

Constabulary Uses of Military Force in Interventions:

The Case of the Panama Crisis, 1987-1990

For a historian, mention of the constabulary uses of military force in interventions readily calls to mind several examples from the American experience alone: the subjugation of the Philippines at the turn of the century; the "banana wars" in the Caribbean region from 1898 to 1934; and more recently U.S. interventions in Lebanon 1958, the Dominican Republic 1965, and Grenada 1983. In each case U.S. forces discharged a variety of police functions, although the troops best trained for these missions were not always the ones to perform them. In this paper, I will address the role of U.S. Military Police during the recent crisis in U.S.-Panamanian relations, the way in which MP missions evolved as the crisis passed through different phases, and the general performance of MP units assigned these missions. While the Panama crisis was unique in many respects, it also exhibited several characteristics, including many concerning constabulary functions, that have appeared and reappeared within the historical record of U.S. interventionism.

A critical premise of this paper is that actual U.S. military intervention in Panama cannot be studied in isolation of the broader crisis that plagued relations between the two countries. Just Cause, in other words, was only one phase--the shortest--of the Panama Crisis. To ignore the other, non-combat phases of the crisis would provide a distorted picture of contingency operations in general and the evolving role of MPs in particular. This paper, therefore, will divide the crisis into four phases in hopes of providing a fuller

understanding of the subject without violating its integrity. The four phases are, in sequence, the Reactive Phase, the Assertive Phase, the Combat Phase, and the Stability Phase.

The Reactive Phase began sometime after June 1987 when, despite early warnings, a crisis in U.S.-Panamanian relations erupted after General Manuel Antonio Noriega, the commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF), cashiered his heir apparent, Colonel Diaz-Herrera. In retaliation, Diaz-Herrera accused Noriega of involvement in murder, election fraud, and drug trafficking. Anti-government demonstrations broke out immediately in Panama City, but through repression and appeals to nationalism, Noriega retained his hold on political power as the man behind the throne. Given the emotionalism surrounding the drug issue in the United States, Washington could not ignore the publicity or the demonstrations, even though U.S. bases and tens of thousands of American citizens in Panama militated for normal relations with any Panamanian government.

At first, the PDF and U.S. officers stationed in Panama agreed that Washington's growing criticism of Noriega was a political problem that should not affect business as usual between the U.S. Southern Command and the PDF. But as the rhetoric from both capitals intensified, military relations began to deteriorate. They plummeted in February 1988, after federal attorneys in Florida indicted Noriega on drug charges, and the Panamanian opposition again took to the streets. On 16 March, Noriega thwarted a coup attempt by a disgruntled cabal of PDF officers. The general quickly blamed the U.S. military for complicity in the affair. As tension mounted, PDF violations of various clauses of the Carter-Torrijos Panama Canal

treaties, the intrusion by armed men onto U.S. installations, and increasing incidents of PDF harassment of U.S. servicemen and other Americans living in Panama and of crimes committed by Panamanians against American personnel and property became causes for concern and provoked a debate over possible American responses. U.S. Army South (USARSO) preferred a "law and order" response by Military Policemen," perhaps supported by infantry. As for MPs on hand, USARSO had an MP headquarters company, the Provost Marshal Office (a TDA activity), and two TO&E combat support MP companies.

By mid-March it became clear that there were not enough MPs in Panama to handle the escalating threat. Using infantry to support the MPs proved effective, but to the detriment of the infantry's primary missions. Thus, USARSO agreed to bringing in additional MP units from the States. Between 18 March and 8 April, two MP battalions composed of three companies each flowed into Panama, as did the 16th MP Brigade headquarters out of Fort Bragg. Together with an Army aviation task force, a Marine rifle company, and various other units, this deployment constituted the first wave of augmentation forces to Panama. The stated justification for the buildup was security enhancement. The Pentagon deliberately said nothing about setting the stage for U.S. intervention, should that become necessary.

Despite the Pentagon's soothing pronouncements, the MP units deploying to Panama had little doubt that they were being sent to participate at least in an evacuation of noncombatants (NEO) and possibly in combat operations. In this sense, they fell victim to some of the pitfalls inherent in hastily mounted contingency

operations. Security enhancement, rather than simply being a cover for more aggressive action, was, in fact, to be the MPs' primary mission. MPs later placed the responsibility for the confusion surrounding this point squarely at the doorstep of the U.S. Forces Command and its failure to provide the units on alert with sufficient guidance and intelligence. The confusion was not entirely dispelled once the units arrived in Panama. Caught up in the day-to-day imperatives of crisis management, U.S. commands in Panama had not prepared a thorough briefing or made available sources of intelligence adequate to orientate the newly arrived MPs and ease them into their missions. Time was therefore lost while the MPs, on their own initiative, acquired the information they needed from several sources. In the months that followed, augmentation units would rotate in and out of Panama. While the breakdown in communications between FORSCOM and these units was never fully repaired, once the units reached Panama they would receive the briefings and information they required in a timely way.

