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Soldiers and pilot recognized for valour for actions in Afghanistan

By: The Canadian Press

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Governor General David Johnston presents the medal of Military Valour to Captain William Todd Fielding of Niagara Falls, Ont., during a ceremony at Rideau Hall in Ottawa on Thursday, January 26, 2012. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

OTTAWA - It was one of those heart-stopping moments every pilot who flew in Afghanistan feared — the dull thud of rounds hitting the helicopter and the smell of smoke.

But for Capt. William Todd Fielding, it wasn't some abstract concern and on Thursday he was awarded the country's third highest valour decoration for what he did in the critical moments after the Taliban sprayed his CH-147 Chinook with gunfire.

Fielding was among seven members of the Canadian Forces to receive the Medal of Military Valour from Governor General David Johnston in a ceremony at Rideau Hall.

His helicopter was hit in the fuel tank and immediately caught fire as it took off from a forward position in the volatile Panjwai district, west of Kandahar city on Aug. 5, 2010.

The native of Niagara Falls, Ont., managed to land the burning chopper in the middle of insurgent controlled territory and get everyone off safely without any casualties.

The other recipients were soldiers and included Master-Cpl. Adam Holmes, Master-Cpl. Gilles-Remi Mikkelson, Pte. Philip Millar, Master-Cpl. Paul Mitchell, Pte. John Nelson, and Sgt. Graham Verrier.

Holmes was recognized for actions that took place in Panjwai that same brutal summer of 2010, when

the 1st Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment battle group was locked in a series of bloody fights with Taliban insurgents and foreign fighters.

A native of Kapuskasing, Ont., Holmes repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire and single-handedly turned back a group of insurgents who had come within 50 metres of his unit's position.

Both Mikkelson, Millar and Nelson were praised separately for delivering life-saving first aid treatment to wounded soldiers under fire.

Mitchell and Verrier were recognized for holding their ground under fire and inspiring other soldiers in separate battles in 2010.

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