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Two Canadian soldiers charged with assault in Cyprus

Linda Nguyen and Bal Brach, Canwest News Service

Two Canadian soldiers have been charged with assault following an incident in Cyprus over the weekend.

Canadian Forces spokeswoman Lieut. Isabelle Riche told Canwest News Service Tuesday that Cypriot police charged two soldiers following an incident in the city of Paphos Saturday.

"It was a civilian issue, involving a civilian local citizen in Cyprus," she said. "The manner is being handled in civilian court."

Lieut. Riche said the two soldiers appeared in court Tuesday with their own counsel. They are both scheduled for a hearing Wednesday.

A local newspaper, the Cyprus Sunday Mail, identified the man allegedly assaulted by the soldiers as British expatriate James Sandford, 32.

Mr. Sandford told the newspaper the incident involved his wife.

He told the newspaper one of the soldiers hit him in the head with a bottle which he said required stitches.

Lieut. Riche refused to reveal any details surrounding the incident or the identities of the two soldiers.

She did say that the two were on the island for a decompression program. They had just finished a six-month tour of Afghanistan, Lieut. Riche said.

Soldiers finishing off their tours of duty usually attend a decompression program -- lasting a few days -- before returning home to Canada.

"What I can tell you is that our CF (Canadian Forces) members are highly trained professionals who are respectful and grateful for the opportunity to be in Cyprus for a short stay before returning to their families in Canada," she said.

Since last year, more than 2,200 Canadian soldiers have gone through Cyprus for the program.

Lieut. Riche stressed that this was a rare occurrence.

"Despite the number of military personnel who have visited Cyprus, there have been no similar incidents reported to the authorities involving the public in Cyprus," she said.

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