-11, Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) 58 and his Ground Force Commander (GFC), Captain David,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 was not unusual, particularly as a result of the insurgency, but clearly, something significant was occurring. The volume and pattern of the exchange of fire, punctu-

ated 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.



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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 co-located 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 unraveling 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). And it was SOTF-58's Green Team² that was responsible for both training and mentoring their Afghan partners. As a result, 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, were to deploy immediately, much akin to a quick reaction unit.

Since the PRC-K was co-located 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 both the PRC-K and themselves to deploy, while SOTF-58 headquarters would immediately coordinate battlefield deconfliction with the battle space owners (BSO) and notify its chain-of-command headquarters (Joint Task Force - Afghanistan (JTF-A)) and Regional Command (South) [RC(S)] that OP *Response* was being executed.

For the Afghans, the PRC-K was an integral part of the Kandahar City security plan. As the SOTF-58 Commander explained, "They were the best of the Afghan units."

And so, despite the complete absence of information with respect to the events that had seized the city, SOTF-58 prepared to deploy the PRC-K. The SOTF commander acknowledged, "We knew we had to go out. We followed as close as possible." What made the situation worse was the fact that strategic analysts noted that the 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.³ 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.⁴ 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 Sarpoza prison. Significantly, the last two operations were accomplished with support from the inside.⁵

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 differentiate 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 and a police substation (close to FOB Graceland), as well as three other police sub-stations, ANP headquarters, the mayor's office, and two high schools. Taliban forces also attempted to block major roads leading into the city.

The Taliban offensive was clearly a major operation. Insurgent commanders declared that their objective was nothing short of "taking control of the city."⁶ The attack, by approximately 60-100 insurgents and up to 20 suicide bombers, was part of the Taliban spring offensive codenamed Operation *Badar*.



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The attack on Kandahar City and its estimated one million inhabitants was a deliberate strategy to turn the insurgency in the Kandahar region more into an urban focus, as the American surge in the rural outlying regions had pushed the Taliban out of their strongholds in the surrounding districts. Having learned from years of fighting, the Taliban realized that if they attacked multiple targets, they would overwhelm the security forces. The Taliban commander explained, "... if we attack one place all the security people will come and surround us; this way they can't stop us."⁷⁷

This 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.

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

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. 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 (NTM). 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.

With that decision, David and his Green Team focused upon assisting the PRC-K to 'get out the door.' However, they also began to prepare to deploy, knowing the inevitable call would be made. The PRC-K members were eager as they drew their weapons, ammunition, and marshalled their vehicles. Once assembled, all of them, with the exception of one section kept back in reserve, quickly raced off toward the sound of gunfire only a short distance away.

The PRC-K arrived shortly thereafter 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 they were firing at the Governor's residence and surrounding buildings with small arms and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). The PCoP and KCoS quickly employed the PRC-K in the attack, and a prolonged firefight and assault ensued.

Meanwhile, CANSOF personnel at FOB Graceland were on a 100 percent alert. Fortuitously, some information began to dribble in from JTF-A headquarters as the situation began to crystallize. By now, the Taliban objectives had been 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 it, 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.

"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."

To that end, 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 that the complexity of the task was beyond the PRC-K, Captain David and his men left FOB Graceland to link-up with the PRC-K commander and the BSO to begin conducting planning for a deliberate assault on the new objective.

As they neared the rendezvous point (RV), David tried to establish communications with *Phoenix 6*, but was unable to do so. 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 improvised explosive device (IED), was limping backwards. "That whole area was obliterated," described Sergeant Clifford, "... you could tell a lot of bombs had gone off. The entire area was a complete mess," Sergeant Caleb recalled, "... the Governor's Palace was shot to bits." 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).

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. 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, which provided force protection by keeping any new insurgents 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 that had occurred 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 reconnaissance 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 the ANP had already established a vantage point. The snipers quickly established 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.



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Aftermath of the initial IED attack in the market area.

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 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."

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. That said, with a plan in place, David commenced the clearance operation at 1830 hours.

