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**JOINT STAFF
SPECIAL HISTORICAL STUDY**

**OPERATION JUST CAUSE
PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF JOINT
OPERATIONS IN PANAMA
February 1988 - January 1990**



**HISTORICAL DIVISION
JOINT SECRETARIAT
JOINT STAFF**

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Operation JUST CAUSE

**Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama
February 1988 - January 1990**

Ronald H. Cole

**Historical Division
Joint Secretariat
Joint Staff
December 1990**

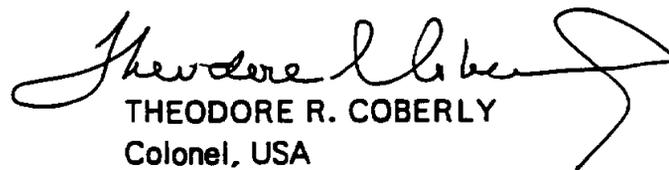
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FOREWORD

This study traces the involvement of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff in the planning, direction, and execution of JUST CAUSE, the combat operations in Panama in December 1989. The study begins with development of initial plans in February 1988 and concludes with the surrender of General Manuel Noriega to US custody on 3 January 1990.

Dr. Ronald H. Cole of the Joint Staff Historical Division researched and wrote the study. For his sources, he relied on the files of the Joint Staff and interviews with the Secretary of Defense, Richard B. Cheney; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin L. Powell, USA; the Commander in Chief, US Southern Command, General Maxwell R. Thurman, USA; the former Commander in Chief, US Southern Command, General Frederick F. Woerner, Jr., USA (Ret); the Director for Operations (J-3), Joint Staff, Lieutenant General Thomas W. Kelly, USA; and the Deputy Director for Politico-Military Affairs, Strategic Plans and Policy (J-5), Joint Staff, Brigadier General David C. Meade, USA.

The following Joint Staff officers provided Dr. Cole valuable assistance in locating and using key documents as well as insight into the planning and execution process: Colonel James Shane, USA; Major Raymond Melnyk, USA; Colonel Kenneth W. Hess, USAF; Commander Russell L. Williams, USN; Colonel Thomas O. Fleming, Jr., USAF; and Colonel Antonio J. Ramos, USAF. Mr. Willard J. Webb and Dr. Walter S. Poole of the Historical Division reviewed the final manuscript and Ms. Penny Norman edited and prepared the manuscript for publication.

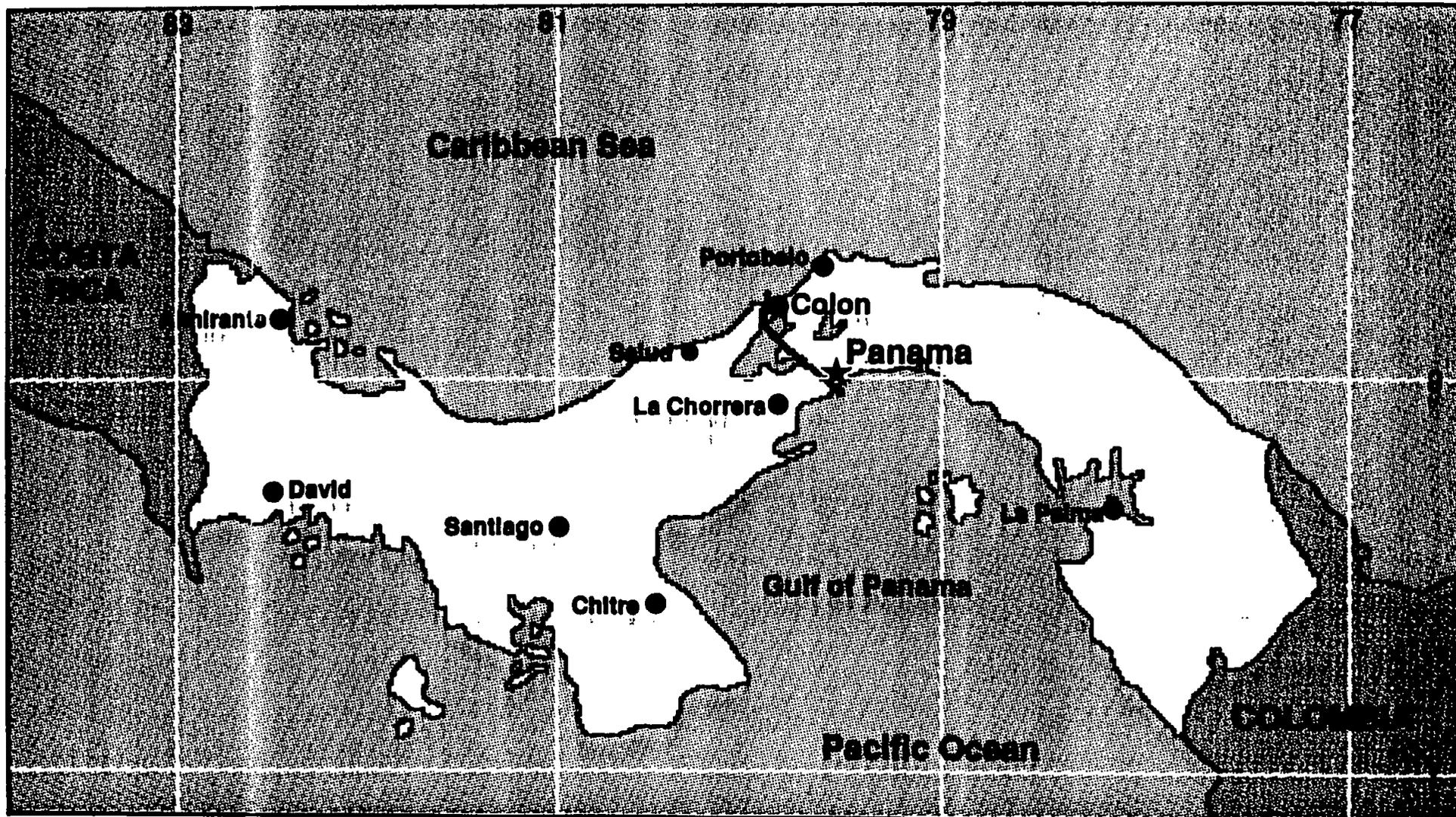

THEODORE R. COBERLY
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Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama
February 1988 - January 1990**

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Chapter 1
Background of the Crisis

Before Noriega

(U) Panama is an isthmus nearly 400 miles long and 50 miles wide that connects Central America to the South American continent. About the size of South Carolina in square miles, Panama now contains nearly 2.3 million Spanish-speaking people, most of mixed Spanish and Indian blood. Once a part of the Spanish colony that later became Colombia, Panama won its independence in 1903. That year, in the Hay - Bunau-Varilla Treaty, the new nation agreed to let the United States build a canal across the narrow of the isthmus linking the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. In 1914 the United States completed the project within a US-controlled "Canal Zone" zone extending five miles on either side of the 52-mile long waterway.

(U) For more than six decades the canal played a pivotal role in US strategic and commercial undertakings. In the age of transcontinental airplanes and intercontinental missiles, however, the importance of the canal to US vital interests diminished. Meanwhile, Panamanian nationalists increasingly resented the US presence in the middle of their country. Thus from the riots in Panama of 1964 to the Carter-Torrijos Treaty of 7 September 1977, US-Panamanian negotiations culminated in an agreement whereby the United States promised to cede control over the Canal to Panama by the year 2000. In agreeing to support the President on this treaty, the US Senate inserted a proviso that permitted the United States to continue to defend the Panama Canal after 1999 if there occurred any interruption in the operation of the waterway. The Senators noted, however, that this proviso should not be interpreted as the right of the United States to intervene in Panama's internal affairs or otherwise infringe upon that country's sovereignty.

(u) (S) In the following decade the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to view the Panama Canal as being of great strategic value. During a conflict in Western Europe or the Middle East, possession of the Canal would permit US naval vessels from the Pacific to reinforce vessels from the Atlantic involved in

defending or supporting both regions. In the hands of an anti-US government, the Panama Canal could be used in wartime by the Soviet Union or one of its client states, such as Cuba, to attack US maritime operations or, in peacetime, to nurture leftwing insurgencies in Central America and drug trafficking with the United States.^{1/}

The Rise of Noriega

(u) (S) Manuel Antonio Noriega rose to power as a highly effective intelligence officer in the service of the late dictator of Panama, Brigadier General Omar Torrijos. After the death of Torrijos in 1983, rumored by some to be at Noriega's hand, Noriega took over the Panama Defense Force (PDF), an organization that subsumed all the armed forces, police, customs and investigative services of Panama. Noriega continued his earlier practice of cultivating friends and patrons within the US intelligence community and clients within the Medellin drug cartel of Colombia. In 1985 the National Security Adviser to President Reagan, Vice Admiral John Poindexter, and the Assistant Secretary of State for InterAmerican Affairs, Elliott Abrams, warned Noriega of US concern over his monopoly of power and his involvement in narco-trafficking.

(u) (S) The first overt confrontation between Noriega and the United States took place in June 1987 when a former chief of staff in the PDF, Colonel Roberto Diaz-Herrera, accused his old master of complicity in the death of Torrijos, electoral fraud, and the murder in 1985 of the leader of Noriega's political opposition, Hugo Spadafora. During the anti-Noriega demonstrations that ensued, Noriega's riot police suppressed the unarmed demonstrators. An angry group of US senators promptly passed a resolution calling for the dictator to step down. A pro-Noriega mob attacked the US Embassy, and the State Department severed all economic and military aid to Panama. On 5 February 1988 federal grand juries in Miami and Tampa, Florida, indicted Noriega and his key henchmen, most in the PDF, of numerous counts of involvement in drug trafficking. Noriega demonstrated his defiance by replacing the nominal chief

^{1/} App, JCSM-75-87 to SecDef, 9 Jun 87, JCS 1976/686, TS; JMF 922/520 (13 May 87).

of state, President del Valle, with a Noriega crony, Solis Palma. Throughout 1988 and 1989 Noriega authorized a systematic campaign of harrasing US citizens in Panama and hindering full US implementation of its rights under the 1977 Panama Canal treaties.^{2/}

(u) (S) Noriega turned increasingly to Cuba, Nicaragua, and Libya for economic and military assistance in 1988 and 1989. Following the US indictments, Cuba began a seven month airlift of 200 tons of materiel and supplies. Cuba and Nicaragua funneled Communist bloc weapons and instructors to Panama and helped Noriega to develop civilian defense committees for intelligence collection and population control, the so-called "Dignity Battalions," or "Digbats" in US military parlance. Libya contributed \$20 million in 1989 in return for Noriega's permission to use Panama as a base to coordinate terrorist and insurgency groups throughout Latin America.^{3/}

(u) (S) Even before the full impact of Cuban and Nicaraguan help, the PDF already numbered 19 companies and 6 platoons numbering 14,000 men of which at least 4,000 were well-trained and well-equipped for combat. The PDF materiel included 29 armored personnel carriers, 12 patrol craft, and 28 light transport aircraft. In combat the PDF could be expected to make a strong defense of its headquarters, La Comandancia, in Panama City, as well as defend bases at Ft. Amador and Rio Hato and the Torrijos-Tocumen Airport. In addition PDF forces had the capability to conduct sabotage and stand-off attacks against the Canal and US defense sites in Panama such as Quarry Heights, Ft. Clayton, Howard AFB, Albrook AFB, and the US naval station at Rodman. A portion of Noriega's forces also maintained the capability to retreat into the mountains and jungles of the interior for prolonged guerrilla warfare.^{4/}

2/ J-3 Briefing, Opn JUST CAUSE, 2 Apr 90, U, J-3/JOD/WHEM.
USSOUTHCOM Hist Rept., 1988, S, pp. 20-21, 128, 133-134, and 153.

3/ National Military Intelligence Support Team (NMIST), Panama Intelligence Task Force (ITF) to USSOUTHCOM J-2, 280150Z Dec 89, S, Pan. Binder, J-5/DDPMA/WHEM. Msg, USCINCSO to JCS, 140325Z Apr 88, TS, Pan. Fact Bk, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

4/ Msg, USCINCSO to JCS, 140325Z Apr 88, TS, Pan. Fact Bk, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

US Contingency Planning Begins, February - November 1988

(u) (S) After the US federal indictments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed General Frederick F. Woerner, Jr., USA, the Commander in Chief of the Southern Command (USCINCSO), to revise contingency plans to protect US lives and property, keep open the Canal, conduct noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO) in peaceful or hostile environments, and to develop a plan to assist any government that might replace the Noriega regime. Under that directive General Woerner and his director of operations, Brigadier General Marc Cisneros, USA (USSOUTHCOM J-3), began work on a series of contingency plans collectively known as ELABORATE MAZE. Working closely with them was Major General Bernard Loeffke, USA, Commander of the US Army South (USARSO), who would execute the plans as Commander, Joint Task Force Panama (COMJTFPM).^{5/}

(u) (S) Based upon guidance from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Woerner's early contingency plans had envisioned a "mass" strategy. Under that concept the United States would execute a massive buildup of forces within US bases in Panama that would either intimidate the PDF leaders below Noriega to overthrow him or, failing that, would invade Panamanian territory and overthrow the entire PDF. President Reagan, Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., USN, and General Woerner himself favored that approach over the "surprise" strategy whereby forces from the United States would deploy in concert with special operations forces and General Woerner's troops for a sudden attack against Noriega and the PDF. At that time they speculated that failure to capture Noriega soon after the initial assault might enable him to flee to the hills and organize guerrilla warfare. Moreover, he might also order his minions

^{5/} Interv, Dr. Ronald H. Cole, Historical Division, with LTG Thomas W. Kelly, USA, Dir J-3, 22 May 90, Secretariat Joint Staff/Historical Division (SJS/HisDiv) (Hereafter: Kelly Interview). Transcript, Testimony of LTG Kelly, J-3, and RADM Edward D. Sheafer, USN, Deputy Director for JCS Support (DIA), before Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), 22 Dec 89, TS, Office of the Chairman (OCJCS)/Legal and Legislative Council (LLC) (Hereafter: Kelly Transcript). Interv, Cole w/ LTC (P) James Shane, USA, J-3/JOD/WHEM, 2 Apr 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Msg, JCS to USCINCSO, 281944Z Apr 89, TS, Pan. Fact Bk, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

to abduct or kill a sizeable number of the nearly 35,000 US citizens then residing in Panama.^{6/}

(u) (S) As Noriega ignored US "signals" and became increasingly brutal during the next year, however, the men who had earlier endorsed the "mass" strategy shifted by degrees toward a plan that embodied elements of both mass and surprise. On 16 March 1988 a faction of the PDF staged a coup attempt at PDF headquarters, La Comandancia. Noriega suppressed the effort and purged the PDF of those whom he considered lukewarm in their loyalty to him. He also declared a state of national emergency cracking down on political opposition and stepping up the tempo of anti-US harassment, chiefly by means of severe travel restrictions, searches, and roadblocks.

(u) (S) The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff consequently asked General Woerner to break down ELABORATE MAZE into four separate operations orders (opords) to facilitate immediate execution. General Woerner's staff did so and renamed the four opords collectively as PRAYER BOOK. The first opord, KLONDIKE KEY, covered a noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) escorting US citizens throughout Panama to assembly areas in Panama City and Colon for evacuation to the United States.

(u) (S) The second opord, POST TIME, provided for the 193d Infantry Brigade already in Panama and forces deploying from CONUS and the US Atlantic Command (USLANTCOM), to defend US citizens, US installations, and the Panama Canal. The deploying forces would include a brigade from the 7th Infantry Division (Light) (L), the 6th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, one mechanized infantry battalion, and a carrier battle group. These forces would be incorporated into the computerized force deployment list, called Time-Phased Force and Deployment Data (TPFDD) and would constitute the bulk of the forces to be used for implementation of the other two opords in the PRAYER BOOK series, BLUE SPOON and BLIND LOGIC.^{7/}

6/ Interv, Dr. Ronald H. Cole w/GEN Frederick F. Woerner, Jr., USA, retired, formerly USCINCSO, Ft. Devens, Mass, 5 Nov 90, U, SJS/HisDiv Files. (Hereafter: Woerner Interview.)

7/ Msgs, USCINCSO to JCS, 140325Z, 140326Z, 140327Z, and 150125Z Apr 88, TS, Pan. Fact Bk, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kelly Interview. Memo, COL James F. Hennessee, USA, XO, USSOUTHCOM, to Dr. Ronald H. Cole, Historian, Joint Staff, 14 May 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Note: The Hennessee memo answered follow-up questions to the interview of GEN Thurman conducted by Dr. Cole on 8 Mar 90.

(u) (S) BLUE SPOON, the progenitor for the US military intervention in Panama on 20 December 1989, specifically called for a joint offensive operation to defeat and dismantle the PDF while at the same time protecting US lives, US property, and the Canal. As conceived by General Woerner and his staff, execution would begin with operations lasting up to eight days by the nearly 12,000 troops already in Panama who would then be joined, incrementally, over a two week period, by approximately 10,000 troops from CONUS. A carrier battle group would interdict Cuban aid and provide close air support while an amphibious task force would provide additional combat ground troops. In addition to CONUS-based forces listed for POST TIME, USCINCSO would deploy a joint task force of special operations troops from the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) for surgical strikes against PDF leaders, command and control facilities, and airfields. They would also rescue hostages, do reconnaissance in support of Joint Task Force Panama, and try to locate and seize Manuel Noriega.

(u) (S) USCINCSO would exercise overall command of BLUE SPOON with USLANTCOM, USTRANSCOM, SAC, USPACOM, and FORSCOM in support. USCINCSO would also be the tactical coordinating command with the Commander of Joint Task Force Panama (COMJTFFPM) and the Commander of the Joint Special Operations Task Force (COMJSOTF) as equal subordinates conducting simultaneous, but compartmented, operations. Beside having two equal ground force commanders, the command and control arrangement for BLUE SPOON posed one other practical difficulty: the major general then commanding the 7th Infantry Division would serve under the less senior major general commanding the JTFFPM.^{8/}

(u) (S) Once the initial assaults of BLUE SPOON had been completed, the joint task forces could begin execution of the civil-military operations called for by the fourth opord in the PRAYER BOOK series, BLIND LOGIC. Except for the carrier battle group, BLIND LOGIC would involve the same forces listed for POST TIME and BLUE SPOON in the TPFDD, but would include a civil affairs brigade. USSOUTHCOM planners envisioned three stages for execution of

8/ Msg, USCINCSO to JCS. 140327Z Apr 88; TS, Pan. Fact Bk, J-3/JOD/WHEM; Kelly Interview. Interv, Cole with LTC Shane, J-3/JOD/WHEM, 2 Apr 90, S; SJS/HisDiv.

BLIND LOGIC. During the immediate stage units would support both ongoing combat actions and civil efforts to reestablish public safety and public health measures. During the sustained stage BLIND LOGIC operations would focus on restoring other essential services and transferring control over them to Panamanian and US civilians. In the long range, US civil affairs troops would work with the new Panamanian government to reconstruct the PDF, reducing its size and powers and otherwise institutionalizing its loyalty to civilian authority and democratic government.^{9/}

(u) (S) From April 1988 until the summer of 1989 Lieutenant General Thomas W. Kelly, USA, the Director of Operations on the Joint Staff (J-3), disagreed with the USSOUTHCOM J-3, Brigadier General Marc A. Cisneros, USA, on the proper chain of command to execute BLUE SPOON. The initial disagreement began when Brigadier General Cisneros contended that Major General Loeffke's Joint Task Force Panama (JTFPM) should be the principal warplanning and warfighting headquarters. General Kelly and his staff argued that JTFPM was adequate only to command the forces already in Panama. Once additional brigades from CONUS deployed, a corps commander would be needed to command and control JTFPM, the 7th Infantry Division, and the JSOTF. In General Kelly's view XVIIIth Airborne Corps had the level of headquarters and the rapid deployment capability needed to plan and implement full scale execution of BLUE SPOON.^{10/}

(u) (S) General Woerner temporarily resolved the dispute during the summer of 1988. His staff had recently been augmented with at least thirteen new spaces, and USCINCSOC had offered him special operations planners as well. With such expertise and the in-country experience his staff had with Noriega and the PDF General Woerner believed that USSOUTHCOM was fully qualified to serve as the warfighting headquarters for BLUE SPOON. However, he recognized that if it became necessary to bolster JTFPM forces with brigades from the United States, a corps level headquarters would be needed to run the operation. Thus

9/ Msg, USCINCSO to JCS, 150125Z Apr 88, TS, Pan. Fact Bk, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

10/ Kelly Interview.

on 5 July 1988. General Woerner requested that Admiral Crowe include a corps-level headquarters in the force deployment list for BLUE SPOON, that is, within the Time-Phased Force and Deployment List (TPFDL) for POST TIME. In General Woerner's mind, however, the corps headquarters would not become operational until after D-day, H-hour. Admiral Crowe approved the request on the 19 October and directed the Commander in Chief of Forces Command (FORSCOM), General Joseph T. Palastra, Jr., to revise the TPFDD accordingly. Nine days later, General Palastra authorized the commander of XVIIIth Airborne Corps and his staff to initiate direct liaison with General Woerner, General Loeffke, and General Cisneros.^{11/}

(u) (S) According to General Woerner, reversion of BLUE SPOON to XVIIIth Airborne tactical command and control would occur only after execution of BLUE SPOON had begun and he found it necessary to deploy all CONUS-based forces listed in the POST TIME TPFDD. Thus the commander of XVIIIth Airborne Corps delegated his planning responsibility, initially, back to JTFPM headquarters. Throughout the period from July 1988 to summer 1989, however, the corps commander monitored the development of JTFPM planning for the operation.^{12/}

(u) (S) Meanwhile, unhappy with that contingency arrangement, seemingly incremental and disjointed in nature, General Kelly met with the J-3s from USSOUTHCOM and FORSCOM on 8 November 1988. They discussed two issues: (1) Should the corps headquarters deploy incrementally or as a complete package? (2) Should it deploy soon after execution had begun, or later, after all on-call combat forces had completed relocation? General Kelly tried without success to convince USSOUTHCOM J-3 to deploy the corps headquarters as a complete package and before all combat forces had deployed. The Chairman of

11/ Memo, COL Hennessee to Dr. Cole, 14 May 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Interv, Cole w/LTC Timothy L. McMahon; USA, Chief of Plans, G-3, XVIIIth Airborne Corps, 26 Apr 90, U, SJS/HisDiv. Press Conference, Army Times et al. w/LTG Carl Stiner, USA, CG, XVIIIth Airborne Corps, 26 Feb 90, U, SJS/HisDiv. (Hereafter: Stiner Press Conference.) Dr. Theresa Kraus, USA Center of Military History, Working Chronology, Operation JUST CAUSE, June 1988. (Hereafter: Kraus Chronology.)
Woerner Interview.

12/ Msg, USCINCSO to JCS, 272115Z Oct 88, TS; Tab D, TP for J-3 for Mtg with J3s, USSOUTHCOM and FORSCOM on 8 Nov 88, 7 Nov 88, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Memo, COL Hennessee to Cole, 14 May 90, S, SJS/HisDiv.

the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Admiral Crowe; apparently sympathized with Kelly's preference, but chose not to overrule USSOUTHCOM at that time.^{13/}

Overturing of the May 1989 Elections and Operation NIMROD DANCER

(U) On 7 May 1989 Panamanians voted into office the candidates of the anti-Noriega coalition, commonly known as the opposition. Leading the opposition, Guillermo Endara defeated Noriega's candidate for president, Carlos Duque, by a three to one margin. Endara's vice presidential running mates, Ricardo Arias Calderon, and Guillermo Ford, did equally well. Despite the presence of observers from the Catholic Church and former US President Jimmy Carter, Noriega's goon squads, notably members of the Dignity Battalions, had tried in vain to coerce the voters into a different outcome. On 10 May Noriega attributed the election results to foreign interference, annulled them, and turned loose the goon squads on the winners. After being physically assaulted, the opposition leaders went into hiding; Endara found political asylum in the papal nunciatura.

