



U.S. airmen injured in French rescue attempt

September 21, 1995

Web posted at: 11:55 p.m. EDT

From Military Affairs Producer Chris Plante and State Department Producer Judd Hirsch

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- CNN has learned, based on reports out of Paris, that two U.S. Air Force Special Forces personnel were wounded by Bosnian-Serb ground fire during a September 7 rescue attempt of two downed French pilots. Sources said that the wounds to the U.S. airmen were "not life-threatening" and that they have subsequently returned to duty.

The rescue attempt, which originated in Brindisi, Italy, used super-quiet U.S. MH-53 "Pave-Low" helicopters assigned to an Air Force special forces unit. The helicopters encountered hostile ground fire while they were transporting a group of French commando troops to the location in an effort to pluck the two man crew of a French Mirage 2000 shot down by Bosnian-Serb anti-aircraft fire on August 30. The helicopters returned fire, but two of the U.S. personnel were wounded and the mission was called off.

At least three NATO attempts to rescue the French pilots have failed to retrieve the pilots from the area near Pale where they were shot down, according to sources. The other attempts included U.S. Navy helicopter rescue teams launched from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt. The Roosevelt was in position to be used as a "platform" for refueling and emergencies in the joint efforts.

Officials would not say whether there has been any direct contact with the men since they were shot down, but it is believed their radio signals were received by NATO searchers. The first and second missions were called off after being launched due to bad weather. The third was halted when the helicopters involved became the target of ground fire from hostile Serb positions, resulting in the injury of the two U.S. personnel.

U.S. Air Force pilot Scott O'Grady was shot down by a Serbian surface-to-air missile last June and spent six days on the ground evading pursuing Serbs before being plucked from the countryside by a U.S. Marine Corps rescue unit.

Another focus of concern Thursday was diplomacy in the Balkans. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke has briefed Secretary of State Warren Christopher and other officials on his shuttle diplomacy. Spokesman Nicholas Burns says the meetings, including one Thursday afternoon at the White House among key Clinton Administration officials, look to the future.

Specifically, Burns says, officials are discussing how to proceed next week in New York when foreign ministers from the region and other interested nations will attend the opening of the U.N. General Assembly. The focus now appears to be on getting the warring parties to a peace conference.

During a radio interview with Larry King, President Clinton said that he has some hope that progress towards a permanent peace settlement can be made. But he cautioned, "this is Bosnia and this is tough."

He said he hopes there is a chance now to limit the misery in the Balkans with the progress being made. "The president instructed the U.S. negotiating team to make an all-out effort in the coming weeks to clear away the remaining obstacles to a political settlement of the Balkan conflict," said White House press secretary Mike McCurry.

Burns says the United States believes it is time to build on the momentum generated September 8 in Geneva when the foreign ministers of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia agreed on a set of principles that form a framework for peace in Bosnia. He also said the United States is pleased that NATO and the United Nations were able to certify Bosnian Serb compliance with the terms of pulling out their heavy weapons from the Sarajevo exclusion zone. But, Burns said, the United States will be watching closely to make sure the Bosnian Serbs do not violate the agreement in the future.

Burns also said the evidence suggests there is sporadic fighting in central and western Bosnia, and Bosnian forces appear to be digging defensive positions west of the Serb stronghold of Banja Luka.

Related Story

- [A welcomed relief in Sarajevo](#)

[CONTENTS](#) | [SEARCH](#) | [CNN HOME PAGE](#) | [MAIN BALKAN TRAGEDY PAGE](#)

| [CONTENTS](#) | [SEARCH](#) | [CNN HOME PAGE](#) | [MAIN BALKAN TRAGEDY PAGE](#) |

*Copyright © 1995 Cable News Network, Inc.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.*