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From Times Online

October 26, 2009

Sixteen Americans dead as helicopters crash in Afghan raids



(David Furst/AFP/Getty Images)

A CH-47 Chinook helicopter is one of the types used by American troops in Afghanistan

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Sixteen Americans have died in a series of helicopter crashes and violent Taliban attacks across Afghanistan, in one of the bloodiest 24 hours for allied forces since the 2001 invasion.

Ten people were killed and at least 26 more were wounded when a fully-laden Chinook transport helicopter crashed in western Afghanistan during a pre-dawn fire fight with insurgents.

In Helmand, in the south of the country, four troops were killed and two others were seriously wounded when a Huey smashed into a Cobra gunship in mid-air, officials said.

In the east, meanwhile, one soldier was killed in an explosion and a second died of wounds sustained in a separate insurgent attack yesterday.

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Colonel Wayne Shanks, a US military spokesman, said "such a significant loss" compounded the military's grief. "These separate tragedies underscore the risks our forces and our partners face every day," he said. "Each and every death is a tremendous loss for the family and friends of each service member and civilian."

The twin-rotor cargo helicopter came down under heavy fire shortly after midnight, as it tried to extract a US Special Forces team from a daring night raid against

one of the region's most wanted drug smugglers.

The Special Operations Force was backed by a squad of Afghan commandos and civilian counter-narcotics agents.

"Seven US service members and three US civilians were killed," a military spokesman said yesterday. At least 11 US troops were also injured in the crash, in Badghis province, as well as 14 Afghan soldiers and one American civilian.

A military spokesman said the civilians worked for "other US government agencies," understood to mean the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

The elite US troops had led an airborne assault against a compound in Darpum district, believed to "harbour insurgents" linked to Afghanistan's multi-billion dollar opium trade, officials said.

"During the operation, insurgent forces engaged the joint force and more than a dozen enemy fighters were killed in the ensuing fire fight," a military spokesman said.

But moments after the raiders boarded a Chinook to leave the battlefield, their aircraft crashed into the main bazaar.

A spokesman for the Taliban claimed responsibility. Qari Yousuf Ahmadi said: "There was fighting in the bazaar between foreign troops and the Taliban. During the fighting the Taliban shot down a foreign helicopter."

But Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) said the reasons for the crash were still being investigated. "The cause is not believed to be from enemy action." Taliban fighters continued to attack the American-led force after the helicopter was downed, hampering rescue efforts to evacuate them.

Eyewitness said they saw another four helicopters strafing Taliban positions in the town. "There were four helicopters in the sky firing bombs and missiles," said Ahmad Farwad, 35. "I was woken by the sound of fighting and I walked my family to another village.

"When we went outside we saw a helicopter had been shot down. The other helicopters were attacking a Taliban compound near the bazaar and also hitting my neighbour's house."

Britain lost two Chinook helicopters in separate incidents in

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Bronwen Maddox

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Helmand, in August, but no one was killed.

In September 2006 a British Nimrod surveillance plane crashed killing all 14 on board., while in May that year 10 Americans died when their Chinook crashed into the mountains in eastern Afghanistan.

The Soviet army was defeated after 10 years in Afghanistan, after US secret agents supplied Afghan resistance fighters with surface to air missiles to shoot down Russian helicopters.

In other operations today, dozens of insurgents were reported killed in raids in Kandahar in the south, and Khowst in the east, while militants were detained during an operation in Farah province in the west.

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YOUR COMMENTS

7 Comments (Displaying 1-7)

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Robert Elliott wrote:

What gives us the right to interfere in another countries issues? Let them develop as we developed. British/American democracy forced down the throat is no answer.

I still don't understand why we are in Afghanistan. Can some Government mouth piece enlighten me?

October 26, 2009 6:08 PM GMT

RECOMMEND? (3)

Tony Gayle wrote:

Heavens above, what are our Servicemen and Women dying for in Afghanistan? Will someone please clarify! More sad news.

October 26, 2009 1:35 PM GMT

RECOMMEND? (40)

Geoffrey Woollard wrote:

"These kind of helicopter tragedies will occur, until we learn to do virtually all movement without these machines"

But people are calling for MORE helicopters, John: haven't you heard?

October 26, 2009 12:40 PM GMT

RECOMMEND? (12)

Alex Penn wrote:

What a horrible way for any man or woman to die. Just because they are soliders does not mean that dying should be an accepted norm.

RIP from London.

October 26, 2009 10:57 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (36)

john sanford wrote:

These kind of helicopter tragedies will occur, until we learn to do virtually all movement without these machines, which have many disadvantages for Counter-Revolutionary Warfare.

October 26, 2009 10:39 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (5)

Prudence Eely Bond McGuire wrote:

It must be a laugh a minute in Afghanistan, while Obama still ponders whether to deploy extra troops or not-NOT being the operative word. How many more deaths will be recorded before he makes up his mind?

October 26, 2009 10:29 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (17)

Kia Fosdter wrote:

Condolences go out to the families of course and it is a great tragedy that this has happened. That said I think both UK and USA need to sit together and re-evaluate things and make sure that we are going in the correct course.

October 26, 2009 10:26 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (41)

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