After 9 April, MF units permanently based in Panama and those coming in as security augmentation forces fell under the operational control of JTF-Panama, a joint task force activated by the Commander in Chief, U.S. Southern Command (CINCSO) for the purposes of monitoring the crisis on a day-to-day basis, providing protection for American personnel and property, providing command and control for the units assigned this mission, and planning and training for further contingency operations. The Commander, JTF-Panama, was also the Commanding General, USARSO. In both capacities, he answered directly to CINCSO.

The intensifying crisis, the arrival of additional U.S. forces in Panama, and the activation of JTF-Panama created an atmosphere of frenetic activity in which many issues were overlooked until they surfaced as the subject of controversy. One such issue for the MPs was that of "Who's in charge?" The MP commander based in Panama strongly believed that, given his familiarity with the area of operations and the political sensitivities of the crisis, units entering the country should be placed under his control. Understandably, the 16th MP Brigade commander, with the two CONUS MP battalions being organic to him, espoused the opposite view. The issue was resolved neither smoothly nor amicably. After a bureaucratic bloodletting between the two O6s concerned, the brigade commander prevailed, as he took command of all MPs in Panama. This arrangement, along with the friction it produced, continued when the 89th MP Brigade replaced the 16th in August. Only later in the year, after the number of MPs in Panama were reduced and the brigade headquarters redeployed in September was the issue finally laid to rest, as the Panama-based commander assumed command for the MPs remaining in country. (This issue was not played out again when the 16 MP Brigade returned during Just Cause, primarily because existing contingency plans clearly called for the brigade to be in charge of combat operations.)

That the vast majority of the 1,900 augmentation forces sent to Panama in the spring of 1988 were combat support MPs and not combat troops was the result of careful calculation. Within the Reagan administration, some high-ranking State Department officials favored military intervention, only to be overwhelmed by advice to the

contrary by the JCS and CINCSO. The military favored an approach that would protect American lives, property, and interests in Panama, while gradually increasing pressures on Noriega in such a way as to not escalate the crisis further. For this situation, the MPs presented the ideal force; they were the best troops to operate in what the Army command in Panama called "The Twilight Zone," that gray area between peace and hostilities.

To begin with, the MPs were "politically acceptable." They represented a "defensive" presence, a symbol of America's commitment to secure its rights without resort to massive violence. Their deployment, as anticipated, did not trigger a war scare in Panama or the United States. (The Pentagon, on the other hand, had to explain over and over again that the Marine company deployed, a combat unit, was not, in fact, going to be involved in combat operations.) In what had evolved into a state of psychological warfare against the American presence in Panama, the MPs' training in handling domestic and civil disturbances, their explicit restrictions on the use of deadly force, their mobility and communications capabilities, and their experience in face-to-face dealings with people, especially in working out disputes or "talking down" tense situations (as opposed to the infantryman's training to rely on fire and maneuver to close and destroy a perceived threat) became critical ingredients in keeping the Panama crisis under control. The MPs in Panama thus found themselves on the front line of a war of nerves in which they were to be protective but not provocative. It was their job to keep anti-American incidents from providing either side with a casus belli.

During this Reactive Phase of the crisis, the MPs by and large emphasized law and order and area security missions. For combat support MP units, law and order functions primarily involved mounting foot and vehicular patrols within American installations and housing areas. The arrival of the augmentation units enabled the MPs to beef up their patrols and expand the area of their operations. It also allowed the infantrymen who had been assisting the permanently based MPs in their patrolling duties (but who, unlike MPs, had no authority on U.S. military property to apprehend individuals suspected of criminal activity) to perform duties more suitable for infantry, such as jungle operations in search of potentially hostile elements and monitoring PDF surveillance of U.S. facilities. In one respect, however, the deploying MP units did not have the anticipated impact. The HMMWV, which provides MPs much of their mobility and communication capability, were in short supply in some of the units, while many MPs found them unsuited to the narrow confines of housing areas and other fixed installations. Furthermore, the vehicle aroused political sensitivities because it looked too much like an armored offensive weapons system (even though it offered little protection even against small-arms fire). As a result, many HMMWVs in Panama were kept under wraps during this early phase of the crisis, and MPs conducted vehicular patrols in sedans and rented vehicles. Despite this sour note, crimes against property on U.S. installations dropped precipitously as MP patrols increased.

One law and order mission, liaison, incorporated a precarious but intensely important function. The harassment, mistreatment, and detention of Americans; trials of Americans in Panamanian courts,

numerous other incidents involving Americans on Panamanian soil, and a variety of legal issues raised by the Canal treaties required MPs to interact on an almost daily basis with members of the PDF. Liaison duties demanded MPs familiar with the country, the people, their culture and their laws. Most important, it required MPs who understood the PDF, what made them tick, how far they could be pushed. The TO&E units, with their training and combat support functions, lacked the experienced personnel and functional dedication necessary to perform liaison duties. Thus, such duties fell exclusively to the TDA activity, or FMO.

