Parachutes blamed in divers' drowning

By Tom Diaz

Four Navy SEALs, divers who drowned while on a high-risk rescue mission during the 1983 Grenada rescue operation may have become tangled in their parachutes after a night-time jump into heavy seas, an informed source familiar with the operation told The Washington Times.

The source, who spoke on condition that he not be named, said a fifth diver from the highly trained Sea-Air-Land commando team was pulled alive from the water, tangled in his parachute.

They [SEALs] have since changed the type of parachute they use," the source said.

The Navy's SEALs are part of the military's "special operations force," whose missions are shrouded in "low-intensity conflict."

The source said there was little chance the four SEAL divers, whose bodies have never been recovered, were the victims of hostile fire. They were led by an experienced consultant, he added.

The divers were supposed to have made a reconnaissance of an airfield on the island, but the mission was called off, he said.

The source also described in some detail the use of other teams from the military's "special operations forces" during the assault on the island.

He said the Army's highly secret "Delta Force" was given two targets to secure in a daylight helicopter assault — Richmond Hill prison and Fort Frederick — but the commandos were driven off by heavy fire from Soviet-made anti-aircraft guns before they could land.

"They [the military planners] wanted an amphibious operation," the source said, because the United States hoped to keep "collateral damage" to civilians and real estate to a minimum.

Although the Delta Force is trained for a specific type of hostage rescue mission, the source said it was used in the Grenada operation for two reasons: first, to quickly the Cuban military force's command and control, thought to be headquartered at Fort Frederic, and to free political prisoners who were believed to be in the prison.

But the helicopters, which were not piloted by members of the counter-terrorist force, could only make two attempts at landing before backing off from the withering fire.

The source said Delta Force commanders strongly objected to the daylight assault because the force is specially trained for night assaults, but they were overruled.

A separate SEAL team also brought in by helicopter successfully carried out its task of securing the governor-general's home in Grenada, the source said, holding it until the main force of troops was able to make contact.

But, he said, the SEAL team credited it a success partly to the fact that much of the ground fire was diverted to the two helicopters carrying in the Delta Force team.

The source said it will be difficult for the United States military to fight these forces to rescue hostages or retaliate against terrorists until the collection of detailed "tactical" intelligence is improved.

Memorial urged for Korean War

By Christopher Simpson

Sen. John Glenn, D-Ohio, who broke into tears while testifying yesterday, was among the many who urged Congress to pass a bill creating a memorial to honor the Korean War veteran.

"He was shot once right through the neck, and those who were there said he fell, then got up again," Sen. Glenn said softly, choking through a tale of a buddy's battlefield death in Korea. "Then he, he died ..."

When he couldn't finish the brief, poignant story of that day 33 years ago, Sen. Glenn — astronaut, American hero and Korean War veteran — became down and cried.

"I'm sorry, I didn't want to do that," he said moments later in the midst of his testimony. "In Korea as much as anywhere, anywhere where we had Americans serve, uncommon valor was common."

The witnesses, including 107 House members co-sponsoring a bill to erect a permanent Korean War memorial in Washington, said the time has come to honor the 54,246 American men and women who died during the three-year conflict.

"The Korean War veteran is sometimes referred to as the 'forgotten' veteran," Rep. James J. Florio, D-N.J., one of three sponsors of the bill, told the House Committee on Rules and Administration.

"For that veteran, there was no warm welcome home, and, to this day, no official memorial recognizing the sacrifices made during that difficult war. The memorial is an idea which is long overdue."

The bill, which is expected to easily sail through the House and Senate, earmarks $3 million for the construction and maintenance of a Korean War memorial in Washington or the metropolitan area.

Site selection, design and construction will fall under the jurisdiction of the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Yesterday's hearing was replete with war tales offered by congressmen, senators, lone soldiers and representatives of a host of veterans groups representing millions who have served in the armed forces.

More than 20 decades after the conflict ended, scarring memories remain for many of the 6 million Americans who served at distant places such as "Kirk Chop Hill, the Inchon Peninsula and the Yalu River.

Sen. Glenn and others who testified called them the "silent veterans." But they pleaded for that silence to end.

"The Korean conflict and the deeds of its participants are often overshadowed by the world war that had not long been ended and by Vietnam, which still live fresh in our minds," Rep. G.V. Montgomery, D-Miss., a World War II and Korean War veteran, said.

"Our Korean conflict veterans have been the silent veterans, the ones who served who then slipped back into civilian life practically unnoticed."

"The only recognition afforded our Korean War veterans is at the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii," said Thomas G. Dabney, executive national adjutant for the Disabled American Veterans.

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