

Earlier Wednesday, a NATO helicopter providing support to British troops in southern Afghanistan was shot down by Taliban gunners, and military officials said all four American crewmen aboard were killed.

The deaths brought the number of American service members killed in Afghanistan to at least 19 this month, according to [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org), a nongovernmental Web site that tracks war fatalities in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The helicopter was helping protect British ground forces during a clearing operation in the Sangin district of Helmand Province, according to Daoud Ahmadi, a spokesman for the governor's office in Helmand.

A spokesman for the United States military, Lt. Col. Joseph T. Breasseale, confirmed that all four victims on the helicopter were American soldiers, but he declined to identify them or give further details pending notification of next of kin.

A spokesman for the Taliban in southern Afghanistan, Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, reached by telephone, said the insurgents shot down the helicopter over the Sangin district bazaar using a rocket-propelled grenade launcher.