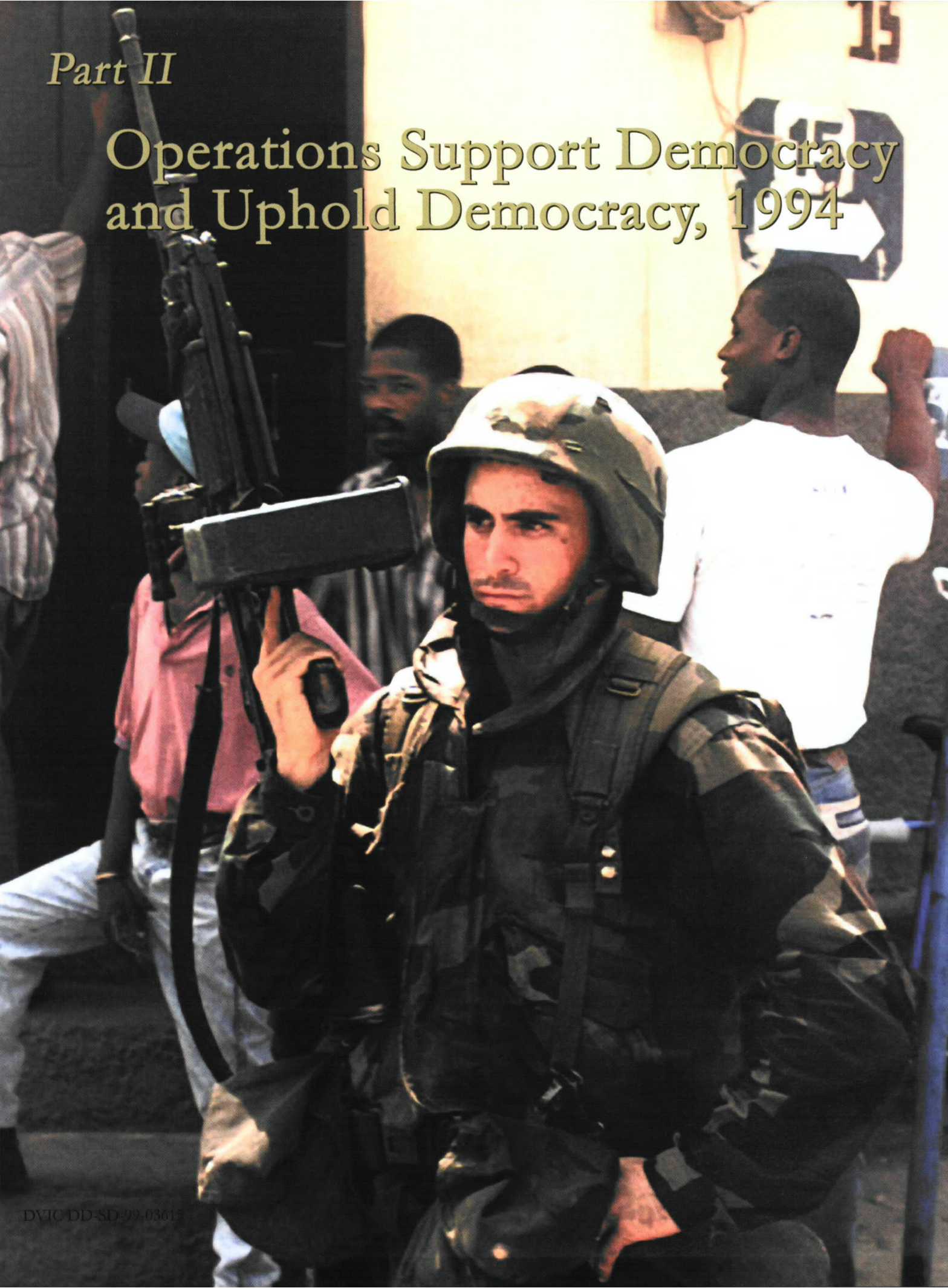


Part II

Operations Support Democracy and Uphold Democracy, 1994



Chapter 4

Preparing to Invade Haiti

Throughout the crisis caused by the flood of migrants, the United States, the United Nations and the Organization of American States debated what action, if any, to take against the Haitian military, which had precipitated the crisis by overthrowing President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The aim for most was to restore Aristide to power, although enthusiasm for that goal waxed and waned. Imposing an economic embargo had been an easy, though not very effective, first step that committed no one to further action. In late June 1993, the U.N. had bolstered the long-standing U.S. embargo with an embargo of its own, which included a ban on all petroleum and arms sales to Haiti. It was only a few days later that representatives of the Aristide government and the Haitian military met separately with U.N. officials and

hammered out the Governor's Island Accord to restore Aristide to power by 30 October 1993.

But that agreement collapsed when one of its major elements, the U.N. mission to rebuild and reorient the infrastructure of the Haitian army and police, failed. To pave the way for that mission, an advance team of American and Canadian troops, which included military engineers from Company B, 8th Engineer Support Battalion, 2d Force Service Support Group from Camp Lejeune, set sail in early October on the USS *Harlan County* (LST 1196). Arriving in Port-au-Prince on 11 October, the *Harlan County* was met by what appeared to be an angry crowd chanting anti-American and anti-U.N. slogans. The U.S. and U.N. commanders decided not to force their way ashore, but to stand off from the harbor and, ulti-





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The destroyer USS Spruance (DD 963) patrols off the coast of Haiti in the summer of 1994. A rigid-hull inflatable boat from the destroyer's boarding party is on its way to inspect a merchant ship. Under the United Nations embargo of the Caribbean nation, all shipping was subject to inspection for contraband.

mately, to order the ship home. The U.N. fell back to a policy of economic sanctions.¹

