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2 Iraq hostages' bodies found; other families fear worst

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BAGHDAD — U.S. authorities have recovered the remains of two American contractors who were kidnapped separately in predominantly Shiite Muslim southern Iraq more than a year ago, the FBI announced Monday.

They were Ronald J. Withrow, a computer specialist of Roaring Springs, Texas, and John Roy Young, a security contractor from Kansas City, Mo.

There was no word about the fate of four other Western hostages believed to be held by the same militant group.

Earlier this month, U.S. officials confirmed that five severed fingers delivered to authorities in Baghdad belonged to Withrow, three other American hostages and an Austrian. Of the six hostages, Young was the only one whose finger hadn't been sent.

Grieving families of the hostages said they feared the worst after receiving news of the mutilations.

"When they said 'five fingers,' I said 'five bodies,'" Sharon DeBrabander, Young's mother, said in a telephone interview from her home in Kansas City. "It's heartbreaking for them to keep the boys this long and then do this. We don't know about the others, but we know John and Ron are dead."

Withrow worked for JPI Worldwide, a Las Vegas-based company that provides Internet service in conflict zones. He was kidnapped at a phony checkpoint near the Iraqi port city of Basra on Jan. 5, 2007. The bodies of his Iraqi translator and driver were discovered the next day.

Young worked for the Kuwait-based Crescent Security firm when a convoy he led was ambushed on Nov. 16, 2006, near the southern Iraqi border town of Safwan. He was seized along with four of his co-workers, all of whom are still missing: Jonathon Cote, of Gainesville, Fla.; Joshua Munns, of Redding, Calif.; Paul Johnson Reuben, of Buffalo, Minn.; and Bert Nussbaumer of Vienna, Austria.

Speaking in a pained and weak voice, DeBrabander said the FBI told her that the bodies of her son, Young, and Withrow had arrived in the United States and would undergo examination before being released. She said she planned to fly to Minneapolis on Wednesday for a meeting with the families of the other abducted contractors.

Relatives of the hostages who are still missing extended sympathy to the families of Young and Withrow on Monday. They also awaited news of their own missing sons, brothers and husbands, fearing the same gruesome culmination.

"We're all in the same boat," said Patrick Reuben, a Minneapolis police officer and the twin brother of Paul Reuben. "We're just waiting."

Francis Cote, the father of hostage Jonathon Cote, wrote on his blog Monday that the FBI had first alerted his family about the discovery of two bodies on Friday. He said the remains had been found

in the Basra area and were unidentified at that time. They were flown to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware for autopsies.

The FBI contacted the family again on Sunday and identified the dead men as Young and Withrow, Francis Cote wrote.

"Our hearts go out to the families that have lost their loved one and (we) have contacted them to express our condolence," Francis Cote wrote on his blog, www.freecote.com. "Other families are now uncomfortably awaiting word on any new development."

The Crescent contractors appeared in two hostage videos released in December 2006 and January 2007 in which they pleaded for the United States to withdraw troops from Iraq and to free all Iraqi prisoners. In the videos, they appeared in good condition and stated that they were being treated well.

No financial demand has been made public, and it's unclear what group is behind the hostage-taking. All of the contractors were seized near Basra, an area swarming with powerful Iranian-backed Shiite Muslim militias.

ON THE WEB

Hear the [hostages speak on tape](#) in January 2007.