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Emerald

Troops prepare for Somalia

WASHINGTON (AP) — The bulk of U.S. troops may not get ashore in Somalia until days after a Marine vanguard lands because of poor conditions at Mogadishu's port and nearby airfields, Pentagon officials said Monday.

Bringing nearly 30,000 soldiers into a country that has been devastated by warring bandit clans requires a massive effort, especially since no supplies of fuel or water exist, nor modern means to transport them, the officials said.

"Expectations are pretty high, but people have to understand how difficult it will be to get in there," said one senior military officer.

"We can drop thousands of men on the airfields, but who's going to feed 'em after a while?" said a second officer.

Both commented only on condition that their names not be used.

Plans now call for the first wave of several hundred Marines to enter Mogadishu early Wednesday to begin "Operation Restore Hope" aimed at saving thousands of Somalis from starvation.

Their mission will be to take control of the port and the international airfield in Mogadishu, and another airport in Baidoa, a famine-wracked town 200 miles to the west.

The Marines, backed by their three amphibious warships, carry enough supplies to sustain themselves for at least 30 days.

But it will be several days before their fellow Marines from Camp Pendleton, Calif., begin to take off for Somalia. And it will be several more after that before members of the Army's light infantry from Fort Drum, N.Y., will begin leaving the United States, the officers said.

President-elect Clinton, when asked in Chicago if he had a plan to deal with Somalia, said, "President Bush is in charge of this mission. Let's let

the mission be carried out."

During the Persian Gulf War build-up, U.S. forces made use of modern technology at ports and bases in Saudi Arabia that had been built years earlier.

They were able to tap into an elaborate supply system and get all the oil and gas they needed, officers said. But in Somalia, they said, moving supplies inland will mean trucking them and maybe even building roads.

At the Mogadishu seaport and airport, where U.S. cargo ships and planes are to unload, an immediate problem is lack of lighting, senior Navy officers at the Pentagon said. Navy Seabees were heading there to install lighting so the cargo handling doesn't have to stop at night, said the officers.

They, too, briefed reporters on condition they not be identified by name.

The port is relatively shallow and could present difficulties to the huge U.S. supply ships heading there.

As for air traffic, officers said they hoped to get a control system running and clear enough space near the airports so planes could fly in, unload and take off in a steady stream.

On Monday, Navy F-14 fighters from the aircraft carrier USS Ranger flew reconnaissance missions over Mogadishu, gathering information about sites where the Marines are expected to land, a Pentagon source said.

Ambassador-at-Large Robert Oakley and Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Frank Libutti were to meet in Mogadishu with Somali clan leaders to brief them on what the Marines will do after their landing, said Pentagon spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Joseph F. Gradisher.

'Daddy has to help the starving people'

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. (AP) — Explaining "why Daddy is going to Somalia" was the hardest mission Sgt. Lee Cook, a 10-year veteran of the Marine Corps, says he has ever faced.

"I started preparing them six months ago, telling them there was a possibility that Dad might have to go over there to help those children, the starving people," Cook said. The father of a 6-year-old boy and 4-year-old girl, Cook handles aviation ammunition at the Marine Air Corps Station in Tustin, about 35 miles south of Los Angeles.

"The kids, they see the pictures on television, so I tell them that's who I'm going to be helping," he said. "I think they understand."

Cook, 31, is assigned to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, headquartered at Camp Pendleton. President Bush on Friday called up 16,000 members of the unit to secure Somalia's major ports and airports and to help deliver famine aid now being stolen by roving armed gangs.

Cook spent Saturday morning taking his son, Terry, to karate lessons, and in the afternoon he put up Christmas lights at home as 6-year-old Terry and 4-year-old Racquel watched.

Cook expects to be called at any time. He worries that his wife, Staff Sgt. Detra Cook, could also be sent to Somalia.

If that happens the children would go to Detra's parents' house in nearby Riverside.

Arrival of food may end gangs

ATLANTA (AP) — U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Saturday he was optimistic U.S. forces could restore order quickly in Somalia and allow the United Nations to begin to negotiate a political truce.

But he acknowledged he didn't know how long it would take to stabilize the war-torn east African nation.

"It depends on the situation on the ground," he said.

Speaking after a two-day conference on global development at the Carter Center, Boutros-Ghali said he was confident that gangs blamed for looting famine relief food will quickly lose power once the U.N. forces start distributing food in Somalia.

"When we will be able to distribute the food, the groups will disappear," he said.

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