The body of a missing U.S. commando has been located in eastern Afghanistan, bringing an end to the desperate search for the last member of an ill-fated, four-man special forces unit that disappeared last month. Twelve other Afghan soldiers were killed Sunday when a land mine blew up under their vehicle in Paktika province, also near the border with Pakistan.

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One of the four men was rescued on July 3; the other two were found dead the next day.

The body of the fourth U.S. Navy SEAL was found Sunday in Kunar province by a search and rescue team, the military said in a statement. It said all indications are that he died in fighting, despite a claim by Mullah Latif Hakimi, a purported Taliban spokesman, that he was captured alive and beheaded.

"The location and disposition of the service member's remains indicate he died while fighting off enemy terrorists on or about June 28," the statement said.

U.S. military spokesman Col. James Yonts repeatedly denied Hakimi's claims.

"There have been claims of being dropped on a mountain wearing red clothes, there have been claims of being beheaded," he said. But "there was no indication supporting the claims. ... This individual was never in custody, he was never defamed or disgraced."

Hakimi never offered proof to back up his claim that the rebels were holding the commando, or that they had killed him. Information from Hakimi in the past has sometimes proven exaggerated or untrue, and his exact tie to the Taliban leadership cannot be independently verified.

The Navy SEAL team went missing after a special forces helicopter carrying reinforcements to a mountainous area in eastern Kunar province was shot down on June 28, killing all 16 Americans on board, the deadliest single attack on the U.S. military since the war here began in 2001.

Yonts said the commando's body was found near the chopper crash site in an area "that we had looked over before, but where his body was located was hard to find."

The name of the commando was not immediately released, pending notification of family.

Kunar province has long been a hotbed of militant activity and a haven for fighters loyal to renegade former premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who is wanted by the United States. U.S. officials said al-Qaida fighters also were in the region. Osama bin Laden was not said to be there _ though he is believed to be somewhere along the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier.

The region's wooded mountains are popular with militants because they are easy to infiltrate from neighboring Pakistan and have plenty of places to hide.

Meanwhile, suspected Taliban gunmen ambushed a border patrol in the desert near the frontier with Pakistan, killing and beheading 10 Afghan soldiers, a provincial governor said Sunday. Violence elsewhere left 15 rebels and soldiers dead.

The 25-member patrol was attacked Saturday in southern Helmand province by militants driving four four-wheel-drive pickups, said provincial Gov. Sher Mohammed Aghunzada.

The insurgents killed 10 soldiers; 15 fled the ambush. Aghunzada said.

"The Taliban cut the heads off all the soldiers who were killed," he said. Aghunzada said the dead soldiers' bodies had been recovered.

He said the assailants launched the assault after driving across the border from Pakistan and returned across the frontier. The border is unguarded in that remote area.

Twelve other Afghan soldiers were killed Sunday when a land mine blew up under their vehicle in Paktika province, also near the border with Pakistan, provincial deputy police chief Ghulam Nabi said.

He said it wasn't clear if the mine was one of hundreds of thousands of old mines left over from a quarter century of fighting, or had been newly planted.


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