

## Canadian soldier killed by IED

COLIN FREEZE

GLOBE AND MAIL UPDATE

DECEMBER 30, 2007 AT 4:37 PM EST

One Canadian Forces soldier was killed and four others were injured outside of Kandahar Sunday shortly after leaving a military outpost.

The highway-bomb attack occurred as a light armoured vehicle was bringing the soldiers away from the front lines for a long-awaited New Year's break, and even as a large group of soldiers were sweeping on foot through Taliban territory and emerged completely unscathed.

Gunner Jonathan Dion, from of the 5th light artillery regiment in Valcartier, was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) shortly after 9 a.m., as his LAV left a forward operating base in the Zhari district for the Kandahar Air Field. KAF, as it is called, is the NATO stronghold in southern Afghanistan, where soldiers suffering privations of forward operating bases go for a few days of rest and relaxation. As of last night the injured, who had not had any breaks this holiday season, were said to be in stable condition.

"This is a very difficult time for the family and friends of Gunner Dion, and our thoughts are with them," said Brig.-Gen Guy Laroche in a statement. The head of the Afghanistan-based Canadian forces said his soldiers have generally had great successes in identifying and disabling IEDs in the past. Homemade bombs have killed the majority of the 74 soldiers who have died in Afghanistan to date.



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Gunner Jonathan Dion is shown in this undated handout photo. *(The Canadian Press/Department of National Defence)*

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The IED attack speaks to the kind of invisible enemy the Canadian Forces will be fighting during the new year.

Even as the roadside bomb exploded, soldiers executed Operation Winter Storm Sunday, were searching villages yesterday for Taliban fighters in vain. The soldiers in the field expressed frustration they were facing an enemy would not engage them frontally. The teams did seize some weapons from the villages without suffering any casualties.

The Canadian infantry who backed up Afghan National Army soldiers who took the lead searching mud compounds and grape fields for the enemy. Shortly after the sweeps began, the forces heard a mysterious boom up the road. "Happy New Year," said one soldier disgustedly, after hearing the news of a slain comrade break on field radios.

The soldiers continued their job of trying to route out insurgents in Sangisar and surrounding villages, once reputed to be the home base of Taliban leader Mullah Omar. But despite sporadic gunshots, the soldiers did not kill or find any Taliban. An elderly man who claimed to be a cook for the insurgents was briefly taken into custody but let go.

Canadian Forces who are mentoring Afghanistan National Army say the fledging army is beginning to prove its mettle in the battlefield. ANA members found some weapons including a machine gun, ammunition, explosives, rocket-propelled grenades, passports, and a tactical vest with blood on it.

A Globe and Mail reporter was embedded in a LAV during the mission, and the convoy travelled painstakingly slow along the highway and dirt roads — at speeds of not much more than a kilometre an hour. Crews proceeded very cautiously, stopping to investigate any possible IED threat

*With files from Louie Palu*

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