(u) (S) With Noriega's callous disregard for law and US public opinion made brutally evident, President Bush and his advisers grew increasingly concerned for the physical safety of thousands of US citizens residing in Panama. In May he ordered 1,900 combat troops to Panama to protect the lives of US citizens and property (Operation NIMROD DANCER). Nearly a thousand troops of the 7th Infantry Division (L) deployed by air in fifty-five sorties from Travis AFB, California. A hundred and sixty-five members of the 2d Marine Expeditionary Force deployed from Camp Lejeune by air within twenty-four hours. Finally, 762 troops of the 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), from Ft. Polk, Louisiana, moved by sea and arrived in Panama on 19 May.^{14/}

13/ TP for J-3, for J-3 Mtg w/USSOUTHCOM AND FORSCOM, 8 Nov 88, 7 Nov 88, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kelly Interview.
14/ Kraus Chronology.

(u) (S) From the perspective of JTFPM and XVIIIth Airborne Corps planners, augmentation of JTFPM forces with 1,900 NIMROD DANCER personnel, was a partial implementation of POST TIME, that, in fact, would facilitate execution of BLUE SPOON. However, they did not view such augmentation as a definite commitment to execute BLUE SPOON. At the time US policymakers and diplomats still hoped to persuade Noriega to resign and retire peacefully, but they underestimated his confidence and his obstinacy. Noriega's immediate reaction to NIMROD DANCER was one of defiance mixed with caution. On 18 May the PDF Department of National Investigation (DENI) detained 17 employees of a Panamanian company that provided security to the US Embassy. On 4 June, however, Noriega instructed the PDF to exercise patience and avoid confrontations with US forces that might provide a pretext for invasion. Noriega specifically ordered the PDF to permit NIMROD DANCER convoys to travel unimpeded on legitimate roadways.^{15/}

A Get Tougher Policy: NSD 17

(u) (S) On 21 March 1989 former congressman, Richard B. Cheney, had succeeded Frank C. Carlucci as Secretary of Defense. After witnessing the theft of the Panamanian election by Noriega, Secretary Cheney met frequently with the Secretary of State, James Baker, and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Lieutenant General (USAF, Ret.) Brent Scowcroft. As members of the Principals' Committee of the National Security Council, they sought new ways to pressure Noriega into early retirement. In addition to persuading other Latin American countries to censure Noriega, they considered signalling US displeasure by reducing US military dependents in Panama while simultaneously augmenting the combat forces.^{16/}

15/ Ibid. Kelly Interview. Interv, Cole w/Dr. Lawrence A. Yates, Hist., CSI, USA C&GS College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, at the Pentagon, 15 Nov 1990, U.

16/ Interv, Ronald H. Cole and Willard J. Webb, Historical Division, with Secretary Richard B. Cheney, 27 Mar 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. (Hereafter: Cheney Interview.)

(u) (S) During the spring and early summer the lower echelons of the National Security Council met frequently to discuss such matters in detail. One such level, the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC), comprised Bernard Aronson from State, William Price from NSC, Richard Brown from OSD, and Brigadier General David C. Meade, USA, from the Joint Staff. As Deputy Director for Politico-Military Affairs in the Directorate for Strategic Plans and Policy (J-5), General Meade informed the J-5 Director, Lieutenant General G. L. Butler, USAF, of all PCC discussion on how to remove Noriega including support of a Panamanian anti-Noriega coup, a US covert operation to snatch the dictator, and major military operations in Panama. In General Meade's mind the decision to oust Noriega had begun with the federal indictments: "Since February 1988, we had 'laid down a marker' that we wanted Noriega out. We [now] had options on how to do it. . . . We could not execute those options [however] without a morally and legally acceptable justification as the catalyst."^{17/}

(u) (S) The discussions at all levels of the interagency arena culminated on 22 July 1989 in National Security Directive 17. In that document President Bush ordered Secretary Cheney and Admiral Crowe to conduct a program of military actions designed to assert US treaty rights in Panama and to keep Noriega and his supporters off guard. NSD 17 listed four categories to accomplish the President's objective. They were arranged in escalatory order starting with Category I (Low Risk/Low Visibility) actions such as publicizing evacuation of US dependents, expanding anti-Noriega campaigns in the media and in psychological operations; and by placing members of the PDF under escort whenever they entered US installations.^{18/}

(u) (S) In the remaining categories, US troops in Panama would play more active roles. In Category II (Low Risk/High Visibility) military police would increase their patrols between US installations, battalion-size forces would deploy to Panama for intensive training, Apache gunship helicopters would

17/ Interv, Dr. Ronald H. Cole, Historical Division, with BG David C. Meade, USA, J-5/DDPMA, 21 May 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. (Hereafter: Meade Interview.)

18/ NSD 17, 22 Jul 89, S, Chairman's Study Group (CSG -- COL Jerrold P. Allen, USAF), Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OCJCS).

conduct frequent training flights, and troops would practice amphibious and nighttime combat operations. In Category III (Medium Risk/High Visibility) US forces would increase their reconnaissance and armed convoys in the vicinity of important PDF installations. In Category IV (High Risk/High Visibility) US troops would regain US access to the causeway leading from Ft. Amador toward the Canal Zone; and they would take control from the PDF over certain key facilities at Quarry Heights, Ft. Amador, and Ft. Espinar.^{19/}

New Leadership and New Plans

(u) (S) The President's decision to get tougher with Noriega surfaced within the defense community shortly after the Panama elections of May 1989. Perhaps influenced by "hawks" who believed that Noriega would not be intimidated by a massive buildup of US forces in Panama—the "mass" strategy originally followed during the Reagan years—President Bush decided in favor of the surprise strategy. He also decided to replace one of the chief critics of the surprise strategy, General Woerner. Upon learning in early June of the decision to replace Woerner, but not the reasons why, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Carl Vuono, a close friend, flew to Panama to tell Woerner personally that the President had "decided to make a change" and that Woerner should retire. At the end of July General Woerner met with Admiral Crowe and Secretary Cheney in Washington. The Secretary explained, "Fred [Woerner], the President has decided to make a change It has nothing to do with you or your performance. You did everything that we wanted you to do. It's political. It's just political."^{20/}

^{19/} Ibid.

^{20/} Woerner Interview. A report in the Washington Post, 22 Jul 89, p. A20, alleged that President Bush had removed General Woerner for two reasons. During the previous February, Woerner had criticized Bush for not dealing adequately with the crisis in Panama. After the overturning of Panamanian elections in May 1989, moreover, conservative senators who had visited Woerner complained to President Bush that Woerner was "not tough enough in dealing with Noriega's provocations against US troops." In the interview with this author, General Woerner speculated that the senators' criticisms may have influenced President Bush to remove him.

(u) (S) After consulting his staff and the Army, on 20 June Admiral Crowe had recommended General Maxwell R. Thurman, USA,^{21/} as General Woerner's replacement. A former Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Thurman was then serving as Commanding General US Army Training and Doctrine Command, Ft. Monroe, Virginia. On the verge of retiring, he enjoyed a reputation throughout the Army and the Joint Staff for uncommon vigor, aggressiveness, and determination to succeed at any endeavor. In the view of some experienced Pentagon observers, Thurman's new assignment, therefore, signalled a shift in the focus of USSOUTHCOM from security assistance and diplomacy toward greater combat readiness.^{22/}

(u) (S) After naming General Thurman USCINCSO, Admiral Crowe asked the general to review the PRAYER BOOK opords, especially BLUE SPOON. On 4 August 1989 General Thurman visited Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, where he received three briefings: an overview briefing followed by more detailed briefings on the JTFPM concept for conventional force operations and the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) concept. As called for in the BLUE SPOON opord of April 1988, the conventional and special force operations remained simultaneous yet compartmented.^{23/}

(u) (S) Later in August, General Thurman and his J-3, Brigadier William Hartzog, USA, conferred with Lieutenant General Carl Stiner, Commander of XVIIIth Airborne Corps. The three men noted that BLUE SPOON called for initial operations by the 12,000 men already in Panama, a buildup in CONUS of about 10,000 more troops, mostly from the 7th Infantry Division (L) over a 5-6 day period, and their incremental deployment to Panama for airmobile assaults over the next 14 days. Thus BLUE SPOON would see a buildup from 12,000 to 22,000 men stretched out over nearly 22 days.^{24/}

21/ Washington Post, 22 Jul 89, p. A 20. Cheney Interview. Kelly Interview.

22/ Kelly and Cheney Interviews.

23/ Memo, COL Hennessee to Cole, 14 May 1990, S, SJS/HisDiv.

24/ Interv, Dr. Ronald H. Cole w/GEN Maxwell R. Thurman, USA, USCINCSO, 8 Mar 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. (Hereafter: Thurman Interview) Kelly Transcript.

(u) (S) The three generals also noted that, since BLUE SPOON had been promulgated in April 1988, Noriega had become more defiant and his forces better equipped and better trained. Piecemeal buildup over 22 days against such an adversary would mean prolonged conventional fighting, more casualties, and more opportunities for Noriega to take hostages or escape to the countryside for guerrilla warfare. The generals also concluded that the operations staff at USSOUTHCOM, accustomed primarily to security assistance and military-to-military diplomacy, was comparatively small and unsuited for the detailed tactical planning and execution needed for the large-scale and fast-moving operation that seemed increasingly likely.

(u) (S) In contrast, the operations staff at XVIIIth Airborne Corps had twice as many people. Most of them were deeply immersed on a daily basis in contingency planning and training for rapid deployment and joint combat operations. Thus, as early as August 1989, General Thurman made up his mind that, upon taking command of USSOUTHCOM in October, he would request that XVIIIth Airborne Corps headquarters be designated at once (not after H-hour) as USSOUTHCOM's primary warplanner and warfighter. Forewarned, General Hartzog's J-3 staff began rewriting the opord for BLUE SPOON in order "to sift out all the confusion that had been caused by eighteen months of evolution" and to include new guidance for the capture of Noriega. Calling the revised opord BANNER SAVIOR, General Hartzog briefed it to General Kelly on 15 September 1989.^{25/}

(u) (S) In August 1989 the President appointed General Colin L. Powell, USA, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff starting on 1 October 1989. Having previously served President Reagan as Assistant for National Security Affairs, and currently involved in support of BLUE SPOON as the Commander in Chief Forces Command (CINCFOR), General Powell readily grasped the problems with that plan and the deteriorating situation in Panama. During discussions with General Thurman and General Stiner in late September, General Powell fully agreed with the other two officers on three key points: The time table for BLUE SPOON must be compressed from three weeks to a few days. US forces

25/ Thurman Interview. Memo, COL Hennessee to Cole, 14 May 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Kelly Transcript.

should make a major effort to seize Noriega after H-hour. More important, however, JTFSO forces should make their primary military objective the disarming and dismantling of the hierarchy of the PDF. In General Powell's words, "if you're going to get tarred with a brush, you might as well take down the whole PDF . . . pull it up by the roots."^{26/}

The Failed Coup, 3 October 1989

(u) (S) On 1 October, Major Moises Giroldi, who had helped suppress the coup attempted against Noriega in March 1988, now proposed to lead one of his own. He planned to seize PDF headquarters, La Comandancia, in Panama City on the next day, rally anti-Noriega PDF to him, and force Noriega to retire from office. Giroldi's motives were less than altruistic; he and his partners sought to succeed all Noriega's friends who monopolized the senior PDF positions.^{27/}

(u) (S) Using his wife as an emissary, Giroldi requested that USSOUTHCOM place blocking forces on roads leading to Panama City from the PDF military bases at Rio Hato in Western Panama and Ft. Amador just southwest of the city. Along those routes Giroldi expected the 5th, 6th, and 7th PDF companies—still loyal to Noriega—to advance to the Comandancia in an attempt to rescue their leader. Giroldi also requested that his family be given sanctuary and that no US aircraft fly overhead near the Comandancia and thereby give the impression that the US was masterminding the coup. Giroldi warned that his men might even shoot down such aircraft.

(u) (S) General Thurman did not trust Giroldi or his plan. Lacking time to check out MAJ Giroldi's claims, he feared that Giroldi might be setting the United States up to intervene blindly on behalf of a nonexistent coup in order

26/ Interv, Dr. Ronald H. Cole and Mr. Willard J. Webb, Historical Division, with GEN Colin L. Powell, USA, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 13 Feb 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. (Hereafter: Powell Interview.)

27/ The account of the coup attempt was taken from the following sources: Trans., Test. SecDef, GEN Powell, and LTG Kelly, SASC and Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), 6 Oct 89, TS; SASC & SSCI Joint Hearing on Panama w/GEN Thurman, 17 Oct 89, S; Trans., Test., GEN Thurman, HASC, 20 Nov 89, TS; OCJCS/LLC. Powell, Cheney, and Thurman Interviews.

to revive anti-American sentiment and Noriega's popularity. Even if the plan proved authentic, Thurman deprecated the idea of allowing Noriega to retire as a recipe for counterrevolution. In Thurman's words, the plan was "ill-conceived, ill-motivated, and ill-led."

(u)(S) At 0238 Monday, 2 October, General Kelly informed the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin L. Powell, that Giroldi would execute a coup against Noriega within the next five or six hours. Kelly also apprised the Chairman that General Thurman strongly opposed employing US combat forces to assist the coup plotters, at least not until more was known about their plans and objectives. Within hours General Powell and Secretary Cheney persuaded the National Security Advisor, General Scowcroft, to avoid immediate commitment of US military forces in support of the coup. That same day, however, Secretary Cheney authorized General Thurman to offer asylum to the families of the plotters and to prepare to assist the plotters with blocking forces if the President subsequently decided to grant Giroldi's request.^{28/}

(u)(S) Upon learning that Noriega would not visit the Comandancia on 2 October as anticipated, Giroldi postponed the coup until the next day. Meanwhile, General Thurman prepositioned some units near the intersections west of the Comandancia for possible blocking operations. Thurman directed his troops not to fire unless in self-defense and not to block the intersections until he received specific orders from the President.^{29/}

(u)(S) On 3 October, the coup went off as planned. With Noriega in hand, Giroldi repeatedly refused requests from General Cisneros to turn him over to USSOUTHCOM for extradition to the United States. Meanwhile, in a move unanticipated by Major Giroldi, the 6th and 7th PDF companies flew over US forces west of Panama City and entered the Comandancia from the east. Inside the Comandancia Noriega persuaded Giroldi to surrender. After being tortured and interrogated, Giroldi and his fellow officers were shot. The Bush administration came under heavy criticism for its apparent unwillingness or inability to assist Giroldi more forcefully.

28/ Thurman Interview. Powell Testimony.

29/ Ibid.

(u) (S) General Thurman drew certain conclusions from the whole episode. The President, Secretary Cheney, and General Powell were quite right in offering only limited aid to the plotters. The United States should never base contingency planning for POST TIME or BLUE SPOON upon any coup by foreign nationals over whom it had no control. For a coup to succeed massive US military aid would be required, and the timing for D-Day and H-Hour would have to rest in US hands, not those of the plotters. After Noriega's torture and slaying of Giroldi and his co-conspirators, very few PDF officers would be brave enough to risk another attempt. Even if some did, and succeeded with or without US help, they probably would perpetuate the corruption of the PDF as well as its monopoly over all Panama's national security apparatus.

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Chapter 2**After the Coup Attempt:
Accelerated Joint Planning and Preparation
3 October – 15 December 1989****General Thurman's Decisions, 3 – 20 October 1989**

(U) (S) Following General Thurman's discussions in August with General Stiner concerning the PRAYER BOOK opords, USSOUTHCOM J-3 had begun revising BLUE SPOON. That staff planned to develop an entirely new opord to be called BANNER SAVIOR, but there was not enough time. After assuming command on 30 September 1989 and witnessing the failure of Giroldi's coup, General Thurman anticipated that the President might order him to support another coup attempt by means of BLUE SPOON. Thurman therefore instructed his J-3 to scrap plans for a new opord and instead expand the forces to deploy from CONUS while simultaneously compressing their "flow time" into Panama. General Powell agreed with that decision and stressed the need to be ready to execute the flow on very short notice.^{30/} --

(U) (S) To facilitate command and control over the multi-brigade force now planned and its accelerated deployment, General Thurman provided for the early activation of Joint Task Force South (JTFSO). On 10 October he designated Lieutenant General Carl W. Stiner, USA, the Commander of XVIIIth Airborne Corps, as Commander, Joint Task Force South (COMJTFSO) upon activation of the task force. General Thurman confided to the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Carl E. Vuono, that "I want Stiner to be [my] warplanner, my warfighter."

(U) (S) From 10 to 12 October 1989 General Stiner met with General Thurman's Director for Operations (USSOUTHCOM J-3), Brigadier General William W. Hartzog, USA, and the Commander of the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF), Major General Gary E. Luck, USA, at USSOUTHCOM headquarters. General Thurman directed the three generals to revise the command and control

30/ Thurman Interview. Memo, COL Hennessee to Cole, 14 May 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. (Hereafter: Hennessee Memo.) Powell Interview.

portion of BLUE SPOON with the COMJTFSO (General Stiner) rather than USCINCSO in full tactical command of all forces in Panama (JTFFM) and all forces, both conventional and special operations, to be deployed. He also directed the three generals to build more flexibility into BLUE SPOON by showing how much of that operation could be executed within 2 hours, 20 hours, 48 hours and beyond of a coup attempt or some other "trigger event."^{31/}

(u) (S) In Washington to testify before two committees of the Senate on 17 October, concerning the Giroidi coup attempt, General Thurman first met with the President and his advisers at the White House on 16 October. Present were: National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft; Deputy National Security Affairs Robert Gates; John Sununu, the White House Chief of Staff; James Baker, the Secretary of State; Secretary Cheney; and General Powell. That same day General Thurman met separately with General Powell and Lieutenant General Kelly to apprise them of the progress being made by Stiner, Luck, and Hartzog on BLUE SPOON. General Powell reiterated his concern that the task force be prepared to go in fully prepared to take down the PDF; that meant plenty of manpower and plenty of rehearsals. Powell later briefed Secretary Cheney who, in turn, stressed the need to minimize casualties and the risk of US civilian hostages.^{32/}

(u) (S) General Thurman returned to Panama after 17 October more convinced than ever that the national authorities wanted the United States to determine the trigger events for intervention rather than waiting for Panamanian conspirators to determine when and how the United States should help. He was also convinced of the need to make the plan more flexible. Hence he approved the staggered interval concept that Stiner, Luck, and Hartzog briefed to him on 20 October. It offered different scenarios of what could be accomplished within a period of from 20 to 48 hours, using forces already in country, and from 2 to 20 hours using forces from CONUS as well.^{33/}

31/ Ibid.

32/ Ibid. Powell Interview. Cheney Interview. Powell later said, "Many people thought we were 'trolling' for an opportunity to invade. We were not. We just wanted to be prepared to go immediately when the President made the decision to do so."

33/ Thurman Interview. Hennessee Memo. Powell Interview. Cheney Interview.

(u) (S) The first scenario would, initially, use only forces already in Panama... JTFPM forces would seize sites, interdict PDF units and airfields, and protect US citizens and Panama Canal workers living in Panama Canal Commission (PCC) housing areas. Meanwhile USSOUTHCOM special operations forces (SOC SO) would attempt to support the opposition, rescue hostages, and capture Noriega. Within 20 hours Rangers from CONUS would conduct additional offensive operations to seize the Tocumen military airfield next to the Torrijos International Airport outside Panama City. To provide adequate fire support for the initial assaults, especially within Panama City, USSOUTHCOM would preposition in Panama Sheridan light tanks, Apache helicopter gunships, and scout helicopters. Within 48 hours Rangers and a division ready brigade (DRB) would seize Tinajitas, Ft. Cimarron, and Rio Hato and then shift to stability operations.^{34/}

(u) (S) A second scenario involved all BLUE SPOON forces, including those from the United States, at H-Hour. Within a period of from 2 to 20 hours, the conventional forces would protect and defend US citizens and installations, and interdict PDF airfields. Special operations forces would protect the opposition, seize the airfields, neutralize the PDF command and control headquarters and facilities. Over the next 28 hours the conventional forces would conduct stability operations.^{35/}

(u) (S) With General Thurman's blessing, the planning staffs at USSOUTHCOM, XVIIIth Airborne Corps, and JSOTF headquarters proceeded during the last ten days of October to draft final plans. During the winter and spring of 1988 the USSOUTHCOM J-3 had greatly restricted access to BLUE SPOON planning documents, conversations, and conference calls to those having clearances of Top Secret Special Category (TS/SPECAT). After the coup attempt of October 1989, and during the drafting of the final operational plans, the FORSCOM J-3 operational security experts further restricted access. They also insisted that each action officer receive only that information relevant to his specific section of the overall plan.^{36/}

34/ Ibid.

35/ Ibid.

36/ Msg, CINCFOR to CDR, USCATA, Ft Leavenworth, KS, DA, WASH, 261340Z Feb 90, S, SJS/HisDiv.

USCINCSO OPORD 1-90 (BLUE SPOON), 30 October 1989

(u)(S) General Hartzog and his staff at USSOUTHCOM completed revision of the opord by 27 October. It now embodied most of the concepts discussed in Panama, Ft. Bragg, and Washington starting in August 1989 when Admiral Crowe named General Thurman USCINCSO-designate and directed him to review the PRAYER BOOK opords. General Hartzog increased the reinforcing troops to include additional brigades from the 82d Airborne Division, the 7th Infantry Division (L), and more units from JSOTF such as Rangers, Army Special Mission Units, and Navy Special Warfare Units. Altogether the revised BLUE SPOON would funnel 27,000 men into battle within 4-5 days in contrast to the earlier version of the plan that would have built up a 22,000-man force over 22 days.^{37/}

(u)(S) New command arrangements blended twin requirements for flexibility and greater unity of command and control. If only in-place forces were available at H-Hour, they would serve directly under USCINCSO acting temporarily as the combat commander. Similarly, when JSOTF was committed, COMJSOTF would assume operational control over USSOUTHCOM special operations forces, but do so under the command of USCINCSO. However, once General Stiner indicated that his headquarters and command were ready, General Thurman would formally activate Joint Task Force South (JTFSO). As COMJTFSO, General Stiner would promptly assume command and control of all ground forces, including unconventional ones. In addition to placing all task forces under a single ground force commander, this arrangement would eliminate the anomaly under the old plan of having a senior major general commanding the 7th Infantry Division (L) serving under the junior major general commanding the JTFPM.

(u)(S) In broad terms the new opord summarized what support the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would make available to USCINCSO and COMJTFSO. In addition to directing deployment and strategic airlift at the outset, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would also direct support of the operation by the Services, the unified and specified commands, and key defense agencies.

37/ OPORDS Panama Folder, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

(u) (S) The Services would provide logistic support and personnel augmentation for their respective components within each task force. That responsibility would extend to forces under the operational control of another service or in a joint command. The Services would provide their components with a five day basic load and any other equipment critical to air movement and ground combat. To regulate the loading up and the flow of CONUS forces to Panama, OPOD 1-90 provided beforehand for establishment at Ft. Bragg of a Joint Movement Control Center.

(u) (S) BLUE SPOON called for support of USCINCSO by five major commanders. If required, USCINCLANT would provide naval and air coverage of the deploying forces and deter any Cuban or Nicaraguan attempts to interfere. In addition to the strategic airlift under Chairman's direction, USCINTRANS would provide sealift and terminal maintenance. As directed by the Chairman, CINCFOR would provide Army forces, civil affairs planners augmented by reservists and, later, would activate a civil affairs brigade. CINCSAC would take care of aerial refueling of deploying and covering aircraft and, on request directly from USCINCSO, provide strategic reconnaissance. Also on request by USCINCSO, COMTAC would deploy two AWACS aircraft.

(u) (S) In addition to diplomatic and political support from State and the USIA, USCINCSO could also count on the aid of four defense agencies: the DIA would deploy a National Military Intelligence Support Team (NMIST) to link the Joint Staff with the intelligence staffs of USCINCSO, COMJTFSO, and COMJTFPM. The NSA would deploy cryptographic elements. The Defense Communications Agency and the Defense Mapping Agency would also assist.

(u) (S) BLUE SPOON 1-90 incorporated a modified version of the two scenarios that General Stiner, General Luck, and General Hartzog had briefed to USCINCSO on 20 October. In the first scenario, "reactive execution," JTFPM forces already in Panama would react immediately to a trigger event such as the taking of US citizens hostage or attacks upon US military installations or the Panama Canal. Reinforcing conventional forces from CONUS would execute their missions later, on arrival in Panama.

