

STORY BACKGROUND

THE BATTLE BEHIND *THE GOOD FRIDAY BATTLE*

1. THE SETTING

On April 2, 2010, a German infantry company moved into the Chahar Dara district of northern Afghanistan. Its mission was to clear improvised explosive devices along the road known as Little Pluto and to push back Taliban control in one of the most contested areas around Kunduz.

The force included German paratroopers from Seedorf and mechanized infantry (Panzergrenadiers) from Oberviechtach. The paratroopers moved on foot and in armored Dingo vehicles; the Panzergrenadiers brought Marder infantry fighting vehicles, whose 20mm cannons represented the heaviest German firepower available on the ground that day.

2. THE TRIGGER

The mission changed when a small German reconnaissance drone, a Mikado, was carried off by the Afghan wind and crashed near Isa Khel. The village was not just another Afghan settlement. It lay in Taliban territory — a maze of fields, mud walls, compounds, irrigation ditches, and tree lines that allowed fighters to observe, move, and disappear.

3. THE AMBUSH

A small German team moved forward to recover the drone. In the open wheat field near Isa Khel, the Taliban opened fire from several directions. Machine-gun bursts, rifle fire, and rocket-propelled grenades cut across the terrain. Staff Sergeant Naef Adebahr was hit and pinned down in the field. Martin Augustyniak was wounded but continued to fight. What had begun as a search for lost equipment became a fight for survival.

4. THE BATTLE EXPANDS

The battle quickly spread beyond the first ambush. German forces tried to reach the wounded, recover the isolated soldiers, and prevent the company from being cut off. At the same time, Taliban fighters attacked other parts of the German position. The Panzergrenadiers and their Marder vehicles became critical, but they were also drawn into the wider fight and tied down. The only bridge across the Kunduz River became a decisive point. If the Taliban could cut that route, German forces west of the river risked being isolated.

5. THE AMERICAN ROLE

Above the battlefield, American fighter aircraft were on station. F-15s and F-16s were coordinated through the joint terminal attack controller known by the call sign “Red Baron.” But airpower could not simply end the fight. German troops were close to enemy positions, civilians may have been nearby, and the danger of hitting friendly forces was too high. The jets could intimidate, observe, and threaten — but their ability to strike was severely limited.

The decisive help came from U.S. Army Black Hawk crews. Dustoff 87, Dustoff 84, and the armed escort helicopter Black Magic 70 flew into the battle area under enemy fire. At first, the crews struggled to establish radio contact and identify the exact location of the wounded. Then they made the decision that would define the day: they would not wait for a safer landing zone. They would go in.

As Dustoff 87 approached the contested landing zone, Taliban fighters shifted fire from the German soldiers to the helicopter. That moment changed the battle. The incoming fire exposed enemy positions, allowing German troops and Black Magic 70 to suppress them. The Black Hawks landed, loaded the wounded, flew them to Kunduz, and returned.

Then the situation deteriorated again. During the German withdrawal, an IED struck a Dingo vehicle, killing and wounding more soldiers and blocking the narrow route between mud walls and ditches. The company was exhausted, ammunition was running low, and the withdrawal itself became another fight. Once again, the American helicopters returned.

By the end of the day, three German soldiers were dead: Nils Bruns, Robert Hartert, and Martin Augustyniak. Five others were severely wounded. The U.S. crews had flown repeatedly into danger to recover wounded allied soldiers. Chief Warrant Officer Jason LaCrosse would later receive the Silver Star; members of the American crews were also honored by Germany.

6. WHY IT MATTERS

For Germany, the Good Friday Battle became a turning point. It challenged the language of “stabilization” and forced soldiers, politicians, and the public to confront what many in uniform already knew: in northern Afghanistan, Germany was at war.

For American readers, the story remains largely unknown. *The Good Friday Battle* brings both sides together: German soldiers trapped on the ground, Panzergrenadiers fighting to hold open the routes, American jets circling overhead, and Black Hawk crews flying into fire to save NATO allies they had never met.

This is not only the story of one battle. It is a story of coalition warfare, battlefield trust, moral risk, and the silence that followed when the survivors came home.