

Marines In Panama: 1988 - 1990

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SUBJECT AREA - History

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### MARINES IN PANAMA 1988-1990

Little has been written about the experiences of Marines who served as part of Marine Forces Panama during the Panama crisis. Numbering approximately 650 personnel during the course of their deployment, MARFOR, as it was known, was organized as a contingency Marine Air Ground Task Force. The performance of MARFOR Panama displayed the utility and flexibility of Marine forces in low intensity conflict

The initial mission of MARFOR was to protect American lives and property. This remained their constant operational focus throughout the deployment. However, the tactical evolutions of MARFOR took many forms. Initially positioned in the Navy's Arraijan Tank Farm, MARFOR provided point security for this and other key facilities on the West Bank of the Panama Canal. In the jungle surrounding the tank farm, MARFOR Marines engaged in night time confrontations with members of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF).

After the first year of the deployment the tactical focus for MARFOR changed. The United States policy took a harder line toward Panamanian violations of American rights protected under the 1977 Panama Canal Treaty. Exercises known as "Sand Fleas," were conducted under the treaty's freedom of movement provisions. MARFOR elements, particularly the Light Armored Infantry Company, participated successfully in numerous operations of this type. Moving forces on land, water, and air, MARFOR helped display American resolve to assert treaty rights and confront the Panamanian regime of General Noriega. Additionally, MARFOR gained invaluable information about the PDF, and the surrounding countryside that they would use effectively in the next phase, Operation JUST CAUSE.

MARFOR participation in JUST CAUSE highlighted the flexibility of Marine forces. Modifying established and rehearsed contingency plans at the last minute, MARFOR quickly and efficiently accomplished their mission. Given responsibility for an area of operations much larger than had been envisioned, MARFOR made maximum use of their assets to detain at-large PDF elements, and reestablish order in the civilian community. Finally, MARFOR Marines worked to develop credibility for the newly formed Panamanian Police Force (PPF).

As a small part of the total force that served in Panama, MARFOR Panama made a large contribution to the

success of American policy. The Marine Corps, through its involvement, gained a wealth of experience in low-intensity conflict.

## MARINES IN PANAMA: 1988-1990

### OUTLINE

Thesis Statement. The performance of Marine Forces Panama during the Panama Crisis, displayed the utility and flexibility of Marine forces in low intensity conflict.

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MARINES IN PANAMA: 1955-1990

by Major Robert B. Neller, USMC

When Marines from the 6th Marine Expeditionary Brigade deployed to Panama in April of 1988 in response to an unstable political situation in the country, they followed in the historical footsteps of Marines spanning over 100 years. Marines had come to Panama before, in 1856, 1885, and in 1903. Although the specific circumstances varied in each case, the missions they were called upon to accomplish were very similar to the mission given the Marines representing their Corps near the end of the twentieth century. Like those who had preceded them, the modern day Marines found themselves in what is now called low-intensity conflict, a confrontation where the political and the military objectives often become confused, where force can only be used selectively under strict criteria, or where a victory may be measured by what action is not taken, as opposed to what action is. Throughout the two year deployment, the thousands of Marines who comprised Marine Forces Panama (MARFOR)

learned this and more. Their performance throughout the Panama Crisis displayed the utility and flexibility of Marine forces in low intensity conflict.

Panama, although an independent and sovereign nation, is not a foreign land to Americans. From the construction of the trans-isthmian railroad in the 1850's, through the completion of the Panama Canal in 1914, and up to the present day, Americans have been involved economically and politically in Panamanian affairs. Thousands of American citizens have been born, lived, and died in Panama, due mostly to the American involvement with the Panama Canal. Relations with the Panamanian government have always remained strong. American-Panamanian cooperation reached its peak with the signing of the Panama Canal Treaty in 1977, handing over to the Panamanian government control of the canal in the year 2000. It was only when the conduct of the regime of Manuel Antonio Noriega became politically unacceptable to the United States that relations between the two countries began a downturn that ended in military conflict.

General Noriega came to power in August 1983 after the death of the Panamanian populist leader Omar Torrijos. A Torrijos protege, Noriega quickly outmaneuvered his opponents and seized de facto control of the country. A favorite U.S. intelligence source, his own drug trafficking behavior eventually made him too great a political liability for the Reagan/Bush administration after he was publicly indicted for drug related activities by a U.S. federal grand jury in January 1988. When Panamanian President Arturo

Delvalle, a Noriega crony, unsuccessfully attempted to fire Noriega in February 1988, the country suffered violent civil unrest. It was in response to this unrest, and the increasing threat to American citizens and property, that Marines were sent to Panama.