(u) (S) Thus at H-Hour JTFPM would deploy in-place conventional ground forces to secure Madden Dam, key defense sites, and PCC housing areas;

to prevent the PDF from reinforcing Canal Zone operating areas and PDF headquarters at La Comandancia; and to prevent the escape of Noriega. JTFPM air support would strike or interdict important PDF facilities at Flamenco Island, Torrijos-Tocumen Airport, Rio Hato, Panama Viejo, Paitilla Airfield, and Tinajitas. At the same time, special operations forces—task organized under a JSOTF—would conduct: raids to capture Noriega; parachute assaults at Torrijos-Tocumen Airport and Rio Hato; operations against PDF forces at Flamenco Island, Balboa Harbor, Paitilla Airfield, Colon Harbor, and the Bridge of the Americas; and waterborne defense operations in the vicinity of and the southern approaches to Howard AFB.

(u) (S) In the second scenario, "deliberative execution," in-place forces and forces from CONUS would conduct missions simultaneously. In describing this option, the planners noted that, "for political reasons, reactive execution is more likely, but deliberative is preferable." This option would allow at least 60 hours preparation for USCINTRANS to execute the airlift, for JSOTF to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance of key targets such as Ft. Cimarron, Tinajitas, Panama Viejo, and the Pacora River Bridge; and for the Chairman to have CINCFOR preposition more armor and aircraft in Panama.

(u) (S) At H-Hour on D-Day, under the deliberative scheme, JSOTF would launch five unconventional task forces: Task Force Green (Army Special Mission Unit) would rescue a US citizen imprisoned near the Comandancia; Task Force Black (USSOUTHCOM Special Forces) would protect opposition leaders; Task Force Green and Task Force Blue (Army Special Mission and Navy Special Warfare Units) would rescue any hostages; and Task Force White (Navy Special Warfare Units) would conduct maritime operations against Panama City, Balboa Harbor, and Colon Harbor. Also at H-Hour, part of a fifth unconventional warfare task force, Red (Rangers), would conduct airborne assaults both at Rio Hato in the West and at Torrijos-Tocumen International Airport in the East.

(u) (S) The deliberative execution would place three of four conventional task forces in action on H-Hour: Task Force Bayonet (193d Infantry Brigade) would seize the Comandancia and other PDF targets in Panama City and environs; Task Force Atlantic (7th Infantry Division and 82nd Airborne Division) would secure key sites in the Canal Zone from Panama City up through Colon; and Task Force Semper Fi (Marines) would concentrate its efforts on the land approaches to the Bridge of the Americas and Howard AFB.

(u) (S) Four phases made up the deliberative execution after H-Hour: At H+45 minutes COMJTFSO would employ the fourth conventional task force, Pacific (82nd Airborne Division) to airdrop at Torrijos-Tocumen and relieve the Rangers. At H+90 minutes Task Force Pacific would conduct operations to capture or destroy PDF strongholds at Tinajitas, Ft. Cimarron, and Panama Viejo. On the second day of operations the 7th Infantry Division and the 16th Military Police Brigade would complete deployment and commence stability operations. From D+3 to D+30 days the 7th Infantry Division would relieve all other combat units and coordinate with the military police to execute the civil-military plan for Panama, Operation BLIND LOGIC.

(u) (S) During late October General Stiner, General Luck, and General Hartzog flew to Washington to brief OPORD 1-90 to General Kelly, General Powell, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 October, 1 November, and 3 November, respectively. Armed with charts, graphs, and many months of near total immersion in the planning, General Hartzog provided what General Kelly later characterized as one of the best operations briefings he had ever heard. General Hartzog fully satisfied General Powell that the plan was flexible and, barring a trigger event in the very near future, would allow ample time for rehearsals. General Powell also liked the emphasis on going into Panama with enough force to overwhelm the PDF in the shortest time possible. On 3 November General Hartzog briefed the plan in the Tank to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They agreed to it as exactly as written.^{38/}

(u) (S) After winning JCS approval of OPORD 1-90 on 3 November General Stiner, General Luck, and General Hartzog returned to their headquarters to refine the target lists and rehearsal plans for each of the task forces. Meanwhile General Powell briefed Secretary Cheney and his Deputy, Donald Atwood, in broad terms on the plan and its flexibility. Secretary Cheney did not apprise either the President or Brent Scowcroft on the details of BLUE SPOON, but merely informed them that General Powell and his commanders were refining a plan for vigorous military intervention in Panama, if and when the

38/ Kelly Interview. Hennessee Memo. Powell Interview.

President found it necessary. However, during the rehearsals by the task forces over the next six weeks, the Secretary posted both men on the special exercises or deployments that might prove politically embarrassing if revealed by the media.^{39/}

JTFSO OPLAN 90-2, 3 November 1989:

(u) (S) The most detailed refinement of the planning took place at General Stiner's headquarters, Ft. Bragg. On 3 November, while Stiner was in the Tank at the Pentagon, his chief planners at XVIIIth Airborne Corps Headquarters completed an operational plan (JTFSO OPLAN 90-2) that paralleled OPORD 1-90, but featured more of the particulars needed by a tactical warfighter. OPLAN 90-2 began with a statement of the commander's intent. Whereas OPORD 1-90 emphasized the need to protect US lives and security interests in Panama, OPLAN 90-2 focused on closing with and disarming the PDF.^{40/}

(u) (S) Leaving the details of special operations task forces for JSOTF to cover in its own plan, XVIIIth Airborne Corps planners enumerated precisely within OPLAN 90-2 the forces and targets for the Rangers and the four conventional task forces: Task Force Red (Rangers) would assault Rio Hato and neutralize the 6th and 7th PDF Companies, the ones that had rescued Noriega during the last coup attempt. Task Force Atlantic (brigade of 7th Infantry Division (L)) would hit targets in the Canal Operating Zone from Gamboa to Colon and secure the Atlantic entrance to the Canal. Such targets would include the electrical distribution center at Cerro Tigre, Madden Dam, and Renacer Prison in Gamboa. Task Force Atlantic would also protect US installations in Colon, neutralize the 8th PDF Company and a naval infantry unit, and seize both Coco Solo Naval Air Station and Ft. Espinar.

39/ Powell Interview. Cheney Interview.

40/ JTFSO OPLAN 90-2, HQ, XVIIIth Airborne Corps, 3 Nov 89, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

(u) (S) Task Force Pacific (Ranger battalion and the Division Ready Brigade from 82nd Airborne Division) would assault northeast of Panama City. The Rangers would commence at H-Hour with an airdrop at Torrijos-Tocumen Airport to be followed in forty-five minutes by the paratroopers who would expand the airhead. Later the task force would seek out the PDF cavalry squadron at Panama Viejo, Battalion 2000 at Ft. Cimarron, and the 1st PDF Company at Tinajitas. They would also secure Cerro Azul and the airfield at Paitilla.

(u) (S) Within Panama City and its western suburbs two other task forces would operate in close proximity. Task Force Bayonet (193rd Infantry Brigade, reinforced after 7 November by prepositioned forces: 4 Sheridan tanks, 6 Apache helicopters, 3 Observer Scout helicopters, and the 503rd MP Battalion) would secure Ft. Clayton, Quarry Heights, and Gorgas Hospital while pinning down the 5th PDF Company at Ft. Amador and the composite PDF forces in the Comandancia. After a special operation to remove a US citizen imprisoned in Carcel Modelo near the Comandancia, Task Force Bayonet would take control of that prison. At the same time, Task Force Semper Fi (one Marine rifle company, one Marine light armored vehicle company, and the Fleet Antiterrorist Support Team) would secure the Bridge of the Americas, the Thatcher Ferry Bridge Highway, and other western approaches to the Canal.

(u) (S) The US order of battle was heavily weighted with Army units numbering over 22,000 troops; but the other Services would contribute nearly 5,000 men making BLUE SPOON a truly joint operation. The Air Force contingent would number nearly 3,400, mostly units from the 830th Air Division. Air Force planes included 2 EF-111s for electronic jamming, 6 EC-130s for electronic combat, 8 AC-130 gunships, 6 F-117 A Stealth fighter bombers, and other aircraft from the 1st Special Operations Wing. The next largest contingent would come from the Marines, about 900 troops from the units already specified for Task Force Semper Fi. Finally, the Navy would contribute over 700 men from the following units: Naval Special Warfare Group TWO, Naval Special Warfare Unit EIGHT, Special Boat Units 20 and 26, Countermine Division 127, and SEAL Teams TWO and FOUR.^{41/}

41/ J-3 Briefing, LTC Shane, 2 Apr 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

(u) (S) JTF SO OPLAN 90-2 contained some very precise guidance on rules of engagement. Commanders would insure that troops used the minimum force necessary to accomplish military objectives. This guidance applied especially in the case of indirect fire weapons such as artillery, mortar, naval gunfire, tube-launched rockets, main tank guns, helicopter gunships, and AC-130 gunships. Use of such weapons in populated areas would require approval by a ground commander in the grade of lieutenant colonel/commander or higher. Bombardment or other forms of attack by indirect fire would be prohibited against hospitals, medical unit facilities, schools, churches, museums, and historical monuments except where they were being used by the enemy to conduct or support offensive operations. Attacks upon public works—dams, power plants, water purification facilities, and the like—would be prohibited except where specifically authorized by the COMJTF SO.

(u) (S) The public affairs annex to JTF SO OPLAN 90-2 acknowledged the leadership role of USSOUTHCOM's Joint Information Office (JIO) as the chief coordinator and sole releaser of operational news. In support of the JIO, the JTF SO public affairs officer would coordinate the public affairs activities of JTF SO task forces and deny release of information concerning current or future operations, intelligence collection activities, friendly forces order of battle, and the effectiveness of enemy tactics and techniques.^{42/}

(u) (S) General Stiner took great pride and reposed great confidence in his oplan. While acknowledging that the 1988 version of BLUE SPOON had laid much of the ground work both for OPORD 1-90 and JTF SO OPLAN 90-2, he believed that clear guidance from General Powell and General Thurman had expedited the revision process making for greater flexibility and efficiency of execution. Moreover, early indications during the previous August on how General Thurman would modify the plan had permitted Stiner's G-3 to make a head start on the revisions. Finally, having helped to brief the plan from General Thurman up to General Powell and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Stiner sensed that his superiors in the chain of command completely

42/ JTF SO OPLAN 90-2, HQ, XVIIIth Airborne Corps, 3 Nov 89, TS, J-3/ JOD/WHEM.

understood the plan and would, when the time came, effectively support its execution.^{43/}

(U) (S) Later in November, General Powell made one significant organizational change in the joint planning. After the Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved OPORD 1-90 on 3 November, General Thurman had informed General Powell that he had established a Joint Deployment System (JDS) Plan Identification for special operations requirements. At USSOCOM headquarters General Lindsay worried that inclusion of such information in the JDS might make special operations visible to personnel uncleared for special operations planning. He was also concerned that his staff lacked the experience necessary for making the transition from planning small, close-hold operations to the kind of planning necessary for the JDS. On the other hand, at XVIIIth Airborne Corps Headquarters, General Stiner questioned that the JDS could accommodate the detailed planning and execution data necessary, such as use of hours and minutes instead of days. Confronted with objections from two major commanders on security and pragmatic grounds, General Powell decided to exclude OPORD 1-90 from the Joint Deployment System. Because USTRANSCOM depended heavily upon the JDS for its planning, General Powell's decision effectively removed that command from the operation and made the Military Airlift Command (MAC) solely responsible for strategic airlift.^{44/}

Rehearsals and a Bomb Threat, 7 October - 15 December 1989

(U) (S) Four days after failure of the Giroldi coup, General Thurman had initiated training and conferences to fine tune his command for action. On 7 October he had ordered Major General Marc Cisneros to test all JTFPM units, from squad to battalion level, with live fire exercises. Upon learning that they had not been so tested in some time, General Thurman insisted that all units remain in the field until they had qualified with every weapon in their inventory. Throughout the remainder of October and into November, the

43/ Stiner Conference. Kraus Chronology.

44/ USTRANSCOM Hist, 1989, S, pp. 62-63.

planning staffs of General Hartzog and General Stiner conferred both at Quarry Heights and at Ft. Bragg to refine their coordination procedures, joint execution checklists, and joint communications instructions (CEOI). They also developed follow-on operations for after D-Day.^{45/}

(u) (S) The most significant of those joint planning conferences took the form of a table top seminar at Ft. Clayton, Panama, on 18 November. General Thurman reviewed with General Stiner, General Cisneros, General Luck, and the USSOUTHCOM Air Force and Naval component commanders the actions each would take during a reactive execution, with little or no notice after a trigger event, and during a deliberative execution after substantial advance notice.^{46/}

(u) (S) During the nine days or more preceding the table top conference at Ft. Clayton, General Thurman had learned from intelligence sources of an alleged plot by the Medellin (Colombia) drug cartel to bomb US defense facilities in Panama in reprisal for the US counternarcotics program. The rumored attack would involve car bombs to be planted and exploded during Thanksgiving week, 19-24 November. It would be carried out with the assistance of two of Noriega's top lieutenants: Major Mario Del Cid in Colon and Major Victor Herrerra in Bocas Del Toro.^{47/}

(u) (S) Although the bomb threat later turned out to be a hoax, General Thurman believed it at the time and acted to protect his command. The idea of a massacre of US troops by car bomb, as had happened to the US Marines in their barracks at Beirut International Airport in 1983, horrified and angered General Thurman. He determined that such an outrage would not happen "on his watch." He also speculated that, if he failed, the resultant loss of American lives would provoke President Bush into ordering execution of BLUE SPOON. Thus after conclusion of the table top seminar on 18 November, General Thurman took General Stiner aside and formally "activated Joint Task Force South for planning."

(u) (S) In related actions General Thurman initiated stringent security checks at all US installations and stepped up the tempo of exercises and rehearsals during

45/ Thurman Interview. Hennessee Memo.

46/ Thurman Interview. Msg, USCINCSO to CDR, XVIIIth Abn Corps et al., 091858 Nov 89, TS, Pro Rata Msgs, Bk 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kelly Transcript.

47/ Msg, USSOUTHCOM to CJCS, 200030Z Nov 89, S, CJCS Files. Thurman Interview.

the next three weeks. In Panama General Cisneros' troops augmented the number of exercises and troop movements in areas where they would operate during BLUE SPOON ("Sand Flea exercises"). At Ft. Benning, Georgia, and in Panama, General Stiner rehearsed the Ranger battalions on their BLUE SPOON missions.^{48/}

(u) (S) General Powell briefed Secretary Cheney on those developments. The Secretary remarked later, "We adopted a more aggressive posture. We sent US forces up and down the causeways, conducted helicopter operations, and scheduled exercises." In the Secretary's opinion the frenetic pace of activity pushed General Stiner's forces to a high state of readiness; increased the tension and incidents between US and PDF troops; and, by their frequency, lulled Noriega into the belief that the US was simply trying to intimidate him. He did not expect an actual attack.^{49/}

48/ Thurman Interview. Msg, CINCFOR to CDR, USCATA, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, and DA, WASH, 261340Z Feb 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Stiner Conference.
49/ Cheney Interview.

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Chapter 3

Trigger Events, Decision to Intervene

and Final Preparations for H-Hour

15-19 December 1989

Trigger Events, 15-16 December 1989

(u) (s) The escalation of tension between US and PDF forces following the unfounded Colombian bomb scare and stepped-up US troop movements in Panama culminated in warlike words from the Panamanian leadership on Friday, 15 December. The National Assembly passed a resolution stating that, "owing to US aggression," a state of war exists with the United States. That same day General Noriega named himself the "Maximum Leader" and publicly speculated that someday the "bodies of our enemies" would float down the Panama Canal and the people of Panama would win complete control over the waterway.^{50/}

(u) (s) Violent acts succeeded violent words on Saturday, 16 December. During the evening four US officers, apparently on a Saturday night outing, took a wrong turn and approached a PDF checkpoint at the Comandancia. At about 2110 hours PDF guards halted the car and tried to force the officers outside. When the Americans refused to leave their vehicle, a PDF troop locked a magazine clip into his AK 47 assault rifle. The driver of the vehicle pulled away. As the guard fired, the car sped off only to approach another PDF guardpost. There the guards also began firing. Their bullets wounded three of the officers in the car; one of them, Marine First Lieutenant Robert Paz, subsequently died of his wounds at the Gorgas Hospital.

(u) (s) While the US officers were trying to escape, a US couple that had witnessed the incident, [redacted] (s) (c) [redacted] were brought by force to a police station for questioning. The interrogators kicked the lieutenant in the groin, hit him in the mouth, and pointed a gun at his head.

50/ Thurman Interview. NY Times, 21 Dec 89, p. A18.

Meanwhile other PDF members forced (b)(6) to stand against a wall while they groped her. She collapsed. 51/

(u) (S) At 2125 hours USSOUTHCOM notified General Kelly at the National Military Comn and Center (NMCC) of the shooting. Within the half hour General Kelly notified General Powell and alerted the commanders of XVIIIth Airborne Corps, MAC, and JSOTF. General Powell informed Rear Admiral William Owens, Senior Military Assistant to Secretary Cheney. On learning of the incident from Admiral Owens, Secretary Cheney called Brent Scowcroft. Ironically, General Thurman and his executive assistant, Colonel James F. Hennessee, USA, were in Washington at the time and first learned of the shooting incident in the NMCC at 2230 hours. When General Powell asked General Thurman what he was going to do, Thurman said he would head back to Panama on the first plane and learn all the facts before making his recommendation. The commander and his executive officer boarded a jet bound for Panama at 0100 on 17 December. 52/

Key Military Meetings, Sunday Morning, 17 December 1989

(u) (S) General Thurman and Colonel Hennessee arrived at Howard Air Force Base in Panama, at 0600 and went directly to the USSOUTHCOM operations center ("the Tunnel") where the J-3, General Hartzog, briefed them. General Thurman then called General Powell to advise him of the options: do nothing, try to seize Noriega in a snatch operation, or execute Operation BLUE SPOON. General Thurman reminded the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, after the Giroldi coup failure and two months of intensive planning and frequent rehearsals, USSOUTHCOM, JTFSO, and JSOTF were in an excellent state of readiness to implement the third option. 53/

51/ J-3 Chron Sum, 16 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Thurman Interview. National Military Support Team (NMIST) Debriefing of [(b)(6)]
52/ Powell Interview. Cheney Interview. Thurman Interview. J-3 Chron Sum, 16 Dec 89, S.
53/ Thurman Interview.

(u) (S) During the morning of 17 December, General Powell consulted with two other commanders and the Secretary of Defense. From 0900 to 0945 he conversed by secure telephone with the commanders of JSOTF and MAC to ascertain how soon they could be ready to execute the airlift and special operations in Panama. They replied 48 hours. General Powell then met with Secretary Cheney, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz, and some representatives from the National Security Council. According to General Powell, most of the policy advisers were uneasy about whether the shooting at the Comandancia constituted "enough of a smoking gun" to go to war. They feared that the "accidental blundering" of the four officers into the vicinity of the Comandancia might appear to be a reconnaissance or even a provocation.

(u) (S) Convinced that the blundering had been truly accidental, Secretary Cheney had fewer qualms about taking strong action against Noriega and the PDF, especially after General Powell reminded him that BLUE SPOON had been refined and General Thurman's forces could not be better prepared to execute it. The Secretary decided to brief the President and his key advisers that afternoon and called Brent Scowcroft to make the arrangements.^{54/}

(u) (S) Before accompanying Secretary Cheney to meet with the President, General Powell conferred with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. To avoid tipping off the press, he invited his colleagues to join him at Ft. Myer. The meeting began in General Powell's quarters at 1130. In addition to the Chiefs, the following also attended: the Vice Chairman, General Robert T. Herres, USAF; General Kelly; and Rear Admiral Edward D. Sheaffer, Director for JCS Support (DIA). On hearing of the shooting and death of Marine Lieutenant Paz, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, especially the Commandant of the Marine Corps, were convinced that the killing of a US serviceman should not go unanswered. After General Kelly and Admiral Sheaffer briefed BLUE SPOON and the intelligence situation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that, if the President wanted to intervene, BLUE SPOON would be a good plan.^{55/}

54/ Cheney Interview.

55/ Powell Interview.

Decision at the White House, Sunday Afternoon, 17 December 1989

(u) (S) About 1400 General Powell and General Kelly departed for the White House. Before leaving, however, they had carefully reviewed with General Powell's executive assistant, Brigadier General Thomas E. White, USA, the pattern of escalating Panamanian harassment and violence during the last two months—proving that the shootings and beatings at the Comandancia on 16 December were not isolated incidents. Such information would be vital to any discussion of the pros and cons of using military force in Panama. The meeting with the President, General Scowcroft, Mr. Gates, Secretary Baker, Secretary Cheney, and the White House Press Secretary, Marlin Fitzwater began at 1430. Secretary Cheney elaborated on the events of Friday and Saturday night, probably placing them in the context of the escalating confrontation. General Kelly then reviewed in broad outline the concept of operations and the forces for BLUE SPOON.^{56/}

(u) (S) In considering a military operation of the scope of BLUE SPOON, President Bush and his counselors discussed objectives broader than mere retribution for the killing of one US military man and assaults upon four others. The planners for BLUE SPOON, both on the Joint Staff and at USSOUTHCOM, had wrestled with the question of political objectives during the previous months. Their answer reemerged during the course of the White House discussion that Sunday afternoon: to safeguard the lives of nearly 30,000 US citizens residing in Panama; to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal and 142 US defense sites; to help the opposition establish genuine democracy; to neutralize the PDF; and, to bring Noriega to justice.

(u) (S) President Bush initially showed guarded interest in a military operation. He wanted assurance that it would not backfire as had the attempted rescue of US hostages from Iran during the Carter administration. He also wanted to preclude the interservice problems that arose in 1983 during the intervention in

56/ This and the succeeding paragraphs derive from the following: Cheney Interview. Powell Interview. Interv, Cole w/LTC Shane, 2 Apr 90, S; SJS/H'sDiv. Kelly Transcript.

Grenada. Playing the role of devil's advocate, the President asked: Would the plan work? "Did it have to be that big?" How many casualties would there be? How much damage would be done? What would be the diplomatic consequences throughout Latin America?

(u) (S) General Powell explained that even if US intelligence could predict where Noriega would be, an operation merely to snatch him would not solve the problems with Panama. The entire PDF leadership was rife with corruption, and there were Noriega clones, anyone of whom could step up and replace him. What was required was a complete breakdown of the PDF as an institution. That could be accomplished, General Powell said, most effectively with a massive military operation to neutralize the PDF as the first step toward its reconstruction in a more democratic mode. During the process, even if Noriega escaped, he would have lost his power base and eventually would be hunted down. Moreover, concluded General Powell, a massive intervention, using all forces at once, would minimize the time available for the PDF to seize US citizens. Needing no further persuasion, President Bush ordered execution of BLUE SPOON with the words: "Okay, let's do it. Hell with it!"

(u) (S) After the President approved execution of BLUE SPOON, General Powell and General Kelly returned to the Pentagon to transform the operation from a concept on paper into the movement by air, land, and sea of thousands of men and tons of materiel over hundreds of miles toward the isthmus of Panama. Movement began within the Pentagon. At 1630 General Kelly briefed his top planners and advisers within J-3 on the President's decision. He also directed them to set up a Crisis Action Team in the Crisis Management Room of the National Military Command Center (NMCC) no later than Tuesday, 19 December.^{57/}

(u) (S) General Kelly also indicated to his staff that General Stiner preferred H-Hour to be at 0100 EST on the morning of 20 December. That time would permit Stiner to launch his special operations and airborne troops at nighttime for which they were better trained and equipped than any other comparable force in the world. Kelly said: "We own the night. We're the best night fighters on earth." Major General James D. Kellim, USAF, the Director of Operations

57/ Kelly Interview.

for the Military Airlift Command (MAC), also found that time agreeable as it provided him with the nearly sixty hours notice he needed to launch the airlift. (u) (S) From 1700 to about 1730 General Powell and General Kelly respectively telephoned key commanders and their directors of operations to alert them about the President's decision and that a written execute order would follow. Specifically, General Powell called General Thurman; General James J. Lindsay, USA, Commander in Chief, Special Operations Command (USCINCSOC); General Hansford T. Johnson, USAF, USCINTRANS and CINCMAC; and General Edwin H. Burba, Jr., USA, Commander in Chief, Forces Command (CINCFOR). General Kelly called General Stiner at XVIIIth Airborne Corps Headquarters, Major General Downing at JSOTF Headquarters, and the operations directors at USSOUTHCOM, MAC, and FORSCOM. After the calls General Kelly asked General Powell to authorize General Downing to begin preparations for pre-H-Hour insertion of special operations forces. By 1930 General Powell notified Kelly that Secretary Cheney had approved the request and JSOTF movement could begin insertions within the half hour.^{58/}

Monday, 18 December 1989: Pre-Movement, the F-117A Decision, and the Execute Order

(u) (S) After JSOTF preinsertion movements had begun, the XVIIIth Airborne Corps commenced movement preparations. At midnight on 17 December the Chief of Staff of XVIIIth Airborne Corps led the JTF SO advance party to Panama. Upon arrival the party moved into the US Army South (USARSO) emergency operating center (EOC), Ft. Clayton, to establish JTF SO Forward. At 1500 on 18 December General Stiner and his principal staff deployed to take command of the forward headquarters. The establishment of the tactical commander in the operational area and the arrival of supporting staff and units on 19 December would greatly facilitate General Stiner's command and control of the assault forces when they landed on D-Day.

