

Chopper downed; 2 die

Witnesses: Gunfire heard before crash

By NICK WAHDAMS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOSUL, Iraq

Insurgents apparently shot down a U.S. Army reconnaissance helicopter in this northern city Friday, killing its two pilots, in the second fatal helicopter crash in Iraq in less than a week.

One witness said he heard machine-gun fire before the helicopter crashed.

Children told soldiers that the sound of gunfire came from three or four directions and that the helicopter was flying erratically, possibly trying to evade it.

The helicopter looked like it crashed on a muddy plateau and then cartwheeled down a 25-foot embankment that was sloped at about a 45-degree angle. It came to rest near strewn garbage.



AP PHOTO

The crumpled wreckage of a U.S. military OH-58D Kiowa helicopter lies on its side Friday in Mosul, Iraq.

The helicopter's two pilots, the only people on board, were killed.

The pilot may have tried to land it in the dirt clearing, about 20 feet from some mud huts with clothes hanging along lines.

The crash came as Lt. Gen. John Vines, chief of the Multi-National Corps Iraq, predicted increased attacks around Iraq

when final election results are released next week.

At least 500 people and more than 50 U.S. troops have been killed since the Dec. 15 elections.

Vines, the second highest ranking general in Iraq, said from Baghdad's Camp Victory that there were indications the OH-58 Kiowa was shot down.

"The indicators are that it was due to hostile fire," he said.

The armed helicopter was on a combat air patrol just outside Forward Operating Base Courage when it went down in Mosul, 225 miles northwest of Baghdad, the military said.

The crash deaths bring to at least 2,214 U.S. service members killed in Iraq since the beginning of the war in 2003, according to an Associated Press count.

Layth Shems al-Din said he was working in his butcher shop when he heard shots that he recognized from his service in the Iraqi army as coming from a heavy machine gun.

Soldiers work to modify Humvees

By RYAN LENZ
AND JASON STRAZIUSO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TIKRIT, Iraq

Soldiers exposed to Iraq's increasingly lethal roadside bombs, which can rip through armored Humvees, are drawing on wartime experience and stateside expertise to protect their vehicles with stronger armor and thermal detection cameras.

The upgrades are being done by individual soldiers and units as the Pentagon decides how Humvees should be changed, and follow public criticism of the Bush

administration for not armoring all Humvees ahead of the war.

Nearly three years after rolling into Iraq in trucks covered in many instances only by canvas roofs, the 101st Airborne Division's 3rd Brigade is adding extra layers of armor to its Humvees.

Col. Michael Steele, the brigade's commander, said he ordered the improvements because the insurgents' roadside bombs, known to the military as improvised explosive devices, have become bigger and harder to detect.

"The responsibility of the commander is to figure out what we need to respond to this evolving

threat. The easiest, the fastest and most appropriate answer is add additional armor," Steele said.

Iraqi insurgents are also using more anti-tank mines and making bombs that can penetrate the Humvee's current armor. Among the more deadly devices are explosives shaped to funnel a blast through Humvee plating, sophisticated bombs that officials suspect are being imported from neighboring countries like Iran.

Because more armor won't always stop such explosives, a National Guard unit in Baghdad has added detection devices and other measures to protect its Humvees.

Man accused of spying said he never had names

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS

A truck driver charged with trying to sell the names of U.S. operatives in Iraq to Saddam Hussein's government told an undercover FBI agent in tape recordings played in federal court that he never had the information.

The recordings played Thursday showed that Shaaban Hafiz Ahmad Ali Shaaban was immediately suspicious when the agent arrived at his home in Indianapolis in the fall of 2004, nearly two years after prosecutors say Shaaban went to Iraq.

Shaaban politely turned the Arabic-speaking agent away after he would not name the Syrian official who had supposedly sent him.

The agent returned about two weeks later and Shaaban told him he hadn't seen the CDs with information he was to receive from a Russian contact.



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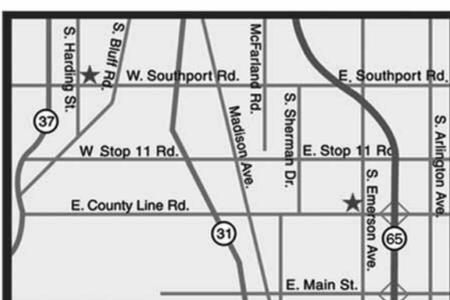
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