The remainder of 1993 and the first half of 1994 was a time of indecision and diplomatic maneuvering. In the spring of 1994, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Norfolk-based U.S. Atlantic Command (USACom) to develop plans to land U.S. forces in Haiti. For that purpose, USACom activated Joint Task Force 180 (JTF 180), built around the Army's XVIII Airborne Corps and commanded by Lieutenant General Henry H. Shelton, USA. By mid-summer, tough talk was added to the mix. In early July, the tough talk included a show of force by the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Operations Capable (MEU (SOC)) under Colonel Martin R. Berndt, who would become known to the public for his role in rescuing downed U.S. Air Force Captain Scott O'Grady in the former Republic of Yugoslavia in 1995. A composite of 3d Battalion, 6th Marine, Medium Helicopter Squadron 266, and MEU Service Support Group 24, this unit had just returned from a 180-day deployment to the Mediterranean and the Indian Oceans, which had included seven weeks ashore in Somalia helping to safeguard the withdrawal of American troops from that desolate and war-torn country. With less than three weeks home to get reacquainted with their friends and families, the orders came for them to pack their bags and return to their ships, the USS *Inchon* (LPH 12), *Portland* (LSD 37),

Trenton (LPD 14), and *Spartanburg County* (LST 1192). Pentagon spokesmen explained, somewhat sheepishly, there was simply no one else ready to go on short notice. This was cold comfort for many young Marines, sailors and their families, but they did their duty. One Marine, Sergeant Jeffrey Glenn, put it simply and directly: "I was disappointed. But you know, I gotta go." In typical Marine fashion, though some were more enthusiastic than others, all remembered there was a reason the Marine Corps laid claim to the "First to Fight" slogan. This was, in the words of one MEU officer, First Lieutenant Douglas M. Powell, for real. "It gets your blood pumping. This is what you sign up for."²

Exactly what was the mission? What did putting pressure on the Haitian government mean in practical terms? Colonel Berndt said his primary mission was to be ready to evacuate American citizens from Haiti, known in the jargon as a non-combatant evacuation operation. But he was quick to add: "We have a list of capabilities as long as your arm. My job is to be ready for anything."³

To exercise and demonstrate their capabilities, the 24th MEU conducted a two-day landing and evacuation exercise on the Bahamian Island of Great Inagua in mid-July. As *The Washington Post* put it dryly, "administration officials called attention to the action, apparently as part of Washington's effort to unnerve the Haiti's military

leaders and pressure them into leaving.”⁴ A few weeks later, in early August, there was another exercise at the Naval Air Station at Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico, where 1,000 Marines stormed ashore to secure the airfield and prepare to evacuate civilians.⁵ Imaginative platoon commanders found ways to augment the training with exercises on board ship, such as when Marines on the *Spartanburg County* worked their way through live fire shooting drills on the flight deck.⁶

But being the force in readiness in this show of force primarily meant, “doing gator squares” in the stifling heat off the coast of Haiti. The slang referred to amphibious, or “gator,” ships steaming in fixed patterns. The average Marine was more than willing to invade Haiti. But after nearly eight months overseas, the Marines wanted very much to go home if the alternative was waiting on station day in and day out.⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff received the message and acted on it. Replacements having set sail, the 24th MEU returned to Morehead City, North Carolina, on 16 August, where Secretary of Defense William J. Perry met them. He told the Marines he had come “to get some first-hand flavor for the stresses and strains that come from extra long deployments” and wanted “to assure [the returning Marines and sailors] that the decision to send them out again after two weeks was



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SPMAGTF Carib commander Col Thomas S. Jones stands in front of the flag of 2d Marines, which was flown in Haiti some 60 years earlier.

not made lightly.” The press photos show Marines listening politely to the secretary’s message. But no doubt their minds were elsewhere.⁸

Replacing the 24th MEU was Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Caribbean (SPMAGTF Carib), built around the headquarters of the 2d Marines under Colonel Thomas S. Jones, a Vietnam veteran who had commanded 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, during the Gulf War. For more than a year, 2d Marines had figured in contingency planning for Haiti and the Caribbean. The regiment had even sent troops to stand by at Guantanamo for operations in Haiti. In the second half of July, Haiti became more than a plan on the shelf for the regiment. Colonel Jones received word his staff would form the nucleus of a SPMAGTF to replace the 24th MEU, and on 20 July, SPMAGTF Carib, destined to play a role in the overlapping Operations Support Democracy and Uphold Democracy to restore the legitimate government of Haiti, officially came into being at Camp Lejeune.⁹ *

The 1,900 Marines and sailors of the SPMAGTF included 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, formed into a battalion landing team (BLT) under Lieutenant Colonel George S. “Steve” Hartley; Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (HMM-264) under Lieutenant Colonel Anthony J. Zell; and Combat Service Support Detachment 29 (CSSD-29) under Major Lance R. McBride. Included in the battalion landing team was a provisional rifle company, Battery B, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, which left its howitzers at Camp Lejeune—no one thought conventional artillery would be of much use in Haiti—and Company B (-), 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, along with its vehicles, which might be needed for at least two reasons. In a noncombatant evacuation, the objectives might be a few miles apart, and the Marines might need the added transportation. Another point in some planners’ minds was a recent and painful lesson from Somalia when members of the U.S. Army’s elite Delta Force and Rangers had been unable to fight their way out of the back streets of Mogadishu without suffering heavy casualties. Light armored vehicles might have saved lives, but there had been none in country.¹⁰ Yet another important decision about

* While the distinction between “Support Democracy” and “Uphold Democracy” is often blurred in literature, Support Democracy refers to the pre-invasion/pre-occupation phase, especially maritime interdiction, while Uphold Democracy refers to the planning for and implementation of the invasion and occupation of Haiti.



