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Taliban attack northern village

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About 100 Taliban fighters on motorcycles attacked a northern Afghan village that was working to join the government-sponsored local police program against the insurgency, killing one villager, police said Wednesday. An ensuing battle also left 17 militants dead.

The Tuesday evening attack sparked a gunfight that raged intensely for two hours and then continued with sporadic shooting until just before dawn on Wednesday, said Abdul Aziz Ghyrat, the police chief for Jawzjan province.

"They targeted Abduraman village. The people there planned to join the local police and the Taliban had heard about this plan," Ghyrat said.

The Afghan Local Police, or ALP, is a controversial new program that encourages villages to select a group of local men to be trained and equipped by the Afghan government to fight the Taliban. Its American and Afghan backers argue that the force is needed to defend areas that are under threat from the Taliban but don't have a strong formal police presence.

Critics, however, say the program essentially funds private militias.

The villagers in Abduraman fought the attackers themselves until reinforcements arrived in the form of Afghan police, army and NATO air support, Ghyrat said.

At the end of the fighting, one villager and 17 militants were dead, he said. Among the dead militants was a local Taliban commander who had planned bombings and attacks in the region, he added.

Elsewhere, calm returned Wednesday to an area of Nuristan province in eastern Afghanistan where some 400 insurgents attacked police outposts a day earlier.

Mohammed Zareen, a spokesman for the Nuristan government, said violence ended late Tuesday after police sent 150 reinforcements to the area. He said that the militants had fired down from the mountains with rockets, mortars and heavy machine guns.

"It's not like a face to face gunbattle. They occupied some mountaintops and used heavy weapons," Zareen explained. He said four militants had been killed in Tuesday's firefight, but no police officers.

Meanwhile, NATO said a bomb killed a coalition service member in eastern Afghanistan on Tuesday. The military alliance did not provide further details on the deceased, in line with a policy of waiting for national authorities to release the information.