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In the Subcontinent

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Taliban shot down NATO helicopter, no-one injured

(DPA)

18 May 2008

KABUL - Taliban militants claimed responsibility Sunday for shooting at a NATO helicopter in southern Afghanistan that was carrying provincial authorities, including a governor. The chopper made an emergency landing, but no-one was hurt.

The militants shot at the helicopter near Musa Qala district in southern Helmand province on Saturday afternoon as Gulob Mangal, the provincial governor and other senior officials were abroad, the Taliban said on Sunday in a statement posted on their website.

'The mujahideen shot the helicopter with an anti-aircraft weapon and it immediately crashed,' the statement said, adding, 'There must have been casualties.'

Mangal confirmed that his helicopter was fired upon by 'enemies of Afghanistan' on the way to Musa Qala district, where he was scheduled to inaugurate a newly-built mosque in the district centre.

'I know I was the target of the attack, but they failed, because none of us on board were hurt,' Mangal told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

He said that after the chopper made a 'hard landing' he, along with other officials and members of the British forces stationed in the province, returned to the provincial capital in another helicopter.

Major Martin O'Donnell, a NATO spokesman in Kabul, confirmed that one of their CH-47 Chinook helicopters was fired upon and made 'a controlled landing' near a British military base in the province.

O'Donnell said the 'chopper's tail was damaged' in the attack, but no-one aboard was injured, adding that the helicopter was set to be repaired and would be operational by late Sunday.

Afghan and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) forces retook control of Musa Qala district in December last year after the Taliban militants had



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captured it and held sway there for ten months.

Southern Helmand, the largest opium-producing province in Afghanistan, is severely plagued by the Taliban-led insurgency. The joint forces killed more than 150 insurgents in an operation earlier this month in Garmsir, another district in the province.

Mangal said last week that more than 500 militants, including a large number of foreign fighters, are still operating around Garmsir district.

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