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An air cushioned landing craft (LCAC 46) speeds along the beach at Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, as Marines conducted a two-day landing exercise in preparation for the landings in Haiti.

the composition of the SPMAGTF came when Colonel Jones argued to add air-cushioned landing craft (LCACs) to the table of equipment because they were faster and more flexible than the more traditional and sturdier utility landing craft. In the end, the task force had both types of landing craft at its disposal.¹¹

The principal difference between the 24th MEU and SPMAGTF Carib was not so much in its organization but in its capabilities. Colonel Jones held the reasonable belief he would not need to conduct special operations in Haiti. It was far more likely his task force would conduct some sort of conventional landing. Jones also wanted an organization robust enough to conduct sustained operations ashore, as opposed to quick incursions, the forte of the MEU(SOC). As the regimental operations officer, Major Thomas C. Greenwood, pointed out, the traditional purposes of a regimental headquarters had always been to plan and conduct landings and, if necessary, fight on shore for the duration. The staff of 2d Marines also had worked together for more than a year, an advantage many MEU staffs did not possess.¹²

Initially, Colonel Jones and his planners thought primarily in terms of conducting a non-combatant evacuation, either in Port-au-Prince or in the country's second city, Cap-Haitien, on the north coast. Like Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitien

boasted a seaport and an airfield, infrastructure with obvious military significance. Jones later commented that some planners thought there might be as many as 5,000 to 10,000 American citizens needing evacuation.¹³ But a peacetime evacuation of civilians was still not the only contingency. The plans for hostilities continued to evolve, and Colonel Jones and Major Greenwood traveled to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to talk with officers from the XVIII Airborne Corps, which would form the nucleus of JTF 180 and assume overall control of an invasion of Haiti.¹⁴ The possibility of "forcible entry," the euphemism for invasion, was very much on Jones' mind when his command set sail on 13 August in the USS *Wasp* (LHD 1) and *Nashville* (LPD 13), forming a small amphibious ready group.

The incoming SPMAGTF and the outgoing MEU passed each other close enough for Colonel Jones and his staff to fly over to the *Imchon* for a briefing by Colonel Berndt. The MEU turned over its operation plans to the newcomers, who proceeded to emulate their predecessors by conducting a series of no less than four major and two partial landing exercises, mostly on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, but also at Guantanamo and Great Inagua. Jones used a building block approach, doing the first landings in daylight without troops, then with troops and then at

night. When the exercises had ended, the SPMAGTF had rehearsed a variety of contingencies through D + 1 (the day following the landing), including a simultaneous landing from landing craft over a beach and from helicopters onto an airfield, and a landing at 0300 with no moon at low tide. Jones believed in night operations, when the darkness would leverage his combat power and denigrate that of the opposition. In each of the exercises, the staff learned something useful and refined its procedures.¹⁵

SPMAGTF Carib received mixed signals from higher headquarters through mid-September. Colonel Jones still reported to Norfolk, but he stayed attuned to developments at Fort Bragg. At one point, the word was “be prepared to conduct all three missions,” the three being two noncombatant evacuations, one in Port-au-Prince and one in Cap-Haïtien, followed by a forcible entry at a “to be determined” location. Part of the problem was each staff had its own focus. USACom, which had been rescuing migrants, literally for years, still tended to think in terms of helping civilians, while JTF 180 planners from XVIII Airborne Corps were more focused on preparing for an invasion and had less interest in an evacuation.¹⁶

As time went on, it seemed likely the Marines would form part of an invasion by JTF 180 rather than conducting an evacuation of noncombatants. Colonel Jones adopted an approach that made each plan a variant of the other, which gave him a great deal of flexibility. The two plans began with simultaneous air and sea landings to secure both a seaport and an airport while neutralizing

any threats. In both cases, it was a matter of getting as much combat power ashore as quickly as possible. This became easier to do when the amphibious task force gained the temporary use of the USS *Asbland* (LSD 48), which had been engaged in migrant operations in Cuban waters. With the *Asbland*, more Marines could go ashore at the same time. The difference between the two plans lay in what would happen after the initial landing and, of course, in the rules of engagement. Whatever happened, it was generally accepted the Marines would withdraw soon after the situation ashore had stabilized.¹⁷

By mid-September, the Marines were focusing their efforts on preparing to seize Cap-Haïtien, as Port-au-Prince had definitively become the province of the Army, which had ostentatiously loaded troops and helicopters onto an attack aircraft carrier. With his reconnaissance assets, including the sophisticated capabilities of the Army’s Bell OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopters temporarily based on the fast frigate USS *Oliver Hazard Perry* (FFG 7), Colonel Jones had an excellent idea of the lay of the land and the challenges that awaited him. Cap-Haïtien was a congested town of some 65,000 persons, laid out in a grid along a crescent-shaped waterfront roughly three kilometers long. There were hills directly behind the town, hemming it between the high ground (the highest was 718 meters) and the beach. The airport was a short distance from the harbor, inland and to the south. Jones thought the area bore some resemblance to Beirut and some resemblance to Vietnam. The once graceful



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Marine amphibious assault vehicles storm the beach at Vieques Island with smoke masking the landing force behind them. A tank landing ship is partially visible in the background.



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Secretary of Defense William J. Perry addresses members of SPMAGTF Carib and the crewmen of the USS Wasp (LHD 1) on 17 September 1994, a little more than 24 hours before the scheduled invasion of Haiti. The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., stands to his left.

