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<http://www.news.com.au/breaking-news/world/last-french-combat-troops-exit-afghanistan/story-e6frfkui-1226537633435>

Last French combat troops exit Afghanistan

12/16/2012

FRANCE has flown its last combat troops out of Afghanistan, two years before allied countries in the 100,000-strong NATO mission led by the United States are due to recall their fighting forces.

Around 200 soldiers of the 25th Belfort infantry regiment, responsible for overseeing the hastened French exit from the 11-year war, took off around 2.30pm local time (2100 AEDT), an airport official said.

They are expected to return to France on December 18 following a three-day decompression stay on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus.

Their departure means France has around 1500 soldiers left in Afghanistan, the vast majority in Kabul. They are due to stay into 2013 to take responsibility for repatriating equipment and training the Afghan army to take over.

Only several hundred French soldiers involved in cooperation or training missions will remain in the country.

At the height of its involvement, France had 4000 soldiers in Afghanistan as the fifth largest military contingent in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), behind the United States, Britain, Germany and Italy.