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Florida Town Is Proud Of Hurlburt Field Fliers

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FORT WALTON BEACH, Fla., April 26—When Jerry Melvin walked into Robert's Drugstore this morning the half dozen businessmen who regularly gather there to chat were well into the news that five airmen from nearby Hurlburt Field had died in the abortive attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran.

"Let me tell you something," one was saying passionately. "I hope we try to do it again." "It's about time," said another. "It's just too damn bad that some of our boys had to die."

Melvin, the executive vice president of the town's chamber of commerce, thought a moment. "The one thing you'll learn here," he said, "is that, without a doubt everybody in this town feels the same way as the guys around the drugstore table. We're sad that these men had to die, but we're proud that something was finally tried—and our community had something to do with it."

In the seafood restaurants and supermarkets, in the cheap, low-rise

apartments where enlisted men live and in the fancy resort hotels, everyone here was talking about the part that tiny Hurlburt field had played in the dramatic rescue effort. And almost everyone was calling for more of the same.

That is in keeping with the character of this seaside resort of about 25,000, where almost half the population is either active Air Force personnel or retired military, and the mayor himself is a former commander of Hurlburt field.

It was in 1970 when airmen from Hurlburt carried troops to Son Tay in North Vietnam for the unsuccessful attempt to rescue prisoners of war believed to be held there. Only after the commandos stormed the prison did they find that all had been moved.

"We're a very tightly knit community," said Mayor Bob Gates, "and we're very close to Hurlburt. There's a deep sense of loss here. I called the base commander last night to ask if there was anything the town could do. Everyone's anxious to help those families in any way they can."



Associated Press

A new crew hurries aboard an Air Force C141 Starlifter at McGuire Air Force Base, N.J. as the old crew leaves. The plane was carrying five injured American servicemen yesterday from the rescue effort in Iran for treatment in a Texas hospital.