MANTIDE 2025: 185 RRAO Folgore trains in hybrid scenario

Published on 10/12/2025

The exercise **MANTIDE 2025** concluded on Friday, November 28, involving the 185th Paratroopers Reconnaissance Target Acquisition Regiment "Folgore" (RRAO), a unit of the Army Special Forces, engaged in the exercise of a **Special Operation Land Task Group (SOLTG)** and a **Special Operations Task Unit (SOTU)** across the full spectrum of special operations, within a specifically simulated **hybrid warfare** scenario.

For two consecutive weeks, without interruption, the **Target Acquirers** conducted an intense training cycle, focused on the **planning and execution of intelligence gathering missions** and **kinetic operations** with a high level of specialization.

The activities took place in various areas between **Tuscany, Sardinia, and Lazio**, involving over **100 men and women** from the Regiment, logistical support personnel, the **Exercise Directorate (DIREX)**, and a group of **role players**. These latter, with their contribution, made it possible to create an extremely realistic training context, especially in **dynamic surveillance**

in urban environments, simulating hostile actors, civilian population, and neutral subjects.

MANTIDE 2025: 185 RRAO Folgore trains in a hybrid scenario

The core of the exercise was the **special reconnaissance** activities, conducted both in **urban environments** and **rural contexts**, demonstrating the **flexibility of the 185th RRAO** in quickly transitioning from one scenario to another while maintaining a discreet and hard-to-detect profile. This capability is one of the distinguishing features of the Target Acquirers, who are often called to operate in depth and in contexts characterized by high complexity.

During the exercise, the **Commander of the 185th RRAO,** Colonel Alessio Di Marzio, welcomed **Brigadier General Carmine Vizzuso**, Commander of the Army Special Forces (COMFOSE). The visit allowed for a detailed illustration of the **Regiment's ability to integrate specialized Defense assets** – terrestrial, maritime, aerial, spatial, and cyber – to operate effectively in a **multi-domain environment** with the aim of providing **actionable intelligence** to top military commands.

The missions of the Special Forces: special reconnaissance, direct actions, and mentoring

In the NATO doctrinal framework, special operations are mainly divided into three major families: **Special Reconnaissance (SR)**, **Direct Action (DA)**, and **Military Assistance (MA)**. The 185th RRAO, as a TIER-1 level Special Forces unit, is specifically trained to carry out these three types of missions.

Special Reconnaissance – “seeing without being seen”

Special Reconnaissance involves observation, collection, and verification of information in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas, conducted with unconventional techniques and high autonomy. The Target Acquirers infiltrate small detachments that operate **behind enemy lines**, staying in the area for several days without resupply, gathering data on targets, movements, infrastructures, and weapon systems, and transmitting information in real-time to higher commands.

The **hybrid scenario** of MANTIDE 2025 emphasized this capability: reconnaissance in crowded urban centers, discreet observation of sensitive targets, monitoring of hostile activities masked among the civilian population, all while maintaining the principle “**videre nec videri**” – to see without being seen – which is the Regiment's motto.

MANTIDE 2025: 185 RRAO Folgore trains in a hybrid scenario

Direct Action – engaging high-value targets

Direct Actions are targeted offensive interventions against limited but **high strategic-operational value** targets. In the case of the 185th RRAO, such actions are often linked to the capability of **terminal guidance of fire** (Terminal Guidance Operations – TGO): the Acquirers identify, pinpoint, and geolocate the target with extreme precision, allowing terrestrial, naval, or aerial platforms to engage it with stand-off weapon systems.

During MANTIDE 2025, the Special Operation Land Task Group simulated the entire cycle: from the target acquisition phase, to designation, up to the neutralization of adversary assets in

complex scenarios, where conventional, irregular, and cyber threats typically intertwine in hybrid conflicts.

Military Assistance and mentoring: experience in foreign theaters

The third major mission of the Special Forces is **Military Assistance (MA)**, which is the set of **mentoring, consulting, training, and education** activities carried out in favor of partner countries' units. Personnel from the 185° RRAO, in collaboration with other SF units, is regularly employed in this role in various operational theaters.

