

IRAQI LAWYER WHO HELPED SAVE JESSICA LYNCH GRANTED ASYLUM

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WASHINGTON - The Iraqi lawyer who led U.S. forces to missing soldier Jessica Lynch (search) has been granted asylum by the United States, Fox News has learned.

Mohammed Odeh Al-Rehatef, 33, who helped U.S. special operations teams track down Pfc. Jessica Lynch, is now living in the United States with his wife and 5-year-old child.

Al-Rehatef was granted asylum (search) Monday in Arlington, Virginia, which allows him to work in this country. He can stay in the U.S. indefinitely and can eventually apply for U.S. citizenship.

Al-Rehatef is considered a hero by many Americans and the U.S. military for making a series of trips between Saddam Hospital in Nasiriyah, where Lynch was being held, and U.S. forces several miles away. He had to walk through dangerous enemy territory each time he made the trek.

He was among several sources who helped the CIA and the military find Lynch, a 19-year-old West Virginian who was rescued in a commando raid on April 2.

Al-Rehatef, whose wife worked in the hospital, told U.S. Marines he saw Lynch being slapped by a security guard there.

To confirm her location, officials with the Defense Intelligence Agency (search), the military counterpart of the CIA, equipped and trained an Iraqi informant with a concealed video camera. On the day of the raid, the informant walked around the hospital, videotaping entrances and a route to Lynch's room.

Knowledgeable sources told Fox News that this specific informant was paid for his services and that he is still in Iraq.

That night, a team of U.S. Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and other commandos helicoptered to the hospital while troops engaged Iraqi soldiers in another part of the city. Rescuers entered the hospital and persuaded an Iraqi doctor to lead them to Lynch.

Lynch, of Palestine, W.Va., worked as a supply clerk with the Army's 507th Maintenance Co. Her unit was ambushed near Nasiriyah after making a wrong turn on March 23, during early fighting in the invasion of Iraq. Several members of her unit were killed; she was among six who were captured.

Lynch, more badly wounded than the other survivors, was left in the hospital. The five other prisoners of war from her unit were later rescued north of Baghdad. All have since been returned to the U.S.

James Thibeault of West Virginia founded Friends of Mohammad, an organization based in Lynch's hometown of Palestine. The group wants to bring Al-Rehatef to West Virginia to thank him.

"There's a wonderful spiritual connection there for the Muslim people," said Thibeault, who hopes a Lynch family member will sit on the group's board.

Local veterans can donate money for Al-Rehatef's trip

Lynch's father said recently that that if he ever meets the lawyer, "he would get a world of hugs out of that heroic deal."

"I am truly grateful," Greg Lynch told NBC's Today show. "I realize he risked his own life to do this. The man is an angel and a god in his own ways."