^{58/} Kelly Interview.

(u) (S) Meanwhile the Military Airlift Command commenced movement preparations of its own on 18 December. General Kellim configured MAC aircraft at Charleston AFB, Pope AFB, Hunter AAF, and Lawson AAF for airlifting equipment and troops. First MAC airmen rigged, loaded, and moved heavy equipment away from home stations to make room on the ramp space for personnel aircraft. Crews of the latter executed schedules for loading and staggered takeoffs on 19 October, D-Day minus 1.^{59/}

(u) (S) Starting with the preparations to deploy, the Secretary of Defense followed with increased interest the tactical execution of BLUE SPOON. He wanted to avoid embarrassing the nation, the President, and the armed forces by repetition of the mistakes that had plagued earlier contingency operations, such as the rescue of the Mayaguez crew in 1975, the loss of 241 Marines at the Beirut airport barracks during peacekeeping operations in 1983, and intervention on Grenada in 1983 where interservice mishaps marred an otherwise successful execution. Secretary Cheney listened carefully as General Powell and General Kelly explained the details of the execute order that they were preparing for transmission later that day. General Powell and General Kelly explained to the Secretary's satisfaction that the chain of operational command was as "short and clean as possible;" that interservice logrolling and pie-sharing had been avoided—with only those forces best suited for the operation being tasked; and that the commanders and their troops thoroughly understood the rules of engagement.^{60/}

(u) (S) Secretary Cheney questioned and changed only one significant operational detail, the plan to employ six F-117A stealth fighters on D-Day. Of the provision in OPOD 1-90 to strike with the super secret, high tech aircraft at Rio Hato and the two possible Noriega hideouts, La Escondida and Boquete, he said, "Come on, guys, how severe is the Panama air defense threat?" Once the press broke the story of the use of the F-117A, he knew that Congress would

59/ Kelly Interview. Thurman Interview. J-3 Chron Sum, 18 Dec 89, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, CINCFOR to CDR, USCATA, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, and DA, WASH, 261340Z Feb 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Kraus Chronology.
60/ Powell Interview. Cheney Interview.

criticize the White House and the Pentagon for opportunistic use of the plane to justify its expense.^{61/}

(u) (S) The Chairman and General Kelly laid out the reasons why General Stiner had asked for the aircraft to stun rather than kill the PDF troops at Rio Hato and to provide airborne troops assaulting at La Escondida and Boquete with the best available nighttime close air support. The case for Rio Hato was especially persuasive. The elite 6th and 7th PDF Companies there had saved Noriega during the October coup attempt. Yet many of the rank and file were known to be friendly to the United States. To kill them with ordinary bombing or gunfire would create a martyr situation that might stiffen resentment and resistance throughout Panama. The rules of engagement clearly sought to avoid that situation. General Stiner believed that by dropping bombs no closer than to within 150 yards of the barracks, the horrendous sound of the explosion and the call for surrender by surrounding Rangers would compel the Panamanians to surrender after token resistance.^{62/}

(u) (S) For Stiner's exacting requirements other aircraft would not do. Air Force gunships would require too much flight time from CONUS and could not be relied upon to fight effectively below a cloud cover of 10,000 feet. Apache gunships could do the job, but those available would be needed to take the Comandancia. General Stiner turned for an answer to his supporting Air Force commander, Lieutenant General Peter T. Kempf, USAF, Commander of the 12th Air Force. General Kempf recommended the F-117A. It was designed to fly at night and could drop 2,000 pound laser-guided bombs with great precision. Moreover, as a stealth aircraft, it could fly low and straight, not having to evade, and thus assure its stability as a firing platform.

(u) (S) After presenting General Stiner's case, General Powell nonetheless asked General Thurman to review again the need for strikes at Rio Hato, La Escondida, and Boquete. Thurman made a strong argument for bombing near the PDF barracks at Rio Hato. Both General Powell and Secretary Cheney agreed

61/ Ibid.

62/ Ibid. This paragraph and the next two are also based on the following: Thurman Interview. Stiner Conference. Kelly Transcript. Powell Interview, 10 Dec 90, S. J-3 Chron Sum, 18 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

on the need for a strike there and on 19 October persuaded the President accordingly. However, neither Powell nor Cheney accepted the logic for using the ultra-sophisticated warplanes against Noriega's two hideouts at La Escondida and Boguete. For them it made more sense to stick to the original plan—to use special operations forces to capture Noriega at either place, but, if he proved to be absent, to bypass both.

(u) (S) About 1050 General Kelly briefed the Chairman on the execute order; the Chairman reviewed it with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. All were satisfied, and the Joint Staff dispatched it at 1825 EST. On receipt of the execute order, General Burba at FORSCOM, in turn, sent a message at 2000 EST to the Commander of XVIIIth Airborne Corps directing him to execute the order with the 82nd Airborne and 7th Infantry Division (L) under his operational control and, if found necessary, the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) as well.^{63/}

(u) (S) In the order the Chairman formally announced to the commanders what he and General Kelly had told them and their operations deputies by telephone the previous day. The provisions, except for those concerning the F-117As, remained virtually identical to the ones that General Hartzog had presented in his briefing of BLUE SPOON in the Tank on 3 November. The order did, however, announce a new name for the operation. The previous evening General Lindsay, USCINCSOC, and General Kelly had discussed the old name, and Lindsay asked whether Kelly wanted to tell his grandchildren that he had participated in Operation BLUE SPOON. While BLUE SPOON had been quite satisfactory for security purposes during the planning stage, General Kelly agreed that the time had come to provide a name that would henceforth indicate the purpose of the operation and simultaneously inspire the men, their commanders, and the people back home. In a discussion with Rear Admiral Lopez, General Kelly had discussed changing the name of the operation to JUST ACTION, but changed the name to JUST CAUSE; General Powell agreed to the change.^{64/}

63/ Msg, CJCS to USCINCSO et al., 182325Z Dec 89, TS (Pro Rata), JCS Specat Traffic Log, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, CINCFOR to CDR, XVIIIth Abn Corps, 190100Z Dec 89, JUST CAUSE Specat Traffic Log, J-3/JOD/WHEM.
64/ Kelly Interview.

~~Tuesday, 19 December 1989: Launching the Airlift~~

(u) (S) On Tuesday, 19 December, General Powell met one last time with President Bush before US troops began their airlift into Panama. Meeting at 1400 the Chairman reviewed the execute order with the President and presented him with the opportunity to make some last minute decisions. If the President had any qualms about the operation, this was the time to call it off. Instead President Bush "stayed the course." He assured Powell that, even if Endara, Calderon, and Ford balked at setting up a new government, he would not postpone or cancel the operation. Concerning the employment of two F-117A's at Rio Hato, President Bush approved, "They're American troops. Give them what they need." Finally, the President announced his intention to explain to Congress and the press the purpose and nature of JUST CAUSE early the next morning. After General Powell reported back to the Joint Chiefs of Staff at 1430, he telephoned General Thurman at Quarry Heights telling him, "It's a go . . . Good luck!"^{65/}

(u) (S) CINCMAC launched the airlift in several segments on 19 December starting with the Rangers from Ft. Lewis, Washington, who departed Lawson Army Airfield in 13 C-130s at 1316 EST. The Rangers from Ft. Stewart, Georgia, departed from Hunter Army Air Field in 12 C-130s at 1432 EST. Later, at 1554 EST, the remainder of 31 C-141 Heavy Drop cargo aircraft that had not already left flew out of Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina.^{66/}

(u) (S) Carrying two battalions of the 82nd Airborne Division from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, 20 C-141s were supposed to depart Pope AFB for Panama shortly after the Rangers' airlift. Unfortunately, freezing rain and repeated icing of the wings prevented them from taking off on time. Using all available deicers, ground crews thawed out ten C-141s for takeoff at 2045 EST. The second ten followed nearly four and a half hours later. The commander of the 82nd Airborne Division had asked permission to delay arrival time of the first serial until both battalions could drop together. Sticking as closely as possible

65/ Powell Interview.

66/ Sources used for the airlift include: Kelly Interview. Msg, CINCFOR to CDR, USCATA, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, and DA, WASH, 261340Z Feb 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. J-3 Chron Sum; TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kraus Chronology.

to the original timetable, General Stiner ordered the commander to drop his men in two separate serials as soon as each reached the target area.^{67/}

(u) (S) Altogether nearly 221 aircraft participated in the deployment to Panama. MAC aircraft directly involved in carrying troops and equipment numbered 80 C-141s, 22 to 25 C-130s, and 11 C-5s. The Strategic Air Command contributed up to 105 KC-10s and KC-135s to refuel MAC aircraft and to conduct supporting reconnaissance missions. During the airflow to Panama and the return trips back to the United States, another twenty aircraft, 16 F-15s and 4 F-16s, from the US Atlantic Command (USLANTCOM) Air Force component, AFLANT, flew combat air patrols (CAPs) out of Key West over that part of the Caribbean between Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula and Cuba. Their mission was to deter or interdict attempts by Cuba or Nicaragua to interfere with or attack the airlift. The F-15s flew CAPs to protect the ingress; the F-16s flew them to protect the egress. Naval aircraft from the Atlantic Fleet provided search and rescue coverage. Finally, USAF E-3 AWACS aircraft provided aerial surveillance, threat warning, fighter control, air situation updates, control of air refueling operations, and back up for search and rescue operations.^{68/}

(u) (S) The mass movement of US aircraft to Panama in the afternoon and evening of the 19 December undoubtedly compromised complete strategic surprise. Upon receipt of the execute order General Stiner's headquarters announced an emergency deployment readiness exercise (EDRE) in an unsuccessful attempt to explain the airlift as just another exercise. At 2200 on the evening of 19 October, Dan Rather of CBS News commented: "US military transport planes have left Ft. Bragg. The Pentagon declines to say whether or not they're bound for Panama. It will say only that the Ft. Bragg-based 18th Airborne Corps has been conducting what the Army calls an emergency readiness measure."

67/ Ibid.

68/ Msg, USCINCLANT to CINCLANTFLT, 190543Z Dec 89, TS; Msg, CINCAFLANT to CINCLANT, 200023Z Dec 89, TS; Msg, HQ, AFLANT to CINCSAC, 200352Z Dec 89, TS; Specat Traffic Log, J-3/JOD/WHEM. USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, S, PM Sitretps, J-3/JOD/WHEM. History of SAC, 1989, 19 Sep 90, S, pp. 31-32.

(u) (S) Intelligence sources in USSOUTHCOM began picking up evidence that the Comandancia was aware of the movement of C-130s and C-141s into Howard AFB as early as 1700 EST. The PDF leaders apparently took precautionary steps to respond to a US military operation against them, but were not certain what type of action it would be and when it would begin. At about 1727 Del Cid, a key Noriega subordinate in Panama City, speculated that the US forces were planning a surgical strike to seize Noriega. By 1849 PDF Headquarters had alerted the elite PDF Battalion 2000 stationed near the Torrijos-Tocumen Airport and some other units as well. It had also placed key bases and sectors of Panama under blackout.^{69/}

(S)

(S)

69/ Sources for evidence of a compromise derive from: Kelly Interview. Stiner Conference. J-3 Chron Sum, 19 Dec 89, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kraus Chronology. Msg, CINCFOR to CDR, USACATA, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, and DA, WASH, 261340Z Feb 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Patrick E. Tyler, "Pentagon Corrects 'Panama Invasion Leaks' Report," Washington Post, 13 Mar 90, p. A23.

(U) General Stiner contended that breaches in security had denied his forces tactical surprise. Some PDF troops, possibly sentries, fired upon the Rangers as they dropped over Rio Hato. Why effective resistance was not more widespread he attributed to Noriega and his advisers misreading US intentions. General Stiner believed that either Noriega and his advisers did not completely trust their own information, or they were too incompetent to take all the necessary measures to mount a proper defense throughout the rest of Panama.^{71/}

(u) (S) General Powell, General Kelly, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Pete Williams, saw the PDF reacting not to hard intelligence about H-Hour as much as taking precautionary measures in the wake of reports of the airlift. If the PDF had truly been alerted, according to General Kelly, they would have distributed .50 Caliber machine guns and other antiaircraft weaponry throughout Panama that same evening. They might also have also begun rounding up as hostages US citizens at the Holiday Inn and the Mariott. They might have issued a general alert that evening instead of the next day, hours after H-Hour. If Noriega had expected an invasion at 0100 EST, he might have spent his evening at a command and control facility or hideout rather than in the home of a prostitute.^{72/}

(u) (S) On the evening of the airlift the Commander of the Joint Special Operations Task Force (COMJSOTF), Major General Wayne A. Downing, USA, elaborated on the instructions to his subordinate task forces to locate and apprehend Noriega either in the air or on the ground. If intelligence, radar, or

70/ Powell Interview. Kelly Interview.

71/ Stiner Conference. Note: The bombing by the two F117As on D-day better explain the alertness of the PDF troops at Rio Hato. (See pp. 47)

72/ Powell Interview. Kelly Interview. Tyler, "Pentagon Corrects . . . Leaks' Report," Washington Post, 13 Mar 90, p. A23.

AWACS detected Noriega attempting to escape by air, AC-130 gunships or F-16 fighters would intercept his aircraft and order it to land. If the pilot refused, the US military aircraft, upon authorization from Secretary Cheney, would shoot down the suspect aircraft. On the ground, if US intelligence sources located Noriega at one of his hideouts such as Altos de Golf or La Escondida, Task Force Green (Army Special Mission Unit) would employ "snatch teams" supported by UH-60 helicopters or AC-130 gunships to assault the hideout and capture the "Maximum Leader."^{73/}

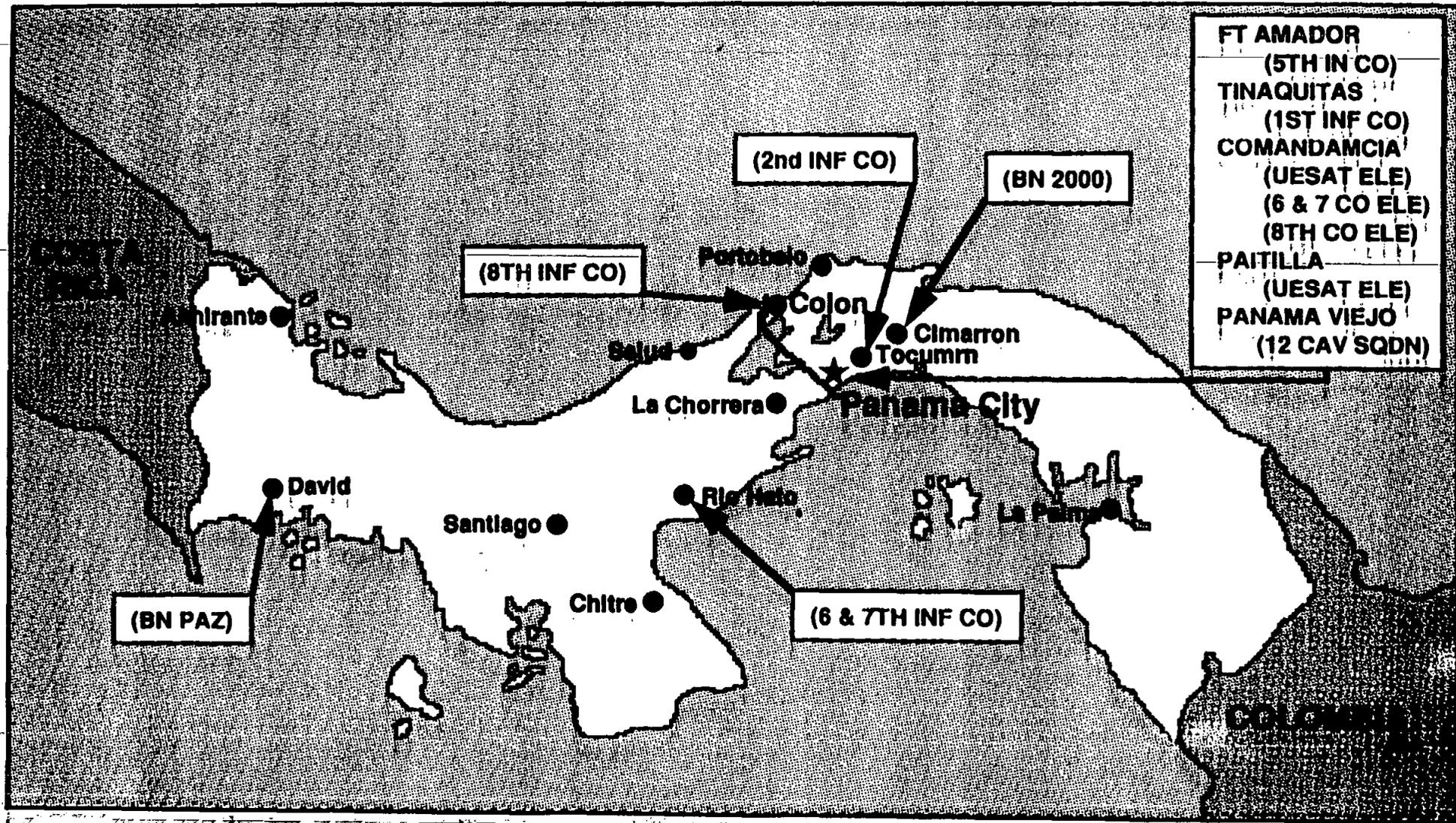
(u) (S) While special operations forces searched for Noriega, US diplomatic and military officials in Panama City prepared to "stand up" a new civilian government even before the first US forces assaulted into Panama. Earlier on 19 December, the US Deputy Chief of Mission in Panama, John Bushnell, had invited to dinner at his quarters on Howard AFB, the President and two Vice Presidents legally elected in May 1989: President Guillermo Endara, First Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderon, and Second Vice President Guillermo ("Billy") Ford. Shortly after arriving at Howard, General Thurman's subordinates reembarked the three Panamanians onto helicopters at 2130 EST for a quick flight to USSOUTHCOM headquarters at Quarry Heights. There General Thurman and Mr. Bushnell briefed the politicians on JUST CAUSE and offered them the opportunity to resume their elected offices and lead the effort to set up a new government. Endara, Arias Calderon, and Ford accepted, and were sworn in by a Panamanian judge just before midnight.^{74/}

73/ Msg, COMJSOTF, Howard AFB to COMJTF SO, Ft. Clayton, PN, 200214Z Dec 89, TS, JUST CAUSE Specat Traffic Log, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

74/ Cheney Interview. Thurman Interview.

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PDF THREAT



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Chapter 4

D-Day, Wednesday, 20 December 1989

Opposing Forces

(U) The Panamanian Defense Forces numbered nearly 12,800 troops, national guard, police, and officials; but only about 4,000 of that total could be classified as combat troops. Equipped with 28 armored cars, the PDF army troops were organized as 2 infantry battalions, 5 light infantry companies, 1 cavalry troop, and 2 public order companies. The PDF air force comprised 500 troops with a modest assortment of reconnaissance, transport, and training planes as well as unarmed helicopters. The PDF navy numbered 400 sailors with a handful of patrol craft, cutters, and launches. In addition, Noriega's forces included up to eighteen paramilitary Dignity Battalions.^{75/}

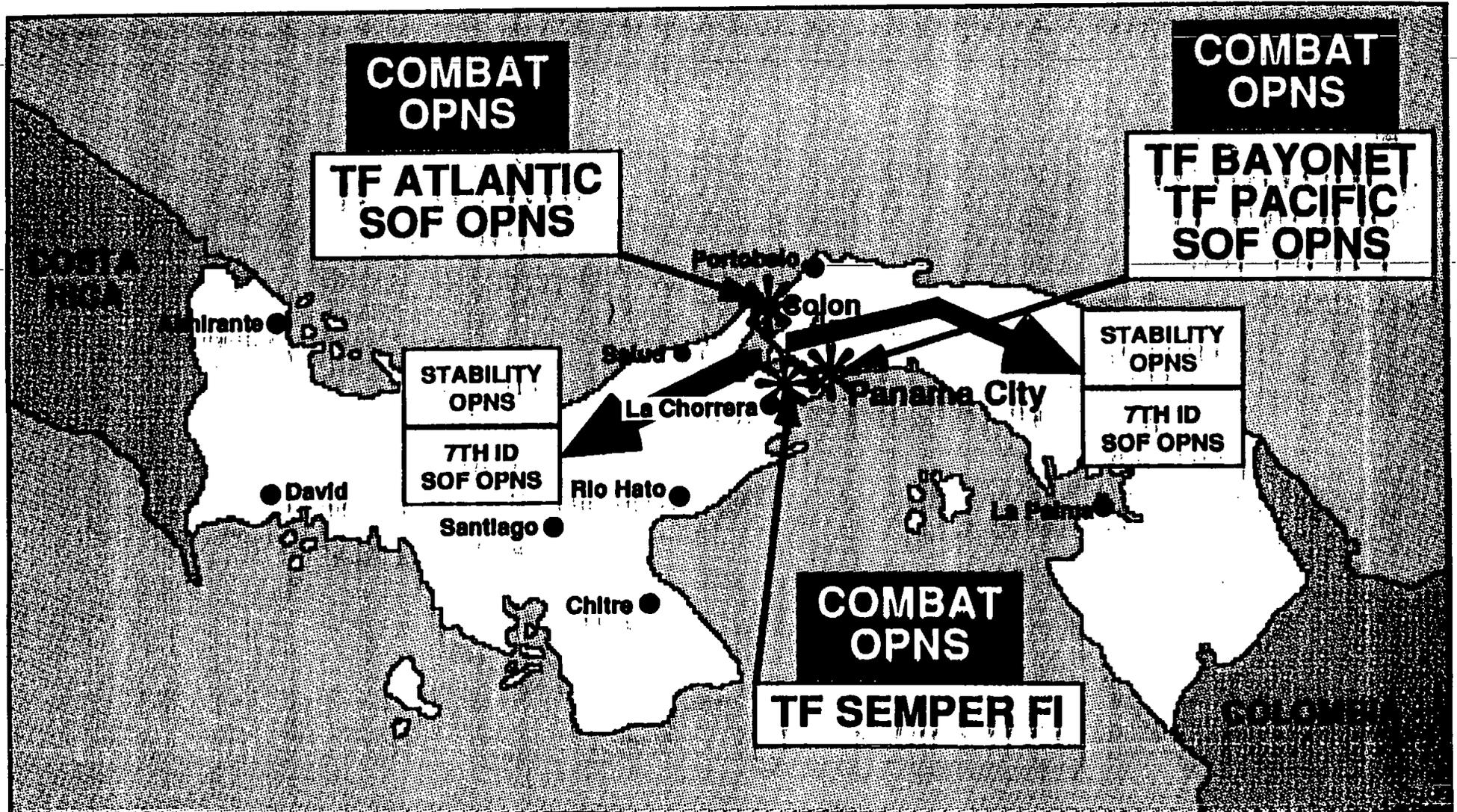
(U) Based upon the record of the PDF units during the abortive Giroldi coup, General Thurman expected particular resistance from the following units: Battalion 2000, about 550 troops at Ft. Cimarron, 15 miles east of Panama City; 2nd Infantry Company, about 200 troops at Torrijos-Tocumen Airport; 1st Infantry Company, about 200 troops at Tinajitas just north of Panama City; 5th Rifle Company, about 300 troops at Ft. Amador near the Bridge of the Americas southwest of Panama City; 12th Cavalry Squadron, about 150 troopers at Panama Viejo between Panama City and Ft. Cimarron; 8th Rifle Company, about 175 men at Ft. Espinar in the Colon area; 6th and 7th Rifle Companies, about 400 troops at Rio Hato; and elements of the 6th, 7th, and 8th Companies, about 150 troops at the Comandancia.^{76/}

(u) (S) Before H-Hour USSOUTHCOM numbered a substantial force in Panama of nearly 13,000 troops including the 193d Infantry Brigade, a battalion from the 7th Infantry Division (L), a mechanized battalion from the 5th Infantry Division, two companies of Marines, and an assortment of military police, Air Force, and Navy personnel. On and shortly after H-Hour on D-Day, the airlift brought in a strike force of another 7,000 troops: a composite brigade of the 82nd Airborne

75/ International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Panama," The Military Balance, 1989-1990, (London, 1989), pp. 198-199.