The original mission assigned to the Marines who arrived in Panama in early April 1988 was to protect American lives and property. This continued to be the primary function of MARFOR, and of other American forces eventually deployed to Panama in response to the situation as it developed over the next two years. Such a mission was very generic and open ended, allowing the command to interpret the implied tasks in a variety of ways. For the Marines, particularly in the early phase of their deployment, their more aggressive interpretation of the mission, coupled with the existing rules of engagement, put them at odds with their higher headquarters, Joint Task Force (JTF) Panama. When a more aggressive approach toward the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) was taken by the JTF in May 1989, many of these differences disappeared. As the situation in Panama became more volatile the "protection" mission became part of a list of other missions, but it always remained the fundamental focus of operations.

The enemy force faced by MARFOR during the Panama crisis was the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF). Though the media and the U.S. government made Noriega out to be the arch villain, it was the PDF, which Noriega headed, that held the real power in the country. Numbering approximately 13,000, the

PDF had only about 3,000 combat capable troops spread throughout Panama. The PDF was comprised of ground, air, and naval components, but the latter two were both small, poorly funded and ill-equipped. Some of the ground units, such as the Special Forces UESAT and the 7th Company "Macho de Montes," were highly trained and well equipped. Others like the 1st Public Order Company, known as the "Dobermans," were organized to provide the Noriega government with the means to suppress public unrest. The combat support portion of the PDF was comprised of the national police force, customs personnel, and a very capable intelligence and internal security force. Due to its limited military capability, the PDF generally avoided direct confrontation with U.S. military forces. The PDF relied on an indirect approach to attack American interests. With American installations concentrated at both ends of the old canal zone it was a simple matter for the PDF to mount small unit operations to harass fixed American security forces, and U.S. citizens who lived or traveled in the local community. The PDF was very good at these low-level operations. When the U.S. forces became more aggressive in confronting the PDF, their inherent weaknesses--dispersion of forces, limited mobility, and lack of firepower--became apparent.

The area of operations (AO) for the majority of MARFOR's activities centered on the West Bank of the old Panama Canal Zone (Figure 1). The West Bank included important antenna fields, pipe lines, pump stations, and the U.S. Naval Station with 3 deep water piers. All these facilities

required protection, but three areas were of critical importance. The first of these areas was the Arraijan Tank Farm (ATF).

Part of the Naval Station, the ATF was the storage area for all the fuel used by American forces in Panama. The ATF



numerous nighttime confrontations between Marines and unidentified intruders over the next two years. Carved out of heavily wooded terrain, the ATF was an area of approximately two square kilometers of rolling grassland, which held the underground fuel storage tanks. Surrounding the tanks was a heavily wooded area covered with trails and numerous streams which provided any intruders with easily accessible avenues of approach. Located adjacent to the Pan-American highway, the ATF was neither surrounded with a security fence, nor equipped with any security lighting.

