



The Invisible War of Her Majesty's Paratroopers

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To survive on the **modern battlefield**, the **British paratroopers** are learning to fight an invisible war as well: the one that takes place in the **electromagnetic spectrum**, among **radio waves**, signals, and interferences.

Leading this transformation is the **Phantom Platoon**, a unit specialized in **Cyber and Electromagnetic Activities (CEMA)** of the **16 Air Assault Brigade**, the global rapid response force of the **British Army**. CEMA combines **electronic warfare**, **cyber operations**, and **electromagnetic spectrum management** with the aim of gathering intelligence on the enemy, disrupting their plans, and protecting friendly forces.

The unit, part of the **2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment (2 PARA)**, participated in **Exercise Orion** in **France**, where British and French airborne soldiers trained together to face potential **real crises**. According to the commander of 2 PARA, **Lieutenant Colonel Craig Shephard**, CEMA serves to understand what the enemy is doing and to create confusion about the intentions of one's own forces, thus gaining that small advantage in **time** or **space** crucial

to winning the battle.

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Technology Built in the Field

One of the main tasks of the Phantom Platoon specialists is to locate **enemy positions** by intercepting and tracking their **radio transmissions**. To do this, they use **Kraken**, a **software defined radio** designed and assembled directly by the unit.

The system consists of an **antenna** capable of detecting signals, connected to a **GPS** and managed via a **single-board computer**. It can be assembled or disassembled in just **five minutes**, placed on the ground, and remotely controlled. Once a signal is detected, the device allows determining **what it is, where it is located**, and what role it plays in the enemy's activity, contributing to building a more precise operational picture.

Alongside Kraken, the paratroopers have also created **Unagi**, a transmitter capable of **jamming** radio communications or emitting **false signals**, and **Plankton**, a **Wi-Fi** extender used to disrupt the connection between a **drone** and its controller. The names, curiously, derive from the fact that one of the team members has a degree in **marine biology**, and for this reason, many devices have “fishy” names.

The peculiarity of these tools is that they are built with components purchased in regular **electronics stores** and then modified with a few lines of **code**, making them extremely flexible. In a concrete case, **Unagi** was first used to **jam** enemy radios and then reconfigured to mimic a **Wi-Fi hub**. The enemy intercepted the signal, believing they had located the British **headquarters**, and attacked a false position. This deception allowed a rifle company to achieve its objective without encountering resistance.

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Innovation, Initiative, and International Cooperation

For the soldiers of the Phantom Platoon, this capability represents a concrete example of the traditional **airborne initiative**, that is, the spirit of initiative typical of **paratrooper troops**.

Soldier Kai explained that in contemporary conflicts, **electronic warfare** is taking on an increasingly central role, and for this reason, the unit has decided to independently develop a capability considered essential today.

On a personal level, CEMA also offers new opportunities. Soldier George, for example, turned a youthful passion for **PlayStation, Xbox, and electronics** into a concrete military skill. After starting to dismantle and modify hardware as a boy, he found in the Phantom Platoon a way to apply those skills in the operational field, with the awareness that his contribution can directly influence the success of a mission.

According to Lieutenant Colonel **Craig Shephard**, the work of the Phantom Platoon demonstrates the willingness of British paratroopers to **innovate** and **adapt** to the needs of the modern battlefield. A valuable resource, especially in exercises like **Orion**, which involved about **2,000 soldiers** from the **16 Air Assault Brigade** and the French **11e Brigade Parachutiste** in joint defensive activities.

The two brigades form the **Airborne Combined Joint Force** and since **2013** have been trained and ready to deploy together to respond to global crises. In a war context where it is no longer enough to control the ground, but it is also necessary to dominate the invisible space of **signals**, **communications**, and **interferences**, the Phantom Platoon shows how the future of combat increasingly passes through technology and adaptability.