76/ J-3 Briefing, Opn JUST CAUSE, 2 Apr 90, U, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

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Division; the 75th Infantry Regiment (Rangers), and the equivalent of five or six battalions of other special operations task forces that included Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs, Navy special boat units, Air Force special operations personnel and psyops troops.^{77/}

(u) (S) Later on D-Day, and during the next few days, an additional 7,000 troops—mostly from the 7th Infantry Division (L) and the 16th Military Police Brigade and various civil affairs and psyops troops—joined the assault forces to relieve them, engage in stability operations, and help establish the new government. The last increment brought to 27,000 the grand total of US forces in Panama for JUST CAUSE. Of that number, nearly 22,000, or the equivalent of 33 battalions, actually engaged in combat operations as part of one of the four conventional task forces (Atlantic, Pacific, Bayonet, Semper Fi), or one of the five unconventional warfare task forces (Green, Black, Blue, White, and Red).^{78/}

Actions by the Special Operations Forces

(u) (S) Unusual PDF activity after midnight on 20 December prompted General Stiner to advance H-Hour. The PDF headquarters warned the commander at Rio Hato to block the runways; shootings occurred at the Comandancia; a US female dependent was shot and wounded at Albrook AFS; more firing was heard at Ft. Amador and the Bridge of the Americas; the PDF headquarters received a report of an attack on a vehicle; and the Dignity Battalions were alerted to report to their respective military zone commanders. To prevent total loss of tactical surprise, General Stiner ordered the special operations forces to launch their operations fifteen minutes ahead of schedule, at 0045 EST.^{79/}

77/ J-3 Briefing, Opn JUST CAUSE, 2 Apr 90, U; USCINCSO, JUST CAUSE Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, S, PM Sitreps; J-3 TP, "JUST CAUSE Recap for CJCS Visit to Paris," 8 Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 5; J-3/JOD/WHEM.

78/ J-3 TP, "JUST CAUSE Recap for CJCS Visit to Paris," 8 Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 5; JTFSO Organization Slides, Tab R, TS, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3; J-3/JOD/WHEM.

79/ J-3 Briefing, Opn JUST CAUSE, 2 Apr 90, S; J-3 Chron Sum, 20 Dec 89, TS; J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kraus Chronology.

(S) (u) (S) Meanwhile, the pilots of the two F-117A stealth fighters flew to Rio Hato to drop each one 2,000 pound bomb within 150 yards of the 6th and 7th PDF Company barracks in order to stun and confuse the occupants just before Rangers of Task Force Red airdropped over the area. Upon reaching the target area, the two pilots encountered high winds coming from an entirely unanticipated direction. In the ensuing confusion the lead pilot, on the right, swung way to the left, and dropped his payload only sixty yards away from the barracks that was supposed to be the near target of the pilot in the second aircraft. Keying off the first pilot, the second pilot dropped his bomb further to the left, up to 300 yards away from the target that had been originally assigned to the lead pilot. Despite the error, the bombs exploded precisely where aimed and momentarily stunned the PDF troops occupying the barracks.^{81/}

(u) (S) At 0100 EST, nearly 1,300 Rangers of Task Force Red jumped over targets in a ninety mile wide swath from Rio Hato in the west to Ft. Cimarron in the east. Within the next forty-five minutes an additional 2,700 troopers

80/ J-3 Chron Sum, 20 Dec 89, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kraus Chronology.
81/ Ibid. Interv, Cole w/Gen Powell, LTG Kelly, and MAJ Melnyk, 10 Dec 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Washington Times, 12 Apr 90, p. A4. NY Times, 11 Apr 90, p. 19. Scott Shuger, "New Weapons, Old Problems," The Washington Monthly (Oct 1990): 43-49.

from the 82nd Airborne Division joined the Rangers marking the largest airborne operation since World War II. The Rangers and paratroopers had the primary mission to isolate Panama City from outside reinforcement while assault forces within Panama City likewise isolated and neutralized PDF headquarters at the Comandancia. Both Rangers and paratroopers dropped at 500 feet or below, lower than the 800 feet practice drops allowed within CONUS. As a result of jumping lower, often in the face of ground fire, some of the men in their excitement forgot to release their heavy rucksacks early. Those troops landed hard and in a number of cases injured their ankles.^{82/}

(u) (S) Within minutes of jumping at Rio Hato and Torrijos-Tocumen Airport the Rangers engaged in some of the heaviest fighting on D-Day. At Rio Hato, the troops of the 6th and 7th PDF companies managed to overcome the shock of the F-117A strikes and fight over five hours before 250 surrendered. Another 150 to 240 fled into the countryside. At Torrijos-Tocumen Airport a Ranger battalion assaulted at 0124 EST and engaged the 1st PDF Company. At 0145 initial elements of the ready brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division parachuted into the area. The ten aircraft delayed by icing in North Carolina arrived with the remainder of the brigade after 0500 EST. The combined Ranger and airborne troops at Torrijos-Tocumen Airport thereupon became Task Force Pacific.

(u) (S) By 0730 EST Task Force Pacific troops had cleared the airport of the 1st PDF Company about fifty of whom surrendered. The airport was then suitable for the landing of men and equipment. While the Rangers and paratroopers set up a security perimeter, General Noriega and his driver drove up to one of their roadblocks. General Noriega had just come from a tryst with a prostitute where the sight of paratroopers dropping nearby compelled him to change his plans for the evening. Spotting the paratroopers at the roadblock, Noriega ordered his driver to turn around and go the other way.^{83/}

82/ J-3 Briefing, Opn JUST CAUSE, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Stiner Conference. NY Times, 21 Dec 89, p. A1.

83/ J-3 Chron Sum, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Stiner Conference. Kraus Chronology. USCINCSO JUST CAUSE. Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, S, Pan. Sit-reps, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

The Conventional Task Forces:

(u) (S) At H-Hour, 0100 EST, Task Force Atlantic—a battalion from the 7th Infantry Division and one from the 82nd Airborne Division—assaulted into the Colon-Gamboa sector, extending southeast from the Atlantic entrance of the Panama Canal midway to Panama City. After combatting the 8th PDF Company at Ft. Espinar and the naval infantry company at Coco Solo NAS, the battalion from the 7th Infantry Division secured the electrical distribution center at Cerro Tigre, Ft. Davis, France Hospital, Madden Dam, and the Gatun Locks. The battalion from the 82nd Airborne Division captured the Renacer Prison at Gamboa where they freed 64 prisoners including 7 PDF officers and 2 US citizens. Task Force Atlantic reported all missions accomplished by 1029 EST. They had killed 22 enemy soldiers, wounded 22, and captured 158; but believed that up to 250 more PDF troops had escaped.^{84/}

(u) (S) Making up Task Force Semper Fi, a Marine rifle company and a Marine armored infantry company commenced operations at H-Hour in the western suburbs of Panama City. They captured PDF stations at Vera Cruz and Arraijan and secured the area surrounding Howard AFB. For their major mission, however, the Marines occupied approaches to the the Bridge of the Americas, a vital choke point along the main roads for PDF forces fleeing the Rangers at Rio Hato with possible intent to reinforce the Comandancia. Having killed 2 PDF troops, wounded 2, and captured 15, at 0700 EST Task Force Semper Fi regrouped to prepare an attack that afternoon against the headquarters of the 10th Military Zone in La Chorrera.^{85/}

(u) (S) Perhaps Task Force Bayonet faced the greatest challenge on D-Day. Supported by the four Sheridan light tanks and helicopter gunships prepositioned the previous month by General Thurman, three battalions (5-87th Infantry, 1-508th Infantry (Airborne), and 4-6th Infantry [Mechanized]) moved from USSOUTHCOM installations at 0100 EST through the sprawling urban area of

84/ USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, Panama Sitreps; USSOUTHCOM Intel Sum, 0637, 20 Dec 89, J-3 Chron Sum, TS; J-3/JOD/WHEM.
85/ J-3 Chron Sum, TS. USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, S, Panama Sitreps, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

Panama City to capture Ft. Amador; seize the Comandancia, and, later, to protect the US Embassy. The US Embassy began taking rounds of rocket propelled grenades and mortar at 0134. The US forces reached the diplomatic compound and reinforced it around 0415 EST. At Ft. Amador the 5th PDF Company held out against Task Force Bayonet forces until 1029 EST.^{86/}

(u) (S) At the Comandancia, elements of the 6th, 7th, and 8th PDF Companies, reinforced by the two public order companies, vigorously defended the PDF headquarters for nearly three hours. In the firefight PDF defenders shot down two US special operations helicopters and forced one observation helicopter to ditch in the Panama Canal. With direct fire support from tanks and helicopters, however, the troops of Task Force Bayonet destroyed much of the Comandancia building and eventually won the day. The Hellfire missiles on the Apache helicopters were so accurate that, in the words of General Stiner, "You could fire that Hellfire missile through a window four miles away at night." During the fighting Task Force Bayonet forces had killed 24, wounded 9, and captured 463 PDF troops.^{87/}

(u) (S) Death and destruction would have been more devastating in Panama City if General Stiner had not strictly enforced the JUST CAUSE rules of engagement that sharply restricted the use of indirect fire weapons such as artillery or high level bombing. To fire artillery into Panama City the troops had to obtain approval of a major general-level commander. To use airstrikes with bombs, the troops had to obtain permission directly from General Stiner.^{88/}

(u) (S) By 1800 EST Task Force Bayonet forces had combed all corners of the compound and were in complete control. With the loss of the Comandancia, the PDF could no longer exert centralized command and control over its forces. For the remainder of D-Day and the next few days, fighting in Panama City would be sporadic as US task forces cleaned up pockets of resistance or engaged small groups of armed civilians belonging to the paramilitary Dignity Battalions.^{89/}

86/ USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, S, Panama Sitreps; USSOUTHCOM Intel Sum, 0637, 20 Dec 89, S; J-3 Chron Sum, TS; J-3/JOD/WHEM. Stiner Conference. Washington Post, 21 Dec 89, p. A37.

87/ Ibid.

88/ Ibid. J-3 TP, "JUST CAUSE Recap for CJCS Visit to Paris," 8 Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 5, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

89/ Ibid.

(u) (S) After the paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division reinforced the Rangers securing Torrijos-Tocumen Airport, three airborne battalions (1-504th, 2-504th, and 4-325th), operating in central Panama as Task Force Pacific, conducted the last major combat assaults on D-Day at Panama Viejo, Tinajitas, and Ft. Cimarron. One battalion made an airmobile assault into Panama Viejo about 0823 EST and declared Landing Zone Bobcat "hot." There, over a hundred troopers of the PDF's 12th Cavalry Squadron and a special antiterrorist unit fought the airborne force for more than three hours.^{90/}

(u) (S) Meanwhile south of Panama Viejo, other airborne troops—the ones delayed in North Carolina by the storm—moved toward Tinajitas to engage the two hundred or so troops of the 1st PDF Infantry Company. Making the assault at about 1050 EST, the paratroopers found few suitable landing areas for their helicopters on the heavily defended hilltop. Apache and Observer Scout helicopters sustained minor damage from small arms ground fire, but no crews were seriously injured. The airborne troops finally subdued the defenders at Tinajitas about 1433 EST. In sharp contrast, about 15 miles east of Panama City, other airborne troops made nearly unopposed helicopter landings at Ft. Cimarron. Except for a small skirmish at the Pecora River Bridge, most of the elite Battalion 2000 broke contact and withdrew. In the three helicopter assaults that day the men of Task Force Pacific had killed 5, wounded 22, and captured nearly 600 members of the PDF.^{91/}

(u) (S) In an appraisal of the action on D-Day the Commander of Joint Task Force South, General Stiner, made some interesting observations on the nature of PDF resistance. Despite psyops broadcasts, and the use of F-117As and other weapons by Stiner's troops to stun and intimidate, most PDF units fought harder than expected before surrendering or fleeing. In conventional fighting they had lost over 53 killed, 55 wounded, and 1,236 captured. Instead of capitulating at the first sight of US forces and US firepower, however, they had fought for hours and killed at least 19 US and wounded 99. Stiner attributed their fighting

90/ J-3 Chron Sum, esp. USSOUTHCOM Intel Sum 0637, 20 Dec 89, TS; USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, S, Panama Sitreps; J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kraus Chronology. Stiner Conference.

91/ See sources in footnote above.

spirit to the way Noriega and the Legislative Assembly had stirred them up with talk of war on 15 December and to possible breaches of US operational security that evolved in the wake of the massive airlift from CONUS.^{92/}

(u) (S) In the end, Stiner's troops had prevailed at Colon, Rio Hato, Panama City and elsewhere over the largest concentrations of PDF troops. Because many of the latter had dispersed rather than surrender, General Stiner expected them to continue to resist by means of hit and run operations, sniping, and sabotage. In Panama City alone Stiner's intelligence estimated that nearly 300 PDF troops had already gathered to operate as well-armed roving bands. A large number of Dignity Battalion members were already active in the city; but, for the time being, they seemed more intent on looting and intimidating the citizens rather than fighting the "Yanquis."^{93/}

Explication and Justification

(u) (S) While US forces fought the decisive, opening battles in Panama, the Bush administration prepared to explain JUST CAUSE to the American people. The Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) of the National Security Council laid the groundwork. That committee included Brigadier General Meade, of J-5, Bernard Aronson of State, Richard Brown of OSD, and William Price of NSC. Having just learned hours before about the decision to execute JUST CAUSE, the PCC members worked in the White House Situation Room on the evening of 19 and throughout the early morning hours of 20 December. They drafted talking papers for the President, and the Secretary of State, to use in briefing the congressional leadership and answering queries of the press. They also helped prepare the speech that the President would deliver on national television later that morning.^{94/}

92/ Stiner Conference. USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, S, Panama Sitreps, J-3/JOD/WHEM. J-3 TP, "JUST CAUSE Recap for CJCS Visit to Paris," 8 Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 5.

93/ Ibid.

94/ Meade Interview.

(U) At 0700 EST President Bush spoke to the nation:

Fellow citizens, last night I ordered US military forces to Panama For nearly two years the United States, nations of Latin America and the Caribbean have worked together to resolve the crisis in Panama. The goals of the United States have been to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking, and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty. Many attempts have been made to resolve the crisis through diplomacy, and negotiations. All were rejected by the dictator of Panama, General Manuel A. Noriega, an indicted drug trafficker.

Last Friday Noriega declared his military dictatorship to be in a state of war with the United States and publicly threatened the lives of Americans in Panama. The very next day forces under his command shot and killed an unarmed American serviceman, wounded another, arrested and brutally beat a third American serviceman and then brutally interrogated his wife, threatening her with sexual abuse. That was enough.

General Noriega's reckless threats and attacks upon Americans created an imminent danger to the 35,000 American citizens in Panama. As President I have no higher obligation than to safeguard the lives of American citizens.

And that is why I directed our armed forces to protect the lives of Americans citizens in Panama and to bring General Noriega to justice in the United States. . . .

I took this action only after reaching the conclusion that every other avenue was closed and the lives of American citizens were in grave danger. . . .^{95/}

(u) (S) In an interview with the New York Times, Secretary of State Baker amplified upon the legal justification for US intervention in Panama. Both Article 51 of the UN Charter and Article 21 of the OAS Charter recognized the right of self defense that entitled the United States to take appropriate measures to defend US military personnel, US nationals, and US installations. Not only had Panama declared the existence of a state of war and brutalized US citizens, but additional reports indicated that Noriega supporters were preparing to attack US citizens in residential neighborhoods. Furthermore, the United States had the right and duty under Article IV of the Panama Canal Treaty to protect and defend that strategically important waterway. Finally, the democratically elected government of Endara, Arias Calderon, and Ford welcomed the US action.^{96/}

95/ Presidential Address, 20 Dec 89, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, vol. 25, pp. 1974-1975.

96/ NY Times, 21 Dec 90, p. A19.

(U) Within the Pentagon Secretary Cheney quietly circulated another legal justification for JUST CAUSE. Historically, the Posse Comitatus Act (18 U.S.C. 1385) and related legislation (Section 375 of Title 10 of the United States Code) prohibited the use of federal military forces to enforce civilian laws. The Department of Defense had codified that prohibition as paragraph A.3. of Enclosure 4 of DOD Directive 5525.5. In a memo drafted on 20 December, the Secretary noted an important exception. According to the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel, the restriction did not necessarily prevent federal military forces from helping to enforce US laws outside the territorial boundaries of the United States, the practice of "extraterritorial arrest."^{97/}

(U) Hence on 20 December Secretary Cheney approved modification of DOD Directive 5525.5 to state: "With regard to military actions outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, however, the Secretary of Defense or the Deputy Secretary of Defense will consider for approval, on a case by case basis, requests for exceptions to the policy restrictions against direct assistance by military personnel to execute the laws. Such requests for exceptions to policy outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States should be made only when there are compelling and extraordinary circumstances to justify them."^{98/}

(U) The same day Secretary Cheney issued a memo making JUST CAUSE such an exception: "Consistent with . . . Revised DOD Directive 5525.5 . . . I approve assistance by the United States Armed Forces in the apprehension of Manuel Noriega of Panama." The Secretary thus legitimized JUST CAUSE as the use of federal troops to assist US law enforcement officers to apprehend a man under federal indictments in the United States for alleged drug trafficking offenses.^{99/}

97/ Memo, SecDef to SecsMilDeps, CJCS, UnderSecsDef, et al., "Modification of DOD Directive 5525.5, 'DOD Cooperation with Civilian Law Enforcement Officials (U),' 20 Dec 89, U, SJS/HisDiv.

98/ Ibid.

99/ MFR, SecDef Dick Cheney, "Approval Consistent with Revised DOD Directive 5525.5, 'DOD Cooperation with Civilian Law Enforcement Officials,' of Assistance to Law Enforcement Apprehension of Manuel Noriega of Panama," 20 Dec 89, U, SJS/HisDiv.

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Chapter 5

Issues in the National Military Command Center: Civil Affairs Reservists, the Media Pool, US Hostages

Inside the National Military Command Center

(u) (S) During the evening of 19 December Secretary Cheney had taken a nap in the bedroom of his Pentagon suite. Just before H-Hour on 20 December he awakened and walked to the National Military Command Center (NMCC) to join General Powell and General Kelly as they monitored the opening assaults in Panama. From that time forward a routine developed in the command center in which Secretary Cheney observed both the events unfolding in Panama and how General Powell reacted to them. Periodically Secretary Cheney informed or consulted the President and his advisers in the White House Situation Room. General Powell, in turn, talked over secure line to General Thurman four or five times a day; and General Kelly and Admiral Sheafer talked respectively to their counterparts at USSOUTHCOM dozens of times a day.^{100/}

(u) (S) At 2000 EST 19 December, General Kelly had transformed the J-3 Response Cell for Panama into the Crisis action Team (CAT) and moved it into the NMCC. In accordance with the JCS crisis staffing procedures, General Kelly made himself chief of the CAT and appointed two vice chiefs, two team chiefs, two deputy team chiefs, and twenty-four representatives from the Joint Staff, the Services, and key Defense agencies—a total of 31 officers divided into Team A working a twelve hour shift from 0500 to 1700 and Team B working the next twelve hours. For his two principal subordinates, the vice chiefs, Kelly picked Rear Admiral Joseph T. Lopez, USN, the Deputy Director for Current Operations, and Brigadier General James W. Meier, USAF, Deputy Director of the NMCC.^{101/}

(u) (S) General Kelly had activated the CAT to coordinate national support and guidance for USCINCSO at the highest level and to respond to joint operational

100/ Cheney Interview. Thurman Interview.

101/ Msg, JCS to USCINCSO, 200006Z Dec 89, JUST CAUSE Specat Traffic Catalog; Memo, Dir J-3 to Service Chiefs, 200300Z Dec 89, TS, JOD Response Cell, Bk 1; J-3/JOD/WHEM.

issues and politico-military repercussions as they arose. To prepare the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Kelly to resolve the issues, the CAT would produce memos, briefing sheets, background papers, and chronologies, and coordinate them with USSOUTHCOM and the Services. Following such staffing and, when appropriate, the briefing of Secretary Cheney, the CAT would draft messages executing whatever responses the Chairman or General Kelly decided.^{102/}

(u) (S) The physical reorganization of space within the National Military Command Center greatly facilitated the efforts of the CAT. Before the triggering events of 16 and 17 December, General Kelly and Admiral Sheafer had spent \$4 million to create a Crisis Management Room (CMR). That room permitted a DIA intelligence task force to work side by side with the CAT sharing computers, information, and insights.

(u) (S) The collocated operations and intelligence experts would then pass on the most accurate assessments possible to the key decisionmakers in the nearby Current Situation Room (CSR). There Secretary Cheney, General Powell, and General Kelly maintained secure telephone contact with General Thurman. During the first few days of JUST CAUSE, Secretary Cheney spent up to four hours a day in the CSR quietly observing as General Powell conferred with General Thurman.^{103/}

(u) (S) Between the CMR and the CSR, General Kelly and Admiral Sheafer had prepared a room equipped with teleconferencing equipment known as the CJCS-J-3 Conference Room. Starting on D-Day, three other "players" would sit in that room: the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Robert T. Herres, USAF; the Director of the Joint Staff, Lieutenant General Michael P.C. Carns, USAF; and the Deputy Director for Politico-Military Affairs, J-5, Brigadier General David C. Meade, USA. These three officers would teleconference daily with the National Security Council and the State Department regarding overseas developments relative to JUST CAUSE.

102/ Ibid. Kelly Interview.

103/ Kelly Interview. Meade Interview. Cheney Interview.

Whenever they learned information of operational value, General Herres would send General Meade or another officer to brief the decisionmakers in the CSR. Conversely, whenever Secretary Cheney, General Powell, or General Kelly needed clarification on central intelligence or politico-military matters, General Herres and his subordinates would query the National Security Council or the State Department.^{104/}

(u) (S) Back in the Crisis Management Room (CMR), the CAT transmitted and received operational message traffic. At 1412, 20 December, with the approval of General Kelly, the CAT vice chiefs removed special "Pro Rata" controls over messages concerning ongoing operations and logistical movements. Such messages were placed in routine general service (GENSER) secret channels. Only non-executed operational traffic continued to receive Pro Rata protection.^{105/} While the initial assaults took place in Panama, action officers in the CAT focused upon three issues that would increasingly consume more of General Powell's and General Kelly's time in the CSR--the need to call up civil affairs reservists for duty in Panama, problems of the media pool, and the taking of US hostages.

Civil Affairs

(u) (S) About 0319 EST on 20 December, General Thurman pointed out in a message to General Powell that "no civil affairs units from active or reserve components are available in the theater to support my mission requirements." The Director of the Joint Staff, Lieutenant General Michael P.C. Carns, USAF, noted that 120 troops from the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, Ft. Bragg, were already preparing to depart for Panama. Thurman recommended call up of all five reserve civil affairs units for a total of nearly 600 active and reserve civil affairs troops. General Carns agreed with General Thurman on the eventual need for such augmentation.^{106/}

104/ Meade Interview.

105/ Msg, Joint Staff to White House et al., 201927Z Dec 89, S, JUST CAUSE Specat Traffic Log, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

106/ Msg, USCINCSO to CJCS, 200819Z Dec 89, TS; Memo, DJS to CJCS, 20 Dec 89, S; J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 1.

