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Operation Herrick

Operation Herrick is the codename under which all [British](#) operations in the [war in Afghanistan](#) have been conducted since 2002. It consists of the British contribution to the [NATO-led International Security Assistance Force](#) (ISAF) and support to the [US-led Operation Enduring Freedom](#) (OEF). Since 2003, Herrick has increased in size and breadth to match ISAF's growing geographical intervention in Afghanistan.

Military details

Operation Herrick has superseded two previous [Operation Veritas](#), which consisted of support to last major action of this was a sweep in east Force Jacana, which ended in mid-2002. The leadership and a 2,000 strong contribution for a 2001. Command was subsequently transferred contingent was scaled back to 300. Since then, conducted under Operation Herrick.



efforts in Afghanistan. The first of these was the [war in Afghanistan](#) in October 2001. The Afghanistan by 1,700 Royal Marines of Task second was Operation Fingal, which involved newly-formed ISAF in [Kabul](#) after December to [Turkey](#) several months later and the British all operations in Afghanistan have since been

Kabul and north Afghanistan

Between 2002 and 2003, the primary component of Herrick remained the 300 personnel providing security in [Kabul](#) and training to the new [Afghan National Army](#) (ANA). ^[1]

In mid 2003, the operation became [battalion](#) strength when a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) was established in Mazari Sharif and in [Maymana](#). The UK also provided a [rapid reaction force](#) for the area. ^[1] Overall command of the PRTs was transferred to ISAF in 2004. Sweden and Norway took over these PRTs in 2005 and 2006 respectively to allow the UK to focus on south Afghanistan. ^[1]

In early 2006, the NATO Headquarters Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) became the headquarters of ISAF for a year. The attached British infantry and signals personnel raised the number of troops based in Kabul to 1,300. ^[2]

Kandahar

In 2004, a detachment of six [Royal Air Force fighters](#) from [Joint Force Harrier](#) was based at Kandahar Airfield to support American OEF forces there. ^[1] A planned withdrawal in mid-2006 was postponed to provide air support for the new ISAF expansion across the south. The force has since been expanded with more Harriers and an RAF Regiment squadron. ^{[3][4]}

On 2 September 2006, a Nimrod MR2 patrol aircraft supporting Canadian forces in [Operation Medusa](#) crashed near Kandahar, killing all 14 service members aboard. It is believed to be an accident. ^[5]

4 more Harrier GR9s were committed in May 2007 bringing them to a total of eleven, along with an extra [C130](#) transport plane and four Sea Kings from the [Fleet Air Arm](#)

The majority of aircraft deployed for Herrick are based at Kandahar. [4]

Helmand

Mission

In January 2006, Defence Secretary [John Reid](#) announced the UK would send a PRT with several thousand personnel to Helmand for at least three years. This had been planned as part of the gradual expansion of ISAF's area of responsibility from the Kabul region to the rest of Afghanistan. An initial strength of 5,700 personnel in Afghanistan was planned, which would stabilise to around 4,500 for the rest of the deployment. [2]

The move was to be a coordinated with other NATO countries to relieve the predominantly American OEF presence in the south. To this end, [the Netherlands](#) and [Canada](#) would lead similar deployments in Oruzgan and Kandahar respectively. [2] Several other countries would support this move with troops. In the case of Helmand, [Denmark](#) sent 280 troops while [Estonia](#) would increase their Helmand force to 150 soldiers. [6][7]

Local Taliban figures voiced opposition to the incoming force and pledged to resist it. [8][9]

Activities

Before the main deployment, the Royal Engineers constructed a central fortification, [Camp Bastion](#), to serve as a main base. A camp for an Afghan force was built nearby. On 1 May, the US OEF force was relieved in a ceremony. [10] At the same time, the United States began a major offensive, [Operation Mountain Thrust](#), against the [insurgency](#) in south Afghanistan. This brought ISAF forces into open conflict with the Taliban. [11]

British forces originally tried to provide security to reconstruction, but instead became engaged in combat. Platoon houses were soon established in northern settlements, due to pressure from the provincial governor for an aggressive stance. [12] However, these quickly became a focus for heavy fighting. [13] One of these was in [Sangin](#), which was cut off and surrounded by the Taliban in early July. Eleven soldiers were killed in [Sangin District](#) over the subsequent period. On 16 July, with support from American and Canadian forces, 200 [paratroopers](#) were airlifted to take the town. [14][15]

In early August, 500 paratroopers and ANA soldiers were airlifted to [Musa Quala](#) after violence flared around the platoon house. One British soldier was killed in the battle. [16] On 25 August, several hundred soldiers were involved in a second operation to escort a group of Afghan policemen as a show of force. [17]

The Taliban made direct assaults on the British-held compounds, attacking with small arms fire, RPGs, and mortar rounds at short range. The British responded with airstrikes and artillery, often aimed right outside their compound walls, in what became a close quarter battle.

