

THE WORLD OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS MEDICINE

Portuguese 2nd Parachute Battalion

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Photograph by Bryan Ferreira and the 2nd Para BN/KTM.



In the World of Special Operations Medicine, the Portuguese 2nd Parachute Battalion (2nd Para BN) plays a unique role as part of the Army Special Forces. It is one of the Army Special Forces' two parachute battalions, and one of the most experienced units in the Portuguese Army.

Its history is not very long, as with any paratrooper unit in the world, but it is full of glorious missions. The 2nd Para BN dates back to 1961, in Angola, with the creation of a "Paratroopers Hunter Battalion" (*Batalhão de Caçadores Pára-quedistas BCP 21*), which was then part of the Portuguese Air Force, where they were directly under the command of the 2nd Air Region (South Atlantic air command). The BN participated in the revolutionary wars of the Portuguese provinces in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, where they put their combat skills and bold spirit to good use.

In 1961, the BN also began the first course for Parachutist Nurses, but of the ones who finished the course, only some won the right to wear the Green Beret—the Beret of the Portuguese Paratroopers.

In 1974, when the civil war in the Portuguese African Provinces ended, among the last military troops to return

to Portugal from Angola were some of the men of the BCP 21. They had been part of major operations, either being dropped by parachute or airborne by helicopter. Among the unit's many awards and decorations, the BN received the Portuguese Gold Medal of Military Valor for its counterinsurgency operations in Angola between 1961 and 1975.

Since 1993, the BN has been part of the Army. Together with the 1st Parachute BN, the Air-Land Pathfinder Company, and the Airborne Replenishment Company, they represent the bulk of the airborne forces. Currently, they are incorporated in the Rapid Reaction Brigade, which is one of the most active Brigades in the Portuguese military. The 2nd Para BN has been deployed in most of the Portuguese International commitments, including Bosnia Herzegovina, East Timor, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Their motto is: "Several skies and lands have we seen."

The 2nd Para BN is headquartered in the military area of São Jacinto, in the city of Aveiro. This is a military area with perfect conditions for the training of Special Forces. It has an airfield and a drop zone, and is surrounded on one side by the ocean and the other by a river. It has been used extensively by Portugal and its allies for joint exercises, training their combat interoperability.

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Tactical Combat Casualty Care in the 2nd Para BN

Jumping behind enemy lines is one of the many missions paratroopers perform, but it is probably one of the most dangerous there is in the military. The Portuguese 2nd Para BN trains to fight in the hardest conditions, outnumbered and sometimes completely surrounded. The Commanders already assume they are going to have casualties, so it is critical that their soldiers have some degree of medical skills. Depending on the mission, the BN can jump with their own nurses and doctors, but for the most dangerous missions, they have to count mainly on their combat life savers (CLSs), so it is critical to also train their regular soldiers in the basic Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) skills. Emphasis on the training to use the individual medical kit in the field is common. Each soldier carries an individual first aid kit (IFAK) with the following items:

- SOF® Tactical Tourniquet (Tactical Medical Solutions, <https://www.tacmedsolutions.com>)
- 1x QUIKLOT® Combat Gauze (Z-Medica; www.z-medica.com/healthcare)
- 1x “H” bandage compression dressing
- 1x nasopharyngeal airway (30FR Robertazzi style)
- 1x 3g tube of Surgilube (to use with nasopharyngeal airway; Day Chemical Co., <https://www.surgilube.com/>)
- 2x TPAK (14GA x 3.25" angiocatheter)
- 5x iodopovidone prep pads
- 5x 2" safety pins (multipurpose)
- 1x combat duct tape (2" x 100" roll)
- 2x set nitrile N-Dex gloves
- 1x combat pill pack (antibiotic, analgesic, and anti-inflammatory)

The individual soldier is able to resolve the three major causes of death in the battlefield—hemorrhage in the extremities, tension pneumothorax, and airway obstruction—which, in the hazard situations that paratroopers are usually in, can make all the difference.

CLSs have additional knowledge and training. After being designated to that function, they receive training in the Armed Forces Hospitals in country. An extensive TCCC course (based on North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] guidelines) is conducted and a small practice internship in a hospital is mandatory. After that, they are incorporated in their units, generally one per platoon section. There, the CLS receives specific training to incorporate their recent knowledge into combat operations.

Each company has a nurse and a CLS to be used as needed. Specific medical backpacks are used by the CLS according to their missions. It is light and jump compatible, because it is mandatory for the kinds of operations this unit performs. Some interesting items included in the pack are:

- PHANTOM® Litter (Tactical Medical Solutions)
- SAM Junctional Tourniquet (SJT®; SAM Medical Products; <http://www.sammedical.com/products>)
- HALO Chest Seal (Sarnova, <http://www.dxemed.com/progressivemed>)
- King LT-D
- I-gel® supraglottic airway (Intersurgical Ltd., <http://www.intersurgical.com/info/igel>)
- H&H Penetrating Chest Injury Kit (H&H Medical, <http://buyhandh.com/>)
- H&H Chest Tube Insertion Kit (H&H Medical)
- Pocket BVM™ (bag valve mask) (Micro BVM, <http://www.microbvm.com/>)
- H&H Emergency Cricothyrotomy Kit (H&H Medical)
- Arrow®EZ-IO®System (Teleflex Inc., <http://www.arrowezio.com/>)
- H&H Combat Eye Shield (H&H Medical)
- Structural Aluminum Malleable (SAM) splint

With the current scenarios around the world, Special Forces can be very vulnerable to terrorist attacks, especially when in their camps. The 2nd Para BN is now deployed to Kosovo and has been giving special importance to mass casualty (MASCAL) exercises in



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their procedures. A MASCAL can be defined as a situation in which there is an excessive gap between the casualty load and medical capabilities, for its conventional management. It demands an organized medical approach in which the concept of First Person on Scene, Casualty Collection Point, and triage is essential. The risk of attack on camp with a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) is big and medical training is a priority to maintain the readiness of the soldiers and increase the operational flexibility facing situations that are always unpredictable.

Portuguese Armed Forces have participated in many multinational operations with NATO, the United Nations (UN), and the European Union, and the paratroopers have been in most of them. This makes it very important that they have interoperability with their allies, including with medical procedures. While deployed to Kosovo, the 2nd Para BN is part of the NATO KFOR Tactical Reserve Maneuver BN (KTM) and has also been doing cross training with medical teams from Hungary and the United States on the KTM MASCAL Plan. Even though Portugal has Combat Search and Rescue EH101 helicopters, they are not deployed to Kosovo, so the BN depends on its NATO partners in country for air medical evacuations.

Conclusion

The Portuguese 2nd Para BN, as do other Special Forces, gives special relevance to casualty care in the battlefield. Whether it is in a VBIED terrorist attack in a UN peace mission, or in a combat jump in a major airborne assault behind enemy lines, the BN trains to keep its medical skills sharp in case of need. TCCC is just one more skill the Portuguese paratroopers have in their heavy jump bag.

Dr Ferreira is a doctor of dental surgery and a paramedic (EMT-P) with extensive experience in remote medicine around the world. He is an American citizen and has lived in Portugal for several years. He is also specialized in Advanced Tactical Casualty Care and has collaborated several times with the Portuguese Armed Forces, especially the Army and Navy Special Forces. Another passion of his is military photography, so he embeds regularly with the military and publishes articles, with unique photographs, in his own Online Tactical Magazine—The Way of the Warrior(s) (www.warriors.pt).
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