French and Spanish colonial-style buildings, now mostly rundown, and the narrow cobblestone streets in the old town must have reinforced that impression. Not far from the city center were overcrowded neighborhoods of half-finished cinder block dwellings.¹⁸

Jones decided to split his ground forces from Battalion Landing Team 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, into three elements. One, which became Task Force Irish, would land by surface and seize the town itself. The second, Task Force Hawg (a reference to Harley-Davidson motorcycles), would conduct a helicopter-borne assault to seize the small airport, which could accommodate the Marines' cargo planes, the Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules. The third element, Company E, 2d Marines, was the reserve, to be held on board the *Wasp* until needed. Bell AH-1W Super Cobra gunships and an Air Force Lockheed Martin AC-130 Spectre, which could fill every square foot of a football field with lead in a few seconds, would stand by if anyone needed close air support.¹⁹

Colonel Jones also decided he would be the mission commander. It would be difficult for Lieutenant Colonel Hartley, the BLT commander, to oversee the disparate parts of the ground operation with the assets at his disposal. Jones, on the other hand, had a regimental staff at his disposal. Hartley, therefore, became the commander of Task Force Irish, while his executive officer, Major Herman C. Broadstone, became commander of Task Force Hawg.

What was the threat picture? The ragtag 7,000-man Armed Forces of Haiti, formally known as the *Forces Armees d'Haiti*, included the army and the police, along with a tiny navy, and had a miserable reputation. *The New York Times* described it as "poorly armed and seasoned only in terror."²⁰ But no one knew for sure what threats awaited Marines ashore. The memory of the U.S. Army's bad experiences in Somalia against irregular forces was still very fresh; there, whole neighborhoods seemed to rise up against the "invaders," launching disorganized but sometimes deadly

attacks with everything from rocks to crew-served weapons in a maze of crowded streets and alleys not too different from those of Cap-Haïtien.²¹ Would elements of the Haitian Army actually fight on the beaches? Would some brave soul aim the machine guns at the airport at the Marine helicopters and open fire? Or, perhaps more likely, would a few hardcore Haitian soldiers or their paramilitary auxiliaries, the infamous *attachés*, use hit-and-run tactics against the Marines, trying to snipe and ambush? It did not help that the Haitian forces in the north, those around Cap-Haïtien, were reputed to be more disciplined and prepared than their counterparts in the south around the capital.²² Their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Claudel Josephat, had a reputation for being both relatively effective and ruthless. According to one account, he led an operation in April 1994 against a reputed insurgent leader, "burning entire villages to the ground [and] razing schools and crops."²³

It was hard to know what to tell young Marines who had trained for combat, in some cases for years. Colonel Jones had purposefully waited to publish the U.S. Atlantic Command rules of engagement for the operation because they seemed to change hourly. On 15 September, he decided the time had come, and he carefully prepared his Marines for an ambiguous situation. He repeatedly told his subordinate commanders they could and should use force decisively if necessary, adding that he would not second-guess their battlefield judgment. But he also urged them to weigh the consequences of their actions and remember the Marines really wanted to capture the "hearts and minds" of the Haitian people. Securing that objective was the best guarantee of the Marines' own security.²⁴

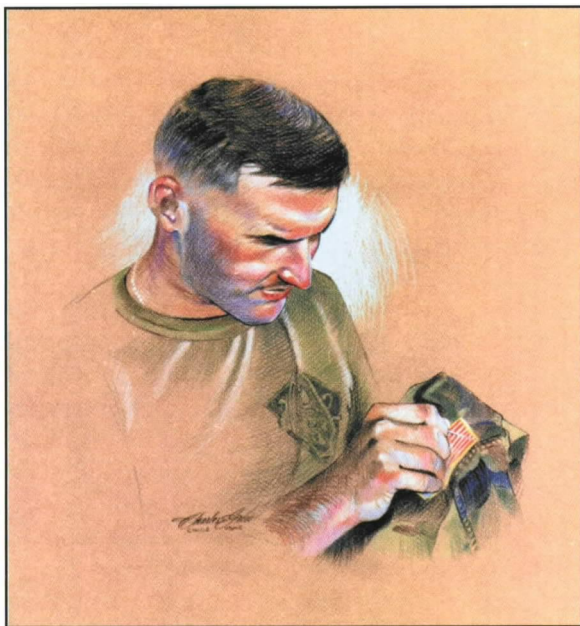
Jones reminded his Marines the last time the Marine Corps had occupied Haiti and run the paramilitary *gendarmérie*, it had not been a uniformly positive experience. He wanted this intervention to be for the good. While some Marines had covered themselves with glory fighting bandits in the 1920s when the Marine Corps certainly helped to modernize the infrastructure of the country, there had also been allegations of brutality by Marines and a famous incident in 1929 near the town of Les Cayes where a Marine contingent opened fire on an unruly and threatening mob, killing and wounding 34.

For 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, the landing would be a homecoming of sorts. It was at Cap-Haïtien during the Marine occupation of Haiti the

battalion had flown its colors for the first time.²⁵*

While the word on what was about to happen was hazy at best, preparations continued on 16 and 17 September. Perhaps the wildest rumor on 16 September was that the Secretary of Defense and the Commandant of the Marine Corps were going to fly to the *Wasp* on a McDonnell-Douglas/British Aerospace AV-8B Harrier jump jet and address the troops. The rumor was partly true. On the morning of 17 September, there still was no confirmation of D-Day or H-Hour, but it was confirmed that Secretary of Defense William J. Perry and General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., were on their way, although not in a Harrier. By the time they arrived in the afternoon, it had been confirmed the landings would occur on 19 September, although there also was news a last minute mission by former President Jimmy Carter, accompanied by the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin L. Powell, and