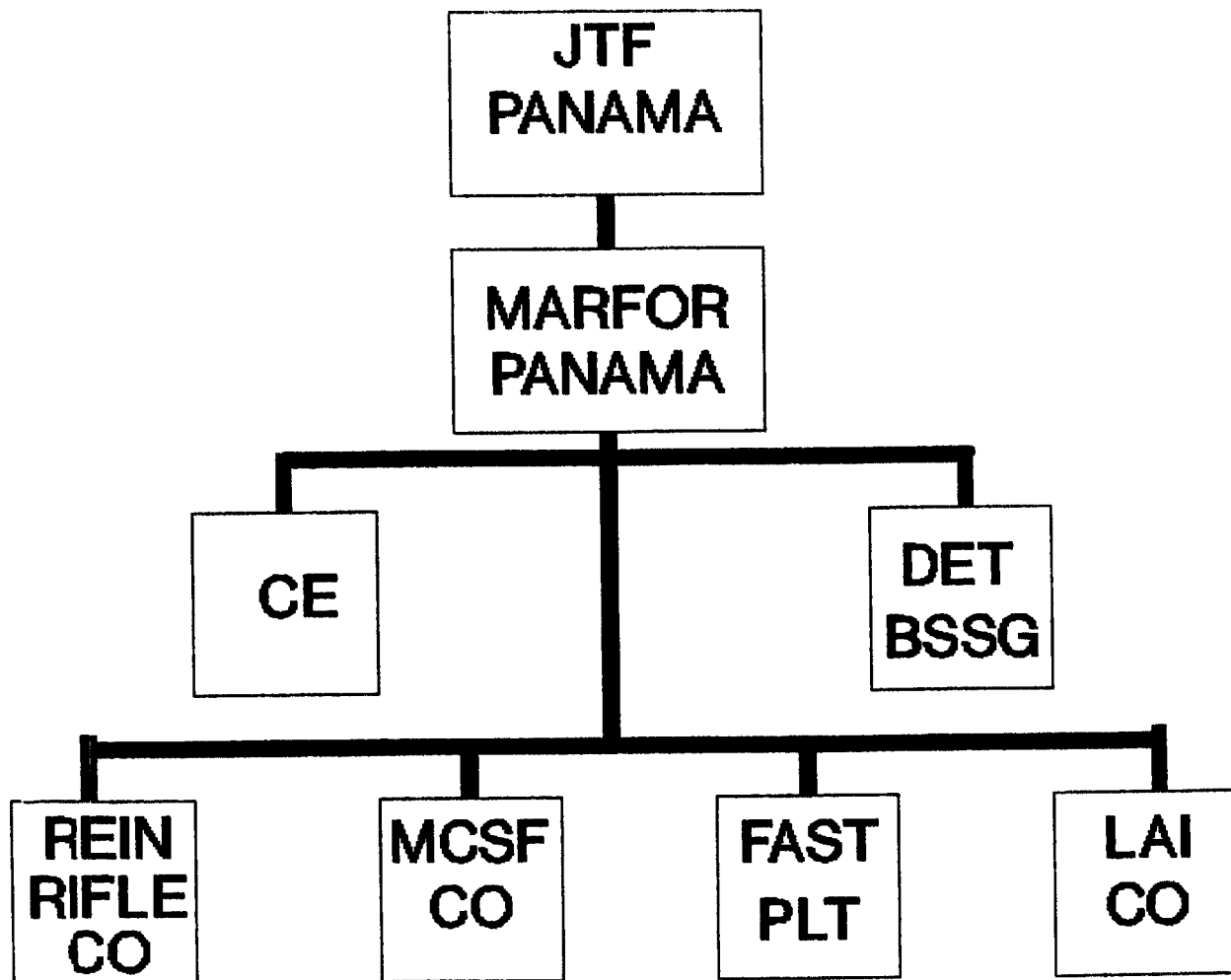
The second area was Howard AFB. Howard was the most significant strategic terrain feature within the AO. In all the contingency plans for the country, reinforcements and resupply flowed through Howard. Its protection was critical. In order to protect Howard, control of the high ground to the west--Cerra Cabra, Cerra Galera, and Sierra Minion--was necessary. From these terrain features an aggressor could mortar the airfield or fire hand held surface to air missiles at U.S. transports. In addition, the main trails leading into the AO from the West crossed these hills.

The third critical area within the MARFOR AO was the Bridge of the Americas. The only permanent structure spanning the Panama Canal, control of the bridge gave the side which possessed it the ability to control all movement in and out of Panama City from the West. With American installations located on both banks of the canal, control of the bridge allowed the reinforcement and resupply of each side using ground transport. Security and control of the

three critical areas were the focus of MARFOR operations throughout the deployment.

The force structure of MARFOR was that of a contingency Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF). MARFOR possessed three of the four components of a normal MAGTF: a command element, a ground combat element, and a combat service element (figure 2), but lacked an air combat element. The initial force deployed to Panama was centered around a reinforced rifle company supported by a detachment from Brigade Service Support Group-6, with the command element provided by advance elements of the 6th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB). MARFOR also assumed operational control of the Marine forces already in country, Marine Corps Security Force (MCSF:) Company Panama and a Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team (FAST) which had deployed to Panama in March 1988 to reinforce the MCSF Company. This structure remained intact until May 1989 when MARFOR was reinforced by a company from the 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion. This remained the basic organization for the remainder of deployment with the exception of a one month period during Operation Just Cause when two rifle companies were deployed simultaneously.

