

THE AFGHAN MISSION: CANADIAN SOLDIER KILLED ON PATROL

Military targets roadside bombs

COLIN FREEZE

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KANDAHAR -- Another Canadian Forces soldier was killed by a roadside bomb yesterday, the latest in a spate of attacks this week, as the military steps up efforts to counter the increasing threat from improvised explosive devices.

Trooper Richard Renaud, a 26-year-old from Alma, Que., was killed during an early morning reconnaissance patrol in the restive Arghandab region, a valley north of Kandahar that has been a source of concern for NATO since a local chief allied with the government died of a heart attack late last year.

It is the third known improvised explosive device (IED) attack against Canadian military vehicles patrolling the Kandahar area in the past three days. The previous two attacks did not result in any fatalities.

"His sacrifice will not be forgotten," Brigadier-General Guy Laroche told reporters in Kandahar last night. Trooper Renaud was from the 12e Régiment blindé du Canada, in Valcartier, Que.

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Trooper Renaud was a member of his armoured regiment's reconnaissance squadron.

The death comes as the military is scrambling to deal with the threat from IEDs, which have accounted for the vast majority of 77 soldiers killed in Afghanistan. Last fall, it brought in 16 armoured trucks fitted with the latest technologies to detect and neutralize IEDs.

More experimental solutions are being considered, like handheld scanners which detect trace amounts of explosives on suspected bomb makers and in vehicles. And the Canadian military has recently announced an ambitious plan to pave 10 kilometres of road in the province, making it harder for the Taliban to plant bombs.

Despite the rash of bombings, Gen. Laroche played down suggestions that the Taliban were stepping up their attacks. "I wouldn't say that," he said. He pointed out the three bombs were spread out over a large geographic area around Kandahar's environs, a dispersal he suggested meant there was no centrally organized campaign.

He said that insurgents in southern Afghanistan have been keeping close to the same "tempo" of attacks as they had been in the summer, without the customary winter lull in hostilities.

Trooper Renaud was in a light-armoured Coyote, a vehicle designed for speed and surveillance, about 10 kilometres north of the city.

Another soldier was injured by the blast, but promptly released from hospital. Two other passengers were unhurt.

Coyotes have been hit in deadly attacks before. Master Corporal Allan Stewart and Trooper Patrick Pentland were killed last April as their Coyote struck an IED.

Two months later, in June, their friend Trooper Darryl Caswell died as his Coyote hit a mine.

Because the Canadian Forces don't reveal statistics on IEDs, it's difficult to say how frequently they occur, how many soldiers are seriously injured by the blasts or how many bombs are intercepted before they go off.

By all accounts, IEDs are a constant threat and possibly a growing one, if this week's events are any indication.

On Sunday, soldiers were driving 35 kilometres southwest of Kandahar city, working to clear mines. Their vehicle hit an IED. All four soldiers were sent to hospital but were soon released.

On Monday, in the same general area, one soldier was injured by an IED but was released immediately from hospital.

In addition to continued bombings of military targets, insurgents have also been hitting "soft" targets, including policemen and foreigners.

Ten police officers were killed last weekend as the Taliban stormed a checkpoint before dawn in the Maywand district, north of Kandahar. On the same day, a suicide bomber killed another police officer in that area.

The Taliban have also stepped up operations in Kabul, killing eight people this week at a luxury hotel frequented by Westerners.

The Associated Press is reporting that the Taliban have announced it plans to hit restaurants in the capital.

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