* The smallest Marine presence in Haiti in recent memory was the 1959 to 1963 U.S. Naval Mission to Haiti, under the command of Colonel Robert Debs Heintz, Jr. About 70 strong and mostly Marines, the mission grew out of contacts between General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., and Haitian dictator Francois Duvalier, who had known each other during the first Marine occupation of Haiti when Duvalier appeared to stand for progress. The mission worked hard to do its job, trying to modernize the armed forces of Haiti. Colonel Heintz believed the Haitian military could literally build the nation if it were professionalized. But it was a thankless task. The Haitian government wanted the appearance of collaboration with the United States and little else. When Heintz left Haiti, his outgoing brief to the chief of staff of the Haitian armed forces was brutally frank, with none of the window dressing so common in diplomatic exchanges or end-of-tour reports. Apart from the frustrations of working with unwilling counterparts, there were charges the mission was helping to prop up the Duvalier regime, as when political columnist Drew Pearson wrote about Haiti in *The Miami Herald* on 30 August 1959. Wasting no time, Heintz replied to the column in a letter to Pearson on 2 September 1959 in his take-no-prisoners style. Heintz wrote that he saw his mission as one of helping Haiti, "not...any incumbent regime." From Heintz's point of view, the Marines involved in the mission had always taken pains to uphold Marine traditions in general and the traditions of the *gendarmérie* in particular. This emerges clearly from documents such as Heintz's 24 August 1959 request to Washington to allow his Marines to wear the field hat still worn by Marine drill instructors. As he explained: "the primary reason for this request is the long-standing association in the mind of the average Haitian of the field hat with the U.S. Marine officers who trained its armed forces from 1915 to 1934. It is the policy of this Mission to foster in every way a sense of continuity between the highly successful past efforts of the Marine Corps in Haiti and the present objectives and operations of this Mission. (Heintz Papers, MCHC; see also Charles T. Williamson, *The U.S. Naval Mission to Haiti: 1959-1963* [Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999])



Sketch by Capt Charles G. Grow

A few hours before the landing, Marines were required to put down their combat gear and pick up their sewing kits to stitch American flags on their uniforms. The Marine sewing is Capt Thomas C. Smith, the commander of Company G, 2d Battalion, 2d Marines.

Senator Sam Nunn were on their way to Port-au-Prince to find an alternative to invasion.²⁶

Secretary Perry and General Mundy addressed the troops briefly and conferred with Colonel Jones. Paying particular attention to the rules of engagement, Jones outlined his concept of operations for Secretary Perry, who appeared to like what he heard. In the evening, a media pool arrived on board, and the various Navy and Marine Corps staffs briefed reporters and answered questions while their troops continued to prepare for combat.²⁷

The tension continued to build on 18 September. In the morning, mission commanders held briefings, and in the afternoons there were concrete preparations for the landings. In the kind of last minute “brown side out, green side out” change familiar to all infantrymen, someone high in the chain-of-command decided all U.S. ground personnel should wear U.S. flags on their right shoulders and one-inch reflective patches on top of their helmets and on their left shoulders to make it easier to identify them, especially from the air. As a result, the warrior elite spent part of the day sewing.²⁸

During the afternoon, the skipper of the *Wasp*, Captain Robert C. Chaplin, USN, spoke to the

ship’s company over the ship’s public address system. He announced that “we will be putting the Marines ashore tonight in Cap-Haitien. This will not be practice. This will be the real thing.” “Anchors Aweigh” and the “The Marine’s Hymn” were then played. After the evening meal, Captain Chaplin followed up with another announcement, confirming that “we have just received the execute order. ... May God be with us all.” Colonel Jones announced that H-Hour would occur at 0001 local time on 19 September.²⁹

The tension was now palpable. There was no horseplay and little bravado. In the time-honored tradition of the Corps, small unit leaders gathered their men to pass the word in straightforward terms, telling them exactly what they needed to do and when they needed to do it. Quiet and focused, Marines checked and rechecked their gear, and after drawing ammunition, staged it neatly where they would wait to be called to board landing craft or helicopters. Some Marines pulled out camouflage sticks and began covering exposed skin, creating elaborate patterns that, with their camouflage utilities, would make them nearly invisible in the right terrain. When there was nothing more to do, many Marines wrote letters home, just as Marines have done for decades before amphibious landings against the chance, however slight in this case, they might die in combat. Around 1900, Marines in the initial serials started to migrate to the staging areas, ready for last minute instructions and perhaps a few minutes of sleep on top of their gear. Around sunset, Navy SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) teams attached to the amphibious ready group slipped into the water ready to spend the night reconnoitering the beaches and marking the landing lanes.³⁰

At 2000, an hour before Jones planned to call the first Marines to fall in on the hangar and well decks, there was a stunning turn of events. Captain Chaplin announced over the address system there was an indefinite delay. The troops were now on a “12- to 24-hour tether,” meaning they might go ashore later than planned. More information trickled in shortly after. The Carter-Powell-Nunn mission had, at the last minute, succeeded in averting an invasion by convincing the Haitian military regime to step down and allow President Aristide to return to power. The landings would still occur, albeit on a revised schedule and without opposition. There was now to be some sort of vaguely defined cooperation with the Haitian army. It did not exactly sound like peace, but it would not be war.³¹

Chapter 5

Landing at Cap-Haïtien

The letdown on 18 September was tremendous. The Marines had trained hard and were emotionally and physically ready to fight. For many, this was to be their baptism of fire, and now they were told there would be no fighting. There were some very vocal expressions of disappointment and dismay. Speaking for many, one Marine said he felt "sold out." Another railed behind the nation's political leadership. Then they began the process of undoing many of their preparations for the invasion of northern Haiti, securing their gear for the night and taking off their camouflage paint, a lengthy and unpleasant process akin to scrubbing your face with a dishrag 20 or 30 times. When they were done, the troops

watched Eddie Murphy's "Beverly Hills Cop" over the ship's internal television system.¹

