

French RAID Team Reveals Robot's Role in Toulouse Counterterrorism Operation

Recon Scout XT micro-robot used to locate subject and assist entry team



On March 22, 2012, commandos from the elite French counterterrorism team R.A.I.D. (Recherche Assistance Intervention Dissuasion) killed Mohamed Merah, a terrorist who had shot three French soldiers in addition to three children and an adult at an elementary school. The operation ended a long standoff in which Merah had barricaded himself in his apartment and challenged police to enter. On June 13, a RAID team spokesman revealed for the first time that an innovative micro-robot played a key role in helping resolve the situation.

WHAT ROBOT DID YOU USE IN THE TOULOUSE OPERATION?

A Recon Scout XT, which we purchased in 2011 from ReconRobotics. The Paris SWAT team (BRI de Paris) also purchased this same robot in 2011. In addition, the STS12 acquisition and deployment management group adopted the ReconRobotics Scout kit solution for further propagation to local, regional and national entities.

HAD YOU TRAINED WITH THIS ROBOT PRIOR TO THIS OPERATION?

We utilize our Scout XTs at all our trainings, which occur a minimum of once a week with our unit specific standby group. Our unit training team develops different training situations and modes of operation on a weekly basis. As much as possible, these training sessions are built on real situation scenarios.

HOW DO YOU USE THIS ROBOT?

We use this robot at the front end of the assault team, opening the search angle, progressing our search up staircases, and enabling us to see in very low light using the robot's infrared capabilities. The primary mission of the robot is to aid the team in all types of reconnaissance, and we use it in all our operations, including those involving barricaded subjects and deranged persons.

WHERE AND WHEN DID THE TOULOUSE OPERATION OCCUR?

This operation had 2 phases. The first phase began around 3h00 as we attempted to call out the suspect from his home. The suspect was awake and engaging with our team, but we were unable at this time to apprehend him.

Based on the suspect being awake and engaging with our team, we then decided to shift to a second phase – a barricaded subject operation with heavier materials and negotiation techniques. We adapted to the situation and began using video devices. We deployed 2 Recon Scout robots: one to provide a better view of the closest access point to the suspect and the other one to provide an overall situational awareness before the assault was triggered.

The apartment building is a typical French urban multi-story building, and the suspect was located in a 45-square-meter apartment a half floor up from the main entrance.

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU DECIDE TO USE THE ROBOT? WHAT DID YOU WANT TO FIND OUT? WAS IT DARK INSIDE THE RESIDENCE?

At 3h00 the suspect shot through the door. With the door slightly open, we threw the robot on the landing stairs right in the firing zone. This gave us a better view of the situation, although the robot was not able to progress through the entire apartment because of the furniture that the subject had piled up everywhere. Throughout this reconnaissance phase, the operator of the robot was located behind another RAID officer who held a ballistic shield.

WHAT DID THE OPERATOR SEE ON THE OCU AS THE ROBOT MOVED THROUGH THE ENVIRONMENT?

The operator could see through the door, and very importantly, was able to see if, at any point in time, the suspect was moving closer to the door or moving the furniture to create new barricades that could impede the entry

team. The robot identified that the suspect was barricaded in the bathroom – not in the part of the apartment where the robot was operating. At no point was the suspect aware of the presence of the robot.

WAS THE ROBOT HELPFUL IN PLANNING AND EXECUTING THE SUBSEQUENT TACTICAL OPERATION?

The robot as well as all other types of equipment utilized for the operation is considered indispensable because our deployment techniques build on the concept of equipment complementing and working together. We always bring this type of equipment.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT THE ROBOT FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

We understand the strength of the robot: It is very easy to use, easy to deploy, very small, and provides good video quality as well as operational run time. During the operation when the robot was placed on the landing in the fire zone, with the door being blocked by the refrigerator, the robot was informing on views facing the door. We would like to acquire another robot working on a different channel allowing us to operate multiple robots in the same area.

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THE USE OF THE ROBOT FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS?

Yes, this equipment is a must and is an integral part of our technical arsenal. It is used as required depending on the situation, and it is used in complement with our other video devices – i.e., pole camera, etc. The robot's versatility and our ability to remotely operate it in an enclosed space make it a major part of our tools and practices.

For more information on ReconRobotics' tactical micro-robots, please visit www.reconrobotics.com