Three Americans Die in Algeria Attack, Seven Survive

BRADLEY KLAPPER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three U.S. citizens were killed in last week's hostage standoff at a natural gas complex in Algeria, while seven Americans made it out safely, Obama administration officials said Monday.

The State Department confirmed that gas workers Victor Lynn Lovelady of Houston, Texas, and Gordon Lee Rowan were killed at the Ain Amenas field in the Sahara. U.S. officials identified Texas resident Frederick Buttaccio as the first death last week.

"I'm glad we were able to get some rescued, but we did lose three Americans," Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said as he was leaving the Capitol, where he attended President Barack Obama's second inauguration. "That just tells us that al-

Qaida is committed to creating terror wherever they are and we've got to fight back."

A Colorado man survived the hostage crisis by hiding from the terrorists for 2 ½ days before escaping to a nearby Algerian military base.

Steven Wysocki of Ebert, Colo., worked as a production supervisor at the natural gas field. His wife, Kristi, told ABC World News Monday that, at times, the terrorists were only a few feet from where her husband was hiding. She said she felt that her husband "made it to hell and back."

A U.S. official had told The Associated Press earlier Monday that the FBI had recovered Lovelady's and Rowan's bodies and notified their families. The official had no details on how the Americans died, and their hometowns were not released.

Militants who attacked Ain Amenas had offered to release Lovelady and Rowan in exchange for the freedom of two prominent terror suspects jailed in the United States: Omar Abdel Rahman, a blind sheik convicted of plotting to blow up New York City landmarks and considered the spiritual leader of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani scientist convicted of shooting at two U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

The Obama administration rejected the offer outright.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the U.S. was still working with

Algeria's government to gain a fuller understanding of the attack and to enhance their counterterrorism cooperation in future.

"We extend our deepest condolences to their families and friends," she said in a statement. "The blame for this tragedy rests with the terrorists who carried it out, and the United States condemns their actions in the strongest possible terms."

Last week's desert siege began Wednesday when Mali-based, al-Qaida-linked militants attempted to hijack two buses at the plant, were repelled, and then seized the gas refinery. They said the attack was retaliation for France's recent military intervention against Islamist rebels in neighboring Mali, but the captured militants told Algerian officials it took two months to plan.

Five Americans had been taken out of the country before Saturday's final assault by Algerian forces against the militants.

The U.S. official said the remaining two Americans survived the four-day crisis at an insecure oil rig at the facility. They were flown out to London on Saturday.

The State Department's Nuland confirmed that seven Americans made it out safely, but said she couldn't provide further details because of privacy considerations.

Algeria says 38 hostages of all nationalities and 29 militants died in the standoff. Five foreign workers remain unaccounted for.

Lovelady, 57, worked at Ain Amenas as a project manager for the Houston-based energy firm ENGlobal Corporation, said CEO William A. Coskey. Rowan's employer wasn't immediately known.

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Associated Press writers Donna Cassata in Washington, Juan A. Lozano in Houston and Colleen Slevin in Denver contributed to this report.

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