N066
RA
DELTA GROUP AP

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. (AP) -- FIFTY MEMBERS OF THE DELTA GROUP COMMANDO UNIT WERE GRIM-FACED AS THEY RETURNED TO FORT BRAGG AND ONE EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION THAT THEIR MISSION TO RESCUE THE AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN IRAN WAS CANCELED.

''YOU'VE GOT A MISSION. YOU KNOW YOU CAN DO IT, AND SOMEBODY TELLS YOU TO PULL OUT,'' ONE OF THE MEN TOLD REPORTERS AS THE GROUP WALKED THROUGH FAYETTEVILLE AIRPORT TUESDAY.

IF THE OTHERS SHARED IN HIS FRUSTRATION WITH THE PULLBACK ORDER, THEY WEREN'T WILLING TO TALK TO REPORTERS ABOUT IT.

THE MISSION WAS ABORTED AFTER THREE OF EIGHT HELICOPTERS WERE DISABLED. IN LEAVING A RENDEZVOUS POINT IN IRAN, ANOTHER HELICOPTER COLLIDED WITH A C-130 TRANSPORT, KILLING EIGHT AMERICANS.

THE DELTA GROUP, WHICH ALSO IS KNOWN AS OPERATION BLUE LIGHT, IS MADE UP OF ABOUT 300 PERSONS FROM ALL U.S. MILITARY SERVICES. BASED AT FORT BRAGG, THE ANTI-TERRORIST UNIT REPORTEDLY IS CONTROLLED DIRECTLY BY THE PENTAGON.

DEFENSE SECRETARY HAROLD B. BROWN SAID AFTER THE ILL-FATED MISSION THAT 180 MEN WERE INVOLVED.

THOSE RETURNING TUESDAY FLEW TO FAYETTEVILLE ABOARD PIEDMONT AIRLINES FLIGHT 250 FROM ATLANTA.

AT THE FAYETTEVILLE AIRPORT, THEY QUICKLY WALKED THROUGH THE TERMINAL TO MORE THAN A HALF-DOZEN DARK GREEN ARMY VANS, STATION WAGONS AND STAFF CARS WAITING OUTSIDE AND WERE DRIVEN OFF, APPARENTLY TO FORT BRAGG.

SOME OF THE MEN CARRIED SMALL MILITARY BRIEFCASES. MOST WORE LEISURE SUITS OR SPORTS CLOTHING WITH OPEN-NECK COLLARS.

AT HURLBURT FIELD, FLA., TODAY, THE AIR FORCE HONORED FIVE AIRMEN FROM THE SMALL FLORIDA PANHANDLE BASE WHO DIED DURING THE ABORTED RESCUE ATTEMPT.

AP-WX-0430 1320EDT

#164