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The Associated Press

## US troop death tally of 63 makes for deadliest month in Afghanistan

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### Poppy-farming area of Marjah at hub of British and Afghan army move against Taliban

Kabul — Three US troops died in blasts in Afghanistan, bringing the military death toll for July to at least 63 and surpassing the previous month's record as the deadliest for American forces in the nearly nine-year-old war.

The three died in two blasts in southern Afghanistan the day before, a Nato statement said today. No names or nationalities were given, but US officials said the three were Americans.

US and Nato commanders had warned that casualties would rise as the international military force ramped up the war against the Taliban, especially in the organisation's southern strongholds in Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

President Barack Obama ordered 30,000 US reinforcements to Afghanistan last December in an effort to turn back the resurgent Taliban.

British and Afghan troops launched an offensive today in the Sayedebad area of Helmand to try to deny insurgents a base from which to launch attacks in Nad Ali and Marjah, the British military said. Coalition and Afghan troops have sought to solidify control of Marjah after overrunning the poppy-farming community five months ago.

In Kabul, a crowd threw stones and set fire to a 4x4 car after a traffic accident today in which two Afghans were killed and two were injured, according to a traffic official, Abdul Saboor. The vehicles are associated with foreigners. Saboor said people from the 4x4 fled the scene.

The tally of 63 American deaths in July is based on military reports compiled by Associated Press. June had been the deadliest month for both the US and the overall Nato-led force; last month 104 international service members died, including 60 Americans.

The American deaths this month include Petty Officer 2nd Class Justin McNeley, from Kingman, Arizona, and Petty Officer 3rd Class Jarod Newlove, 25, from the Seattle area. The sailors went missing last week in Logar province south of Kabul, and the Taliban announced they were holding one. McNeley's body was recovered there on Sunday, and Newlove's body was pulled from a river Wednesday evening, officials said. The Taliban offered no explanation for Newlove's death, but Afghan officials speculated that he had died of wounds when the pair were ambushed by the Taliban.

The discovery of Newlove's body deepened the mystery of the men's disappearance nearly 60 miles from their base in Kabul. US authorities remained at a loss to explain what two junior enlisted men in noncombat jobs were doing driving alone in Logar, much of which is not under government control. Senior military officials in Washington said the sailors had not been assigned anywhere near where their bodies were found.

Samer Gul, chief of Logar's Charkh district, said the sailors, in a four-wheel drive armored SUV, were seen on Friday a week ago, by a guard working for the district chief's office. The guard tried to flag down the vehicle, carrying a driver and a passenger, but it kept going, Gul said.