

Afghanistan

5 US Troops Killed By Friendly Fire



Friendly fire

A coalition airstrike called in to help ward off a Taliban attack may have bombed NATO troops.

BY RAHIM FAIEZ AND PATRICK QUINN
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Five American with a special operations unit were killed by a U.S. airstrike called in to help them after they were ambushed by the Taliban in southern Afghanistan, in one of the deadliest friendly fire incidents in nearly 14 years of war, officials said Tuesday.

The deaths were a fresh reminder that the conflict is nowhere near over for some U.S. troops, who will keep fighting for at least two more years.

Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby said the five American troops were killed Monday "during a security operation in southern Afghanistan."

"Investigators are looking into the likelihood that friendly fire was the

cause. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of these fallen," Kirby said in a statement.

In Washington, U.S. defense officials said the five Americans were with a special operations unit that they did not identify. Earlier, officials had said all five were special operations-qualified troops, but later an official said their exact affiliation was unclear and one or more may have been a conventional soldier working with the special operations unit.

The deaths occurred during a joint operation of Afghan and NATO forces in the Arghandab district of southern Zabol province ahead of Saturday's presidential runoff election, said provincial police chief Gen. Ghulam Sakhi Roohlawanay. After the operation was over, the troops came under attack from the Taliban and called in air support, he said.

"Unfortunately five NATO soldiers and one Afghan army officer were killed mistakenly by NATO airstrike," Roohlawanay said.

There was no way to independently confirm Roohlawanay's comments. The coalition would not comment and NATO headquarters in Brussels also declined to comment.

However, special operations forces often come under fire on joint operations and are responsible for calling in air support when needed. Because of constraints placed by President Hamid Karzai, such airstrikes are usually called "in extremis," when troops fear they are about to be killed.

Airstrikes have long caused tensions between the Afghan government and coalition forces, especially when they cause civilian casualties.

Airstrikes that kill coalition soldiers

are far less common. One of the worst such incidents came in April 2002, when four Canadian soldiers were killed by an American F-16 jet fighter that dropped a bomb on a group of troops during a night firing exercise in southern Kandahar. In April 2004, former National Football League player Pat Tillman was killed by coalition fire while serving in an Army Ranger unit in one of the most highly publicized cases.

One of the five American troops killed Monday was identified as 19-year-old Aaron Toppen of Mokena, Ill., who had deployed to Afghanistan in March, a month after his father died, according to a family spokeswoman, Jennie Swartz. His family was suffering a "double hit" of grief, Toppen's sister, Amanda Gralewski, told the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for Monday's ambush in Zabol.

Insurgents Overrun Most Of Mosul

BAGHDAD (AP) — In a stunning assault that exposed Iraq's eroding central authority, al-Qaida-inspired militants overran much of Mosul on Tuesday, seizing government buildings, pushing out security forces and capturing military vehicles as thousands of residents fled the second-largest city.

The rampage by the black banner-waving insurgents was a heavy defeat for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki as he tries to hold onto power, and highlighted the growing strength of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The group has been advancing in both Iraq and neighboring Syria, capturing territory in a campaign to set up a militant enclave straddling the border.

There were no immediate estimates on how many people were killed in the assault, a stark reminder of the reversals in Iraq since U.S. forces left in late 2011.

Earlier this year, Islamic State fighters took control of Fallujah, and government forces have been unable to take it back.

Mosul is a much bigger, more strategic prize. The city and surrounding Nineveh province, which is on the doorstep of Iraq's relatively prosperous Kurdish region, are a major export route for Iraqi oil and a gateway to Syria.

House Majority Leader Cantor Defeated

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — House Majority Leader Eric Cantor was defeated Tuesday by a little-known economics professor in Virginia's Republican primary, a stunning upset and major victory for the tea party.

Cantor is the second-most powerful member of the U.S. House and was seen by some as a possible successor to the House speaker.

His loss to Dave Brat, a political novice with little money marks a huge victory for the tea party movement, which supported Cantor just a few years ago.

Brat had been a thorn in Cantor's side on the campaign, casting the congressman as a Washington insider who isn't conservative enough. Last month, a feisty crowd of Brat supporters booed Cantor in front of his family at a local party convention.

His message apparently scored well with voters in the 7th District.

"There needs to be a change," said Joe Mullins, who voted in Chesterfield County Tuesday. The engineering company employee said he has friends who tried to arrange town hall meetings with Cantor, who declined their invitations.

Tiffs between the GOP's establishment and tea party factions have flared in Virginia since tea party favorite Ken Cuccinelli lost last year's gubernatorial race. Cantor supporters have met with stiff resistance in trying to wrest control of the state party away from tea party enthusiasts, including in the Cantor's home district.

Bergdahl Deal Sealed Day Before Swap

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration only finalized the exchange of the last remaining U.S. prisoner of war in Afghanistan for five Taliban detainees at Guantanamo a day before the swap, a top Democratic lawmaker said Tuesday. He said American officials didn't learn the pickup location for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl until an hour ahead of time.

Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the Senate's No. 2-ranked Democrat, presented the timeline as an explanation for why President Barack Obama didn't inform Congress 30 days before the May 31 prisoner trade. Republicans and some Democrats have sharply criticized the president for failing to notify them and contend he broke the law. Obama says he acted legally.

"They knew a day ahead of time the transfer was going to take place," Durbin told reporters in the Capitol, where military officials briefed the Senate Armed Services Committee behind closed doors. "They knew an hour ahead of time where it was going to take place."

Durbin spoke as a House panel overwhelmingly backed a measure barring U.S. funds for the transfer of detainees from the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, amid the congressional outcry over the swap.

On a bipartisan 33-13 vote, the Appropriations Committee added the provision to a \$570 billion defense spending bill. The measure bars 85 percent of the funds in the account for overseas conflicts until Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel reassures Congress that congressional notification on Guantanamo transfers will be respected.

Facebook, Twitter Gear Up For World Cup

NEW YORK (AP) — This year's World Cup will play out on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and messaging apps like WhatsApp just as it progresses in stadiums from Sao Paulo to Rio De Janeiro.

Nearly 40 percent of Facebook's 1.28 billion users are fans of soccer, better known as football outside of the U.S. and Australia. On Tuesday, the world's biggest online social network is adding new features to help fans follow the World Cup — the world's most widely viewed sporting event — which takes place in Brazil from June 12 to July 13.

Facebook users will be able to keep track of their favorite teams and players throughout the tournament in a special World Cup section, called "Trending World Cup." Available on the Web as well as mobile devices, the hub will include the latest scores, game highlights as well as a feed with tournament-related posts from friends, players and teams. In addition, an interactive map will show where the fans of top players are located around the world. The company is also launching a page called FacebookRef, where fans can see commentary about the matches from "The Ref," Facebook's official tournament commentator.

Social media activity during big sporting events such as the Olympics and the Super Bowl has soared in recent years and should continue as user numbers grow. In 2010, when the last World Cup took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, Facebook had just 500 million users. Now there are just that many soccer fans (people who have "liked" a team or a player) on the site, the company says.

Facebook has recently focused on making its mobile app usable on simple phones that use slower data speeds since many of its newest users are in developing countries. As a result, Rebecca Van Dyck, head of consumer marketing at Facebook, said the World Cup hub will also be available on so-called "feature phones." Here the section will be "little less graphical" than what's shown on smartphones and on the Web, she said, but will include the same information.

Congress Moving Quickly On VA Care

BY MATTHEW DALY AND ALAN FRAM
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — United in response to a national uproar, Congress is suddenly moving quickly to address military veterans' long waits for care at VA hospitals.

The House unanimously approved legislation Tuesday to make it easier for patients enduring lengthy delays for local doctors instead. The Senate was poised to vote on a similar bill within 48 hours, said Democratic leader Harry Reid.

The legislation comes close on the heels of a Veterans Affairs Department audit showing that more than 57,000 new applicants for care have had to wait at least three months for initial appointments and an additional 64,000 newly enrolled vets who requested appointments never got them.

"I cannot state it strongly enough — this is a national disgrace," said Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller, R-Fla., chief author of the House legislation.

Miller made his comments minutes before the House completed the first of two votes on its measure. Lawmakers approved the bill 421-0, then re-voted a

little over an hour later, making sure no one was left out on the politically important vote, with five more in favor and no one against. Miller sheepishly admitted the reason for the second vote: He was in his office and missed the first tally.

Rep. Mike Michaud of Maine, top Democrat on the Veteran Affairs Committee, said the care that veterans receive at VA facilities is "second to none — that is, if you can get in. As we have recently learned, tens of thousands of veterans are not getting in."

The House bill and a similar version in the Senate would spend hundreds of millions of dollars to hire more doctors and nurses, but that may be easier said than done given a nationwide shortage of primary care physicians.

"This is not a problem that is just isolated to the VA," said Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev. "It's out there in the community."

Primary care physicians are expected to become increasingly in demand as millions of people newly insured under the federal health care law start looking for regular doctors. The Association of American Medical Colleges has projected that by 2020, there will be 45,000 too few primary care physicians, as well as a shortage of

46,000 surgeons and specialists.

Shortages tend to be worse in both rural and inner-city areas.

Nevada already has a chronic shortage of doctors, both in primary care and among specialists, Titus said. The state ranks 46th among states and the District of Columbia for availability of general and family practitioners, she said, and 51st for surgeons.

While she voted for the bill, Titus said Congress and the Obama administration need to do more to ensure that veterans receive care in the private sector.

