

OKC soldier killed in bombing in Iraq

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — An Oklahoma City soldier who was killed in an insurgency attack in Iraq this week was a happy, giving young man, family members and friends said Friday.

Spc. Sonny Gene Sampler, 23, was one of five U.S. soldiers who died Thursday at a military headquarters in Samarra, Iraq, when insurgents detonated a car bomb and fired mortars at the building.

Rellon "Skeeter" Sampler said the family learned of his

younger brother's death Thursday afternoon.

"He was a first-class kid," Skeeter Sampler said. "He'd do anything for you. He always had a smile on his face."

Sonny Sampler grew up in Altus and moved to Oklahoma City with his family. He attended John Marshall High School before getting his GED.

In 2001 he joined the Army, which his friend Dylan Toombs said Sampler saw as a way to better himself.

"He wanted to kind of make

something of himself and have a direction in life," Toombs said.

"He thought when he came out of the military he would have a pretty straight head on him."

But Toombs said the main reason Sonny Sampler gave for joining the Army was so he could save money and help his family.

Skeeter Sampler said the last time he talked to his brother, Sonny Sampler said he was looking forward to coming

home for two weeks of leave beginning Aug. 1.

Toombs said he spoke to Sonny Sampler two weeks ago.

"He was pretty much just telling me what was going on where he was staying," he said. "I didn't like talking to him much about that kind of stuff."

"You don't want to talk to him very much in that situation because you don't want to make too many promises," Toombs said. "You never know what is going to happen next."

Detainees to be notified of rights

By ROBERT BURNS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — All 594 terrorist suspects held at the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, will be notified next week of their right to contest their detention in U.S. federal court and of their option to appear before a military panel to challenge their status as an "enemy combatant."

Gordon England, the Navy secretary who is overseeing the process at Guantanamo Bay, told a Pentagon news conference Friday that he chose James McGarrah, a rear admiral in the Navy Reserve, to be the "convening authority" who will select the panel members, whom he called a "neutral party."

The Pentagon had announced Wednesday that Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz had ordered that all Guantanamo Bay detainees be notified within 10 days of their opportunity to appear before the panels.

The purpose of the panels is limited to determining whether a detainee is properly classified as an "enemy combatant." If not, then the detainee would be released to his home country, England said.

The Pentagon hastily added the panel process this week in response to last week's Supreme Court decisions that said all such detainees have a right to contest their case in a civilian court.

Afghanistan presidential election set for October

By STEPHEN GRAHAM
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan's oft-delayed presidential election will take place Oct. 9, its top electoral official said Friday, but a parliamentary vote scheduled to be held simultaneously was put off until the spring.

The vote is seen as a referendum on the rebuilding of this war-ravaged nation and a test of the ability of Afghan and international forces to keep the peace. It will be the first direct election for president in the country's history.

Zakim Shah, head of the joint Afghan-U.N. electoral commission, announced on state television that the body "decided to hold the presidential election on Mizan 18" — a date in Afghanistan's calendar that corresponds to Oct. 9.

He said the parliamentary vote would likely be in April or May, and appealed to Afghan authorities and the international community to do more to improve security "to create a more secure atmosphere for the candidates and the voters."

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher welcomed the decision. "We think that the elections will mark another major step in Afghanistan's transition to a constitutional and representative government and constitute another milestone," he said.

"We join the Afghan government in fully supporting the electoral body's decision, and we'll do our part to assist these historic elections," he added.

He said the United States was providing funds, training and expertise as well as security.

DAILY U.S. CASUALTIES

ASSOCIATED PRESS

As of Friday, July 9, 875 U.S. service members have died since the beginning of military operations in Iraq last year, according to the Defense Department. Of those, 651 died as a result of hostile action and 224 died of nonhostile causes.

The British military has reported 59 deaths: Italy, 18; Spain, eight; Bulgaria and Poland, six each; Ukraine, four; Slovakia, three; Thailand, two; Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and the Netherlands have reported one each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 737 U.S. soldiers have died — 542 as a result of hostile action and 195 of nonhostile causes. The latest deaths reported by military:

► A soldier died Thursday in a nonhostile incident.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

► Army Pvt. 1st Class Samuel R. Bowen, 38, Cleveland; died Wednesday in Samarra, Iraq, when a rocket-propelled grenade exploded near his vehicle; assigned to the Army National Guard's 216th Engineer Battalion; Akron, Ohio.

► Marine Lance Cpl. Scott E. Dougherty, 20, Bradenton, Fla., and Marine Pfc. Rodricka A. Youmans, 22, Allendale, S.C., killed Tuesday in Iraq's Anbar province; assigned to 2nd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force; Camp Lejeune, N.C.

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