

14 Filipino soldiers killed, some beheaded

by UPI

MANILA, Philippines -- Fourteen Filipino soldiers reportedly were killed, some of them beheaded, in the Philippines' south where Islamic separatists are active. The Guardian reported the soldiers, who had gone in search of a kidnapped Italian priest, were killed Tuesday in clashes with rebels. The report said the bodies of the soldiers were recovered Wednesday on the southern island of Basilan. Leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front were quoted as saying the clashes started after the government troops, in violation of a 2003 cease-fire, entered territory under its control. A military spokesman told The Guardian the forces had intelligence reports that the Rev. Giancarlo Bossi, who was kidnapped a month ago, had been taken to the area. The military blamed the clashes on Abu Sayyaf, the country's Islamic separatist group, which has been accused of beheadings in the past. The eight-hour long battle, in which four rebels were killed, involved 80 soldiers and up to 300 militants near the town of Tipo-Tipo, the report said. Mohagher Iqbal, chief negotiator for the MILF, was quoted by The Guardian as saying his group no longer has ties with Abu Sayyaf. MILF is having peace talks and is providing fighters to locate the priest, the newspaper said.

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