The following day, 19 September, was another full of frustration. The Marines learned they would not land at Cap-Haïtien until the Army component of Joint Task Force 180 had landed at Port-au-Prince; the operations in the north became contingent on the results of the operations in the south. On the USS *Wasp* (LHD 1), Marine commanders were able to watch the progress of those landings on the Cable News Network. They saw U.S. Army helicopters taking off from the deck of an aircraft carrier to ferry troops ashore, a sight that made some Marines grind their teeth. After all, amphibious landings

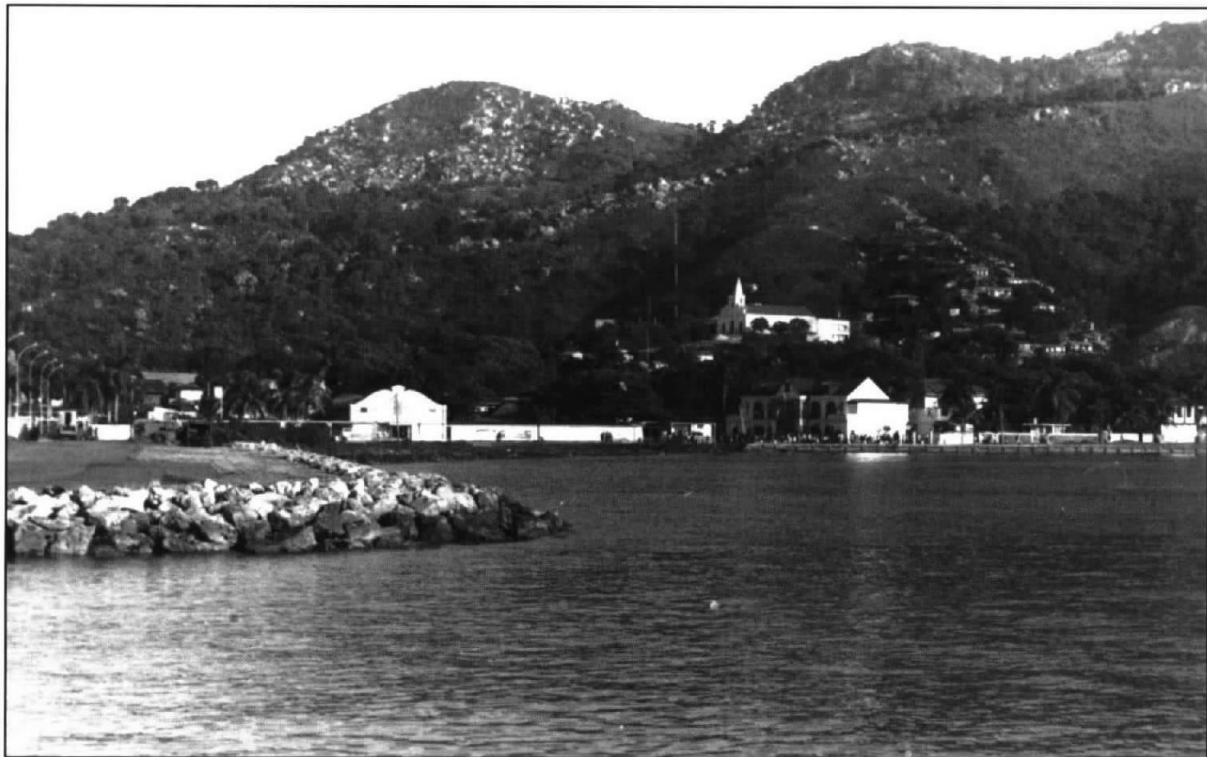


Photo courtesy of Maj John T. Quinn II

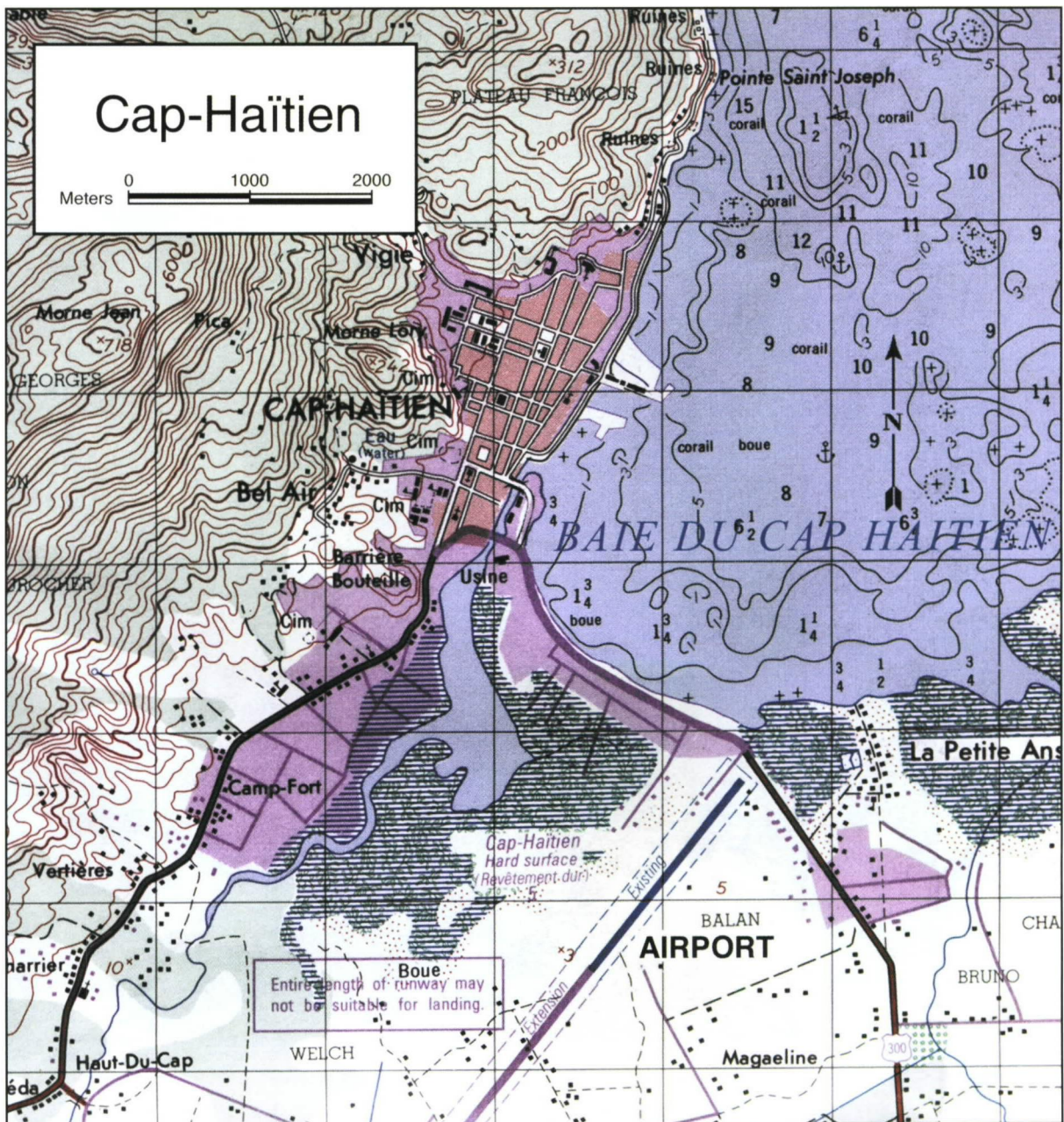
Downtown Cap-Haïtien as viewed from the sea. Although appearing small and quaint, it was Haiti's second most important city. Behind the old town, and on its flanks, there were newer buildings.

were the Marines' *forte*, not the Army's. Nevertheless, the official word from Headquarters Marine Corps was the operation in Haiti was not setting a precedent. As a spokesman noted: "this operation does not require a robust forcible entry or the unique capabilities only available in [the] Marine Corps."²

Adding to the sense of frustration, the Marines had to wait nearly the entire day for any definite word about their role in the operation. Would they land at all, or simply go home? Most Marines and sailors in the amphibious ready group seemed to think Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Caribbean (SPMAGTF Carib)

had been on station, ready to invade, far too long to steam away without going ashore in Haiti and playing a role in the operation. After all, the task force had prepared for both "hard" (opposed) and "soft" (unopposed) entries. Colonel Thomas S. Jones' operations officer, Major Thomas C. Greenwood, observed that, according to the dictates of operational doctrine, it would have made good sense to land simultaneously at Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien.³

Being a seasoned commander, Colonel Jones knew the situation was one of those proverbial leadership challenges, especially for the young officers and noncommissioned officers who were





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Members of the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, offload from a Navy air cushioned landing craft (LCAC 9) at Cap-Haïtien. It is little wonder the citizens were impressed by these unusual forms of transportation.

platoon and squad leaders. He spent much of the day making the rounds to his subordinate commands, talking to his men and combating what he recognized as the “play me or trade me” syndrome. While he shared their disappointment, he did not want them to be demoralized. He said later he was glad the Marines had the luxury of a “buffer day” to adjust their attitudes and reorient their thinking while they waited for a decision from the commander of JTF 180, Lieutenant General Henry H. Shelton. It was a measure of good small-unit leadership and the overall discipline of the force that the Marines successfully made the adjustment when the word came around 1800 that they would indeed make a soft landing at Cap-Haïtien on 20 September as part of JTF 180 in Operation Uphold Democracy.⁴