The US cordon force indicated that enemy forces had been last seen in the building ten minutes earlier. However, they had no idea how many insurgents occupied the building, or where they might be located 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 ground force commander (GFC) 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' (friendly forces engaging each other - Ed.) engagements. At every control point, (i.e., at each floor, at one of the three stairwells), the mentors were to leave a PRC-K member. 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 to leave their posts, if not carefully supervised.

With 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. The Afghan civilians were ordered to come down and taken into custody. Sergeant Sebastian, who was on his fourth combat tour in Afghanistan, remembered: "It surprised us. We weren't expecting to see that many 'friendly' 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 the 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 Sebastian and his assault detachment then proceeded to clear the basement. The shopping complex was the nightmare the CANSOF operators

dreaded it would become. There were gaps in the floor that allowed one to see into the basement, or, conversely, to see up. The PRC-K and mentors began the clearance of the basement. It was huge, with many locked doors, and it required 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 Sebastian, and cleared the first floor. Once again, there was no contact with the enemy. Sergeant Sebastian's detachment now moved to the second floor. They quickly found an individual, and took him under control. 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 guard detail, as well as the requirement to post sentries on all the stairwells, ate into the number of troops Clifford had available for clearance operations. As a result, Sebastian's assault detachment pushed through and carried on to clear the third and final floor.

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 in which they were holed up was encased in a series of iron bars with glass, which not only made it difficult to approach without actually 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 this 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.



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Some of the captured munitions resulting from the engagement.

Sebastian posted security on the barricaded shooters and ensured that 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 GFC, he then attempted to manoeuvre around the third floor from the opposite direction in an attempt to better define and engage the threat. Meanwhile, the snipers were prepared to fire into the shooter's den if they detected movement.

By the time the assault force reached the third floor, the mission seemed to be anti-climatic. Complacency began to set in with the PRC-K. It became increasingly difficult for the mentors to focus their Afghan partners. The final level appeared to be just more of the same. Similar to the other floors, this one contained 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.

Sebastian now looked for an alternate approach. As they skirted some shops, they came across a number of wounded fighting age males in adjacent shops, and they were evacuated to the CCP. Having verified the ground, Sebastian'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 instruction to his PRC-K assault force. A major concern was the fact that the PRC-K preferred not to use night vision goggles (NVGs), had no lasers, and relied upon 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.

As Sergeant Malcolm ran up the staircase to join his detachment commander on the third floor, he immersed on the landing just in time to meet some of the PRC-K personnel who had just begun sweeping the upper floor. 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.

Sebastian now pulled everyone back so that they could assess the situation. It appeared that at least one or more insurgents were barricaded in a



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Sergeant Sebastian went to turn back, and then fell over the interpreter, who was literally directly behind him. Sebastian 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.⁸ The close combat quarters and heavy enemy fire now caused the Afghan PRC-K members to scatter in panic.

It was evident to Sebastian that the barricaded position was well-chosen. It commanded a dominating position of observation and fire that swept with all approaches with deadly fire. Moreover, it funnelled anyone attempting to assault the position into a deadly killing zone.

The second attempt had failed. Captain David revealed the complexity of the situation with which he had to deal. "It was not just the enemy." He described what happened as follows:

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 (NVGs). As a result, we lost a lot of time.

In the end, Sergeant Sebastian managed to reassemble a force and imbue them with a will to fight. He then led yet a third attempt against the insurgents. The detachment commander now planned to hug the wall of stores and attempt a stealthy approach to the target area. Sebastian 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 this latest attempt, one Afghan soldier was wounded in the eye by shrapnel, and he was evacuated to the CCP. After discussing the next approach with the GFC, they decided upon an 'old-school' assault using covering fire as they moved down along the frontage of the shops.

As they were discussing the next assault, Sergeant Andy, positioned in the VDO, informed the GFC that they 'had eyes on,' and could use the .50 calibre heavy machine gun (HMG) to pound the shooter's den. The air quickly vibrated with the staccato of the "boom, boom, boom" as the HMG pounded the insurgent lair. The tracer rounds, however, 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 cov-

ering fire for the fourth assault as Sebastian 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 lobbing grenades into each room as they slowly moved down towards the objective. Repeatedly, Sebastian 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 Sebastian never hesitated to lead the assault against insurgents and exposed himself to intense close range fire each time," lauded the GFC: "He showed incredible skill in his ability to motivate his wavering Afghan force for each assault."

