

GIs at Ft. Meade Take Alert in Stride

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By a Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington area military personnel were among thousands of servicemen who went on alert status across the nation yesterday in the face of possible Soviet troop moves into Mideast war areas.

Notice of what the Pentagon called a "precautionary alert" reached area service units about 2 a.m., and the alert continued in effect at 6 last night.

The reaction of one Army sergeant at Ft. Meade, headquarters of the First Army, was typical of reaction reported throughout the area. "Nobody knows what the hell it means, and nobody is paying much attention to it," the sergeant said.

Sources at Ft. Meade said no leaves had been canceled and that no "drastic actions" had been taken. They said the alert generally meant that commanding officers were required to know at all times the whereabouts of

personnel assigned to them.

Among those taken by surprise was Maryland Gov. Marvin Mandel who said at his morning news conference in Annapolis that some combat elements of the Maryland National Guard had been alerted.

Brig. Gen. William U. Ogletree, the Guard's assistant adjutant general, said there was no alert for the Guard but that some Guardsmen who man Nike-Hercules missile sites in the Baltimore-Washington area had been placed on alert.

The 15,000-man Airborne Division at Ft. Bragg, N.C., went on alert at 2 a.m. when troops reportedly were told to be ready to move by 6 a.m.

By late afternoon, there had been no discernible troop movements out of nearby Pope Air Force Base.

In the 82d Division area at Bragg, streets were crowded with jeeps, trucks and personnel carriers and men were loading personal equipment and belongings

into trucks backed up at main doors of the barracks.

Only a few soldiers were noticed carrying weapons, and the only other weapons evident were 105-mm guns mounted on jeeps.

Reporters and photographers were permitted in Ft. Bragg throughout the day, but only reporters were allowed at Pope.

Military installations in the Tidewater area of Virginia were placed on alert early in the morning, resulting in cancellation of leaves and tightened security procedures.

Military officers at Atlantic Fleet headquarters in Norfolk and Langley Air Force Base, headquarters of the Tactical Air Command, said the area was on a "Condition 3 alert," described as "a high readiness defense posture." The alert scale runs from 5, a normal peacetime alert, to 1, a wartime alert, one officer said.

A Condition 3 alert means, in effect, that while

no orders have been received to move out, combat elements must be ready to move on extremely short notice.

Seamen and marines questioned near Atlantic Fleet headquarters said that weekend liberties had been canceled and guards placed on many ships and in front of airplane hangars.

They said that enlisted men were being allowed to leave the base on personal errands. One sailor said that many of his friends were on an alert in which they were warned they may have to move to another assignment within four hours.

At Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach, which is home for a number of the Navy's East Coast fighter planes, flight operations were virtually nonexistent while squadron personnel met in guarded hangars.

Contributing to this story were Washington Post staff writers Jay Matthews, Ron Shaffer and Adam Shaw.