Casualties increased on both sides, with many more Taliban casualties as their assault had exposed them to the full scope of NATO's heavier firepower. Numbers of civilian casualties and damage to local infrastructure increased. The NATO forces grew increasingly concerned that they were alienating residents with heavy-handed tactics, in spite of their intention to win "hearts and minds". It was also becoming clear that the British did not have the number of troops and

helicopters to sustain the platoon house strategy indefinitely under the circumstances. Realising that the situation could not carry on unchanged, British commanders approached local tribal leaders to organise a temporary ceasefire.^[18] [1]

Through pressure from the local tribal elders and their mounting casualties, the Taliban agreed to withdraw from the contested towns at the same time as the British, having been unable to realise their goal of forcibly expelling the foreign troops. NATO estimated Taliban losses over the summer period to be around 1000 killed in Helmand alone. [2][3]

The British commander, Brig. Ed Butler, later said the deal had come just 48 hours before Musa Qala was planned to be abandoned because of the risks support helicopters were taking.^[12] As a result of the deal, British forces peacefully withdrew from the settlement in mid October.^[19] The truce drew criticism from American commanders who believed it showed a sign of weakness on NATO's part. The deal would again be called into question when the Taliban broke the truce and retook the town of [Musa Qala](#) in February 2007 following the killing of a leading commander in an American airstrike.[4] The town was eventually retaken by British and Afghan forces.

By late September, 31 British soldiers had died in Afghanistan over the year. Two, Corporal [Bryan Budd](#) and Corporal [Mark Wright](#), were posthumously awarded the British Armed Forces' highest awards for gallantry. Brig. Butler declared the Taliban to have been "tactically defeated" for the time being.^{[12][20]}

Response

The stress of operations was admitted to be unexpected by the [Ministry of Defence](#),^[21] and there was increasing pressure to send more forces to Helmand.^[22] Lt. Gen. David J. Richards said that this was the heaviest persistent combat the British Armed Forces had experienced since the [Korean War](#) or the Second World War.^[23]

As a result, Herrick was increased to 7,700 personnel.^[24] Additional aircraft, artillery pieces (including 4GMLRS) and armoured vehicles (such as Warrior IFVs), an additional [Platoon](#) of Snipers were also sent. [5]

Operation Volcano

Main article: [Operation Volcano](#)

In early February 2007, at the end of a six week operation, the Royal Marines cleared 25 Taliban compounds in the proximity of the Kajaki hydroelectric dam in order to allow repair work to be conducted on the machinery.[6]

Operation Achilles

Main article: [Operation Achilles](#)

In between early March to late May 2007, the British led [Operation Achilles](#), NATO's drive to push the Taliban out of Helmand.

In early May 2007 Operation Silver, a sub-operation of Achilles, successfully expelled Taliban fighters from the town of [Sangin](#). It was followed in mid-May by Operation Silicon, where British led forces removed the Taliban from [Gereshk](#) and much of the surrounding countryside. The Royal Engineers then set up three camps in the area for the Afghan National Army.

Operation Lastay Kulang

Main article: [Operation Pickaxe-Handle](#)

A followup to Achilles, Operation Lastay Kulang was launched on 30 May 2007 near the village of Kajaki Sofle, 10 kilometres to the south-west of [Kajaki](#), to remove a Taliban force encamped there. A force of 1000 British troops, another thousand ISAF soldiers, and elements of the [Afghan National Army](#) moved into the area to confront the insurgents. On the night of 30 May the American 82nd Airborne Division conducted an air assault on enemy positions during which one of their [Chinook](#) helicopters crashed, apparently due to enemy fire, killing five Americans, a Briton and a Canadian.[7] By the second of June, ISAF and Afghan forces had isolated several pockets of insurgent fighters in the north and south of the Upper Sangin valley. In an effort to win over local support, the Royal Engineers have started work on several reconstruction projects, such as digging irrigation ditches to help farmers in the area.[8] Operation Lastay Kulang is described in the book, Attack State Red, about the Royal Anglian Battle Group in Helmand.

