

U.S. deaths

Afghanistan

As of Friday, at least 901 members of the U.S. military had died in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan as a result of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ A U.S. servicemember was killed Friday by a bomb in western Afghanistan, according to NATO.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

Three soldiers died Wednesday in northwest Pakistan, from wounds suffered when insurgents attacked with an improvised explosive device. Killed were:

■ Sgt. 1st Class David J. Hartman, 27, of Okinawa, Japan; Sgt. 1st Class Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller, 35, of Callettsburg, Ky.; and Staff Sgt. Mark A. Stets, 39, of El Cajon, Calif. Hartman and Sluss-Tiller were assigned to the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne), Fort Bragg, N.C. Stets was assigned to the 8th Psychological Operations Battalion (Airborne), 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne), Fort Bragg, N.C.

Two soldiers died of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device on Tuesday in Zabul province. Killed were:

■ Capt. Daniel Whitten, 28, of Grimes, Iowa; and Pfc. Zachary G. Lovejoy, 20, of Albuquerque, N.M. They were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C.

■ Lance Cpl. Michael L. Freeman Jr., 21, of Fayetteville, Pa., died Monday while supporting combat operations in Helmand province; assigned to 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Lejeune, N.C.

■ Staff Sgt. Rusty H. Christian, 24, of Greenville, Tenn., died Jan. 28 in Uruzgan province of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked with an improvised explosive device; assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

Two soldiers died Jan. 29 in Wardak province while supporting combat operations. Killed were:

■ Capt. David J. Thompson, 39, of Hooker, Okla., who was assigned to the 3rd Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, N.C.; and Spc. Marc P. Decoteau, 19, of Watterville Valley, N.H., who was assigned to the 6th Psychological Operations Battalion (Airborne), 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne), Fort Bragg, N.C.

■ Sgt. David J. Smith, 25, of Frederick, Md., died Jan. 26 from wounds received Jan. 23 in Helmand province; assigned to 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 4th Marine Division, Marine Forces Reserve, based out of Camp Pendleton, Calif.

From The Associated Press

Probe faults closure delay in base attack

By JOSHUA PARTLOW

The Washington Post

KABUL — Delays in closing a remote U.S. military outpost in eastern Afghanistan increased the vulnerability of the base, where eight American soldiers were killed during a prolonged siege by 300 insurgents last October, according to a summary of a military investigation released Friday.

The attack on Combat Outpost Keating in the Kamdesh district of Nuristan province was one of the worst insurgent attacks against American troops in Afghanistan.

The investigation into the attack, led by Maj. Gen. Guy C. Swan III, drew on interviews from about 140 people who were at the outpost or had information about the attack. The inquiry found that the roughly 60 soldiers stationed there fought courageously, killing about 150 insurgents as they defended their base.

But the report also said those soldiers were

stationed in a place of “no tactical or strategic value” and said critical intelligence and surveillance capabilities that could have helped them had been diverted to other missions.

With limited manpower and located in a ravine surrounded by hills, the mission for Bravo Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry had devolved into protecting their base, Swan concluded. During their five months at the outpost they were attacked about 47 times, three times as often as the unit that came before them, the report found.

“As a result, the chain of command decided to close the remote outpost as soon as it could,” the report said.

But a scheduled closure between July and August 2009 was delayed because the equipment needed to haul away base supplies and to conduct surveillance and gather intelligence was sent to another operation in Barg-e-Matal and to search for a missing soldier in southern

Afghanistan, the report said.

“The delayed closing of COP Keating is important as it contributed to a mindset of imminent closure that served to impede improvements in force protection on the COP,” the report said. “There were inadequate measures taken by the chain of command, resulting in an attractive target for enemy fighters.”

The report said commanders should have done more to improve the base’s defenses and to analyze intelligence reports that the enemy was planning a major assault. It recommended that the squadron commander overseeing the outpost receive a letter of reprimand. Military officials said the brigade commander was given a letter of admonishment, a less severe punishment.

The letters are part of a new push by top military brass to hold commanders accountable for major incidents in which troops are killed or wounded.



SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

Sgt. William Coy, 39, of Belfast, Northern Ireland, battles virtual enemies Jan. 29 using the Reconfigurable Vehicle Tactical Trainer at Grafenwöhr, Germany. Coy is a theater-specific individual readiness training company instructor.

Benefits of the virtual world

Troops safely, cheaply simulate downrange scenarios

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWÖHR, Germany — Europe-based soldiers are heading into virtual reality to prepare for real-world encounters with roadside bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Troops are using computerized simulators known as Reconfigurable Vehicle Tactical Trainers to run anti-bomb missions at Grafenwöhr Training Area before they head downrange, said Gregorio Galvan, a virtual training program specialist.

Last month, five soldiers tramped through a snowy parking area at Grafenwöhr and entered a trailer that housed a mock-up of a Humvee surrounded by a virtual desert projected on the walls.

Soon, the soldiers were conducting a virtual mission to track down a group of bomb-laying insurgents. During the mission, an observer controller detonated a roadside bomb disguised as a pile of boxes, throwing a plume of smoke across the screens and rattling the soldiers’ Humvee. Then, virtual insurgents in pickup trucks attacked while the soldiers fought back with M4 rifles

and a roof-mounted .50-caliber machine gun.

Bruner Caudill, a civilian contractor who trains soldiers using the simulators, said the virtual enemy is being equipped with the latest improvised explosive devices employed in Afghanistan.

“You can make (virtual) IEDs with trash cans, boxes, pickup trucks, cars, buses and people — just about everything they are using for IEDs over there right now,” he said. “What we are using right now is a lot of vehicle IEDs. A few units also want suicide bombers.”

Vehicle simulators can replicate Humvees, Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and various types of Army trucks. Last month, the newest vehicle simulators — able to replicate the armored vehicles that engineers use to clear bombs from roads — arrived at Baumholder, Galvan said.

The Route Clearance Trainer Systems, which the Army plans to field at Grafenwöhr this year, can replicate the engineers’ heavily armored Buffalo vehicles, which include a robotic arm used to examine suspected bombs, as well as the tracked, camera-carrying robots, used by explosive ord-

nance disposal units, he said.

Simulators that replicate the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles will be fielded soon, Caudill said.

By fiscal 2011, the Army plans to link the vehicle simulators to the Joint Multinational Simulation Center — a Grafenwöhr facility that allows leaders to practice command and control of their units during exercises against virtual enemies, Galvan said.

The long-term goal is to link the vehicle simulators to the command and control systems of leaders supervising real-world training at Hohenfels’ Joint Multinational Readiness Center so they can monitor real-world and virtual training at the same time, he said.

“The advantage of simulations is that you can do normal exercises with minimal resources,” Galvan said. “You can run the exercise as many times as you like and capture better data for after-action review.”

“It saves units hundreds of thousands of dollars in fuel, ammo and wear and tear on vehicles,” Caudill added.

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Afghan police kill 7 civilians

The Associated Press

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Afghan border police mistook a group of villagers gathering wood near the Pakistan border as insurgents and opened fire, killing seven civilians, a police official said Saturday.

All six officers involved in Friday’s pre-dawn shooting have been arrested and the incident is under investigation, said Gen. Abdul Raziq, the commander of the border police of southern Afghanistan.

In neighboring Helmand province, NATO and Afghan forces clashed with insurgents in Musa Qaleh district. The forces came under fire from militants Friday and killed three when they retaliated, NATO said in a statement.

Militant video shows abducted U.S. contractor

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Shiite militants kidnapped an Iraqi-American contractor after luring him into central Baghdad with promises of visiting distant relatives, an Iraqi defense official said Saturday, after a video apparently showing the man surfaced online.

The U.S. Department of Defense said Friday that Issa T. Salami, 60, went missing Jan. 23 in Baghdad and that search and recovery efforts were under way.

In the video, the man — who did not identify himself — said his abductors from the League of the Righteous are demanding the release of militants and the prosecution of Blackwater security contractors accused of killing 17 Iraqis in 2007 in Baghdad.

A U.S. intelligence official and an Iraqi defense official confirmed the man in the video is Salami. The Department of Defense said the missing contractor is from El Cajon, Calif.