The adjustment was to a more ambiguous situation, which was reflected in the new rules of engagement that were quickly printed on orange cards and issued to each member of the landing force. Under the original rules of engagement, a Haitian carrying a weapon was a legitimate target if he was not putting it down or in the process of

surrendering. The emphasis now was on self-defense. The Marines could expect to encounter armed Haitians, but they could fire only to protect themselves. As Major Greenwood put it when he briefed the commanders: “We are not supposed to be out there killing people. We are ... taking all steps to create a strong, positive impression. These folks are not the enemy. Everyone we meet is an ally until they prove otherwise.” He noted that no one had fired any shots on 19 September during the landings in and around Port-au-Prince.⁵

At the same briefing, Greenwood declared that, apart from the rules of engagement, the landing plan had not changed dramatically, though the Marines would not be painting their faces or assaulting the same objectives. The Haitian army barracks, for example, was no longer on the list. The pace of the operation would slow as it was no longer necessary to push combat power ashore as fast as possible. The watchwords changed from “shock action” to “steady flow.” Nevertheless, the basic outlines of the operation were still the same. The Marines would land “but-

toned down” (ready for action with weapons loaded). The two task forces would simultaneously seize the port and the airfield and establish blocking positions at key intersections and bridges throughout the area, ready to stop traffic if necessary. There would also be outposts on the high ground in and around the city. Colonel Jones made a point of emphasizing he did not want the Marines to be isolated in their enclaves, as they had been in Beirut. Although the AC-130 Spectre would not support the operation—its capabilities were now clearly overkill—there still would be heavily armed Bell AH-1 Cobra helicopter gun ships on station. But no one expected any lethal opposition. The biggest threat was likely to be curious crowds that might get in the Marines’ way, and they needed to be ready to control them through peaceful means. After securing the area, the Marines would conduct a civil-military operations evaluation of Cap-Haïtien’s infrastructure and prepare to cede control to Army occupation troops in 10-14 days. The final issue was timing. Colonel Jones still would have preferred to land at night, but higher powers decided the landing would occur precisely at 0800 on 20 September.⁶

