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GROUPES D'INTERVENTION DE LA GENDARMERIE NATIONALE

Groupe was created in the aftermath of the deadly failure to counter the hostage taking of Israeli Olympians at the 1972 Games in Munich.

A series of errors during the failed attempts to release the 11 Israelis highlighted the lack of specialist counter-terrorism forces across Europe to deal with well-organized and well-armed groups.

Along with the German GSG-9, the GIGN was created to deal with this and has specialized in incidents on planes and ships. It was responsible for the storming of the Air France flight hijacked by four Algerian terrorists in 1994. The terrorists killed three passengers before the plane was flown to Marseilles where the GIGN stormed it and killed the four hijackers from the Algerian Armed Islamic Group. Plot leaders said later that the plan was to detonate the aircraft over the Eiffel Tower. The first man through the door shot three hijackers but spent months in hospital after being badly injured, losing the use of one arm. He returned to the GIGN as a shooting instructor. A feature film in 2011 told his story.

The group was reorganized in 2007 to provide a 200-strong highly-trained team to respond to hostage situations. Since it started operations, it has freed 600 hostages, according to its website.

Part of the gendarmerie, it is involved in 200 operations a year, targeting drug dealers and serious organized crime in armed operations. It is also involved in the protection of VIPs overseas, and nuclear and chemical weapons threats. Under French law, the faces of its members cannot be shown in the media.

It recruits from within the ranks of police for a three-month selection process followed by more than a year of training. Its training programme is notoriously brutal: a French documentary team that followed a group of potential new recruits at its main center in Satory, south of Versailles, saw 120 volunteers whittled down to 18 in two weeks. The instructors called it the easy part of the programme. It was followed by “punitive” boxing that saw recruits battered and knocked down by trained fighters - before being encouraged to get up and fight again.

It may look eerily deserted, but like other crumbling European ghost villages requisitioned by the military and law enforcement, these modern ruins are still very much active. The facility is a training centre for the GIGN, the special operations unit of the French National Gendarmerie. It's here that the elite operatives hone their skills in hostage rescue and counter-terrorism, among other duties.

Derelict structures used by the GIGN for counter-terrorism and special operations training

Officially known as the Groupe d'intervention de la Gendarmerie nationale (National Gendarmerie Intervention Group), the GIGN was founded in 1974 following the Munich massacre, in which Palestinian terrorists of the Black September Organization murdered 11 Israeli hostages during the 1972 Summer Olympics.

The former village, reportedly located in Mondesir, is now used for a variety of hazardous training scenarios involving live ammunition. In addition to hostage rescue, the GIGN is charged with the protection of government officials, covert surveillance and the targeting of organized crime.

List of references:

1. Le GIGN (Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale) / [Электронный ресурс]. - Режим доступа: <https://www.police-nationale.net/gign/>
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