Progress was slow, but the assault force made headway. Sebastian detonated two distraction devices (DD) to signal the firebases to stop their covering fire. As they prepared to close with the objective, one of Sebastian'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 members continued on past the safe area and into the actual target frontage. Then, 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, Sebastian 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.

Sebastian 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. 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: "Other PRC were visibly shaken by the wound." 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 that the environment 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 dangers in the smoldering death trap, the CSOR mentors focused on the mission and their Afghan charges.

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Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) crest.



Qualification badge for CSOR operators.

DND photos.

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, Sebastian 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 lobbed 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, all the while 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 a fire.

Sebastian 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. To this point, it had been a consistently 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.”

With the latest attempt, fatigued by the extended period of combat, including their previous action at the Governor’s palace, and now distracted as they were by the casualties they had taken, the PRC-K became increasingly unreliable and difficult to mobilize. “The mentors were no longer coordinating and coaching the Afghans – they were leading them and in some cases dragging them forward.” After the last effort,

Sergeant Sebastian commented, “... it was impossible to get any PRC 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, explosives, 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 to only come out once the assault force came close to their barred stronghold. In any case, the GFC kept the insurgents under observation and pulled back to reconsider options.

The SOTF 58 commander sent forward an ammunition resupply and reinforcements in the form of the SOTF Black Team. The team leader was Lieutenant (N) James. They arrived at approximately midnight. After a briefing, James, David, and their detachment commanders conducted another leader’s reconnaissance 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 vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), 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 the building and knocked down a large number of individuals. The SOTF commander observed: “The Taliban picked the site carefully. It showed the amount of preparation. They had pre-positioned vehicle IEDs where they expected [the] first responders to be.”

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 fire-base, 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 also permitted the more effective use of 7.62mm and .50 calibre fire. The tactic was used to great effect, and it 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.

“With the stubborn defence ongoing, RC(S) headquarters had authorized AH-64 attack helicopter gun runs on the target.”

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 GFC, 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."

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."

The current respite, albeit brief, 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 had also been on stand-by since early afternoon and 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 members of 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.

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, which had not yet been engaged in direct clearance operations, David designated them to lead the PRC-K in the renewed assault. Once again, they commenced at the basement and 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



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An AH-64D Apache and an AH-64D Apache Longbow in tandem flight.



DND photo.

Objective secured.

the mind how difficult it can be to deal with a few bad guys.”

Emerging from the chaos and crisis, however, were the great efforts of the PRC-K and SOTF-58. 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 down there [Kandahar] probably deserves it.”⁹ The PRC-K was later awarded a National Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Medal of Recognition. Nor did the CANSOF contribution go unnoticed. This action garnered a series of honours and awards, including two Stars of Military Valour, a Medal of Military Valour, a Mention in Dispatches, and two Chief of the Defence Staff commendations.



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. 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 fighting age males detained and passed to the BSO, as well as four PRC wounded. In closing, Captain David acknowledged, “It boggles



DND photo DH1_2011_40_86

A CSOR operator.

NOTES

1. First names only will be used throughout the monograph to protect the names of SOF personnel still serving.
2. “Green Team” refers to the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) element within the SOTF. They were specifically tasked with training and mentoring assigned Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) organizations.
3. Yaroslav Trofimov, “Taliban Move into Kandahar City,” in *The Wall Street Journal*, at <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303654804576341271303806658.html>>, accessed 23 March 2013.
4. 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.
5. Trofimov.
6. Jon Boone, “Taliban launch multi-pronged attack on city of Kandahar,” in *The Guardian*, 8 May 2011, at <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/08/taliban-launch-attack-kandahar-city>>, accessed 23 March 2013.
7. *Ibid.*
8. 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.
9. COMISAF Morning Stand-Up, 10 May 2011.