The *Wasp* sounded reveille at 0500, but many Marines had been up long before that hour. At 0530, the first serials were called away and Marines mustered on the hangar deck. Flight quarters were sounded and the troops loaded on to helicopters. In the bright, clear morning, the large Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters turned up at 0700, then lifted off and hovered. Next came the aging twin-rotor Boeing CH-46E Sea Knights. By 0740, the air armada, escorted by Cobra gun ships, had formed and was ready to cross the beach. The same was true of the old-fashioned, blunt-nosed utility landing craft launched from the USS *Asbland* (LSD 48), and of the amphibious assault vehicles (AAVs), which launched from the USS *Nashville* (LPD 13). The landing craft and AAVs circled in the water until they received the signal to proceed ashore on line with the LCAC hovercraft. At precisely 0800, the forces hit the beach while Colonel Jones watched from his command and control vantage on board a Bell UH-1 Huey helicopter. Another Huey flew low over the city broadcasting the message the Marines had come in peace. That message reached literally thousands of Haitians who left



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A Marine walks the perimeter of the Cap-Haïtien airport while another stands in his foxhole tented with a camouflaged poncho. Securing the airstrip was a vital link for incoming logistical support.



Photo courtesy of Maj John T. Quinn II

Marines guard one of the headquarters buildings of the Haitian army and police in downtown Cap-Haïtien.

their homes to watch the spectacle.⁷

The landing went virtually without a hitch. The only problem was the LCACs landed before the small helicopter-borne advance party had been able to land and secure Blue Beach at the northern end of the port area to protect the thin-skinned inflatable hovercraft from any hostile Haitian soldiers, as well as the crowd of bystanders. But in the end it did not matter. Mounted in their amphibious assault and light armored vehicles, Company G, 2d Marines and Company B, 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, the main components of Task Force Irish, rolled ashore in good order to a peaceful, friendly reception. The crowd burst into applause as the Marines emerged from their strange conveyances.⁸

The scene at the small airport south of town was not much different. In textbook fashion, the Marines of Task Force Hawg, in particular Captain Gregg L. Lyon's Company F and Captain Alvin W. Peterson, Jr.'s artillerymen of Battery B, 10th Marines, dashed off the helicopters and quickly established a tactical perimeter, facing outboard, ready for any threats. The Marines looked so professional that Major Greenwood, who was able to watch their deployment over a soundless closed circuit television feed from a circling aircraft, initially thought they were under fire. It was, he remembered, like watching a very realistic silent war movie. But he soon learned the only threat

was from Haitian children waving American flags, and then from a crowd of Haitians from nearby slums who gathered at the end of the runway, clapping and cheering.⁹

While the helicopters and landing craft returned to the ships to ferry the second and third waves ashore, Colonel Jones' staff prepared to phase control of the operation ashore, the landing having been controlled from the landing force operations center on the *Wasp* in accordance with Marine Corps doctrine. Major Greenwood made his way to the beach on an LCAC and was stunned by the level of poverty; garbage piled high throughout the town, crowds of curious onlookers, and the general air of chaos and confusion. Even so, within a little more than an hour, he and his Marines had set up a working command post and operations center in the port area (which was fenced off from the rest of the city and relatively secure), and took control from the landing force center on the *Wasp*.¹⁰

For its part, the Haitian Armed Forces in Cap-Haïtien reacted as much to the crowds as to the invaders. A number of Haitian soldiers and police tried to restrain the onlookers, and almost certainly threatened their countrymen for being too friendly to the Marines. "They pushed us and shouted at us to go home and leave the Americans alone," said one Haitian.¹¹ Dozens of armed Haitian soldiers milled around in the port area while the Marines tried to do their work, nei-

ther side sure exactly how to treat the other. One beaming Haitian soldier with the improbable name of Voltaire, who declared that it was “a fine day” because the Americans had returned and now “everything will be better,” was curtly silenced by one of his officers.¹²

The situation being well in hand, the next order of business was to find the local commander of the Haitian Armed Forces and establish an understanding with him. Mounted in a handful of tactical vehicles and accompanied by a small security detachment, Colonel Jones, Lieutenant Colonel George S. Hartley, and Major Greenwood made their way in mid-afternoon through the congested streets to the Haitian military compound, a two-story colonial building bleached by the tropical sun on a pleasant tree-lined square in the old town near the waterfront. There they found the rough equivalent of a company of Haitian soldiers, armed with pistols and M1 rifles, milling around slowly and aimlessly. Jones and Hartley, along with a few Marines, dismounted and went inside the compound while Greenwood waited outside in the heat, keeping a careful eye on the Haitians and worrying about the security of his commander. It was, he remembered, an



Photo courtesy of Maj John T. Quinn II
SPMAGTF Carib commander Col Thomas S. Jones (right) takes time out to talk with one of the many journalists who covered the operation.

eerie sensation as the minutes ticked by and there was no word on the talks between the two leaders.¹³

Inside the compound, the atmosphere was far less tense. One spokesman later said it was actually cordial. Colonel Jones thought Lieutenant Colonel Claudel Josephat, the Haitian in com-



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Cpls Gregory Camp (left) and Joseph Cooper of the Scout Sniper Platoon, 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, watch the outskirts of Cap-Haïtien. During the operation, lookouts were posted on high ground 24 hours a day, keeping an eye on the situation in the town below, the tools of their trade at hand.