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Four NATO troops killed on sixth day of Marja Offensive in Afghanistan

By Joshua Partlow

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KABUL -- The sixth day of the military offensive in southern [Afghanistan](#) proved the deadliest so far as four NATO troops were killed in bombings and gun battles during the painstaking push to take back a Taliban stronghold.

From the beginning of the operation in [Marja](#) -- the biggest joint military operation of the war -- coalition troops have encountered sporadic gunfire and a host of roadside bombs, many detected before they could cause damage or injury. But the Taliban resistance has appeared to intensify rather than diminish as U.S. Marines and Afghan soldiers have taken control of key roads, bridges and the defunct government center.

The top military commander in southern Afghanistan, British Maj. Gen. Nick Carter, said that the operation had reached the "end of the beginning" but that it would take about a month to be sure "we have secured that which needs to be secured."

Three of the four deaths Thursday came in two separate roadside bombings; the fourth service member was killed by small-arms fire. The deaths brought the toll for the Marja offensive to at least nine NATO troops and one Afghan soldier. NATO did not release the nationalities of those killed Thursday, but a British soldier was among those who died.

The operation in Marja is intended not only to push out the Taliban but also to install a local government and Afghan security force where there have long been none. The pace

has been slowed by regular insurgent attacks and the prevalence of mines and bombs, which can make [moving even short distances an undertaking of hours](#).

Brig. Gen. Larry Nicholson, the U.S. Marine commander in Helmand province, told the Associated Press that progress had been steady but not yet dramatic in Marja. "I'd say we control the spine" of the town, he said. "We're where we want to be."

Also Thursday, a NATO airstrike in northern Afghanistan mistakenly killed Afghan policemen and prompted calls for an investigation. The bombing took place after NATO and Afghan troops came under insurgent attack in the Sahib district of Kunduz province and called in an airstrike. They later learned that "several Afghan police were killed and wounded," according to a military statement. The Interior Ministry said seven policemen were killed, according to the AP.