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RANDOM HOUSE

Army classifies 40 as AWOL

Soldiers claim mistreatment, shortened two-day leave passes

SHREVEPORT, La. (AP) — About 40 Louisiana National Guard soldiers were classified Wednesday night as absent without leave, an offense punishable by imprisonment, several hours after they complained of mistreatment at Fort Hood, Texas.

The troops said earlier they planned to go AWOL because, in addition to alleged mistreatment, they were overworked and the Army took back half of a two-day leave they had been promised.

In addition to the 40 accused of being AWOL, 90 others were on a 24-hour pass and some may have gone home to Shreveport "to discuss problems they have encountered during training," said Dan Nance, spokesman for the Army's 5th Infantry Division (Mech).

"We understand some of these soldiers have had a difficult time making the adjustment from civilian

to military life," said Nance in a news release. "But we would be remiss if we didn't provide these soldiers with the training necessary to survive, fight and win."

One of the soldiers said the guardsmen were "desperate."

"This isn't a rebellious thing," said Sgt. Thomas Baker, 24, of Pine Bluff, Ark. "We just wanted some time off. We'll be back Saturday."

"We understand the country is at war," said another soldier, who wouldn't give his name. "We just think we need some time off."

Baker said about one and one-half busloads of soldiers dressed in jeans and T-shirts took the bus to Shreveport, and others found other ways

home. All were from the 1st Battalion, 156th Armor, 256th Infantry Brigade, a National Guard unit which was made part of the U.S. Army in December and moved to Fort Hood, in central Texas, on Jan. 21.

Baker, Sgt. Victor Giglio and other soldiers who wouldn't give their names said 70 to 150 soldiers left Fort Hood about midnight Tuesday. Most were scheduled for one day of leave this week but planned to stay home for three, according to Baker and Giglio.

The Army said there was little official information about it, although Nance said he didn't know when or

if the other 90 or so guardsmen might be classified as AWOL because they were due back at intermittent times.

Late Wednesday, a spokeswoman for Rep. Jim McCrery, R-La., said the Army had acknowledged "there are troops that have left without a pass, there are troops that also have left with a pass."

"They are not using the term AWOL," said McCrery's press secretary, Leslie Corkern.

In Washington, a spokeswoman for Rep. Jim McCrery, R-La., said it was "encouraging any troops without a pass to return to Fort Hood before their deadline. And we are keeping our Shreveport office open until 11 p.m. to field questions from any soldiers or family members, (or if they want) to voice complaints about Fort Hood."

Report projects fewer nuclear weapons

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Energy Department is considering a major shift toward much smaller nuclear weapons production that would end output at several plants, government sources said Wednesday.

The department is scheduled to announce its proposed long-term blueprint for reorganizing weapons production on Thursday in a report to Congress.

The report is expected to represent the clearest indication yet of the department's shift away from aggressive production to the monumental task of environmental cleanup at 13 labs and factories in a dozen states. The cost of the cleanup has been estimated at more than \$100 billion.

According to government sources familiar with it, the report assumes that by the year 2015 the United States will need a much smaller stockpile of nuclear weapons — perhaps only as much as 15 percent of current stockpiles.

The United States now has an estimated 25,000 nuclear warheads, bombs and other weapons.

As a result, the report envisions no need to produce new plutonium, relying instead on plutonium recovered from retired warheads, and smaller production of tritium.

The department's budget, sent to Congress earlier this week, includes \$500 million for planning and designing a new nuclear reactor plant to produce tritium.

Originally department planners had wanted to build two plants.

Tritium, the explosive material in so-called "thermonuclear" weapons and a booster in ordinary nuclear weapons, decays slowly, with 5.5 percent being lost every year. New supplies must be provided existing warheads from time to time.

Among the plants where production is to end, according to sources familiar with the blueprint, is Rocky Flats near Denver.

Production there has been shut down since November 1989 because of equipment and training problems. The Bush administration earlier this week asked Congress for an additional \$283 million so that some production might resume at the plant in the short term.

Sources said the Amarillo, Texas-based Pantex, the country's only final assembly plant for nuclear bombs and missile warheads, could take over some of Rocky Flats' duties.

Other locations where production would end include the Fernald and Mound Plant plants in Ohio, the Hanford facility in Washington, and the Oak Ridge Y-12 complex in Tennessee.

Energy Department spokesman Harry Phillips said he could not confirm specifics of the report. He said the study is aimed at providing an array of options that will be examined further over the next three years.

Arab

Continued from page 9

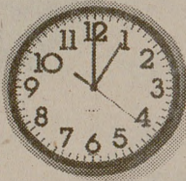
it's presented, which is exactly the opposite, he says.

He says many similarities and few differences exist between Islam and Christianity, including:

- Both believe in one god.
- Both call for goodness and high morals and invite people to be peaceful.
- Both respect Jesus Christ, although with some differences. Some say Muslims cannot be Muslim without believing in Jesus as prophet.
- Muslims do not believe in the Trinity nor believe God had a son. They believe Jesus was an honorable prophet, born miraculously to a virgin mother.
- Muslims do not believe in original sin. They believe Adam and Eve both were tempted by Satan and repented to God.
- Islam is a comprehensive religion and encompasses all aspects of life. It governs family life, community life, the political system and economic dealings.
- Muslims pray five times a day and do not need agents or priests because they have a direct relationship with God, he says.
- "Jihad" is another commonly understood word in the West. The Western translation to "holy war" is totally alien to Moslems, Safwat says.
- "When you say 'holy war,' the Western mind thinks of the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition," he says.
- In Islam, jihad means an exertion of effort and struggle for excellence on three levels, Safwat says.
- The first level is the struggle with evil within oneself. The second is the struggle against evil in society and the third is the struggle against injustice, oppression and tyranny using political or armed means as a last resort.
- "If they want to know about our culture, they should read the books they subscribe to, like the Koran," Safwat says. "Somehow when the information does get out, it's distorted, as if there is some sort of control by Israel. You can see this in the events of the war."
- "When Scud missiles attack Israel, the media will spend hours and days showing the terror," Safwat continues. "But, very little is said about the thousands of civilians who are killed right now in Iraq and Kuwait. As long as the media is biased and the information received by the American public is wrong, the misunderstanding will continue."
- "It is important for the American people to put pressure on the U.S. government to be more balanced in its foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East," Safwat says. "If the realized how peaceful the people of the area are, and how hospitable they are to visitors from all over the world, they would apply this pressure to change U.S. foreign policy, which is strongly pro-Israel and against the interests of the rest of the people in the region."
- Safwat reminds the American public that Israel forced Palestine from Palestine in 1948 when the United Nations created Israel.
- "They are constantly oppressed by the Israelis," he says.
- An international conference of the Palestinians after the conflict only a remote possibility, he says.
- "Israel and the U.S. government have not made a commitment to have an international conference. In that sense, there isn't any hope for a conference, even if the whole world would say it was needed," Safwat says. "As long as the United States and Israel insist the issues are not linked, then they are a sense, making sure Hussein will continue to do what he is doing."
- "Regardless of politics, I believe this incident is linked to the Palestinian conflict," Safwat says. "There is a strong link."
- This link is the latest in a chain of events going back to the creation of Israel, Safwat says. The tension has increased and the Palestinian problem has festered since then.
- Because Israel feels uncomfortable with this tension, Israel is pressuring the United States to target more than Iraqi military targets, Safwat says.
- Safwat says peace was not given an ample chance because the Bush administration was not interested in reconciling differences between Hussein and the Kuwaiti royal family.

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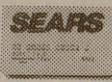


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