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Pa. family angry with American government over son's brutal death

By **JASON STRAZIUSO**
 The Associated Press
 5/11/2004, 5:01 p.m. ET

WEST CHESTER, Pa. (AP) — The family of an American civilian shown beheaded on an Islamic militant Web site huddled in in tears Tuesday after learning of the existence of the graphic videotape.

The video showed Nick Berg, 26, in a staged execution carried out by an al-Qaida affiliated group. The video said the killing was to avenge the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers.

"My name is Nick Berg, my father's name is Michael, my mother's name is Suzanne," the man said on the video before being killed. "I have a brother and sister, David and Sara. I live in ... Philadelphia."

Berg's family said U.S. State Department officials on Monday had told them Berg was decapitated. The family, though, had wanted that information to remain private.

When told about the Web site, Berg's father, brother and sister, grasped one another in a standing hug and slowly dropped to the ground, where they quietly shed a few tears while holding on to each other.

"I knew he was decapitated before," said the father, Michael Berg. "That manner is preferable to a long and torturous death. But I didn't want it to become public."

Michael Berg lashed out at the U.S. military and Bush administration, saying his son might still be alive had he not been detained by U.S. officials in Iraq without being charged and without access to a lawyer.

Nick Berg, a small telecommunications business owner, spoke to his parents on March 24 and told them he would return home on March 30. But Berg was detained by Iraqi police at a checkpoint in Mosul on March 24. He was turned over to U.S. officials and detained for 13 days.

His father, Michael, said his son wasn't allowed to make phone calls or contact a lawyer.

FBI agents visited Berg's parents in West Chester on March 31 and told the family they were trying to confirm their son's identity. On April 5, the Bergs filed suit in federal court in Philadelphia, contending that their son was being held illegally by the U.S. military. The next day Berg was released. He told his parents he hadn't been mistreated.

Michael Berg said he blamed the U.S. government for creating circumstances that led to his son's death. He said if his son hadn't been detained for so long, he might have been able to leave the country before the violence worsened.

"I think a lot of people are fed up with the lack of civil rights this thing has caused," he said. "I don't think this administration is committed to democracy."

The Bergs last heard from their son April 9, when he said he would come home by way of Jordan.

Berg had traveled several times to Third World countries to help spread technology, his family said. He had previously traveled to Kenya and Ghana, where they said he had purchased a \$900 brick-making press for a poor village, the family said.

Berg's mother, Suzanne Berg, said her son was in Iraq to help rebuild communication antennas.

"He had this idea that he could help rebuild the infrastructure," she said.

Michael Berg described himself as fervently anti-war, but said his son disagreed with him.

"He was a Bush supporter," Berg said. "He looked at it as bringing democracy to a country that didn't have it."

Suzanne Berg said she was told her son's body would be transported to Kuwait and then to Dover, Del. She said the family had been trying for weeks to learn where their son was but that federal officials had not been helpful.

"I went through this with them for weeks," she said. "I basically ended up doing most of the investigating myself."

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