(u) (S) About 1555 EST on 20 December, while awaiting action on the request for civil affairs reservists, General Thurman began execution of BLIND LOGIC, the civil-military opord in the PRAYERBOOK series. He explained that JUST CAUSE had largely neutralized the PDF not only as a military structure, but also as a coherent police force. In the face of extensive looting and violence in downtown Panama City, as well as Panama's chronic economic problems and fuel shortages, Thurman predicted a complete breakdown in law, order, and public safety unless he took immediate action. Hence, without a full complement of civil affairs troops, he initiated the opening phases of BLIND LOGIC. As soon as the Endara government could provide the personnel, they would be integrated into the operation. Inasmuch as armed remnants of the PDF and the Dignity Battalions were instigating much of the lawlessness in Panama's principal cities, General Thurman asked that troops executing BLIND LOGIC be allowed to defend themselves under the rules of engagement already in effect for JUST CAUSE. 107/

The Media Pool

(u) (S) At the White House meeting on 17 December, or possibly the next day, President Bush had approved use of a DOD-organized media pool--made up either of Washington reporters or those already in Panama--to cover execution of JUST CAUSE. General Kelly preferred using the reporters already in Panama; far removed from the preparations and execution of the airlift in CONUS, he considered them less of a security risk before H-Hour. Choosing instead a Washington-based pool, Secretary Cheney reasoned that the reporters should be the most experienced journalists on Central American affairs, many of whom worked in the Washington area. 108/

107/ Msg, USCINCSO to JCS, 202055Z Dec 89, TS, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 1.

108/ Kelly Interview. Cheney Interview.

(u) (S) Instead of allowing the media pool to accompany the deploying forces, Secretary Cheney delayed its activation until after the airlift was well under way. The previous day he had heard a weather report that snow or ice on 19 December might delay the airlift for twenty-four hours. Such a delay might prove too great a temptation for at least one member of the pool to leak out the story to a newspaper or television network. Thus the Secretary postponed activation of the media pool until after the 7PM news on 19 December: "I really felt [that] it was a direct trade off between maintaining security of the operation and protecting lives . . . versus accomodating the press. . . . Protecting the security of the troops was my first priority."^{109/}

(u) (S) Activation of the media pool occurred at 1930 EST on 19 December, but their transportation from Andrews AFB took place four hours later. They would not arrive in Panama until 0515 EST, nearly four and a half hours after H-Hour. The pool comprised fourteen reporters, most of whom the Secretary of Defense would later characterize as comparative novices rather than the experts he had anticipated. They were accompanied by two technicians and three officers acting as escorts.^{110/} Secretary Cheney made last minute efforts to facilitate the reporters' task before their airplane landed in Panama. At 2328 EST on 19 December and 0137 EST on 20 December he sent guidance to General Thurman on how to accommodate the belated newsmen: Deploy them with US forces to cover segments of operations. Reassemble them periodically to file their stories in a timely manner, but no sooner than two hours after the commencement of the action being covered. Allow the media temporary access to US communications satellites and uplink equipment until their own equipment arrives. Develop a plan to facilitate arrival of the latter.^{111/}

109/ Cheney Interview.

110/ Powell Interview.

111/ Msgs, SecDef to USCINCSO, 200428Z Dec 89 and 200637Z Dec 89, S, JUST CAUSE Specat Traffic Log, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

(u) (S) Problems of the media pool seemed manageable at first. Secretary Cheney's delayed notification had kept the 14 reporters from reaching Panama until about 0515 EST 20 December when the troops were wrapping up their initial operations. Yet CH-47 helicopters subsequently ferried teams of reporters from Ft. Clayton to inspect the sites of recent battles at Ft. Amador, Torrijos-Tocumen Airport, Punta Paitilla Air Field, Balboa, and the Comandancia. To answer media queries about the operations, on a 24-hour basis, USSOUTHCOM had set up a Joint Information Board at the Quarry Heights Officers' Club.^{112/}

(u) (S) From the reporters' point of view, however, visits to lukewarm battlefields and sanitized handouts from public affairs officers failed to meet their basic needs—to travel to active battle sites, observe personally the action, and then return at once to nearby urban facilities where they could file their stories in time for the next day's news. When reporters requested transit to ongoing operations, they found themselves losing helicopter spaces to combat, logistical, and medical troops directly involved in the operation. The arrival over the next two days of nine civilian aircraft filled with more reporters only exacerbated the competition for helicopter transit. Between the reporters already living in Panama, the members of the official media pool, and the horde of newcomers, nearly 260 reporters competed with each other and combat troops in a losing battle for helicopter spaces.^{113/}

(u) (S) With the advantage of hindsight Secretary Cheney, General Powell and General Kelly agreed that more could have been done during the planning phase to facilitate the work of the media pool. For example, General Kelly contended that, instead of assigning only three escort officers, the Defense Department should have provided the pool with a team of six to ten officers, preferably all experienced in combat and trained in journalism. More escorts could have facilitated media movement around operational sites with minimal distraction to

112/ USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 001, 210947Z Dec 89, and Sitrep 002, 221230Z Dec 89, S; Panama Sitreps, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, OASD/PA to CINCFOR et al., 201957Z Dec 89, U, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 4.
113/ Ibid. Kelly Interview.

the combat commander and his men. For maximum effectiveness, those facilitators and their pool would have to be equipped with helicopters and crews beyond those needed for operations.^{114/}

(U) On 20 March Mr. Fred Hoffman would submit a report to his chief, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Mr. Pete Williams, in which Hoffman would recount his observations on the problems encountered by the media pool during the deployment to Panama and while covering operations in country. Hoffman would conclude the report with seventeen specific recommendations, the most significant of which included: At the outset of final preparations to execute an operation, the Secretary of Defense should make clear his policy that the media pool must be given every assistance to report on combat operations; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff should send a message of a similar nature to all echelons in the operational chain of command; all operational plans should contain an annex spelling out detailed measures on how the pool would accompany the lead combat elements; the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs should be prepared to apprise the Chairman, his operations deputy, and other senior officers of any obstacles to the pool's accomplishment of its mission; pool escorts should be experienced combat officers drawn from the Services primarily involved in the operation; such officer escorts should deploy in appropriate field uniforms or draw them immediately on arrival in the area of operations; public affairs officers from Unified Commands should meet periodically with reporters and photographers assigned to the pool with whom they might have to work during future operations.^{115/}

The Hostage Issue

(u) (S) In addition to civil affairs reservists and the media pool, the crisis managers in the CAT and the CSR on 20 December and ensuing days focused on a third issue--the danger that Noriega's supporters would capture US citizens

114/ Cheney Interview. Powell Interview. Kelly Interview.

115/ Memo for Correspondents by Fred Hoffman, "Review of Panama Pool Deployment, December 1989," 20 Mar 90, U, SJS/HisDiv.

for revenge or barter. A hostage crisis promised to be politically more sensitive in Washington than either of the other two issues. Throughout the morning and afternoon of 20 December three hostage-taking incidents in particular attracted concern in the Current Situation Room. About 0249 EST a CBS executive, John Meyersohn, and an employee of the GTE Corporation, Douglas Miller, were taken by force from the Marriott Hotel to a PDF site at Rio Abajo. Later PDF troops abducted 11 employees of the Smithsonian Institute from an island near Colon where they had been engaged in research. From about 1035 EST to 1500 EST the CAT received reports that members of the Dignity Battalions were searching the Marriott Hotel for up to 30 US citizens believed to be living there.^{116/}

(u) (S) After General Thurman's staff informed him of the incidents, and General Powell had asked about them, General Thurman sent a message to the CAT at 1500 EST listing his priorities for the remainder of that day: first, insure that Task Force Pacific completed operations at Tinajitas and Ft. Cimarron; second, provide President Endara a building where he could safely set up his administration; third, send troops to secure the Marriott Hotel. As an Eastern Airlines pilot and reporters hiding in the Marriott leaked out word of their plight, the press in Washington increasingly pressed for the President to send troops to the rescue.^{117/}

(u) (S) By 1600 EST Secretary Cheney informed General Powell of the President's concern about the safety of the US citizens at the Marriott and the adverse publicity for JUST CAUSE that their captivity would create. Ordinarily, General Powell would have let General Thurman run the operation according to his own priorities. But, as soon as General Stiner's troops had achieved Thurman's first priority, the taking of Tinajitas and Ft. Cimarron, General Powell made a series of calls from the Current Situation Room to General Thurman impressing upon the field commander the need to mount an operation at the Marriott as soon as possible. At one point General Powell said, "You've got to have a plan. Tell me when it's [the Marriott Hotel] going to be taken."^{118/}

^{116/} J-3 Chron Sum, 20 Dec 89, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kraus Chronology.

^{117/} Ibid.

^{118/} Cheney Interview. Powell Interview. Kelly Interview.

(S) General Thurman replied at 1620 that General Stiner would need about four hours to complete plans and preparations for the operation. Not satisfied, General Powell called Thurman from the CSR two hours later and directed that Stiner's troops enter the Marriott no later than midnight. Powell had other guidance to impart as well. First, take down Radio Nacional antennas to end the taped broadcasts of Noriega trying to rally his supporters. Second, recognize that the building of democracy in Panama must take precedence even over the capture of Noriega; "stand up" the Endara Government with all haste. At 2100 EST troops of the 82nd Airborne Division—veterans of Panama Viejo, Tinajitas, and Ft. Cimarron—began an action to clear the Marriott Hotel; by 2328 EST they had succeeded. The Americans there came out of hiding and rejoiced to greet their rescuers.^{119/}

119/ J-3 Chron Sum, 20 Dec 89, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kraus Chronology.

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Chapter 6

Last Combat, Civil Affairs, and the Hunt for Noriega

21 - 24 December 1989

Last Combat with the PDF

(u) (S) Late in the evening of 20 December a composite brigade of the 7th Infantry Division (L) (minus the battalion already serving in Task Force Atlantic) and the 16th Military Police Brigade arrived in Panama. As anticipated in BLUE SPOON, their arrival reflected the changing combat situation. While regular combat with PDF companies and battalions wound down during the next four days, the need to mop up remnants of the PDF and to conduct civil-military operations increased. Taking command of Task Force Atlantic, the brigade of the 7th Infantry Division participated in the stabilization operations while the military police helped to execute BLIND LOGIC primarily in the cities.^{120/}

(u) (S) Stabilization and mop up operations extended from the periphery of Panama City to the westernmost provinces and to Darien Province in the east. A common technique used in those operations combined Rangers and regular troops. At night Rangers or other special operations forces contacted the PDF commanders and urged them to surrender by daybreak. Meanwhile conventional forces surrounded the target area. At dawn, if the PDF troops refused to surrender, the conventional forces launched a mock or a mild attack. Usually the PDF troops quickly surrendered.^{121/}

(u) (S) On Friday, 22 December 1989, President Endara abolished the PDF and reorganized a portion of it as the cadre for the new Fuerza Publica (Public Force). President Endara appointed the former chief of the Panamanian navy, Roberto Armijo, to lead the new military structure. Pro-Noriega supporters scorned the Fuerza Publica and fought on in the hopes that Noriega might reappear to lead them. In the cities and larger towns west of Panama City,

120/ Msg, CINCFOR to CDR, USACATA, and DA, 261340Z Feb 90, S, SJS/HisDiv.

121/ J-3 Briefing, Operation JUST CAUSE, 2 Apr 90, S; J-3 Chron Sum, 21 Dec 89, TS; J-3/JOD/WHEM.

PDF remnants and Dignity Battalions sporadically challenged US troops and military police as they tried to restore law and order.^{122/}

(u)(S) The day that Endara abolished the PDF a force of Rangers moved north of Rio Hato to capture PDF elements at Penonome in Cocle Province. Another force advanced against two platoons of the 5th PDF believed to be holding out at La Chorrera, a small town about 15 miles southwest of Panama City.

Meanwhile, General Stiner prepared to conduct major assaults in the distant provinces of Chiriqui and Bocas del Toro near Costa Rica and the province of Darien near Colombia. To support Stiner, General Thurman asked General Powell to send a second brigade of the 7th Infantry Division. With the approval of Secretary Cheney, the Chairman agreed and ordered CINCFOR, CINCMAC, and CINCSAC to make the arrangements.^{123/}

(u)(S) One minor setback for US forces occurred in the Task Force Atlantic area on Saturday, 23 December. A group of about 30 Dignity Battalion members approached a unit of 3-504th Airborne guarding the Madden Dam. They carried a white flag of surrender; but, as the US paratroopers stepped away from cover to accept their weapons, the Panamanians suddenly opened fire. The surprised paratroopers suffered 19 wounded, but drove off the DigBats killing at least 5 of them.^{124/}

(u)(S) In addition to final combat with the PDF during the period 21 through 24 December, US troops devoted significant time to evacuating casualties and US civilians fearful of being taken hostage. By 21 December General Thurman's staff reported 19 US killed, 117 wounded, and 1 missing. Evacuation of the wounded, to Kelly AFB, Texas, began with the first C-141 carrying 43 wounded out of Panama on D-Day, followed by somewhat smaller evacuation flights during the next three days. Starting with the four Navy SEALs killed during the assault at Punta Paitilla before H-Hour, US killed were flown from Panama on 21 December and ensuing days to Dover AFB, Delaware.^{125/}

122/ Ibid. USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 003, 231150Z Dec 89, S; J-3 Chron Sum, 21 Dec 89, TS; J-3/JOD/WHEM.

123/ Ibid. Msg, CJCS to CINCFOR et al., 222116Z Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 1.

124/ USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 004, 241000Z Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

125/ J-3 Chron Sum, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

(u) (S) The eleven Smithsonian employees abducted on D-Day were located about 0820 on 22 December. Deserted by their captors and unharmed, they were evacuated to Ft. Clayton. The CAT in the Pentagon logged in additional reports of small numbers of US citizens being taken hostage, including 13 employees of Evergreen International Aviation Company who had been staying at Hotel Caracol. Upon investigation, General Stiner's troops found the Evergreen employees and other small groups of isolated Americans only fearful of being taken hostage. Those believed to be in genuine danger were moved to the safety of nearby US military installations. During this period, however, US forces continued to look for the CBS executive, John Meyersohn, and the GTE employee, Douglas Miller, both of whom were in fact being held hostage at Rio Abajo as possible bargaining chips by their captors.^{126/}

(u) (S) With the PDF in disarray and largely on the run after D-Day, members of the paramilitary Dignity Battalions (DigBats) increasingly constituted the chief danger to US troops and US civilians. Under the command of Benjamin Colomarco, squad-sized units in Panama City and other urban areas looted stores and robbed private residences in upper class neighborhoods. Starting on 21 December, DigBats in Panama City began sniping at the US Embassy. For the next few days sniping and standoff attacks by the DigBats impeded the efforts by the US military police, civil affairs troops, and Panamanian officials to establish order and democracy.

Civil Affairs and PROMOTE LIBERTY

(u) (S) As noted earlier, looting by the DigBats and others on D-Day had already compelled General Thurman to execute preliminary aspects of the civil affairs operation BLIND LOGIC. At 0953 EST on 21 December, however, General Powell informed General Thurman that the National Command Authorities had formally approved the plan for execution. Minutes earlier, he had approved deployment to Panama after Christmas of nearly 300 civil affairs reservists. In accordance with BLIND LOGIC, General Thurman would combine into a civil-military operations task force (CMOTF) some of his own troops

^{126/} Ibid.

with those of the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion who were expected to arrive about dawn on 22 December and the 300 reservists who would follow, incrementally, within the next three weeks. 127/

(u) (S) On 22 December General Kelly and his staff agreed that the name BLIND LOGIC made a poor name for an operation requiring great skill and high purpose. Hence they renamed the operation PROMOTE LIBERTY and informed General Thurman of the change that evening. During the first stage of PROMOTE LIBERTY the CMOTF continued to concentrate on public safety, health, and population control measures. Later it transferred to the US country team and the new Panamanian government responsibilities for the following: population control; rebuilding of commerce; winning the support of the masses for the reforms; and restructuring of the PDF into separate police, customs, and defense organizations. As chief of the CMOTF, the commander of the 96th Civil Affairs Brigade served under General Stiner and assigned civil affairs forces to Zone P (Panama City and the eastern provinces), Zone C (Colon), and Zone D (all the provinces west of Panama City). To reinforce the CMOTF General Powell directed General Vuono, the Chief of Staff of the Army, to deploy, at Army expense, volunteer reservists from the following battalions: 321st, 358th, 360th, 361st, and 478th. USCINCSOC would coordinate their deployment; CINCMAC, aircraft for the airlift; and CINCSAC, refueling of the aircraft. 128/

(u) (S) About 0530 EST on 22 December the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion landed in Panama. General Hartzog greeted the commander with an extensive list of tasks to be accomplished under PROMOTE LIBERTY: restore basic functions throughout Panama City; establish a police force; provide emergency food distribution; create a night watch using helicopters with spotlights; protect property; supervise Panamanian contractors in cleaning up the city; restore the production and distribution of newspapers; and develop a grass roots organization to "sell" the Endara government to the public. In one of his first

127/ Msg, CJCS to USCINCSO et al., 211453Z Dec 89, S; Msg, CJCS to CSA, 211457Z Dec 89, S; J-3 Cell SOA Binder 1, J-3/JOD/WHEM. CJCS Sitrep 007, 262028Z Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 2, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kelly Interview.

128/ Ibid. Msg, CJCS to USCINCSO et al., 211415Z Dec 89, JOD Response Cell, Book 1.

moves, the commander of the CMOTF worked with Colonel Roberto Armijo of the new Fuerza Publica to recruit volunteers for police duty. Four hundred men volunteered, mostly former policemen or soldiers under the PDF; only 160 were found acceptable. 129/

(u)(S) As initial PROMOTE LIBERTY actions began, DigBats and other pro-Noriega PDF remnants continued to resist. On Saturday (D+3), 23 December, Mr. Bushnell reported that shooting incidents at the US Embassy continued. Assailants had fired nearly 67 shots into his car: miraculously only one hit the diplomat on his flak jacket. Bushnell attributed the vigor of the resistance to a residual fear of Noriega and the expectation that he would soon receive help from Cuba and Nicaragua. With understandable concern, Bushnell asked General Stiner for more troops to pacify Panama City. General Stiner's promised help, but could not concentrate all his forces in Panama while Noriega remained free to join and rally PDF holdouts in the provinces. 130/

(u)(S) Meanwhile on 23 December, General Powell and General Kelly advised General Thurman on a two-pronged pschological warfare campaign to win public support for Endara and to persuade more resisters to lay down their arms. The 71 Psyops troops deployed to Panama for JUST CAUSE would join General Thurman's troops in promulgating themes such as the following to the civilian populace: US troops had deployed to protect the lives and property of US citizens; US troops would help President Endara form a government responsive to the will and aspirations of the people; US differences were with Noriega, not with the Panamanian people; US forces would depart as soon as the new government could take over; the United States would reward those who assist in locating PDF leaders and weapons caches; a reward of \$1 million would be paid for anyone apprehending Noriega and turning him over to US forces. 131/

(S) Sporadic fighting and looting continued in Panama City on Sunday, 24 December (D+4). USSOUTHCOM intelligence estimated that anywhere from 200 to 500 DigBat and PDF resisters still operated in the capital. General Thurman's headquarters had picked up a rumor that the DigBats were preparing

129/ J-3 Chron Sum, 22 Dec 89, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

130/ Memo, Bernard Aronson, STATE, to BG Meade, DepDirPolMil/J-5, 1400, 23 Dec 89, S, J-5/DDPMA Panama Binder, J-5/WHEM.

131/ Msg, CJCS to USCINCSO, 231924Z Dec 89, S, JOD Response Cell, Bk 1, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

a six-company attack against US troops at Punta Paitilla on Christmas Day. General Thurman hoped that they would try such an action and come out into the open where superior US firepower and skill would "destroy them as a credible threat." In any event, Thurman considered the DigBats a serious threat throughout the country. Since JUST CAUSE began, his analysts increased to 18 the number of DigBat battalions believed in existence throughout Panama and interconnected by a comparatively simple yet functional radio system of repeaters. 132/

(u) (S) Neither General Kelly nor General Thurman's top operations advisers expected the DigBats to concentrate their forces for a conventional assault. More likely, they would continue to wage hit and run guerrilla warfare. General Kelly and General Hartzog agreed at 0728 EST on 24 December to help Colonel Armijo to expand the number of police in the Fuerza Publica as the quickest way to regain order in the cities. With regard to pacifying the countryside, Major General William K. James, Deputy USCINCSO, called Brigadier General Meier in the CAT at 1020 EST to recommend deployment from Ft. Bragg to Panama of a US Special Forces battalion or even a Special Forces Group Headquarters from Ft. Bragg. Under the supervision of either, Special Forces teams would train and advise Panamanian police in liberated areas outside the major cities. In the opinion of General James such training would expedite the withdrawal of US combat troops. 133/

The Hunt for Noriega

(u) (S) The hunt for Noriega that began when special operations teams and paratroopers landed on D-Day continued for the next four days. On Thursday, 21 December, General Thurman made the capture of the Panamanian dictator the highest priority after neutralization of the PDF. That priority stemmed from intertwined military and political considerations. In military terms Noriega became more a symbol of resistance to his followers than a genuine

132/ Msg, USCINCSO to CJCS, 241535Z Dec 89, TS, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 2, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Thurman Interview. Kraus, WCOJC.
133/ J-3 Chron Sum, 24 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

military threat. Continued resistance by pro-Noriega supporters, however, would tie down large numbers of US ground combat forces in Panama. Their prolonged presence could exacerbate Latin American paranoia about US imperial disdain for the sovereign rights of the Latin states.

(u) (S) A prolonged US military presence could also discredit the legitimacy of the Endara government. According to the politico-military experts in J-5 and the NSC Deputies Committee, Latin American recognition of the Endara Government hinged upon Endara's ability to demonstrate that he could restore law and order without US combat troops. With Noriega captured or killed, resistance to Endara would diminish to the point where the Fuerza Publica could function effectively with comparatively little or no help from US troops. 134/

(u) (S) On 21 December General Kelly called General Hartzog from the CSR; they discussed the possibility of a bounty on Noriega's head to expedite his capture. An amount of \$1 million was later approved, but even before it was announced individuals freely reported sightings of Noriega and his cronies over the next two days. When teams rushed to the sites, however, they found them empty. In at least two cases evidence indicated that Noriega or some of his supporters had just departed in a frantic game of hide and seek with their pursuers. 135/

(u) (S) On 22 December Task Force Bayonet forces searched Noriega's residence at Ft. Amador. They found 50 kilograms of white powder they surmised to be cocaine worth \$1.25 million, but that turned out to be a substance used in Latin American cooking. They also found pictures of Hitler, an extensive pornography collection, \$83,000 in cash, and a "witches diary." This diary chronicled visits by two witches from Brazil who periodically flew up to provide Noriega with opportunities to practice black magic. Later that day, special operations forces at Alto de Golf searched another Noriega residence where they discovered approximately \$8 million and a valuable art collection. They also found a briefcase containing lists of bank accounts both in Switzerland and the Cayman Islands, \$200,000 in cash, a personal wallet, bifocals, and three diplomatic passports. 136/

134/ Kelly Interview. Meade Interview. Memo, MG Richard Loeffke, Chmn, IADB, to DJS, "Meeting w/Secy Gen OAS, 21 Dec 89 (U)," S, J-5/DDPMA Panama Binder, J-5/WHEM.

135/ J-3 Chron Sum, 21, 22, & 23 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

136/ Ibid. Transcript, Testimony, RADM Sheafer, J-2 Rep (DIA), SASC, 22 Dec 89, TS, OCJCS/LLC.