Due to the open ended commitment of Marines to Panama the decision was made early to have deploying units rotate on a 90 day cycle. Members of the command element also served a 90 day tour, but rotated as individuals. Initially, the only exceptions to this policy were the MARFOR commander,



(Figure 2)

executive officer and sergeant major who served a 6 month tour. The 6 month tour was later extended to most of the S-2 shop, and other principal staff officers. Overall, the force structure proved to be adequate to the missions assigned MARFOR. The personnel rotation policy created a great deal of turnover, especially with the staff, and made continuity a

constant concern of the MARFOR leadership.

The experiences of Marines deployed as members of MARFOR varied greatly based upon the time period of their service. To discuss the key events that took place during the deployment this paper will break the experience down into phases: the jungle phase, the election phase, the freedom of movement phase, and the JUST CAUSE phase. The final phase of the MARFOR experience, participation in Operation PROMOTE LIBERTY, which followed JUST CAUSE, will not be covered.

The jungle phase began prior to the arrival of the 6th MEB advance party. Soon after Noriega's indictment in the States, Marines from MCSF Company came in contact with intruders at the Arraijan Tank Farm. It was these contacts and the violent civil unrest within Panama that led first to the reinforcement of the company by a FAST platoon, and then the deployment of what was to become MARFOR. Although intruder activities against American installations throughout Panama were becoming more frequent, the greatest number occurred at the ATF.

Immediately upon arrival in country the ground element of MARFOR, India Company 3/4, moved into and occupied defensive positions in the ATF. They were immediately probed by intruders on the nights of 9 and 10 April, as was to become the pattern every time a new unit entered the tank farm. On the night of 11 April a patrol from the company split up in an attempt to catch an intruder. One patrol element ended up firing on the other in the darkness, and in the process killed one Marine. The next night, 12 April, the

company was probed by a 30 to 40 man unit. The intruders were picked up by seismic sensors and a listening post positioned along a stream the intruders used as an avenue of approach. The Marines exchanged fire with this force, engaging them with small arms, mortar, and automatic grenade launcher fire for close to 2 hours. The engagement ceased upon direction of the Joint Task Force (JTF:) Panama commander, who arrived on the scene accompanied by a PDF officer. This general officer directed the Marines to remain in their positions until daybreak, and ordered them not to search the engagement area until daybreak. This order was complied with as the Marines watched ambulances pull up to the ATF on the adjacent highway, and saw personnel with flashlights move around the area where the contact had taken place. The next day, all Marines involved in the firefight were directed to submit to a urinalysis. The event was reported in the international media, with the Panamanians claiming the Marines were shooting at palm trees. Surprisingly, the SOUTHCOM public affairs officer did not dispute the Noriega regime's interpretation of events.

The 12 April firefight set the tone for the rest of the jungle phase for MARFOR. The ATF became the focus of operations as Marines patrolled by day and established listening and night surveillance posts after dark. The intrusions were not imaginary, as the Noriega regime attempted to portray. Between 11 April and 17 September 1988, on the West Bank area (Howard AFB, the ATF, and the Army Ammunition Supply Point), there were 14 weapons

engagements, 43 sightings of uniformed intruders, and 296 sensor activations. Though some of these sightings were probably inaccurate, especially when a new unit pulled its first few nights of duty in the ATF, the number of shooting engagements, sightings, and sensor activations provided ample proof that someone was probing the Marines.

MARFOR never experienced another night like the one of 12 April; however, intruder sightings continued to take place on a weekly basis. Other major shooting incidents occurred in late July and on 31 October when there were 5 separate shooting engagements in one evening. It was clear to all concerned that the intrusions were not directed toward the sabotage of fuel stored within the ATF, but at the Marines. In November 1988, at the direction of CINCSOUTH, the Marines were ordered to raze the fixed defensive positions they had erected following the April events, and to restrict their operations. In an effort to see how far into the tank farm the intruders would venture, and to determine whether their real target was fuel tank or Marine, MARFOR was restricted to day patrols no further than 300 meters outside the outer perimeter of the ATF. Additionally, they were not allowed to conduct any night operations outside the same outer perimeter. Finally, the size of the force positioned within the ATF was reduced to a platoon sized element. This change in method of operation concerned the MARFOR commander, as he felt the Marines on duty in the ATF were being put in a vulnerable position in order to prove what he already knew to be true--the Marines were being targeted in order to

discredit the U.S. government.