The American Medical Association added its voice, in Chicago, as the House was voting. At its annual policy meeting, the AMA approved a resolution urging President Barack Obama to take immediate action to enable veterans to get timely access to care from outside the VA system. The nation's largest doctors group also recommended that state medical societies create and make available registries of outside physicians willing to treat vets.

"Clearly there is a problem," said Dr. Robert Wah, the AMA's incoming president. He didn't say how Obama should ensure vets get access to non-VA doctors but said the president needed to address the issue immediately.



Attorney Glenn Rothner speaks during a press conference outside the Stanley Mosk Courthouse in Los Angeles after an L.A. County Superior Court judge ruled Tuesday that key job protections for California teachers violate the state's constitution.

Judge Strikes Down Tenure For Teachers In California

BY LINDA DEUTSCH
AP Special Correspondent

LOS ANGELES — A judge struck down tenure and other job protections for California's public school teachers as unconstitutional Tuesday, saying such laws harm students — especially poor and minority ones — by saddling them with bad teachers who are almost impossible to fire.

In a landmark decision that could influence the gathering debate over tenure across the country, Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Rolf Treu cited the historic case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in ruling that students have a fundamental right to equal education.

Siding with the nine students who brought the lawsuit, he ruled that California's laws on hiring and firing in schools have resulted in "a significant number of grossly ineffective teachers currently active in California classrooms."

He agreed, too, that a disproportionate number of these teachers are in schools that have mostly minority and low-income students.

The judge stayed the ruling pending appeals. The case involves 6 million students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

The California Attorney General's office said it is considering its legal options, while the California Teachers Associ-

ation, the state's biggest teachers union with 325,000 members, vowed an appeal.

"Circumventing the legislative process to strip teachers of their professional rights hurts our students and our schools," the union said.

Teachers have long argued that tenure prevents administrators from firing teachers on a whim. They contend also that the system preserves academic freedom and helps attract talented teachers to a profession that doesn't pay well.

Other states have been paying close attention to how the case plays out in the nation's most populous state.

"It's powerful," said Theodore Boutros Jr., the students' attorney. "It's a landmark decision that can change the face of education in California and nationally."

He added: "This is going to be a huge template for what's wrong with education."

The judge declined to tell the Legislature exactly how to change the system, but expressed confidence it will do so in a way that passes constitutional muster and provides "each child in this state with a basically equal opportunity to achieve a quality education."

The lawsuit contended that incompetent teachers are so heavily protected by tenure laws that they are almost impossible to fire. The plaintiffs also charged that schools in

poor neighborhoods are used as dumping grounds for the bad teachers.

In striking down several laws regarding tenure, seniority and other protections, the judge said there was compelling evidence of the harm inflicted on students by incompetent teachers.

"Indeed, it shocks the conscience," Treu said.

He cited an expert's finding that a single year with a grossly ineffective teacher costs a student \$50,000 in potential lifetime earnings.

California teachers receive tenure after just two years, sooner than in virtually any other state. If a school district moves to fire a tenured teacher and the educator puts up a fight, it triggers a long, drawn-out process, including a trial-like hearing and appeals.

Los Angeles School Superintendent John Deasy testified it can take over two years on average — and sometimes as long as 10 — to fire an incompetent tenured teacher. The cost, he said, can run from \$250,000 to \$450,000.

In his ruling, the judge, a Republican appointee to the bench, said the procedure under the law for firing teachers is "so complex, time-consuming and expensive as to make an effective, efficient yet fair dismissal of a grossly ineffective teacher illusory."

Police: Teen Gunman In Ore. Likely Killed Self

TROUTDALE, Ore. (AP) — A teen gunman armed with a rifle shot and killed a student Tuesday and injured a teacher at a high school in a quiet Columbia River town in Oregon then likely killed himself, authorities said.

Troutdale police said they spotted the suspect slumped on a toilet in a bathroom but couldn't see what was happening with him.

Officers used a robot with a camera to investigate and discovered the suspect was dead and that he likely killed himself at Reynolds High School in Troutdale, police spokesman Sgt. Carey Kaer said.

Authorities have tentatively identified the gunman but weren't ready to release the name, police Chief Scott Anderson said.

They were in the process of notifying the family of the gunman and student who was killed.

Anderson said the teacher's injuries weren't life threatening, and he was treated at the scene. He was identified as physical education instructor Todd Rispler.

During an evacuation of the school, another gun was found and one person was taken into custody. Anderson said that weapon and arrest were not related to the shooting.

The attack panicked students at the school after a lockdown was ordered and they were told to go quietly to their classrooms.

Freshman Morgan Rose, 15, said she hunkered down in a locker room with another student and two teachers.

"It was scary in the moment. Now knowing everything's OK, I'm better," she said.

Freshman Daniel DeLong, 15, said after the shooting that he saw a physical education teacher at the school with a bloodied shirt. He said he was texting friends to make sure they were all OK.

"It just, like, happened so fast, you know?" he said. Anderson said he was sorry for the family of the slain student.