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Hussein's Two Sons Killed In Firefight With U.S. Troops

Tip Led Soldiers to Raid Northern Iraq Mansion

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MOSUL, Iraq, July 22 -- The two sons of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein were killed today during a lengthy and intense gun battle with U.S. soldiers who raided an opulent stone mansion after receiving a tip from an informant, the top U.S. military commander in Iraq said.

Qusay Hussein, 37, the onetime heir apparent who led Iraq's elite Special Republican Guard military force, and Uday Hussein, 39, a playboy and publisher who commanded the Saddam's Fedayeen militia, died during a military operation in Mosul, about 220 miles north of Baghdad.

"We are certain that Uday and Qusay were killed today," Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez said at a late-night news conference in Baghdad. He said the bodies, which were "in a condition where you could identify them," were confirmed by "multiple sources" to be the former president's two sons.

The deaths of Hussein's sons, who earned a reputation for brutality in both their official and personal lives, could have a major impact on efforts to squelch attacks against U.S.-led occupation forces in Iraq and could also help narrow the search for the former president, military officials and analysts said.

In the latest attack on U.S. troops, one soldier was killed and another wounded in an ambush today on a road northwest of Baghdad, in an area dominated by the minority Sunni Muslims from whom Hussein drew much of his support. A Sri Lankan Red Cross technician was killed in a separate incident near the town of Hilla in central Iraq.

Although U.S. military officials said the brothers' deaths could result in an immediate wave of retribution attacks, they contended that the elimination of two such prominent figures in Hussein's hierarchy would demoralize many former soldiers, Baath Party militiamen and other paramilitary fighters who have carried out recent resistance attacks out of loyalty to the former president and his family.

"This will prove to the Iraqi people that at least these two members of the regime will not be coming back into power, which is what we've stated over and over again," Sanchez said.

L. Paul Bremer, the U.S. civil administrator of Iraq, called the deaths "good news for the Iraqi people." The White House, in a statement, lauded the military action and said that Hussein's sons "can no longer cast a shadow of hate on Iraq." British Prime Minister Tony Blair hailed the deaths as "a great day for a new Iraq."

Sanchez said a "walk-in" informer provided U.S. forces with information on Monday night about the whereabouts of the two men, who ranked immediately behind their father atop the U.S. military's list of most-wanted Iraqis. The general said the U.S. government probably would pay the informer a \$15 million reward that had been promised for information leading to the capture or death of each of Hussein's sons.

As preliminary reports of the deaths were broadcast on Arabic-language satellite television stations, thousands of Baghdad residents poured out of their homes to dance, shout and fire AK-47 assault rifles into the air. Red tracer rounds arced across the night sky, and horns blared on the capital's streets.

"We are really happy because now we can say for sure that we have gotten rid of the old regime," said Ibrahim Ali, 26, a student who ran into a street in eastern Baghdad with his rifle. "I don't believe that Saddam Hussein will be a danger anymore without Uday and Qusay."

Qusay Hussein was in charge of Iraq's most elite security services, heading the Special Security Organization service and the National Security Council in addition to the Special Republican Guard. Quiet and reclusive, he was widely regarded as his father's successor before Saddam Hussein's government was ousted.

Uday was his brother's opposite. Flamboyant and reckless, he was the heir apparent until he murdered one of Hussein's bodyguards at a party. He collected luxury cars by the hundreds and reportedly ordered his guards to snatch young women off the street so that he could rape them. In addition to controlling Saddam's Fedayeen, he published the country's most popular newspaper, ran a youth-oriented television station and was chairman of the country's Olympic committee, whose offices housed his personal jail and torture chamber.

The raid that claimed the brothers' lives began at about 10 a.m., when soldiers from the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division, which is responsible for a swath of Iraq that includes Mosul, swooped in on the three-story house in the city's northern Falah neighborhood. The uniformed soldiers, driving Humvees equipped with .50-caliber machine guns and vehicles mounted with Avenger missiles, were accompanied by members of Task Force 20, a combination of Special Operations forces and CIA operatives assigned to search for top leaders of Hussein's government, a senior defense official in Washington said.

Brig. Gen. Frank Helmick, the assistant commander of 101st Airborne, said the military had received intelligence reports that suggested "high-value targets" were inside the house, a gaudy stone edifice with tall, Greek-style columns in the front. Sanchez did not describe the tipster or identify the person's relationship with Hussein's sons.



Neighbors identified the owner of the house as Nawaf Zaidan, a businessman who boasted of being related to Hussein and a member of the former president's Abu Nasr tribe.

The senior defense official said early indications suggested that the two sons had been living in the house "for some time." Shahr Khazraji, 31, who lives across the street, said Zaidan told one of his neighbors that Qusay, Uday, one of Hussein's bodyguards and Qusay's son Mustafa, 14, had been in the house for 23 days.

Khazraji said he saw Zaidan leave the house with his family around 6 a.m. and return at about 9 with just his 19-year-old son. At around 9 a.m., Khazraji said, a small group of U.S. soldiers came to the front door and demanded to search the house.

Zaidan refused. A short while later, Khazraji said, Zaidan and his son were taken by the soldiers to a nearby house and told to wait there. Khazraji said he was told by the owner of the second house that Zaidan told the soldiers they could not search the premises, telling them, "I can't let you into my house because I have an important official of the government in there."

An Arabic-speaking soldier subsequently used a megaphone to order the occupants to leave, neighbors said. Helmick said his soldiers were fired upon from inside the house. Khazraji and other residents said U.S. soldiers shot first.

The exchange quickly escalated into an all-out firefight involving automatic weapons, rockets and rocket-propelled grenades. Witnesses said bullets whizzed across the street, and tonight Khazraji's house was pocked with bullet holes and .50-caliber shell casings still littered the street. Soldiers later said that up to 200 troops participated in the raid and that TOW missiles were fired at the house.

As the fire from inside the house died down, the soldiers eventually fought their way in. When they reached the second floor, they found it fortified with bulletproof glass and barricades, leading commanders to summon two OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopters. The helicopters fired 2.75-inch rockets and at least one missile at the upper floors of the house, sparking a fire that eviscerated much of the structure.

Helmick said his soldiers entered the house at 1 p.m. and recovered four bodies. "They came out dead," he said.

According to a senior administration official in Washington, the Hussein brothers' remains were identified by Abid Hamid Mahmud Tikriti, Hussein's presidential secretary and top security adviser, who was captured on June 16 and remains under interrogation. The other two bodies reportedly were those of Qusay's son and the bodyguard.

The house is located on an eight-lane road in a crowded residential and commercial neighborhood. There is a large mosque across the street, about 150 yards from the house.

Helmick said he had AH-64 Apache attack helicopters and other heavy arms at the ready, but "we did not use them on purpose. We took extra caution and special care to focus on precision gunning on this building."

Four U.S. soldiers were wounded in the raid, according to U.S. Central Command in Florida.

Chandrasekaran reported from Baghdad. Staff writers Bradley Graham and Dana Priest in Washington contributed to this report.