After these changes were implemented the intrusions continued, but at a slower pace. In early 1989, a request from CINCSOUTH to redeploy the Marines was rejected by the National Command Authorities. With action in the ATF almost nonexistent, MARFOR moved into the next phase of its deployment, the election phase.

The slowing of activity in the ATF was primarily due to the change in the focus of PDF operations. The new year, 1989, was an election year in Panama, and Noriega had to permit the election to take place in order to reduce domestic tensions and counter international criticism. However, he did not have to allow an honest or fair election. In order to achieve the result he desired, he reoriented the PDF toward fixing the election and harassing the political opposition.

For MARFOR the near termination of activity in the ATF provided an opportunity to spend much needed time working out the details of several contingency plans to deal with the Panama situation. When the election phase was over, these plans were exercised, modified, and eventually became the basis for MARFOR operations during Operation JUST CAUSE. Time was also spent doing a great deal of training, especially live fire evolutions, which would pay great dividends in the future.

Noriega's effort to fix the election was a critical mistake. He greatly underestimated the hatred and disdain felt for him, not only by the Panamanian people, but his own

PDF. When the election was held on the 7th of May under the watchful eyes of numerous international observers and the media, the Noriega party ticket was soundly beaten, even though Noriega had attempted to assure victory with massive fraud. In response, Noriega annulled the election. The day after the election, Noriega sent his paramilitary "Dignity Battalion" to viciously attack the publicly acclaimed winners of the election. These events gave the U.S. government the moral basis to pursue a more aggressive policy which became known as "Freedom of Movement."

Soon after the elections, the U.S. forces in Panama were reinforced. Two army infantry battalions, one mechanized and one light, were in country by the end of May. For MARFOR, the reinforcement came in the form of a Light Armored Infantry (LAI) Company with its organic LAV-25 vehicles. During the "Freedom of Movement" phase, and for the remainder of the deployment, the LAI Company would become the focus of of MARFOR's operations.

With Noriega suffering significant national and international criticism, the previously passive U.S. response to PDF illegalities changed. Rather than administratively protest the harassment and detention of Americans by the PDF, it was decided to actively exert American rights under the Canal Treaty. This was done for several reasons. It was believed that confronting Noriega would discredit and humiliate him in the eyes of the PDF leadership, and further erode his support. Secondly, the maneuver of American forces under the guise of freedom of movement and canal defense,

would allow U.S. forces in country to make reconnaissance and rehearse the contingency plans that were being prepared.

For MARFOR the freedom of movement exercises, known as "Sand Flea" operations, took many forms. MARFOR elements reinforced the American Embassy in downtown Panama City, conducted helicopter and amphibious landings, and ran riverine operations on the Panama Canal. The most effective "Sand Fleas" were conducted by the LAI Company. Using their speed and mobility to good advantage, LAI traveled within and outside the old canal zone. When LAI Company went outside U.S. areas of jurisdiction it always drew a strong response from the PDF. Lacking the ability to stop the LAI movements, the PDF would attempt to trap the LAI Company with roadblocks. With the vehicles stopped, PDF supporters would harass the Marines, and attempt to bait them into harming Panamanian civilians or damaging property. The actions of the "colonialist" Marines and the "patriotic" Panamanians would then be reported by the government controlled media.

The PDF attempted to set such a trap on 8 August 1989, when a number of PDF vehicles and personnel who were attempting to stop an LAI patrol followed the patrol into an area of U.S. jurisdiction and were themselves apprehended, disarmed, and photographed. The detention of this group of 29 PDF and civilian Noriega supporters, which included Noriega's brother-in-law, greatly discredited the regime. The PDF's inability to stop the LAI movements, and the strong support shown to the Marines by the majority of the local people during the operations, gave the Marines confidence in their

ability to execute the contingency plans. They would soon have their chance.

On the morning of 3 October 1989, a group of PDF officers, led by Major Moises Giroldi, attempted a coup against Noriega. Supported by American forces who blocked the movement of one PDF company out of their garrison, and covered the western approaches to Panama City, the rebels took custody of Noriega and asked him to resign and retire from the PDF. Leaving him alone to make his decision, Noriega used an unmonitored phone in his room to call forces still loyal to him. Within hours, these forces flew to Panama City, counterattacked, and freed Noriega. The mutineers were arrested and the leaders killed. This coup attempt, the second in 18 months, was significant in that it showed the increasing dissatisfaction with Noriega within his own organization. Due to the large numbers of personnel involved in the plot against him he was forced to cashier several of the PDF companies involved in the coup, and keep a stronger security force close by for personal protection.

