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Announcement

2 soldiers killed in action

31 May 2011

The Australian Defence Force had a very bad day in Afghanistan yesterday.

And it is with immense sorrow that I am here this morning to announce the death of two Australian soldiers in Afghanistan in two separate incidents overnight.

First Incident

In the first incident, which occurred early yesterday evening, a member of the Mentoring Task Force, while undertaking guard duty at patrol base MASHAL in the Chorah Valley, was shot by an Afghan National Army Soldier who was also manning the security guard tower.

Despite receiving substantial medical treatment at the base, and being airlifted to a nearby ISAF medical facility at Tarin Kot in well under an hour, the Australian soldier died from his wounds.

The Afghan National Army Soldier who fired his weapon fled the scene of the incident.

Another Afghan National Army Soldier who discovered what had happened, but was not in the area during the incident, fired upon the offending ANA soldier as he was fleeing.

Additionally, a security operation was launched in an effort to impede the suspected gunman's escape.

However, the perpetrator was not apprehended, but he has been identified.

Like the death of all our soldiers in Afghanistan, the death of this soldier is both sad and tragic.

Of course, the particular circumstances of this incident are also disturbing given that the perpetrator in question was thought to be our partner and was the recipient of our mentoring and training.

Though we have the broad detail of what occurred, I am sure you will understand that I can't speak today about the motivation of this Afghan National Army soldier, nor any associations he may have or the amount of planning that did or didn't go into the attack.

The entire event is under investigation and we are obviously going to take a very close look at how this occurred, why this occurred and what, if anything, could have been done to prevent it.

Today, to the family of the Australian soldier, who have been notified about this soldier's death overnight, on behalf of all the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, I offer my condolences for their loss.

Though I can't ease their grief at this very sad time, I want them to know the ADF will be there to provide comfort and support as their loved one is laid to rest.

I am not in a position to share his name with you this morning, but I can share with you a little bit about his experience and what kind of soldier he was.

This young man was 25 years old and at the rank of Lance

Corporal.

He had served in the Army for 7 years.

He had previous operational experience in East Timor and started his rotation in Afghanistan in November last year.

I am told he was a loyal, reliable and very trusted member of his unit.

He was promoted last year to his current rank, and displayed great leadership potential.

Though he was quiet and reserved, he enjoyed a joke with his mates and was always the first among them to volunteer when work was required to be done.

He will be very sadly missed by his many Army mates.

This will also be a tough time for the Mentoring Task Force.

Not only have they lost a mate, they also knew and, in some cases, would have worked closely with the

perpetrator.

They will be experiencing a myriad of emotions—grief and anger foremost among them.

But I know that they will also want to reaffirm their commitment to the Afghan partners with whom they do enjoy a productive, trusting and close relationship.

They will not want this one terrible incident to damage the outstanding progress made by many rotations of mentors and their Afghan partners.

We remain committed to our mentoring role and I can't stress highly enough the importance of the Mentoring Task Force to achieving our mission in Afghanistan.

The relationship between the Afghan National Army soldiers of the 4th Brigade is one of the longest running in Afghanistan and there is a genuine bond between the forces.

The 4th Brigade Commander Brigadier General Mohammed Zafir Khan has expressed his shock and outrage at the attack and he and his soldiers are actively seeking to apprehend the suspect.

That said, I understand this incident is obviously going to quite rightly raise some very serious questions about the security measures we have in place and I can assure you we will be looking very closely at the outcomes of the investigation and any necessary changes that may be required to enhance the protection of our people.

Second Incident

In the second and separate incident, which occurred a few hours after the shooting just after 9 pm last night, Australian Eastern Standard time, an Australian Officer was killed when an Australian Chinook Helicopter, which was undertaking a re-supply mission, crashed 90km east of Tarin Kot, in Zabul Province.

An American Chinook was in close proximity and the crew onboard witnessed the crash.

They landed and provided immediate medical assistance for the most seriously wounded soldier to the Role II facility in Qalat, 70 km to the south of the crash site. Unfortunately, despite this immediate medical assistance, the Officer could not be saved.

The other five Australians onboard the crashed helicopter were subsequently evacuated to the Role III medical facility at Kandahar and I'm pleased to say are in a satisfactory condition.

The Chinook Helicopter could not be recovered and was destroyed in-place.

The family of this soldier were notified about his death this morning.

I am not able to release his name at this stage.

However, I can share that he was 27 years old and a Lieutenant in the Army.

He was a qualified pilot who had provided sterling service in Afghanistan since he deployed a short time ago.

He had previously served in East Timor and he had been part of Operation FLOOD ASSIST in Queensland, coming to the

assistance of his fellow Australians who found themselves in need in January.

Though this incident has not long happened, already his comrades are saying what a keen, motivated and driven young officer he was, committed to serving our nation and excelling as a pilot.

To this Officer's large and close-knit family, I offer my deepest sympathy and assure them we will provide whatever assistance we can.

I hope they are able to draw some comfort from the knowledge they are in the thoughts and prayers of so many Australians today that are grateful for their loved one's service to our nation and the sacrifice he has made on our behalf.

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