Taliban spring offensive defeated

By late May 2007 the Taliban spring offensive promised for March 2007 had failed to materialise. This is put down in part to the massive casualties the Taliban took while trying to storm British strongholds across Helmand and by systematic attacks on their mid-level commanders during operations over the winter, which has hampered their ability to coordinate large troop movements.[9][10]

A British Army spokesman said however that he wouldn't "discount the Taliban as a spent force just yet", as an "increase in enemy tempo" is expected; as of October 2008 the number of clashes has risen from five a day to 15, lasting from 10 minutes to 11 hours.

In a new development, it has been reported that the Taliban may be recruiting child soldiers from the tribal areas of neighbouring [Pakistan](#) to fight coalition forces.[11]

Build-up to summer offensive

In February 2008 the Taliban prepared for the summer offensive with a number of attacks on [JTAC Hill](#) ^[25]

British Royal family involvement

On the 28th of February an American website [Drudge Report](#) reported that Prince Harry, a member of the [Household Cavalry](#), was operating as a Forward Air Controller on JTAC Hill with a [Gurkha](#) unit. The MoD had made agreements with the British and a few other countries' media not to reveal that he was there until he came home or the news was otherwise released. An Australian weekly women's magazine New Idea initially broke the story in January, but it was not followed up at the time. New Idea editors claimed ignorance of any news blackout. Then a German newspaper, the Berliner Kurier, published a short piece on 28 February 2008, also before Drudge.

Kajaki Dam convoy

Main article: Operation Eagle's Summit (Operation Tsuka)

In late August one of the largest operations by British and NATO forces in Helmand province took place, with the aim of bringing electricity to the region. A convoy of 100 vehicles took five days to move massive sections of an electric turbine for the [Kajaki Dam](#), covering 180 km (112 miles). The operation involved 2,000 British troops, 1,000 other NATO troops from Australia, Canada, Denmark and the US, and 1,000 Afghan soldiers. The Canadians covered the first leg and the

British took over at a meeting point in the desert, using 50 BVS10 Viking armoured vehicles to escort the convoy. Hundreds of special forces troops went in first, sweeping the area and although difficult to verify, British commanders estimated that more than 200 insurgents were killed, without any NATO casualties. British Harrier GR9 and WAH-64 Apaches, Dutch, French and US aircraft, helicopters and unmanned drones provided aerial reconnaissance and fire support. ^[26]

British Casualties

Main article: [British Forces casualties in Afghanistan since 2001](#)

As of 16 August 2009, British forces have suffered 201 fatalities. The vast majority of these fatalities have taken place since the redeployment of British forces to the [Taliban stronghold](#) of Helmand province; only 5 men died between April 2002 and early March 2006. Full casualty records, including non-fatal cases, are currently available only for the period after 1 January 2006. Since that date 1,579 British personnel have been wounded, injured or fallen ill (396 wounded in action), 1186 of whom required aeromedical evacuation. Totals including the period 2003-2006 will be greater.

[Operation Panther's Claw](#), which began in July 2009, resulted in the highest number of losses in a month for British Forces in Afghanistan.

158 fatalities are classed as "KIA", and 31 are a result of illness, non-combat injuries or accidents, or have not yet officially been assigned a cause of death pending the outcome of an investigation. ^[27]

See also

- British forces casualties in Afghanistan since 2001
- [Civilian casualties of the War in Afghanistan \(2001–present\)](#)
- [Coalition casualties in Afghanistan](#)
- [International public opinion on the war in Afghanistan](#)
- [International Security Assistance Force](#)
- [Operation Herrick order of battle](#)
- Protests against the invasion of Afghanistan
- Provincial reconstruction team
- Attack State Red

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External links

[Operations in Afghanistan - Ministry of Defence](#)

[Operations in Afghanistan - Permanent Joint Headquarters](#)

[Casualties in Afghanistan & Iraq](#)