

U.S. continues search for soldiers missing since May

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Stars and Stripes

PATROL BASE DRAGON, Iraq — U.S. forces continued their search Sunday for the possible remains of two soldiers missing since May 12.

Search dogs and imaging equipment roamed over the rocks and sand pits lining the farming village of Owesat, which lies along the Euphrates River, about 15 miles southwest of Baghdad.

The search began Friday as part of Operation Marne Courageous, when a 23-year-old woman who had been imprisoned and tortured by her brother implicated him in the two soldiers' abductions.

She led soldiers to a wide swath of sand one-quarter from her house, where soldiers began digging.

Her brother, Ibrahim Abid Aboud al-Janabi, remains in U.S. custody as a suspect.

The operation began Friday, when air assaults landed soldiers from the 3rd battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division in Owesat at 4 a.m.

"We're very satisfied with the operation so far," Task Force 3-187 executive officer Maj. Will Beck said Sunday. "Some of the intelligence we gathered pointed to many locations (for the missing soldiers), Owesat being one of them. What we've found has definitely justified the resources committed to the operation."

Spc. Alex R. Jimenez and Pvt. Byron W. Fouty, both of the 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, were abducted after an ambush on an observation post near Yusufiyah this spring. The body of a third soldier, Pfc. Joseph Anzack Jr., who was also abducted May 12, was found in the Euphrates River on May 23.

There is a 252 million dinar (about \$200,000) reward for anyone who leads soldiers to Jimenez and Fouty, U.S. officials said.

The woman is a "wealth of information" and being held in protective custody, a military intelligence official said. She has identified multiple high-value targets and led soldiers to roadside bombs planted in Owesat.

Soldiers have detained seven men suspected of insurgent activities, Beck said Sunday.

There were two initial casualty reports Sunday.

Initial reports indicated two soldiers were injured when an AK-47 magazine on the ground attached to homemade explosives exploded. The soldiers were evacuated to an area military hospital. Both broke bones but did not appear to have life-threatening injuries, according to reports.

Meanwhile, soldiers have found two suicide belts rigged to explode and another one without a fuse since Friday, Beck said. They also found a PKC heavy machine gun, bombs, bomb-making tools and suspicious communications equipment, he said.

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