

11 Philippine soldiers killed in 'friendly fire' by its air force

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11 Philippine soldiers were killed and seven others wounded on Wednesday after a bomb dropped by their air force hit army troops locked in close-range combat with the extremists who have taken cover in buildings and houses.

The Marchetti S-211 jet was dropping bombs on Islamic extremists and the plane had made three successful bombing runs before dropping the wayward bomb.

According to Philippine military spokesman Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla, the military has ordered an investigation of the friendly fire, which reflects the difficulty faced by government forces to contain the insurrection despite their overwhelming number and firepower.

“Despite the stringent procedure followed, there happens even with the best of armed forces, a case of friendly fire hitting our own troops,” Padilla told The Associated Press.

Military chief of staff Gen. Eduardo Ano has ordered an investigation partly to prevent another incident, Padilla said, as government forces, backed by more than 30 assault aircraft, continue to advance toward the remaining positions of the militants, 89 of whom have been killed in the intense fighting with several others surrendering and now providing intelligence to the military.

At least 25 soldiers and five policemen have been killed in clashes.

- (With AP inputs)