

Radulan Sahiron, the veteran one armed leader of the Abu Sayyaf based in Sulu, was reported as one of seven militants wounded in a fierce fighting Friday with troops of the Army's 10th Infantry Battalion.

On the U.S. State Department wanted list with a \$1 million reward for his capture for his involvement in the kidnapping of U.S. tourists in Dos Palmas resort, Palawan in 2001, horse riding Sahiron managed to escape during the battle, Gen. Alan Arrojado, chief of the Joint Sulu Task Force, said.

"There's an intelligence report that Radullan Sahiron was wounded in the firefight," Arrojado told reporters. "We don't know where he was hit but one of his assistants was shot in the leg."

Arrojado said at least seven other bandits and a soldier were killed in the gunbattle that erupted in the village of Panglayahan, Patikul, Sulu on Friday morning.

He said 6 other Abu Sayyaf bandits, including Sahiron, were wounded.

Arrojado identified two other wounded suspects as Asari Sajail and Almujeer Yada, who sustained a gunshot wound in his left leg.

The Abu Sayyaf, known for kidnappings, beheadings, bombings, and extortion activities, is one of the most hardline Islamist rebel factions in the Muslim south.

Arrojado said Sahiron was linked to the kidnapping of 20 tourists, including three Americans, from the Dos Palmas resort in Palawan island in 2001.

An American national, Guillermo Sobero, was beheaded while another American, Martin Burnham, was killed during a rescue operation a year later. His wife, Gracia, was wounded.

Friday's clash saw both sides exchanged mortar and machine gun fire that lasted until 10.40 a.m.

10th IB commander Lieutenant Colonel Mario Jacinto was wounded along with 16 of his men.

The seven slain militants remained unidentified.

According to the Task Group commander, a combined military and police team also arrested three Abu Sayyaf members in the village of Bangkal, Patikul town — a notorious Abu Sayyaf safe haven — on Thursday.

“The suspects were riding a motorcycle in Barangay Bangkal around 11.40 a.m. when a joint military and police team led by Major Ibni Saddama noticed they had guns tucked in their waists,” said Arojado.

The trio are being held on suspicion of involvement in the deaths of police officers at Jolo airport, and a fatal ambush Tuesday on two army intelligence operatives.

A military source who asked not to be identified as he is not authorized to talk to the media told Anadolu Agency that security forces are continuing intensive operations in the jungles of Sulu in an effort to release Norwegian and Canadian hostages being held by the group.

On March 10, a video was posted to Facebook showing the three thin, bearded and handcuffed hostages appealing to their governments for help securing their release, saying that if their kidnapper's demands are not met they will be killed April 8.

Since 1991, the Abu Sayyaf — armed with mostly improvised explosive devices, mortars and automatic rifles — has carried out bombings, kidnappings, assassinations and extortion in a

self-determined fight for an independent Islamic province in the Philippines.

It is notorious for beheading victims after ransoms have failed to be paid for their release.

In 1970, leader Sahiron — also known as Kumander Putol (Putol is Filipino for “cut,” and can also mean limbless) — lost his right arm fighting security forces.

Then president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo heralded his capture in 2005, until the arrested man turned out to be a lookalike missing the wrong arm.