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## **NATO helicopter crash-lands in Afghanistan**

**A crew member is killed. Taliban forces claim responsibility for downing the helicopter in eastern Kapisa province. Forces arriving to rescue the two crew members aboard are fired upon by insurgents.**

By Molly Hennessy-Fiske, Los Angeles Times

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Reporting from Kabul, Afghanistan

A NATO helicopter crew member was killed when the aircraft crash-landed in eastern Afghanistan on Saturday, advertisement authorities said.

The cause of the "hard landing" in Kapisa province was still under investigation late Saturday, said Maj. Michael Johnson, a NATO forces spokesman. Johnson said he could not disclose what type of helicopter crashed or whether it was part of a larger operation in the area.

Rescue forces who arrived at the crash scene were shot at by insurgents as they tried to evacuate the helicopter's two crew members, and they returned fire, according to a NATO statement. One of the crew members died at the scene and had not been identified by NATO forces late Saturday.

Taliban officials claimed responsibility for the crash, saying they shot the helicopter down and killed the crew, who they claimed were French.

"The forces had come to the area to attack mujahedin strongholds, but they faced furious attacks," said Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid.

NATO spokesmen said they could not comment on why the helicopter crashed.

NATO and Afghan security forces rely on helicopters and other aircraft to transport and supply troops across Afghanistan's mountainous provinces, where paved roads are scarce.

In September 2010, nine U.S. troops were killed when their helicopter crashed in a remote area of Zabul province in southern Afghanistan. In May 2006, a Chinook helicopter crashed while attempting a night landing on a mountaintop in eastern Kunar province, killing 10 U.S. troops.

Fighting has increased in eastern Afghanistan in recent days as coalition forces intensified attacks on insurgents along the Pakistan border, and militants fought back with suicide bombs and assassinations.

On Saturday, insurgents killed two Afghan police officers, ambushing their supply convoy in eastern Nangarhar province, which borders Pakistan, according to spokesmen for the Interior Ministry and Nangarhar's governor. Two other police were wounded in the attack, they said.

Insurgents also attacked and killed a NATO service member in eastern Afghanistan on Saturday.

On Friday, a NATO soldier was killed in an insurgent attack in eastern Afghanistan, and the day before, another NATO soldier was killed in the same region by a roadside bomb. NATO forces do not initially disclose the nationality of soldiers killed.

So far this year, 135 NATO forces have been killed in Afghanistan, including 98 U.S. troops, according to icasualties.org. This month, there have been 23 U.S. casualties, three more than in April 2010, according to the website. In years past, U.S. casualties have increased during the summer months as the fighting season heated up.

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