

Swastikas smeared on Army barracks

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (AP) — Eight doors in an Army barracks housing Special Forces soldiers were smeared with red swastikas early Tuesday. Black soldiers lived in six of the vandalized rooms.

About 350 soldiers were temporarily restricted to their two-building compound while military authorities investigated. Soldiers were only allowed to leave the barracks area after they spoke with investigators.

"The chain of command is very serious about this," said base spokesman Walter Sokalski. "Something like this will not be tolerated."

Three white Fort Bragg-based soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division were charged last December in the racially motivated murders of a black man and woman in nearby Fayetteville. Two were said to have ties with neo-Nazi skinheads. The slayings touched off an Army-wide investigation of extremist activity.

Asked about hate crimes at

Fort Bragg, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said: "There is no room for it in the U.S. military, any place, any time."

Special Forces commander Brig. Gen. Kenneth Bowra, saying he wanted to re-emphasize the Army's "zero tolerance of racism," met Tuesday with the 1st Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group — the 950-man unit containing the restricted soldiers.

Most of the soldiers housed in the two L-shaped buildings are younger men assigned to the Special Forces in a support role. Most are in training to reach the rank of sergeant, a process that takes at least three years.

The 80-room barracks are similar to a college dormitory, with each room housing a single soldier. Officials said six of the rooms smeared with the two-foot-square swastikas were occupied by black soldiers and the other two rooms were empty at the time of the incident, which happened around 5 a.m.

Special Forces spokesman Capt. Cabot Gatlin said investigators were uncertain whether someone outside the unit had entered the building.

Although the barracks are supposed to be locked, people appeared to come and go freely Tuesday afternoon, including pizza delivery men.

Fort Bragg officers refused to allow reporters to interview any of the troops housed in the three-story, brick barracks.

Some black soldiers at the base said they had not heard about the incident, while others denied the Army had a problem with racism.

The Special Forces, known in the Vietnam era as the Green Berets, are specially trained to conduct secret missions behind enemy lines and to liaise with foreign military forces.

Fort Bragg also headquarters the U.S. Army Special Operations Command and the 82nd Airborne, which is composed of paratroopers.

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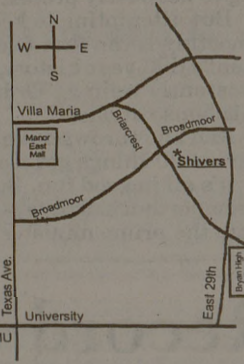
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