

Canadian killed in Afghanistan

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KANDAHAR — A Canadian soldier is dead and another wounded today in a gun battle with Taliban militants outside of Kandahar.

The attack comes as NATO forces throughout southern Afghanistan are bracing for the anticipated surge in violence that usually accompanies the end of the poppy harvest.

Corporal Michael Starker, of the 15 Field Ambulance Regiment, was pronounced dead in a military hospital on Tuesday after his patrol was ambushed in the Pashmul region of Zhari district, about 25 kilometres west of Kandahar city.

Cpl. Starker, 36, was a Calgary paramedic. News of his death deeply saddened the tight-knit emergency medical service community.



Corporal Michael Starker of the 15 Field Ambulance Regiment (*DND Photo*)

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Canadian killed in Afghanistan

CTV's Paul Workman discusses the latest Canadian death from Kandahar

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Brigadier-General Guy Laroche, commander of Canadian troops in Afghanistan, says the wounded soldier is being treated in hospital at Kandahar Airfield and was able to call home on his own.

The name of the wounded soldier has not been released.

Meanwhile, in Calgary, Emergency Medical Services Chief Tom Sampson held an emotional news conference this afternoon to talk about Cpl. Starker, who had been a paramedic with the city since June, 2005.

"He was one of those people who wanted to help others," Chief Sampson said fighting back tears. "... I think he went to help there and it's such a shame that he should die while trying to help like that."

The 36-year-old married man had been involved with the military for a decade and was deployed to Afghanistan in December.

His family has asked for privacy as they mourn their loss.

Friends described him as a strong, caring individual with a "heart of gold" and the "best partner they ever worked with," Chief Sampson said.

In the main hallway at EMS headquarters an almost life-sized picture of Corporal Starker hangs on a wall. He is wearing military fatigues and is leaning against a city ambulance. With him is fellow paramedic Travis Lanoway, also dressed in camouflage, who left a month ago for Afghanistan.

“We understand that Travis is very interested in bringing Mike home,” Chief Sampson said while crying.

The soldiers were part of a civilian military affairs team, which is attempting to reach out to local Afghans.

Pashmul has been a hotly contested region since Canadian troops deployed in Kandahar more than two years ago.

The fact the soldiers could walk through the area and interact with the locals was a hopeful sign and Canadian troops won't be deterred, said Brig.-Gen. LaRoche.

“The intent was to exchange with the population — something we could not do last year,” he said.

“We will maintain our presence there as long as we need to do so.”

This death brings to 83 the number of Canadian soldiers killed in the war-torn country since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001.

With a report from Dawn Walton in Calgary