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BAGHDAD (AP) -- An al-Qaeda-linked group claimed Tuesday that it used "new methods" in staging a double suicide bombing with dump trucks that blasted a paratrooper outpost in volatile Diyala province, killing nine Americans from the 82nd Airborne Division and wounding 20.

The attack underscored the ability of guerrillas of the Sunni Arab-dominated insurgency to wage war in Iraq four years after the U.S.-led invasion, and it came in a region that has seen violence escalate since U.S. and Iraqi troops launched the security crackdown in Baghdad.

The first truck hit outlying concrete barriers surrounding the outpost at Sadah and exploded after soldiers opened fire. A second truck rammed into the wrecked vehicles, dragging it and other rubble before it exploded 30 yards from the building housing the post's troops, said Lt. Col. Michael Donnelly, U.S. military spokesman in north Iraq.

Neither vehicle penetrated the patrol base's inner perimeter, but the second powerful blast ruptured the wall of the building, collapsing its second floor and causing most of the soldier casualties, a U.S. military statement said Wednesday. A civilian house was destroyed and several smaller structures collapsed in a nearby neighborhood, the military said. A civilian hospital and a mosque about 200 yards from the patrol base also were damaged.

All the casualties were in the 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, which has been conducting operations in largely impoverished villages in the area as part of a security push to tame insurgent activity in Diyala.

The deaths made April the deadliest month of the year for the U.S. military. It was also the single deadliest attack on U.S. ground forces since Dec. 1, 2005, when 10 Marines

were killed by a bomb inside an abandoned flour mill near Fallujah. "We are recovering, supporting the families during this time of loss, praying for them and continuing our mission," Donnelly told The Associated Press in telephone interview. "The enemy brings nothing to benefit the people ó nothing."

The attack at Sadah inflicted the biggest loss on the 82nd Airborne since June 1969, when 12 paratroopers were ambushed and killed in Vietnam, a spokesman, Maj. Tom Earnhardt, said at the division's base at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Donnelly said the patrol base was set up less than a month ago after an operation that sought to drive militants from the area. Sadah, a rural Sunni town of about 7,000 people near the capital of Diyala province, Baqouba, has been an al-Qaeda stronghold.

The Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella group of Sunni militants that includes al-Qaeda in Iraq, said it was behind the suicide attack. Its account on the Internet was similar to that of the U.S. military, but claimed it used new techniques.

"Almighty God has guided the soldiers of the Islamic State of Iraq to new methods of explosions," the statement said without elaborating, while claiming 30 Americans died.

Lt. Col. Christopher Garver, a U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad, said the style of the attack fit the pattern of al-Qaeda but he said an investigation was under way into who was to blame and exactly what happened.

When asked about the "new methods" claimed by the group, he said the military was on heightened alert for dump trucks as they had been used in several recent high-profile attacks.

"The use of dump trucks seems to be a recurring theme recently in the last few weeks," he said.

He said the military had foiled several attempts to use the large vehicles, mentioning the discovery earlier this month of a dump truck filled with barrels of gasoline that overturned north of Baghdad.

Michael O'Hanlon, a military analyst at the Brookings Institution, said he didn't think the attack demonstrated a particular new technology, adding that securing remote bases in Iraq has always been difficult for U.S. troops.

"Small arms fire followed by two truck bombs is not new, it's just effective use of time-tested tactics," he said in an e-mail message.

American troops are facing increasing danger as they step up their presence in outposts and police stations in Baghdad and areas surrounding the city, as part of the security crackdown to which President Bush has committed an additional 30,000 soldiers and Marines.

"The new counterinsurgency strategy takes U.S. forces out of relatively safe positions and exposes them," said Anthony Cordesman, an Iraq watcher at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"It simultaneously gives any hostile faction in their area of operation greater incentives to attack them, while making them more dependent on the Iraqi army and police, and local support, to avoid infiltration and spying that can lead to more effective attacks.

Sunni militants are believed to have moved out of the capital to seek haven in nearby areas like Diyala. The U.S. command deployed an extra 700 soldiers to Diyala last month.

The military, meanwhile, reported a Marine killed Monday in the insurgent stronghold of Anbar province, west of Baghdad. That was in addition to a U.S. soldier reported killed the same day in a roadside bombing in Diyala, raising to 86 the number of American troops killed this month.

In other violence, 83 Iraqis were killed or found dead around Iraq. ____

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