As a result, U.S. forces had a less capable PDF to face in the future, led by a man focused more and more on his own isolation within the organization he lead. In a desperate situation, Noriega took measures which would give him time to reconsolidate his position.

For MARFOR, the coup provided a real situation in which to test its contingency plan. On the day of the coup, MARFOR elements moved to assembly areas just short of their planned blocking positions. The FAST platoon actually occupied their

position, blocking traffic for 1 1/2 hours on the Pan-American highway leading into the city from the West. although not confronted by the PDF, the Marines gained valuable experience and confidence in their plan, and their ability to execute it rapidly.

After the coup attempt, MARFOR and other U.S. elements continued to exercise their treaty rights with freedom of movement operations. The much slower and weaker response of the PDF to these operations was evidence of the disorganization and lack of morale in the post-coup PDF. In order to remove those PDF members who had plotted against him, Noriega needed a respite from the pressure of increased U.S. activities. He achieved this, during November 1989, by using a deception plan which centered upon a car bombing campaign against U.S. installations. Unable to ignore the intelligence concerning the bomb threat, the American forces focused on their own internal security long enough to allow Noriega to reorganize his own forces, and begin the recruiting and training of replacement personnel. After several weeks of heavy security, without any sign of a bomb, the deception was acknowledged by U.S intelligence. Plans for continued pressure on Noriega were implemented.

As the month of December began tensions remained high between U.S. and PDF forces. Rumors about future coups against Noriega circulated in and around Panama City. The consensus seemed to be that his time was running out. No one, however, could have predicted the events that led to his downfall.

On the night of 16 December 1989 two events took place which set in motion the operation now known as JUST CAUSE. First, a Marine assigned to U.S. Southern Command, 1/LT Robert Paz, was shot by PDF troops when the private vehicle he was riding in drove through a PDF check point. He died of his wounds that night. Second, a U.S. Navy officer and his wife were detained at the same check point where LT Paz was killed. They were taken to a PDF headquarters and beaten and physically abused during interrogation. When these events became public the Bush administration decided to execute the contingency plan that had been developed and refined since the failed 3 October coup.

MARFOR had been planning and rehearsing a number of different contingency plans for several months. The mission of MARFOR was basically the same in each plan: to isolate Panama City from the west by seizing the Bridge of the Americas, occupy other blocking positions, and secure Howard AFB as the airhead for reinforcements. Individual units within MARFOR had been assigned specific tasks within the overall mission, and had made extensive reconnaissance and rehearsed their movement to and occupation of these positions. On 19 December all but one of these units had their mission and/or blocking position changed. All the units also found out the upcoming operation would take place at night, something which had not been rehearsed. Nevertheless, at 1800 on 19 December all were ready to go.

MARFOR was fortunate. All the components of the force had been in country for at least one month and were familiar with

the plan and the entire area of operations. The experience level of the units allowed for quick adjustments to these last minute changes.

When MARFOR crossed the line of departure at 0100 hours on 20 December 1989, the individual unit missions were as follows:

LAI Company- Attack and seize the PDF traffic police station on Pan-American highway, continue west, attack and seize the PDF station in Arraijan. Screen to the west of Arraijan. Be prepared to attack other targets as directed.

India 3/6-Establish a roadblock south of Howard AFB. attack and seize PDF station in Vera Cruz. Maintain security in ATF. When relieved by MCSF Company in ATF, occupy high ground to the west of Howard, and screen the jungle approaches to the airfield.

BSSG-Form a provisional platoon, reinforced with army MP's. Seize Bridge of the America's. Provide CSS to MARFOR.

MCSF Company-Relieve India Company in the ATF. Follow in trace of LAI Company and establish a roadblock west of the ATF on Pan-American Highway. Continue to man designated security positions.

FAST Platoon-MARFOR reserve. Be prepared to reinforce U.S. Embassy. Be prepared to provide Close Quarters Battle (CQB) element to LAI for offensive operations.

