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Bodies found in Iraq await ID

Sun staff and wire report

WASHINGTON (AP) — Authorities are awaiting identification of the remains of three bodies in Iraq, a U.S. law enforcement official said Tuesday, a day after the remains of two kidnapped contractors were identified.

Four other kidnapped Western contractors have been missing for more than a year, including Jonathon Cote, a former University of Florida student from the Buffalo, N.Y., area. The disappearances received new attention this month when the severed fingers of Cote and other kidnapped contractors were sent to the U.S. military in Iraq.

Several relatives, including Cote's father, Francis Cote, also of the Buffalo area, had taken the discovery of the fingers as a hopeful sign.

But hopes dimmed Monday when the FBI said the remains of Ronald Withrow of Roaring Springs, Texas, and John Roy Young of Kansas City, Mo., had been identified.

Young was captured along with Cote in November 2006.

A U.S. law enforcement official, speaking on condition of anonymity because the identification process is ongoing, confirmed that three other bodies are awaiting testing.

In addition to Cote, Paul Reuben of Minneapolis; Joshua Munns of Redding, Calif.; and Bert Nussbaumer of Vienna, Austria, remain missing.

A finger from each was received by the military recently.

Francis Cote said he remains hopeful his son is alive, and said he hopes his son's friends in Gainesville keep him in their thoughts.

"Their continued prayer and support is greatly appreciated," he said. Francis Cote also said he would post frequent updates on freecote.com, a Web site devoted to news about his son.

Munns' mother says she has lost hope that her son is alive after hearing from the FBI that the remains of Withrow and Young had been identified.

"I think at this point, because they already killed the others, (he) is going to be probably dead as well, that's just a mom's intuition," said Jackie Stewart, a resident of Ridgefield, Wash.

Stewart, 45, hopes some good can come out of the story of her son's ordeal. "I was never seeking media attention, but if (it helps) somebody else get their kids back, and get this war over with," she said she

would gladly “stand in the limelight.”

Reuben’s family said they were still holding out hope that he is still alive.

“We’re still just praying for everyone involved,” said Patrick Reuben, the missing contractor’s twin brother.

Patrick Reuben’s wife, Jennifer Reuben, added that there are many hostages, and the three additional bodies could be the remains of any of those who have been captured.

She said even if the bodies end up being the remains of the contractors, the fate of a sixth contractor is still unknown.

“This is just really terrible,” she said.

The family will hold out hope for Reuben until they learn otherwise, Jennifer Reuben said.

“How can you not?” she said.

Sun staff writer Amy Reinink and Associated Press writers Amy Forliti from Minneapolis and Manuel Valdes from Seattle contributed to this report.

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