A significant example is represented by the activities in **Niger**, where the MISIN mission and the Italian Special Operation Task Group and Task Unit contributed to the training of the **Nigerien special forces**, enhancing their capabilities to conduct operations against terrorism and illegal trafficking. In this context, mentoring ranges from tactical planning to the use of weapons and equipment, to medical evacuation procedures, communications, and coordination with air and ground forces.

This type of commitment, although less visible than kinetic actions, is essential for the **stabilization of critical areas**, the building of local capacities, and the indirect protection of national and European interests.

The 185° RRAO heir of the “F” Squadron: history, symbols, and traditions

The 185° Paratroopers Reconnaissance Target Acquisition Regiment “Folgore” has its roots in the history of the **185° Paratroopers Infantry Regiment “Folgore”** of World War II and, in particular, in the historic **Reconnaissance Squadron “F” (F Recce Squadron)**, a vanguard unit that operated alongside allied forces in Italy conducting reconnaissance missions, patrols beyond the lines, intelligence gathering, and raids.

After the transformations of the post-war period and the transition through the phase of **Paratrooper Artillery Regiment**, on April 3, 2000, the unit was reconstituted as the **185° Reconnaissance Target Acquisition Regiment (RAO)**, with a strong intelligence connotation and the mission to conduct special reconnaissance and guide deep fires.

In 2015, the Regiment was assigned as a **beret badge** the historic emblem of the Reconnaissance Squadron “Folgore” – the **Squadron F** – formally sanctioning the ideal continuity with that elite unit and transferring its symbols and traditions to today's Target Acquirers.

MANTIDE 2025: 185 RRAO Folgore trains in a hybrid scenario

The connection with Squadron F is also evidenced by other distinctive elements:

- the **motto “Videre nec videri”**, which summarizes the ability to observe without being seen;
- the **Herring dagger** worn in ceremonies, reminiscent of the dagger issued to the paratroopers of Squadron F trained and equipped by British commandos;
- the new **Target Acquirer badge**, which symbolically combines bat wings (operating at night), the parachute, and the reference to the “F” of the historic Squadron.

These elements are not mere aesthetic details but are part of a **unit identity** that unites current professional rigor with the traditions of elite Italian paratroopers.

A technologically advanced unit: the multi-domain “tactical bubble”

Today, the 185° RRAO is recognized as one of the most **technologically advanced** units of the Italian Army. In addition to individual and unit weaponry, the Regiment employs a wide range of **sensors, secure communication systems, ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance,**

Reconnaissance) platforms, and tools for terminal fire guidance, all integrated into a true **“multi-domain tactical bubble”**.

This concept envisions that the detachment in operation is at the center of a network of:

- **advanced sensors** (optronics, night and thermal vision devices, mini-UAVs, ground surveillance systems);
- **communication networks and data-links** that connect operators to command centers, air, naval, ground, and cyber assets;
- **stand-off fire platforms**, national or allied, capable of engaging the target designated by the Acquirers with great precision and reduced risk to personnel. (Italian Army)

In recent exercises, such as those dedicated precisely to the **“Multi-Domain Tactical Bubble”** , the Special Forces of the 185° RRAO have operated in close synergy with infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineering, and helicopter units of the Army Aviation, demonstrating the ability to **integrate conventional and special components in the field** and to exploit technological innovation to enhance the effectiveness of kinetic actions and the protection of forces.

A pillar for the defense of national interests

In the **current complex and ever-changing geopolitical scenario**, characterized by hybrid conflicts, asymmetric threats, terrorism, competition in cyberspace, and the growing importance of information, the MANTIDE 2025 exercise confirms the **Army Special Forces** – and in particular the **185° RRAO** – as a **fundamental pillar for the defense of national interests**.

The ability to:

- **observe in depth** (Special Reconnaissance),
- **strike with precision** (Direct Action),
- **train and assist partners** (Military Assistance / mentoring),
- and do so within a **technologically advanced tactical bubble** in a multi-domain environment,

makes the Regiment a **solid, organized, and prepared** entity to face the operational challenges of today and tomorrow, in perfect continuity with the legacy of Squadrone F and in

full adherence to the highest standards of NATO Special Forces.

News link: https://www.esercito.difesa.it/comunicazione/Pagine/Esercitazione-Mantide-2025.aspx