

Four Canadian soldiers wounded

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GLOBE AND MAIL UPDATE
JUNE 2, 2008 AT 5:28 PM EDT

Kandahar, Afghanistan — Four Canadian soldiers were wounded, one seriously, in two separate incidents that occurred within minutes of each other in the Zhari district, a volatile area southwest of Kandahar.

Around 12:15 p.m. local time, a soldier was hurt when Canadians got into a firefight with insurgents during a security operation.

Around the same time, three soldiers and one Afghan interpreter were wounded by an improvised explosive device while on foot in a nearby area, according to the military.

The most seriously injured soldier may be airlifted to be flown to a U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany for treatment.

“We expect, and we hope, that he's going to pull through,” Major Jay Janzen, a Canadian military spokesman, told reporters in Kandahar late Monday.

He said the other three Canadian soldiers were listed in either fair or good condition and were receiving treatment at the military hospital on the Kandahar Air Field base.

The Afghan interpreter is receiving treatment at a nearby Afghan army hospital and is listed in good condition.

Little information about the soldiers, including their names and the units they belong to, is being released for privacy reasons. All of the next of kin have been notified.

Major Janzen said the casualties come on the heels of last week's successful large-scale security mission in Zhari which was code-named Operation Rolling Thunder. The four-day operation saw Canadian soldiers engaged in the heaviest fighting so far this year against Taliban militants.

No Canadian soldiers were injured. However, several insurgents were killed, including a mid-level Taliban leader, during the joint Canadian and Afghan military aimed at dismantling bomb-making operations in the rural area.

“We've come to expect retaliation from insurgents following their setbacks, and we do everything possible to ensure we are prepared,” Major Janzen said. “These injuries are unfortunate, but it's critical that we continue to press our initiatives to further improve the security situation.”

Zhari, a rural area where Monday's casualties occurred, is the birthplace of the Taliban movement. It is a hornet's nest of insurgent activity. The battle-scarred region has been the site of several, often bloody, battles for Canadian soldiers since 2006.

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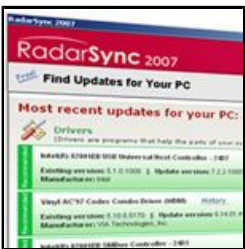
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