(u) (S) By the evening of 22 December General Thurman conjectured that either Noriega was hiding in Panama City or, more likely, heading west to his home province of Chiriqui. On 23 December US intelligence experts received reports supporting the latter possibility and speculated that, if true, Noriega might execute PLANAMONTANA, a contingency plan for setting up a guerrilla base in the mountains. From that redoubt Noriega could orchestrate raids and terrorism against US forces and representatives of the Endara government. 137/

(u) (S) On Sunday, 24 December, General Stiner and General Thurman completed plans for the last major combat assault of JUST CAUSE, the taking of David, the provincial capital of Chiriqui Province and the headquarters for the PDF 5th Military Zone. They believed that the surrender of the zone headquarters, protected chiefly by the 3rd PDF Company, and subsequent search operations into the mountainous countryside would thwart PLANAMONTANA. The two US generals planned to send in an initial assault force backed up by a battalion. On the other hand, at David a PDF captain named Jurado contacted General Cisneros, COMJTFPM, and offered to surrender the zone headquarters and turn over its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Luis Del Cid. In case the surrender and turnover failed to materialize, General Thurman insisted on deploying the assault and the battalion as planned. When apprised in the CSR of the deployment and possible assault, Secretary Cheney personally approved the operation for execution on Christmas Day. 138/

(u) (S) Noriega once again confounded his enemies and did the unexpected. Instead of fighting a last ditch effort in the hills of Chiriqui, he sought refuge in the embassy of the Papal Nuncio to Panama, Monsignor Jaime Laboa. Monsignor Laboa had no love for Noriega and had previously granted Noriega's political adversary, Endara, sanctuary in the Nunciatura after the election of May 1989. Before US intelligence misjudged Noriega's intention to flee to Chiriqui, General Thurman and General Stiner had anticipated the possibility that Noriega might seek asylum in the embassy of a sympathetic country. Consequently, on 21 December, Stiner's troops had cordoned off the embassies of Cuba.

137/ USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 003, 231150Z Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.
J-3 Chron Sum, 23 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

138/ Msg, USCINCSO to CJCS, 241535Z Dec 89, TS, J-3 Cell SOA Info
Binder 2, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

Nicaragua, and Libya while keeping surveillance on several other embassies. Probably aware that no US troops watched the Nunciatura, Noriega contacted Monsignor Laboa on 24 December and requested political asylum until he could obtain entry to Cuba or Spain. 139/

(u) (S) Desirous of ending the bloodshed, Monsignor Laboa agreed to give Noriega temporary political refuge until he could be whisked out Panama to a third country. At about 1445 on 24 December, the Nuncio sent an official car to collect Noriega at a secret rendezvous and bring him back to the Nunciatura. Later, Laboa permitted some of Noriega's chief advisers to join him including: Lieutenant Colonel Nivaldo Madrinan, Chief of Noriega's Department of National Investigation (DENI); Captain Asuncion Gaitan, Noriega's senior aide and chief of security; Colonel Arnulfo Castrejon, Commander of the Navy; Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Velarde, a military chaplain; and Mr. and Mrs. Castillo. In addition to this group the Nuncio had earlier granted asylum to eight civilians and five Basque Separatists. 140/

139/ J-3 Chron Sum, 21 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Stiner Conference. USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 005, 251000Z Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Powell Interview. Cheney Interview. Meade Interview. MFR, BG Meade, 25 Dec 89, S, J-5/DDPMA, Panama Binder, J-5/WHEM. OPS/INTELL Brief., 1700 EST, 28 Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM.
140/ J-3 Chron Sum, 21 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Stiner Conference. USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 005, 251000Z Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Powell Interview. Cheney Interview. Meade Interview. MFR, BG Meade, 25 Dec 89, S, J-5/DDPMA, Panama Binder, J-5/WHEM. OPS/INTELL Brief., 1700 EST, 28 Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

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Chapter 7
Siege of the Nunciatura
24 December 1989 – 3 January 1990

An Overview

(u) (S) About 1500 EST on 24 December, General Thurman learned of Noriega's retreat into the Nunciatura and promptly sent troops from Task Force Green and the military police brigade to cordon off the diplomatic compound. As though providing an early Christmas present to the White House and the Pentagon, General Thurman notified General Kelly at about 1600 EST of Noriega's predicament—trapped, yet, for the time being, safe from US apprehension. Surprised and elated, Secretary Cheney instructed General Powell, "Don't let that guy out of the compound." State Department immediately informed the Vatican and requested that it deny Noriega asylum. Since most of the Vatican dignitaries were about to celebrate Christmas Midnight Mass at St. Peter's, no response was made that day.^{141/}

(u) (S) On a daily basis from Christmas-Eve 1989 to 3 January 1990, diplomatic and military efforts to pry Noriega loose from the Nunciatura involved the interagency arena and all levels of the chain of command. From Washington Secretary of State Baker communicated through the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Pio Laghi, to the Papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano. The fruits of those communications passed through the White House Situation Room to the Chairman's conference room in the National Military Command Center from which Generals Herres, Carns, and Meade kept Secretary Cheney, General Powell and General Kelly posted. In turn Powell and Kelly informed General Thurman of developments and reported back to the White House his assessments from Panama. Major General Cisneros, COMJTFPM, negotiated in Panama with Monsignor Laboa, sometimes right outside the gate of the Nunciatura.^{142/}

141/ Ibid. Msg, Amembassy Rome 00536 to SecState, 101727Z Jan 90, C, J-5/DDPMA (Panama), J-5/WHEM.
142/ Meade Interview.

(u) (S) General Powell spoke several times daily to General Thurman giving the commander in the field what Powell referred to as "the view from the 32nd floor." During those conversations, over secure lines in the CSR, General Powell apprised General Thurman of concerns of the White House and State Department negotiations with the Vatican for Noriega's release into US custody. In turn, General Thurman briefed Powell on operational needs and the status of Cisneros' talks with Monsignor Laboa. Far more frequently, General Kelly and his subordinates in the CAT communicated with General Hartzog and his staff on the details of reporting and implementing decisions made by their superiors.^{143/}

(u) (S) The day that Noriega retreated to the Nunciatura, 24 December, General Herres reached an agreement with Mr. Robin Ross, chief of staff to Attorney General Richard Thornburgh. By the terms of that agreement the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), would be the appropriate civilian agency to take custody of Noriega once apprehended. While in Panama, however, General Stiner's forces would provide Noriega and his DEA escort protection and transportation for extradition to the federal district court in Miami. To the decisionmakers in the National Military Command Center and General Thurman's headquarters at Quarry-Heights, however, such procedural dickering seemed premature, for neither Noriega nor the Nuncio were then willing to turn Noriega over to General Thurman. In fact, for the next ten days during the "siege of the Nunciatura," General Powell, General Thurman, and their staffs would find themselves increasingly preoccupied with more immediate problems: rules of engagement for cordoning off the Nunciatura, the negative impact of the rock music campaign there, contretemps with Cuban and Nicaraguan diplomats, and, above all, Vatican resistance to US requests for custody of Noriega.^{144/}

Rules of Engagement for Cordoning Off the Nunciatura

(u) (S) The presence of Noriega and some of his top aides at the Nunciatura presented General Thurman with two problems, first a security problem and,

^{143/} Powell Interview. Kelly Interview.

^{144/} Ibid.

later, a potential hostage situation. From the confines of the Nunciatura Noriega could use couriers to perpetuate and coordinate resistance by his followers on the outside. In addition to using visitors posing as diplomats or negotiators to smuggle communications back and forth, he might even attempt to escape the cordon by hiding in one of the visitor's vehicles as it left the compound. Responding to such concerns, General Kelly telephoned the following guidance at 1640 EST on 24 December to General Hartzog for General Thurman and General Stiner: Troops could stop diplomatic cars entering or departing the Nunciatura and demand identification. If suspicion existed that Noriega or one of his lieutenants might be hiding in the trunk of a car, it could be searched, preferably in the presence of representatives of the Endara government. If Noriega or his lieutenants were found during such a search, they should be removed into US military custody pending further instructions.^{145/}

(u) (S) At 1714 on 24 December the Acting Secretary of State, Robert Kimmitt, insisted on making some exceptions. Kimmitt instructed the Deputy Chief of Mission, John Bushnell, to allow unhindered access to and from the Nunciatura to all Vatican diplomats and to the top four officials of the new Panamanian government--Endara, Arias-Calderon, Ford, and the Foreign Minister, Linares. Kimmitt added that, wherever possible, it would be "preferable" for Bushnell to notify General Thurman in advance of such visits. General Thurman complained that the word preferable opened a huge loophole, and requested that advance notice be given for all visits to the Nunciatura. General Powell supported Thurman's request; and on 26 December the Deputies' Committee of the National Security Council approved it. They did, however, allow Bushnell to authorize visits for Panamanians other than the four VIPs, provided he notified Thurman's headquarters in advance.^{146/}

(u) (S) No sooner did Washington authorities resolve the question of visitor control when the potential for a hostage situation demanded additional guidance. On 26 December Monsignor Laboa informed General Stiner that,

145/ J-3 Chron Sum, 24 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

146/ "NCA Guidance for Selected Diplomatic Facilities," 25 December 89, C, Tab 18, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM. J-3 Chron Sum, 25 and 26 Dec 89, TS, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

should Noriega and his men use their weapons to take control of the Nunciatura. Laboa would approve entry of Stiner's troops into the compound. After being briefed by General Powell, Secretary Cheney gave Stiner permission to enter the Nunciatura, but only after Stiner's men heard shots being fired within. 147/

(U) (S) On 27 December General Kelly briefed Acting Secretary of Defense Donald Atwood on General Thurman's request to employ military snipers should a hostage situation erupt at the Nunciatura. Atwood answered: "You are authorized to use the appropriate military force necessary to resolve any hostage situation . . . which you have reason to believe is immediately lifethreatening. Of course, if time permits, you are expected to consult with the National Command Authorities." Meeting with General Kelly on 31 December, Secretary Atwood reaffirmed his earlier guidance, but further stipulated that the entry of US troops into the Nunciatura must be requested directly by the Vatican, not Laboa. And, after the entry, the Vatican must publicly acknowledge that it had made the request. 148/

Rock Music at the Nunciatura

(U) (S) In addition to the cordon of troops General Stiner erected a sound barrier around the Nunciatura in the wake of a visit there on Christmas Day by General Thurman. Ordinarily General Thurman left to General Cisneros the responsibility for negotiating with Monsignor Laboa. On Christmas morning, nevertheless, Thurman spoke personally to the churchman right at the gate of the Nunciatura. As Thurman turned to depart, a reporter from an upper floor window of the nearby Holiday Inn shouted, "Hey General Thurman, how ya doin'? Merry Christmas!" Fearing that reporters could use powerful zoom microphones to eavesdrop on delicate negotiations between Cisneros and Laboa, General Thurman ordered that a music barrier be set up around the Nunciatura.

147/ J-3 Chron Sum, 26 Dec 89, S. Ltr, Papal Nuncio, Panama, to USCINCSO, Tab I, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 2, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

148/ J-3 Chron Sum, 27, 30, and 31 Dec 89, TS. Memo, Actg SecDef to CJCS, 27 Dec 89, TS, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 2, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

Later a zealous psyops commander blared hard rock music around the clock and claimed to do it as part of a campaign to harrass Noriega.^{149/}

(u) (S) Depicted as a form of press censorship by the media, the bombardment of the Nunciatura around the clock with rock music soon aroused other critics. By 28 December diplomats, Catholics in the United States, Vatican officials, and others deplored the practice as a clumsy effort to harrass Noriega that needlessly inflicted stress upon the Nuncio and his staff. The President soon made his political discomfort known to Secretary Cheney and General Powell.^{150/}

(u) (S) About 1140 General Powell asked one of the CAT vice chiefs, Brigadier General Meier, to explain the purpose of the music. Meier repeated General Thurman's original motive, to mask sensitive negotiations between General Cisneros and Monsignor Laboa. General Thurman, however, also justified the music as an effective psychological tool. The Nuncio was talking about sleeping outside the compound and Noriega and his henchmen were becoming increasingly worried and nervous. To Thurman the strategy of applying pressure, not only to Noriega but to his host as well, would compel Monsignor Laboa to release Noriega to USSOUTHCOM.^{151/}

(u) (S) In the face of mounting public criticism and presidential sensitivity, General Powell grew increasingly uncomfortable with the rock music at the Nunciatura. According to Powell, President Bush viewed the alleged psyops tactic not only as politically embarrassing, but also "irritating and petty." On 29 December, after returning from an NSC meeting in which he had been instructed not to "make things any more difficult or unpleasant for Monsignor Laboa than necessary," General Powell instructed General Thurman to stop the music. Rear Admiral Sheaffer relayed the order to General Thurman's staff. Admiral Sheaffer also called NSA to locate a less provocative noise jammer to prevent the media from eavesdropping on negotiations between Cisneros and Laboa.^{152/}

149/ Thurman Interview. Powell Interview.

150/ J-3 Chron Sum, 28 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

151/ Ibid.

152/ Powell Interview. Msg, CJCS to USCINCSO, 292327Z Dec 89, C, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

Contretemps over Cuban and Nicaraguan Diplomatic Privileges

(U) (S) On 28 December a confrontation between US troops and Cuban diplomats at the Cuban ambassador's residence had also promised to embarrass the President. At 1530 the Cuban Ambassador to Panama, Lazaro Mora, and his escort, Alberto Cabrera, tried to depart Mora's residence. Members of the 82nd Airborne Division, making up a cordon around the residence, stopped the two men and asked for credentials. Cabrera's identification papers showed him to be the Cuban Embassy's First Secretary for Exterior Affairs, but the JTFPM Black List described Cabrera as a hostile intelligence officer to be detained. Amidst vociferous protests by the two Cubans, the troopers sought instructions from their chain of command. From brigade headquarters orders came back to bring Cabrera to Panama Viejo, the headquarters of Joint Task Force South. The ambassador insisted on accompanying Cabrera. 153/

(U) (S) To avert an international incident, General Stiner arranged for the two Cubans to be returned to Mora's residence by 1700 EST. Stiner subsequently explained to General Kelly that in using the black list the troopers had carried out standard procedure for locating members of the PDF wanted on criminal charges in the United States. Stiner assured Kelly that both diplomats had been treated with respect and dignity. When the Cuban Government protested the incident, the State Department denied that there had been any arrests or abuse, and assured Cuban officials that the troops had acted reasonably under the circumstances. 154/

(U) (S) On 29 December US troops in the El Dorado section of Panama City forced their way into what would later be identified as the residence of the Nicaraguan Ambassador, Alberto Feero. Early on 29 December, a US citizen, who had provided reliable tips in the past, informed General Stiner's staff that they could find a cache of weapons and a supply of drugs at the residence. At

153/ Memo, LTG Stiner to Joint Staff, 29 Dec 89, S; Msg, State 045454Z to NMCC/CAT, 29 Dec 89, S; J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM.
154/ Ibid.

1630 EST troops of the 2/9th Infantry surrounded the house, gave two orders to come out, and then fired two 5-round bursts of rifle fire as a last warning. The occupants came out. At that time Feero appeared claiming himself to be the Nicaraguan Ambassador and demanding that the troops leave. Neither Feero nor the other occupants could produce papers proving their claim.^{155/}

(S) An official-looking seal, according to General Powell the size of a manhole cover, on the outside of the building, however, indicated that the house might indeed be affiliated with the Nicaraguan embassy. Uncertain whether to search the premises for the alleged cache and drugs, the onsite unit commander called up the chain of command to JTF SO headquarters for instructions. A liaison officer from the US Embassy informed JTF SO headquarters that his list showed no ambassadorial residence in El Dorado. Unknown to the liaison officer, US Embassy clerical personnel, owing to cutbacks in their number, had failed to update the list to show that in April 1989 the Nicaraguan ambassador had indeed moved into the residence in question.

(S) Based on this inaccurate information from the US Embassy, the troops of the 9th Infantry entered the residence at 1900. Inside they found and removed a weapons cache that included 4 Uzi machineguns, 7 rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPG 7s), 15 T-65 automatic weapons, and 12 AK-47 assault rifles. When the US Embassy in Panama City belatedly confirmed the diplomatic status of the residence, the US troops returned the weapons. Subsequently, when Nicaragua protested the US entry as a violation of diplomatic immunity, the United States replied that the presence of such weapons violated diplomatic privilege.^{156/}

(S) Very early on the morning of 30 December, State Department informed the Joint Staff that the government of Nicaragua, in retaliation for

155/ For this and the following paragraphs see: J-3 Chron Sum, 29 Dec 89, S; CJCS Sitrep 011, 301841Z Dec 89; J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Powell Interview. Meade Interview.

156/ Ibid. Msg, Amemb Managua to SecState 07575, "Nicaraguan Government Claim US Forces Break into their Ambassador's Residence in Panama (U)," 300214Z Dec 89, C, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD WHEM.

the US search of Ambassador Feero's residence, would expel up to 40 US Embassy workers within the next 72 hours. To avert future reprisals, the State Department sent General Thurman detailed guidance later that day on the diplomatic privileges and immunities that his forces must observe under the rules of the Vienna Convention. Article 22 permitted entry and search of an embassy or mission, or search of its property or transportation, only if there existed imminent danger to public safety such as loss of life or bodily injury that could be averted only by immediate action. Mere suspicion that weapons were cached on such premises would not provide an acceptable basis for entry.^{157/} Article 38 applied the same standard of inviolability to the private residence of a diplomat. Moreover, if doubt existed on the diplomatic status of the resident, that doubt should be resolved before gaining entry. To preclude mistakes, the State Department recommended that US officials work with the Endara government to update listings and addresses of private diplomatic residences. Article 41 declared that, while it was forbidden for diplomatic missions or residences to contain arms caches, only the host government had the authority either to demand their removal or to close and search the premises.^{158/}

Negotiations with the Vatican

(u) (S) During the final ten days of JUST CAUSE the negotiations with the Vatican for the release of Noriega into US custody increasingly occupied center stage. On Christmas Day the Papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Sodano, responded to Secretary Baker's request for the release of Noriega with a polite but firm refusal. To the Vatican, Monsignor Laboa was not granting asylum to a man indicted for international crimes, but giving him "political refuge" to end the bloodshed. Sodano proposed to offer refuge until a third country could be

157/ J-3 Chron Sum, 30 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, State 412988 to USCINCSO, "Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities (U)," 310422Z Dec 89, C, J-5/DDPMA/WHEM.

158/ Msg, State 412988 to USCINCSO, "Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities (U)," 310422Z Dec 89, C, J-5/DDPMA/WHEM.

found willing to grant Noriega permanent asylum. During the next two days Spain, Peru, Mexico, and other countries refused; and Cuba's offer of asylum to Noriega, his family, and his lieutenants proved unacceptable to the United States. 159/

After a meeting of the National Security Council on 29 December, General Powell passed on policy guidance to General Thurman to get Noriega, but do it in a way that did not rupture relations with the Vatican—in other words, not to make things unpleasant for Monsignor Laboa. Encouraging Panamanian leaders to appeal to the Pope to release Noriega into US custody offered Thurman an indirect but effective way of expediting US-Vatican negotiations. On 27 December President Endara had already appealed to John Paul II in a letter explaining that the continued presence of Noriega in Panama fueled pro-Noriega propaganda that he was invincible and likely to resume leadership with a vengeance. 160/

(u)(S) Meanwhile General Thurman granted Archbishop Marcos McGrath, the senior prelate in Panama, permission to visit the "witch house" and other Noriega residences to "gain insight into the man's soul." After the tour Archbishop McGrath convened a conference of Panamanian bishops to discuss what he had learned. On 29 December the bishops of Panama wrote John Paul II a letter explaining that the dictator had committed torture and murder, had practiced devil worship and voodoo, and had stockpiled weapons and ammunition in preparation for prolonged and bloody guerrilla warfare. Unanimously, they urged the Pope to order his release into US custody. 161/

159/ Msg, Amemb Rome 00536 to SecState 101727Z Jan 90, C, J-5/DDPMA/WHEM. Msg, CIA to DIA, "Release of Noriega to Panama Authorities on 30 December," S, 300019Z Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, USCINCSO to Joint Staff, 260815Z Dec 89, SJS 1778/396-00, TS, JMF 933. Msg, Amemb Rome 00536 to SecState, 101727 Jan 90, C; Memo, MG Loeffke to DJS, 27 Dec 89, S; J-5/DDPMA/WHEM. CJCS Sitrep 009 281823Z Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM. 160/ J-3 Chron Sum, 29 Dec 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Ltr, Episcopal Conference of Panama to John Paul II, 29 Dec 89, U, J-3 Cell SOA Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Ltr, Pres. Endara to Pope John Paul II, 28 Dec 89, U, J-3/JOD/WHEM. 161/ J-3 Chron Sum, 29 Dec 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Ltr, Episcopal Conference of Panama to John Paul II, 29 Dec 89, U, J-3 Cell SOA Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

(u) (S) The indirect approach worked. On 29 December there appeared in the Vatican newspaper, l'Osservatore Romano, a communique stating that the Vatican had never intended to hinder justice by granting Noriega refuge. The Vatican also informed Secretary Baker that its senior expert on Central America, Monsignor Giacinto Berlocco, would fly to Panama to help Monsignor Laboa and General Cisneros persuade Noriega to turn himself over to the mercy of US justice. To assist General Cisneros, Secretary Baker provided the general with a top diplomat, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Michael Kozak. 162/

(u) (S) Monsignor Berlocco arrived at 2025 EST on 1 January and confided to General Cisneros that he hoped for "a fair, speedy, and just resolution of the problem." The next day Berlocco and Laboa talked with General Cisneros and Mr. Kozak. They discussed an offer from Noriega to surrender on condition that the United States agree not to pursue the death penalty at his trial and that it not extradite him to Panama. Kozak agreed to the first condition, but waffled on the second by promising to "reduce the possibility of his extradition back to Panama." 163/

(u) (S) Reports of a massive anti-Noriega rally near the Nunciatura, to take place on the afternoon of 3 January, provided US and Vatican diplomats with the final catalyst they needed to persuade Noriega. Intelligence sources indicated that members of the DigBats might shoot into the crowd in an effort to involve the people in a crossfire with US troops. At 0835 EST General Hartzog informed General Kelly that General Stiner would move extra troops into the area and had arranged overhead surveillance by Air Force AC-130s and Army AH-64s. If shots were fired, Stiner's troops and aircraft would not fire into the crowd, but try to locate and shoot the snipers. Stiner's precautions succeeded: a crowd of

162/ Msg, Amemb Panama 00007 to SecState, 011818 Jan 90, U; Msg, Amemb Rome 00536 to SecState 101727 Jan 90, C; J-5/DDPMA/WHEM. CJCS Sitrep 012, 311747Z Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3, J-3/JOD/WHEM. J-3 Chron Sum, 30 Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

163/ J-3 Chron Sum, 1 Jan 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, Amemb Panama to SecState, Info JCS, 082251Z Jan 90, C, Spec, J-5/DDPMA/WHEM. J-3 Chron Sum, 2 Jan 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. J-3 Chron Sum, 2 Jan 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, Amemb Panama to SecState 082251Z Jan 90, C-Spec, J-5/DDPMA/WHEM.

10,000 people gathered at Balboa, at about 1641 EST; they demonstrated peacefully; no shots were fired into or from the crowd.^{164/}

(u) (S) The angry sounds of the crowd and the echoes of anti-Noriega slogans, however, finally enabled Monsignor Laboa to make Noriega "an offer that he could not refuse:" Either leave voluntarily or, at noon on 4 January, Laboa would lift diplomatic immunity at the Nunciatura. That threat left open the possibility that, if US troops did not enter, an anti-Noriega crowd might. Noriega finally agreed to surrender, but first made five small requests: that the transfer be made secretly; that he be allowed to call his wife at the Cuban Embassy; that he be given a military uniform to wear; that the Nuncio accompany him to the gate; and that he be allowed to talk with General Cisneros on the above and other details.

(u) (S) General Cisneros refused to meet with Noriega and left to Major General Downing, the Commander of the Joint Special Operations Task Force, the conduct of the turnover. The long sought after turnover of General Manuel Antonio Noriega, chief of the defunct PDF and one-time de facto generalissimo of Panama, took place secretly within the span of an hour. At 2045 EST on 3 January, Monsignor Laboa notified Downing that Noriega was coming out. Three minutes later, Noriega walked through the gate where US troops handcuffed him. The former strongman balked at the unexpected humiliation, but calmed down and walked under escort to the helicopter. At 2053 General Thurman informed General Kelly, "He is out of the gate and in the school." The waiting helicopter departed at 2057 EST and landed at Howard Air Force Base six minutes later. At 2107 EST General Kelly asked General Hartzog to have General Thurman brief the local press at the Holiday Inn. At 2117 EST, on the ramp of a C-130 at Howard Air Force Base, DEA agents arrested Noriega, warned him of his rights, and hustled him up the ramp. The C-130 departed Panama for Homestead Air Force Base, Florida, at 2131 EST.

