

## **Afghanistan: Four More Canadians Killed, Nine Wounded**

Written by

Sunday, 03 September 2006 14:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 03 September 2006 14:00

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**CBC News** - Four Canadian soldiers have been killed and nine others wounded, one seriously, during a ground assault on an insurgent position as part of a major NATO offensive in southern Afghanistan.

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[4 Canadians killed, 9 injured in Afghan battle](#)

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CBC News

Brig.-Gen. David Fraser, the Canadian Forces general who commands the NATO forces in southern Afghanistan, said Sunday that the Canadians died during an air and ground offensive against the Taliban that started in southern Kandahar province a day earlier.

Two of the soldiers have been identified as Warrant Officer Frank Robert Mellish and Warrant Officer Richard Francis Nolan, both members with the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, based in Petawawa, Ont., the Department of National Defence said in a release Sunday.

The military did not say how old they were and would not say when the names of the other soldiers would be released. All of their families have been notified. The families of two soldiers requested that their names not be released at this time, the DND said.

"Let's just have our hopes and prayers with people who are grieving tonight," Fraser said at a news conference in the city of Kandahar.

"They were moving into a position," Fraser said, explaining how the Canadians were killed. "They came under insurgent attacks and during these attacks they succumbed to injuries from the insurgents."

Gordon O'Connor, minister of National Defence, said in a statement that nine others were wounded. Fraser also said one Canadian soldier had been seriously wounded, but the other wounded soldiers are all expected to return to their duties within days.

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Fighting was continuing late into Sunday night as U.S. jets and helicopters bombed and strafed suspected Taliban positions, the Canadian Press reported.

Neighbour recalls soldier's 'genuine soul'

A neighbour of Nolan in Petawawa described him as a committed soldier with a "genuine soul" who took the most pleasure in spending hours playing outside with his three school-aged sons and teenaged stepdaughter.

"I'd be out working in my garden, and I would hear him with his children ... just giving them perfect guidance," Sarah Jane Proulx told the Canadian Press Sunday.

Nolan's children are being cared for by his mother who came from his home province of Newfoundland to look after the kids while their parents were overseas, she said.

Both Nolan and his common-law partner Kelly were serving six-month stints in Afghanistan, but were not posted to the same part of the country.

'Serious damage' as 200 Taliban killed

Canada has more than 2,200 troops in NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In Operation Medusa, which is being led by the Canadians, most of the force's combat units have been fighting alongside troops from Afghanistan, the U.S. and Britain.

The NATO operation aims to drive Taliban militants from their strongholds in the Zhari and Panjwai districts near the city of Kandahar.

"We will continue operations here. Despite these losses, Operation Medusa will continue,"

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Fraser said. "ISAF is determined to remove the Taliban threat from this region. We're making good progress."

In the first two days of the NATO offensive, 200 Taliban militants were killed and 80 others captured, Fraser said. An additional 180 insurgents were seen fleeing the region.

"This operation, which is continuing on tomorrow, has inflicted severe damage to the Taliban capability," Fraser said.

### Soldiers 'surprised' at Taliban resistance

The Canadians moved in with light armoured vehicles in the early morning after NATO forces had pounded enemy positions for more than 24 hours with helicopter gunships, artillery and bombs.

Taliban insurgents put up a stiff fight, using small arms and rocket-propelled grenades to hit back at the Canadians, who later returned to their own stronghold.

Some soldiers expressed surprise at how stubbornly Taliban fighters had defended their ground, near a river valley that cuts a green ribbon through this desert area west of Kandahar city. Others noted NATO commanders had given everyone, including the enemy, a few days of advance notice before starting Operation Medusa in Panjwaii district.

"Truthfully, I was surprised by the resistance they put up," said Maj. Geoff Abthorpe, commander of Bravo Company of Task Force Kandahar and a member of the Royal Canadian Regiment.

"We came at them with what I perceived to be a pretty heavy fist."

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The latest deaths bring to 31 the total number of Canadian soldiers killed since the mission in Afghanistan began in 2002.

The last time the Canadian Forces suffered as many deaths in one day was Aug. 3 when two roadside bombings and a hail of rocket-propelled grenades killed four Canadians and injured 10. Most of those casualties occurred near the village of Pashmul within Panjwahi district.

Latest deaths spark calls to end mission

Prime Minister Stephen Harper expressed his condolences on Sunday to the family and friends of the soldiers, and paid tribute to their colleagues who continue their dangerous mission.

"While deeply saddened by this loss, I hope the families may find some solace in the knowledge that they do not grieve alone and that Canada will not forget the heroism of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice," Harper said in a statement released Sunday afternoon.

"They will be sorely missed by their comrades in Afghanistan who carry on with our mission there, serving our country with tremendous professionalism, skill and determination."

NDP Leader Jack Layton, during a news conference in Toronto on Sunday, reiterated his call to get Canadian soldiers out of Afghanistan.

"This is the wrong mission for Canada. It's not balanced. It doesn't represent the equilibrium between humanitarian aid, reconstruction and comprehensive peace process that Canadians would want to see," he said.

British plane crashes

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The Canadians weren't the only NATO troops to die during Operation Medusa. Hours after the offensive began on Saturday, a British reconnaissance plane crashed in the Panjwai district, killing all 14 military personnel on board.

A purported Taliban spokesman claimed militants shot the plane down in Kandahar province with a Stinger missile, but British Defence Secretary Des Browne said the crash appeared to be "a terrible accident."

Col. Fred Lewis, the deputy commander of the Canadian contingent of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), told reporters the Taliban "don't have the technical ability to shoot down an aircraft like that."

### NATO promises reconstruction

Thousands of locals have fled villages in the Panjwai district since May following the arrival of hundreds of Taliban fighters still loyal to leaders who were ousted from power by a U.S.-led coalition of troops in late 2001.

Operation Medusa is the largest offensive since NATO took over the mission in Afghanistan earlier in the summer.

NATO commanders have promised to push forward with a reconstruction plan after the operation is over and leave behind troops to help restore infrastructure.

"The Afghan people want peace and stability and they deserve our support," said Fraser. "The Taliban offer only intimidation and violence to the Afghan population. The Afghan government offers hope and development and reconstruction."

With files from the Canadian Press