Troops, families mourn loss of fallen soldiers (CANADA)

This is an article from a list of major incidents in Afghanistan involving Canadian forces or other personnel. It includes incidents where Canadians died, were injured, where they engaged insurgents or where they may have inadvertently injured or killed Afghan civilians.

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Canadian troops are vowing to carry on with their mission to stabilize the Afghan capital of Kabul, as they mourn the loss of two soldiers who died in a powerful explosion.

Sgt. Robert Alan Short, 42, and Cpl. Robbie Christopher Beerenfenger, 29, were killed and three other soldiers were injured when their Iltis jeep hit what is believed to be a landmine. The bodies of the two fallen soldiers will be flown back to Canada on Sunday.

While Ottawa fielded some tough questions over the safety of its vehicles throughout the day, family and friends grieved for the dead. Cpl. Jason James read a statement on behalf of one of the soldiers injured in the incident.

"On behalf of the family of Cpl. T.J. Stirling, we first wish to offer our thoughts and prayers to the families of the two soldiers who unfortunately gave their lives in a vehicle accident in Afghanistan yesterday. Our hearts go out to the families of Cpl. Beerenfenger and Sgt. Short," James said.

"T.J. knew and respected both of these men, and we mourn the loss of these fine soldiers. As a proud member of Canada's armed forces, T.J. volunteered to go over to Afghanistan to be a part of an effort to bring back peace and civility back to a troubled country."

Tina Beerenfenger described her husband as her best friend and a good provider. She said he was a loyal husband and a wonderful father to their two sons and baby daughter.

Short, an experienced light engineer known as a pioneer, left behind a wife and two children.

On the day of the accident, Stirling's wife, Barbara Robichaud, said she had planned to meet her husband online and assumed he was having problems with the Internet service when he wasn't there.

In the hours that followed, she said information about her husband's medical condition was limited. The family statement said Stirling was on the road to recovery.

"T.J. is doing fine, he's recovering well from his injuries, he has told both his wife and his family that he is doing fine. We don't know the extent of his injuries, nor do we wish to speculate to that effect, all we know is that if T.J. says that he is doing fine, then he's doing fine," James said.

The Canadian Press reports Stirling will be moved to a military hospital in Germany over the weekend and will later return to Canada.

The others injured are Master Cpl. Jason Cory Hamilton and Cpl. Cameron Lee Laidlaw. They belong to the Royal Canadian Regiment, 3rd battalion, based in Petawawa, Ont.

Canadian Commander Maj. Gen. Andrew Leslie said the incident won't deter Canadian troops from performing their duties.

"The Taliban and al Qaeda want the international forces to retreat to our camps or run away when we suffer such tragedies. That will not happen," he said.

Leslie said that Canadian engineers travelled the same route as the ill-fated patrol at least six times in the day before the blast. He said the patrol was established to help prevent terrorists from launching attacks.

He urged his soldiers to be resolute and defended the Canadian mission and its goals.

"It's a question of balancing the risks. We are here to help the people of Afghanistan and the way to do that is to get out amongst them," Leslie said.

The Stirling family statement acknowledged the risks involved in military service and the dedication of the men and women serving in the armed forces.

"T.J. and the men and women of the armed forces stationed in Afghanistan are well aware of the risks involved and the duties they are obliged to perform. It is a dangerous job, in a dangerous place. If there was no risk we wouldn't be there," James said.

Leslie, meanwhile, said it will likely be a couple of days before investigators get a better sense of what, or possibly who, caused the deadly explosion.

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