Commencing their movement at 0100 on 20 December 1989, MARFOR forces quickly quickly seized their initial objectives, against light resistance. The West Bank was secured, and PDF forces within the city isolated.

The ability of MARFOR units to adjust their plan at the last minute, and execute at night, was a credit to the months and months of training that preceded the operation. All units benefited from the reconnaissance of the objectives they were able to accomplish during freedom of movement operations. Even with their initial success, MARFOR would be forced continually to adapt, and have their resources stretched, in the the following weeks.

During tie period 20 through 23 December, MARFOR elements attacked and cleared PDF installations in Arraijan, Vera Cruz, Vista Alegre, La Chorrera, and Vaca Monte. Using primarily the LAI Company reinforced with the CQB Team from the FAST Platoon, MARFOR pushed their area of influence farther and farther to the west. The MARFOR AO eventually exceeded 400 square kilometers, a much larger AO than had been anticipated in any of the contingency plans. In order to maintain some coverage/security over this terrain, MARFOR was given operational control of an army light infantry battalion. They were also reinforced by another Marine rifle company, Kilo Company 3/6, which was scheduled to relieve India Company in early January 1990.

With the PDF was eliminated as an organized military threat, the mission for MARFOR became twofold. First, continue to search for and apprehend at-large PDF members and supporters. Second, provide to the local populace a security force until the new Panamanian government could organize and establish its own new national police force.

To accomplish these missions MARFOR units operated

directly within civilian population areas. By establishing small unit outposts in several villages and towns, the Marines were able to gain the confidence of the people, and use them as a source of intelligence regarding the identity and location of the PDF members. By developing this intelligence and acting rapidly on it, MARFOR units were able to capture hundreds of PDF/Noriega government officials. By actively patrolling to establish a presence within the local community, MARFOR units were able to reduce looting and other crimes against property, and a certain level of normalcy was brought back to the lives of Panamanians. In addition to the military actions of MARFOR, Marine Reserve Civic Action Group personnel made successful efforts to reestablish public utilities and assist the newly appointed government in providing needed services to the populace.

Two weeks after the initiation of JUST CAUSE the new Panamanian government established their own national police force. Due to international pressure to withdraw American troops rapidly, and without the time to train from the ground up its own personnel, the Panamanian government was forced to use repatriated PDF personnel to form the bulk of the force. Known initially as the Panama Public Force (PPF), it was sent back to the areas now controlled by U.S. forces to conduct combined patrols. With extremely limited arms and equipment, the PPF's task was to reestablish a local police force.

The Marines were now faced with an ironic situation. Their mission required them to work with the same people they had confronted only a few weeks earlier. However,

cooperation and mutual support were quickly established, due to the lack of combat between the two forces and the Marines' sense of mission accomplishment. The Marines adjustment was minor to that of the Panamanian people. To them, the new PPF was comprised of the same people who had oppressed and violated them for years. The Panamanian people's acceptance of their new police force is still incomplete. Full acceptance will undoubtedly take many years to achieve.

As the new Panamanian government became operational, and the PPF assumed responsibility for law enforcement, MARFOR scaled back their presence west of the old canal zone. Still tasked to follow up intelligence leads, MARFOR conducted mobile operations, again emphasizing the use of the LAI Company, to track down at-large PDF forces. Several of these operations took MARFOR elements several hundred mile west to the Costa Rican border. However, by spring 1990 the situation in Panama was stabilized enough to warrant ending the MARFOR deployment.

In retrospect, it can clearly be said MARFOR Panama accomplished their mission. Like their brethren of the 19th and early 20th century, they were successful in protecting American lives and property. Their noteworthy performance during Operation JUST CAUSE is proof of this. In addition, MARFOR achieved much more. Operating as a contingency MAGTF, they displayed the utility and flexibility inherent in Marine Corps forces performing a contingency mission. Throughout the varied phases of the Panama crisis they were able to

adjust, adapt and contribute positively to the desired end. Participating in a joint environment, MARFOR conducted operations in the jungle, on water, in urban and rural areas, and over extended land distances. Making maximum use of their force structure, MARFOR Panama were able to rapidly adjust the focus of their operations in line with the changing political/military situation in the country. Finally, the experience and training in low-intensity conflict gained by over two thousand Marines who served in MARFOR Panama created an invaluable resource for the Marine Corps. The Corps and the Nation will be able to draw on this experience to insure success in future conflicts of this kind.

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