

LEOPARD II DEPLOYMENT

Tank hit by IED back in service: Hillier

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OTTAWA -- General Rick Hillier, speaking to reporters yesterday in Ottawa, denied reports that a Leopard II tank that was struck by an IED last month was a writeoff, insisting that the tank has been repaired and is once again in use.

"It's now back operational," Gen. Hillier said.

He confirmed that the tank, one of 20 that are on loan from the German Armed Forces was struck by an IED or anti-tank mine. The army is also awaiting delivery of as many as 100 used Leopard IIs that Canada is purchasing from the Netherlands.

"The Taliban have been engaged with some of the new Leopard II tanks in several ambushes," he said, noting that he did not believe the tanks had been deliberately targeted but were hit because they were part of military convoys.

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Gen. Hillier said the Leopard performed as it should - even though the IED blew up beneath the driver's seat, the tank driver suffered nothing but a small hip fracture - and that as a result the Taliban "learned some very harsh lessons" and lost the battle in question "very quickly and very violently."

"That young kid called home and said, 'Mom, I would not have been alive if it had been any other vehicle but a Leopard II,' "Gen. Hillier said.

The General said that 14 or 15 of the German Leopard IIs have so far arrived in Afghanistan, of which four have been operational since mid-August.

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