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The Washington Post

Kidnapped British aid worker killed in Afghan rescue attempt

By Joshua Partlow

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A British aid worker who was kidnapped in northeastern Afghanistan two weeks ago was killed during an attempted rescue operation by NATO troops, U.S. and British officials said Saturday.

Linda Norgrove, 36, who worked on agricultural projects with DAI, a Bethesda-based contractor for the U.S. Agency for International Development, was kidnapped along with three Afghan colleagues in remote Kunar province on Sept. 26.

As a team of Afghan and NATO troops swooped into Kunar to rescue her Friday night, Norgrove's captors detonated a bomb that killed her, according to a U.S. military official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. The NATO troops suffered no casualties, but several of the captors were killed in the operation, the U.S. military official said.

Norgrove's Afghan colleagues managed to escape, according to a Western official familiar with the case.

"Responsibility for this tragic outcome rests squarely with the hostage-takers," British Foreign Secretary William Hague said in a statement. "From the moment they took her, her life was under grave threat. Given who held her, and the danger she was in, we judged that Linda's best chance lay in attempting to rescue her."

Hague said NATO learned of Norgrove's whereabouts and decided to act. NATO authorities did not say which militant faction abducted Norgrove, but the Taliban is known to operate in Kunar, which borders Pakistan.

Norgrove's death follows the massacre in August of 10 Christian aid workers in Badakshan province, which borders Kunar, who were returning from a trip to provide eye care to destitute villagers.

"We are saddened beyond words by the death of a wonderful woman whose sole purpose in Afghanistan was to do good - to help the Afghan people achieve a measure of prosperity and stability in their everyday lives as they set about rebuilding their country," James Boomgard, the president and chief executive of DAI, said in a statement. "Linda loved Afghanistan and cared deeply for its people, and she was deeply committed to her development mission. She was an inspiration to many of us here at DAI and she will be deeply missed."

Norgrove, who had a background in development and environmental issues, had worked in Mexico and Uganda, and as a manager of a World Wildlife Fund forestry program in Peru before coming to Afghanistan. From 2005 to 2008, she worked with the United Nations on forestry, horticulture and watershed projects, among other environmental topics, according to DAI. She also provided job training to former Taliban fighters.

At DAI, which she joined in January 2010, she focused on creating job and strengthening local leadership in volatile areas.