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Captives' fingers sent to U.S. army in Iraq

Gruesome delivery gives hope that 5 kidnapped contractors may be alive

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Severed fingers of five Western workers were sent to the U.S. military in Iraq, giving the men's relatives hope they're still alive.

The men were abducted in late 2006 and early 2007, a U.S. official said yesterday in Washington.

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

Patrick Reuben, whose twin brother, Paul Reuben, is among the missing, said Wednesday the FBI told his family members that "the fingers were confirmed to be those of the hostages."

Patrick Reuben said the news of the severed fingers was "shocking," but that the initial word the family got was "much more serious than that."

Jackie Stewart learned from a reporter that her son's finger had been cut off, and the FBI later confirmed it to her, she said.

"The fact that my son lost a finger is very disturbing," said Stewart, the mother of Joshua Munns.

"But if they haven't killed him now, I seriously doubt they will, unless something tragic happens, something devastating."

In a statement, the FBI declined to confirm the men had been identified by fingers.

"The FBI has received DNA evidence and is conducting an examination," said spokesperson Richard Kolko. "We understand this is a very difficult time for the families and discussing this matter further in the media is not appropriate."



AP PHOTO VIA AP TELEVISION

Paul Reuben, shown here in a video dated in December 2006, is one of five men kidnapped by Iraqi gunmen in November 2006 and January 2007.

Four of the men were guards for a convoy ambushed near the Kuwaiti border on Nov. 16, 2006. The fifth, Ronald Withrow, 40, of Lubbock, Texas, was a contractor and was abducted on Jan. 5, 2007 near Basra.

In addition to Reuben, those abducted in 2006 were Jonathon Cote, 25, of Getzville, N.Y.; Munns, 25, of Redding, Calif.; and Bert Nussbaumer, 26, of Austria.

They were working for a Kuwait-based private security company.

A fifth hostage taken in the Nov. 16, 2006, ambush was John Young, 45, of Lee's Summit, Mo. None of his fingers was sent to U.S. officials.

Meanwhile, the body of a Chaldean Catholic archbishop was found in a shallow grave in northern Iraq yesterday, two weeks after he was kidnapped by gunmen.

Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, 65, was seized on Feb. 29, after he delivered a mass in Mosul. Three of Rahho's companions were killed.

No one has claimed responsibility for Rahho's kidnapping or death.

It was not immediately clear if Rahho was killed or if he died of an illness.

A Mosul morgue official said the body had no bullet holes.

Also yesterday, a parked car bomb exploded in a commercial district of central Baghdad, killing 18 people and wounding dozens more. Gunmen also killed five members of an anti-Al Qaeda group near Tikrit, and a correspondent for a newspaper in Baghdad.