^{164/} The above and the ensuing paragraphs derive from the following: J-3 Chron Sum, 3 Jan 90, S; USCINCSO JUST CAUSE 015, 041000Z Jan 90, S; J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, Amemb Panama to SecState (info JCS), 082251Z Jan 90, C-Sp, J-5/DDPMA/WHEM.

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Chapter 8
The End of Organized Resistance,
the Shift to Nationbuilding, and Redeployment
25 December 1989 – 3 January 1990

(u) (s) Save for the planned assault into Chiriqui Province on Christmas Day, the Nuncio's grant of political refuge to Noriega had signalled the end of JUST CAUSE as a combat operation. The decisionmakers in the Pentagon and at Quarry Heights began wrapping up JUST CAUSE: assessing final casualties; disposing of captured weapons; explaining the operation to Congress and the media; redeploying Rangers, airborne, and special operations forces back to CONUS; and disestablishing the Crisis Action Team (CAT) in the NMCC. In Panama, during the next ten days, General Thurman and General Stiner progressively transferred JTFSO assets to the civil affairs operation, PROMOTE LIBERTY.

End of the Fighting

(u) (s) About 1100 EST on Christmas Day Rangers made an air assault into the David, the last PDF stronghold. Lieutenant Colonel Del Cid, the commander of the 5th Military Zone, and the 3d PDF Infantry Company surrendered. Wanted by the United States on drug trafficking charges, Del Cid was immediately flown to Howard Air Force Base for turnover to DEA officers. The Rangers uncovered two helicopters and an arsenal of 7,000 weapons. Later the Rangers successively air assaulted into Boquete, Volcan, La Escondida, and Bocas del Toro, where they found no defenders but several weapons caches. On 26 December elements of the 82nd Airborne Division made an assault into Flamenco Island where they too uncovered weapons caches but no PDF resisters. Previous combat actions and word of Noreiga's flight to the Nunciatura had practically ended all resistance by organized combat forces.

Throughout Panama officers and men of the PDF stood down and waited for the US forces to accept their surrender.^{165/}

(u) (S) By midnight on 25 December General Thurman submitted revised casualty figures on JUST CAUSE: 23 US killed and 322 wounded; 297 Panamanians killed, 123 wounded, and 468 detained. Joint Task Force South had captured 36 armored vehicles, 7 boats, 33 aircraft, and 33,507 weapons. By the close of the operation the number of captured weapons rose to 77,553 of which 8,848 had been turned in for \$811,078 in US reward money. In a "weapons for dollars program" a battalion of the 4th Psyops Group had paid \$25 for a handgrenade, \$100 for a pistol, \$125 for a rifle, \$150 for an automatic rifle, and \$150 for a mine.^{166/}

(u) (S) During the next few days and weeks, US casualty figures remained constant, but Panamanian figures fluctuated according to the personnel and the methods used for counting. By 8 January 1990, the US forces raised the number of Panamanian military dead to 314. Meanwhile the Endara government estimated that 203 civilians had died during the fighting. On 21 May 1990, based upon an actual body count, the Panamanian Minister of Health provided a new rundown of Panamanians killed during JUST CAUSE: 51 uniformed PDF, 58 unidentified civilians [DigBats?], and 143 identified civilians for a grand total of 252.^{167/} General Kelly attributed the higher JTFSO figures to the tendency of combatants firing at the same target to each claim credit for it. Yet, he added, the Panamanian health officials based their figures on bodies actually counted in hospitals and morgues. But that method overlooked a significant number of dead still to be recovered from the field, and General Kelly believed that the true Panamanian casualty figure lay somewhere between the figures of the JTFSO and the Panamanian ministry.^{168/}

165/ USCINCSO JUST CAUSE Sitrep 006, 261050Z Dec 89, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. CJCS Sitrep 007, 262028Z Dec 89, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 2, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

166/ CJCS Sitrep 007, 262028Z Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 2; CJCS Sitrep 009, 281823Z Dec 89, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 3; J-3/JOD/WHEM. J-3 TP, "JUST CAUSE Recap for CJCS Visit to Paris (U)," 8 Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 5, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

167/ LA Times, 24 Apr 90, p. 1. Memo, USCINCSO to JCS, 100105Z Jan 90, C, J-5/DDPMA Binder Panama, J-5/WHEM.

168/ Kelly Interview.

Civil Affairs and the Question of Redeployment

(u) (S) With Noriega cocooned in the Nunciatura, PROMOTE LIBERTY finally began to show signs of growing vitality. On Tuesday, 26 December, 25 civil affairs reservists landed in Panama, marking the vanguard of the 300 approved for deployment by General Powell on 21 December; 120 more were expected on 1 January and up to 155 by 15 January. In addition to those troops, General Thurman asked General Kelly on 26 December for more US Special Forces troops to assist the civil affairs troops in reestablishing law and order, promoting stability, and reconstructing the infrastructure of the new Panamanian government. From 26 December to 3 January, civil affairs and Special Forces troops helped distribute throughout Panama 1,660 tons of food, mostly DOD "Meals Ready to Eat" (MRE), and 218 tons of DOD medical supplies. They also organized a camp at Balboa for nearly 5,000 persons displaced by the fighting.^{169/}

(u) (S) Despite the defeat of the PDF, the DigBats and armed criminal elements continued to loot and shoot. The need to protect civilians and forces executing PROMOTE LIBERTY remained paramount. Late in the afternoon of 26 December, General Thurman complied with a request from General Powell on 23 December to submit a supplementary rules of engagement. To discourage looters, Thurman recommended the following: allow the on-scene commander to authorize warning shots as a deterrent; employ minimum force to apprehend looters for turnover to the civilian authorities; and use deadly force only if necessary to save lives. General Thurman recommended more detailed rules of engagement for roadblocks and defensive positions. After establishing clearly marked perimeter limits, troops should be authorized to fire warning shots to deter violators. If warnings failed, minimum force should be used to detain civilian infiltrators. For armed encroachers, troops should be allowed to use whatever force necessary to disarm and detain them. Troops should also be permitted to disable or attack any vehicle trying to force its way past a

169/ CJCS Sitrep 007, 262028Z Dec 89, S; Msg, USCINCSO to Joint Staff, 260845Z Dec 89, S; CJCS Sitrep 008, 272213Z, S; J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 2, J-3/SOD/WHEM. J-3 TP, "JUST CAUSE Recap for CJCS Visit to Paris (U)," 8 Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell Info Binder 5, J-3/SOD/WHEM.

checkpoint. Of course, troops should be permitted to use proportional force, up to and including deadly force, to repulse an outright attack or even the threat of an attack. To clear buildings, General Thurman's proposed ROE specified this procedure: warn the occupants to exit the building; if necessary, fire warning shots to hasten their movement; avoid damage to medical, religious, and historical sites unless they are clearly being used for attacks against US troops or against civilians; minimize damage to nonmilitary government buildings and dwellings; and respect private property to the maximum extent possible. 170/

(u) (S) Two days after submission of new rules of engagement, General Thurman addressed another question of key concern to General Powell: When could US combat and logistical troops deployed for JUST CAUSE, but not needed for PROMOTE LIBERTY, return to the United States? Early in the afternoon of Thursday, 28 December, General Thurman communicated this assessment: Redeployment of the majority of combat forces should begin as soon as possible after removal of Noriega from the Nunciatura and final neutralization of the DigBats. General Thurman concluded that the longer JUST CAUSE forces remained in Panama, especially beyond 30 days, the more difficult it would be "to declare the operation a success." He therefore recommended the following sequence for redeployment: first, Rangers and all other special operations forces, then troops of the 82nd Airborne Division, and then the Air Force units that supported combat operations. A small residual combat force should be retained indefinitely, under the command of COMJTFPM, Major General Cisneros. 171/

(c) (S)
(b) (1)

170/ Msg, USCINCSO to CJCS, 262235Z Dec 89, C, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 2, J-3/JOD/WHEM.
171/ Msg, USCINCSO to CJCS, 281808Z Dec 89, S, SJS 1778/399-00, S, File 933 (CY 1989).



(b)(1)

(u)(S) In the CAT Rear Admiral Lopez, the Vice Chief, and also the Deputy Director for Current Operations, J-3, responded on 2 January to General Thurman's recommendations for redeployment. Admiral Lopez informed General Thurman's Operations Director, General Hartzog, that the Joint Staff would consider sequential redeployment of major units, but would first require specific dates and sizes of the elements to be redeployed. Hartzog agreed to provide the necessary information as soon as it could be compiled. 173/

(u)(S) The need to institute true checks and balances within the Panamanian military and security forces worked against rapid withdrawal of US forces. Having returned to Panama on 21 December, the US Ambassador, Arthur H. Davis, wanted US forces to remain on hand to deter any interference with efforts by the Endara government to separate and "civilianize" the functions once monopolized by the PDF. In a message to Secretary Baker on 2 January he explained that a new structure, avoiding monopoly of police and military power under one aegis, should be created before U.S. forces withdrew. So far, observed Ambassador Davis, the leaders of the new Fuerza Publica had voluntarily agreed to separate the investigative police (DENI), the immigration service, and the prison police from the armed forces. However, the Fuerza Publica leaders seemed intent on thwarting further necessary separations by the Minister of Justice, Vice President Arias Calderon. 174/

172/ Memo, CINCSOUTH to CJCS, 1 Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 4, J-3/JOD/WHEM.
173/ J-3 Chron Sum, 2 Jan 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM.
174/ Msg, Amemb Panama 00028 to SecState, 022202Z Jan 90, S-Spec, J-5/DDPMA (Panama), J-5/WHEM.

(u) (S) General Thurman and Ambassador Davis concurred with Arias Calderon's desire to separate functions from an extensive list that included police, national investigations, customs, prisons, air support, coast guard, presidential security, traffic registration, traffic law enforcement, forest service, counternarcotics, and counterterrorism. They also agreed that the Fuerza Publica should rely on US combat forces to defend the Panama Canal from attack. Whatever the ultimate separation of powers, however, Thurman and Davis favored retention within the Fuerza Publica of public order companies to maintain crowd control and a modest counterinsurgency force to resist Cuban subversion. 175/

(u) (S) General Powell determined that whatever influence the presence of US combat troops would have on Panamanian reform, it would have to be exercised within the next two weeks. The presence in Panama of nearly 17,000 combat troops above the 9,500 troops normally assigned to USSOUTHCOM could not continue indefinitely. On 3 January General Powell thus approved General Thurman's request of 1 January to redeploy special operations troops and selected items of equipment. Powell also directed that General Thurman further employ backhauling US aircraft between 7 and 26 January to redeploy the additional units in this sequence: 401st Military Police Company (7-10 Jan), 82nd Airborne Division (10-18 Jan), XVIIIth Airborne Corps Headquarters and Corps troops (12-20 Jan), Assault Helicopter Company of the 7th Infantry Division (L) (14-22 Jan), AFFOR (10-26 Jan), XVIIIth Airborne Corps Support Command (COSCOM) (14-26 Jan), and Division Ready Brigade, 7th Infantry Division (L) (18-26 Jan). 176/

(U) Late in the evening of 3 January 1990, President Bush announced that, with the capture of Noriega just hours before, General Stiner's task force had attained all the objectives set for JUST CAUSE. The President continued:

I want to thank the Vatican and the Papal Nuncio in Panama for their even-handed, statesmenlike assistance in recent days. . . . The

175/ Ibid.

176/ USCINCSO JUST CAUSE/PROMOTE LIBERTY Sitrep 015, 041000Z Jan 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, CJCS to USCINCSO et al., 032235Z Jan 90 and Msg, CJCS to USCINCSO, 032236Z Jan 90, S; J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 4, J-3/ JOD/WHEM.

return of General Noriega marks a significant milestone in 'Operation Just Cause.' . . . The first US combat troops have already been withdrawn from Panama. Others will follow as quickly as the local situation will permit. . . . The armed forces . . . have performed their mission courageously and effectively, and I again want to express my gratitude. . . . A free and prosperous Panama will be an enduring tribute.^{177/}

(u) (S) At noon on 5 January General Kelly reduced the CAT to a response cell. Over the next week the JCS Response Cell assisted in or monitored the close out of several final events relating to JUST CAUSE. On 8 January General Powell sent to all the unified and specified commanders a message complimenting them on their success and their professionalism. As the President had indicated, troops had already begun to redeploy by 4 January. Some 4,200 had redeployed by 8 January with more to follow through August until US forces in Panama returned to the pre-JUST CAUSE level below 10,000 troops. On 10 January Benjamin Colomarco, commander of the DigBats, surrendered to US forces and was transported to the 16th Military Police Brigade facility at Ft. Clayton. At 0939 on 11 January General Kelly notified General Thurman that, if the commander had no objection, the Joint Staff would terminate JUST CAUSE to coincide with termination of Joint Task Force South at 1800 EST that same day. General Thurman agreed, and, two hours after termination of JUST CAUSE, General Kelly disbanded the JCS Response Cell.^{178/}

177/ Presidential Statement, 3 Jan 90, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, vol. 26, pp. 8-9.

178/ J-3 Chron Sum, 8 and 11 Jan 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, Joint Staff to USCINCSO, 061621Z Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 4; J-3 TP, "JUST CAUSE Recap for CJCS Visit to Paris," 8 Jan 90, S, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 5; Memo, Joint Staff to CSA et al., 11 Jan 90, U, J-3 Cell SOA Info Binder 5; J-3/JOD/WHEM. Msg, COMJTFSO Sitrep 025 to USCINCSO, 110445Z Jan 90, S, J-5/DDPMA/WHEM.

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Chapter 9

Assessments

Some Preliminary Assessments, January – April 1990

(U) In a letter to Secretary Cheney on 24 January 1990, General James J. Lindsay, USCINCSOC, emphasized that in JUST CAUSE his special operations forces and the conventional forces had made great progress toward joint interoperability since the 1983 intervention in Grenada—URGENT FURY. In Panama the Rangers and the crews of supporting Air Force gunships had worked together quite effectively while exercising great restraint on the use of firepower. Such restraint minimized civilian casualties and property damage. The special operations task forces of Army, Navy, and Air Force also succeeded in coordinating their efforts with each other. General Lindsay also spoke highly of the accuracy and timeliness of tactical intelligence; the effective support by civil affairs and psyops personnel; and the well-coordinated, responsive actions of logistical units.^{179/}

(U) In an interview with the Army Times on 26 February 1990, Lieutenant General Carl W. Stiner, Commanding General of XVIIIth Airborne Corps and, until 11 January 1990, COMJTFSO, stated the following:

JUST CAUSE . . . validated that what we are doing is right . . . that the training program . . . is exactly as it should be We expect tough, realistic training of our troops, and this included live-fire and night operations. Our training program paid off in spades in Panama and that's the reason you saw the discipline, the efficiency, the effectiveness and the proficiency that was demonstrated by our troops. . . . JUST CAUSE was a joint operation in every sense of the word. Cooperation among all services was absolutely outstanding. . . . Each service had unique and important capabilities that were needed to perform this mission. . . . First of all, we received clear guidance from the national command authority level of what was expected. Secondly, we were allowed to prepare a plan in detail to accomplish that. Third, we briefed that plan all the way up through the decisionmaking authority, and that plan was

^{179/} Msg, USCINCSOC to SecDef et al., 241720Z Jan 90, U, SJS/HisDiv.

approved. Fourth, we were allowed sufficient time to conduct detailed rehearsals for its execution. And fifth, when conditions dictated that it should be executed, we were allowed to execute it without changes to the plan. And that was very germane in the outcome of Operation JUST CAUSE. 180/

(U) (S) In a briefing of 2 April 1990 for VIPs to the National Military Command Center, General Kelly and his staff in the Joint Operations Division attributed the success of JUST CAUSE to several factors. During nearly two years of deliberate planning and three months of "fine tuning," the Joint Staff, USCINCSO, and the tactical commanders had carefully crafted and coordinated their efforts. Simplicity characterized both the operations order for JUST CAUSE and the chain of command that resulted. If there was a planning weakness, it was the lack of detailed attention to post-combat operations and the civil affairs personnel needed to carry them out. 181/

(U) (S) In General Thurman and General Stiner, General Powell had two outstanding commanders whom he could rely on to do their jobs with minimal supervision. He supported both men to the hilt with staffing and resources. Both men justified General Powell's confidence by the thoroughness with which they rehearsed their forces during the weeks before they went into action. Such rehearsals precluded many of the mistakes associated with earlier contingency operations. 182/

(U) (S) In fairness to the planners of earlier operations, JUST CAUSE had a major advantage: the presence in country of nearly half of the operational forces even before the trigger event of 16 December. The substantial US presence in Panama facilitated the rapid insertion into Panama before D-Day of special operations forces and the operational chain of command for Joint Task Force South. Their presence and activities ensured maximum communications interoperability at H-Hour and during the first critical days of combat. The US military presence also provided a foundation for speedy force development and the logistical buildup. Of course, without a successful deployment, the forces on

180/ Stiner Conferènce.

181/ J-3 Briefing, Opn JUST CAUSE, ca 2 Apr 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kelly Interview.

182/ J-3 Briefing, Opn JUST CAUSE, ca 2 Apr 90, S, J-3/JOD/WHEM. Kelly Interview.

the ground could not have executed JUST CAUSE. For the success of the deployment, therefore, much depended upon refueling from SAC, aircover from USLANTCOM and TACOM, and, of course, the airlift itself by MAC.^{183/}

(U) Although General Powell admitted that "there are bound to be one or two glitches in an operation as complex as this," both he and Secretary Cheney scarcely concealed their satisfaction with JUST CAUSE. In an interview in Panama in early January 1990, General Powell spoke of the "unfaltering commitment of the troops who successfully carried out the complex missions of JUST CAUSE. . . . in all the combat and training operations I have ever been involved in, I have never seen one as complex as this executed and planned as well." In an interview with this author on 27 March 1990, Secretary Dick Cheney said: "JUST CAUSE showed what we're capable of I feel very, very good about the overall quality of the operation, the quality of advice we got, and the professionalism with which [the military] carried out the operation."^{184/}

The Impact of Goldwater-Nichols on JUST CAUSE

(u) (S) The transmission of guidance on Panama contingency planning from national authorities to General Thurman and General Stiner reflected changes in the national chain of command formally enacted by the Goldwater-Nichols Act Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. That act made the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff--instead of the corporate Joint Chiefs of Staff--the chief military adviser to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council. Thus during the planning for BLUE SPOON, Secretary Cheney worked solely through General Powell. This practice eliminated the customary and time-consuming deliberation within the Joint Chiefs of Staff needed to win consensus among the Services.^{185/}

183/ Ibid.

184/ Air Force News Service, Internal Information Service, News Center, Kelly AFB, TX, 10-16 Jan 90, U, p. 3. Cheney Interview.

185/ Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986, PL 99-433, 1 October 1986, secs. 151, 153. Kelly Interview. Cheney Interview. Kelly Transcript. J-3 Briefing, Opn JUST CAUSE, 2 Apr 90, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

(u) (S) The Goldwater-Nichols Act also made the Joint Staff directly responsible to the Chairman instead of to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was no longer necessary to delay operational planning decisions to allow for the traditional coordination and staffing by the Services in preparation for JCS approval. Thus during the planning for BLUE SPOON, General Kelly in J-3, and the commanders and their planners in Ft. Bragg and Panama briefed the Chairman frequently, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff rarely. Out of respect for the superior expertise of the Service chiefs on strictly Service matters, however, General Powell consulted or briefed them on Service-related matters affecting the plan. 186/

(u) (S) As noted, the Chairman, General Kelly, and Admiral Sheaffer had briefed the Service chiefs on the shooting of Lt Paz and the revised version of BLUE SPOON at General Powell's quarters on 17 December. At that time the chiefs assented to execution of the plan virtually as written. In General Kelly's view JCS approval would not have been so facile if the crisis had arisen before the Goldwater-Nichols Act had increased the power of the Chairman. Under the old system the chiefs might have "brokered" more over roles and missions and the forces to be employed. After Goldwater-Nichols became law, neither Admiral Crowe nor General Powell encouraged such brokering. Thus the force structure developed for BLUE SPOON, and accepted by the Chiefs after the fact, made the Army predominant.

(u) (S) Furthermore common sense dictated a leadership role for the Army. Nearly 13,000 Army troops were already in Panama, and Panama fell within the area of operations of a unified command dominated by the Army, USSOUTHCOM. However, the planners did calculate those Marine and Naval forces readily at hand into the operational equation. The Air Force played a more significant role than the two maritime services because of the Army's dependence upon it for airlift, logistical support, suppression of anti-aircraft fire, and interdiction. 187/

186/ Ibid. Powell Interview.

187/ Kelly Transcript. Kelly Interview. See discussion of friendly forces, p. 45-46.

(u) (S) Not everyone agreed that the shortened chain of command embodied in BLUE SPOON depended upon formal legislation. In General Powell's view the Secretary of Defense had always had the choice of working through the Joint Chiefs of Staff, through the Chairman alone, or of taking personal command over an operation. Ample historical precedent exists in support of that interpretation. During the Vietnam War and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Secretary of Defense usually worked solely through the Chairman in transmitting guidance to the commanders. During the US intervention in Grenada in 1983, Secretary Caspar Weinberger exerted this prerogative and made the Chairman, General John W. Vessey, Jr., USA, the de facto commander for the operation.^{188/}

(u) (S) Goldwater-Nichols did spell out added authorities for the commanders of the unified and specified commands, especially by including them within the national military budget-making process. Whether or not that development influenced General Thurman, he nonetheless exerted strong guidance on the makeup of the chain of command below his headquarters. As noted, he had practically insisted that General Stiner be his tactical warfighter. General Thurman subsequently placed both the JTFPM and the JSOTF under General Stiner and gave him wide latitude in their employment.^{189/}

(u) (S) In turn, General Stiner subdivided the JTFPM and the JSOTF into nine separate task forces. He decentralized or "broadened" the chain of command below his headquarters to allow separate commanders, dispersed over a wide geographic area, maximum independence and flexibility. General Stiner envisioned his principal mission after H-Hour as supplying each of the nine task force commanders with all the resources they needed to attain their objectives without delaying to await the movements of other units. Thus, a chain of command streamlined at the national level and broadened at the

188/ Powell Interview. Interv, Cole w/GEN Vessey, 25 Mar 87, S; SJS/HisDiv.

189/ Kelly Interview. Thurman Interview. Interv, Cole w/LTC Shane, 2 Apr 90, S, SJS/HisDiv. Kelly Transcript. J-3 Briefing, Opn. JUST CAUSE, 2 Apr 90, U, J-3/JOD/WHEM.

tactical level greatly facilitated timely execution and support for every phase of JUST CAUSE.^{190/}

(u) (S) The period 28–29 December had marked a turning point in the command relationship between General Powell and his two field commanders, General Thurman and General Stiner. Until 28 December General Powell had taken pains not to intrude in their conduct of the combat of JUST CAUSE or the early civil affairs operations of PROMOTE LIBERTY. By that time, however, politico–military factors started to loom larger than military ones. From General Powell's point of view, General Thurman and General Stiner were being asked more and more to make decisions of a politically sensitive nature. In three cases the results had proven awkward, if not embarrassing, to Secretary Cheney and the President—the ostensible use of rock music to harrass all occupants of the Nunciatura, the detention of the Cuban ambassador on 28 December, and, on 29 December, the illegal search of the Nicaraguan Embassy. Increasingly on 28 and 29 December, therefore, General Powell played a more active role in the non–tactical aspects of JUST CAUSE providing more explicit and more frequent guidance to his two field commanders.^{191/}

Perhaps one of the most moving tributes to the planners and executers of JUST CAUSE came unexpectedly from a member of the media, a profession not always enamored with the military. In a CBS News show on 28 December 1989, while US troops were concluding the last combats in Panama, Dan Rather stated:

In Panama the men and women of the United States Armed Forces have done a superb job. They have performed bravely, efficiently, and professionally. For this they deserve the thanks and respect of a grateful nation, and our prayers as they continue their service and their sacrifice The men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States were given a mission by their Commander in Chief. . . . They were given a job to do, and they did it well. . . . Before the smoke completely clears up in Panama, before the politicians and the propagandists complete weaving their self-serving spells, it would be well for the rest of us to note and ponder the brave, efficient, professional service our country's warriors have given our country in the streets and jungles of Panama.^{192/}

190/ Ibid. Stiner Conference.

191/ Powell Interview.

192/ Dan Rather Reporting, News Analysis and Commentary, CBS News, 28 December 89, U.