

# Fingers of hostages turn up in Baghdad

By HANNAH ALLAM

MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

BAGHDAD — U.S. authorities in Baghdad have received five severed fingers belonging to four Americans and an Austrian who were taken hostage more than a year ago in Iraq, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

The FBI is investigating the grisly development, and the families of the five kidnapped contractors have been notified, American officials said on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the case publicly.

Authorities confirmed that the fingers belonged to hostages Jonathan Cote of Gainesville; Joshua Munns of Redding, Calif.; Paul Johnson Reuben of Buffalo, Minn.; Bert Nussbaumer of Vienna, Austria; and Ronald J. Withrow, an American who was kidnapped separately from the others.

The first four men were security contractors with Kuwait-based Crescent Security and were captured in a brazen ambush of their 43-truck supply convoy in the southern Iraqi town of Safwan, near the Kuwaiti border, Nov. 16, 2006.

There was no word on a fifth contractor who was seized with them, John Young of Kansas City.

"The government is in touch with us, but they said nothing has been verified yet," said Sharon DeBrabander, Young's mother. "I certainly don't understand why my son's [finger] wasn't found. What does that mean?"

Withrow, a computer specialist who worked for JPI Worldwide, was kidnapped separately at a phony checkpoint near the southern Iraqi city of Basra on Jan. 5, 2007, according to news reports. The bodies of his Iraqi translator and driver were discovered the next day. His employer is a Las Vegas-based company that provides Internet and technological support to remote or war-torn areas around the globe, according to the company's Web site.

The Austrian weekly magazine *News* first reported the delivery of the five fingers in Wednesday's edition, citing unnamed authorities working on the case.

"All we have right now is prayers," said Mark Munns, the father of former Marine Joshua Munns, 25, who has spent his past two birthdays in captivity. "I don't know how to make head or tails of what's going on. Are they still alive? A whole bunch of stuff goes through your head."

## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **A U.S. military spokesman** said three American soldiers were killed in a rocket attack on their combat outpost south of Baghdad on Wednesday. Twelve U.S. troops have been killed in three days.

■ **Fewer Americans know** how many U.S. troops have died in the war in Iraq, even as public attention to the conflict has gradually diminished, a poll showed Wednesday. Only 28 percent correctly said about 4,000 Americans have died in the war, according to the nonpartisan Pew Research Center. Last August, 54 percent gave the accurate casualty figure.

■ **Turkey's prime minister** plans to travel this weekend to the country's poor southeast, in an apparent effort to address the concerns of the Kurds, two weeks after the Turkish military ended a ground operation against Kurdish rebels based in Iraq.

— COMPILED FROM WIRE REPORTS

## NAMES OF THE DEAD

The Department of Defense has identified 3,975 American service members who have died since the start of the Iraq war and 418 in and around Afghanistan. The latest name released by the military:

■ Army Sgt. Gabriel Guzman, 25, Hornbrook, Calif.; 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C. (Afghanistan).