Protecting American lives was the most important aspect of liaison duty, but its value to the military extended well into other areas. Because Washington had forbidden all high-level contacts between the U.S. military and the PDF, the encounters between MPs and PDF took on special significance. During the course of a meeting, MPs would extract information from the PDF; they would also keep their eyes and ears open. The FMO itself, with its connections to the PDF and the Panamanian justice system, obtained additional information. Thus, simply by performing their duty, MPs engaged in liaison work became a valuable source of low-grade intelligence. As such, they walked a precarious line between policemen and spies. The Provost Marshal well understood this, if military intelligence did not. He reported information to MI when he considered it appropriate to do so, but he refused even in the face of enormous pressure to let intelligence organizations turn his MPs into spies or involve them in covert operations against Noriega's government. The

PDF would have eventually uncovered such activities, leaving the MPs ineffectual in their liaison role and vulnerable to retaliation.

In this Reactive Phase of the crisis, liaison duty also gave the Army one of its few, and legal, opportunities for standing up to the PDF without creating an unwanted incident. A mature and experienced MP, given some ingenuity and a little advice from Napoleon, usually could best his PDF counterparts in an official encounter. Napoleon's advice provided the basic rule of thumb: "It is a well established maxim of war never to do what the enemy wishes you to do." Once the MP on the scene determined the approach his PDF adversaries intended to take in a confrontation, he would try an opposite ploy to throw them off guard and onto the defensive. If, for example, the PDF were cooperative, the MP might respond by being assertive, brusque, even hostile. If the PDF were animated, the MP might remain calm and relaxed. The trick was in knowing that the PDF were inflexible; incapable of changing strategems without approval from above. Once an MP had foiled whatever approach the PDF had in mind, they usually capitulated. During a time when Washington preferred to look the other way when Americans in Panama were being mistreated on a routine basis, these minor "victories" of the MP liaison officers offered some solice for the dispirited.

Another irritant the MP commanders faced in the pre-intervention phase was the intrusion of political considerations into their police work. The politics of the situation revolved around Washington's desire to keep the crisis from boiling over and SOUTHCOM's and USARSO/JTF-Panama's attempts to keep an anti-American incident from escalating into a major hostage situation or a military

confrontation. On occasion, therefore, higher headquarters pulled the MPs off especially severe cases--those in which American soldiers or civilians had been beaten, raped (in one case), shot at, tortured, etc. at the hands of PDF or Dignity Battalions--in order to conduct the investigations themselves. To the higher headquarters, such action was essential given the enormous risks involved should an incident receive undue publicity. To the MPs, having the investigations taken away from them represented unwarranted interference in police matters.

Together with law and order missions, the MPs in Panama performed area security duties. Generally, this meant guard duty at an installation gate or on a fixed facility, such as the Rodman Ammunition Supply Point (ASP) and the Arraijan Tank Farm (ATF). MP units assigned these duties provided the communications and firepower necessary for accomplishing the mission. The MPs performed admirably, at times coming under fire from armed intruders, presumably PDF. Their only significant complaint was that these were static security missions that wasted one of their key assets, mobility.

MP units on the ASP and ATF were usually opcon to the infantry and Marine units responsible for the particular area. The MP-Marine pairing, in the opinion of the USARSO staff, created a contrast that demonstrated the wisdom of using MPs instead of combat-oriented units for constabulary activities in the LIC environment. With the Beirut tragedy uppermost in mind, the marines on guard duty gave the peacetime rules of engagement then in effect a rather liberal interpretation. The commander and staff at JTF-Panama took a much

more restrictive view, which to them seem vindicated when the marines, within days of assuming the ATF security mission, became involved in a major firefight with armed intruders. The marines were temporarily removed from the ATF "to get themselves together," and Army units acclimated to the nature of the crisis took their place. The marines defended their actions as legitimate self-defense, but the JTF thereafter viewed the Leathernecks as "trigger happy" and likely to cause an incident that would hand Noriega a martyr and the moral high ground in the crisis. Differences of opinion over the proper line separating restraint from the legitimate use of force would remain a point of contention between the marines and the JTF-Panama staff well into 1989. From the perspective of the latter, the MPs stood in diametrical opposition to the marines. MPs, with their fire discipline and mastery of the peacetime rules of engagement, could be relied upon to fire their weapons only when their lives were in immediate danger, when stopping the escape of a dangerous felon, or when protecting a second party from the deadly intent of a third. (It should be noted that many infantry officers and enlisted men performing security duties identical to the marines favored the Marines' interpretation of the rules of engagement over that of JTF-Panama.)

In addition to law and order and area security missions, the combat support MP units were also required to help plan and, if need be, execute a variety of contingency opords that were being written and continuously revised. MP officers provided input to the planning process, albeit to not the extent they desired. The main obstacle to fuller participation was OPSEC. Few MPs on the brigade and battalion

staffs had the Top Secret clearance that would grant them entry to the planning sessions.

More fruitful were the joint exercises combat support MP units engaged in with combat, combat support, and combat service support elements from the Army and the sister services. The commander, JTF-Panama, initiated these exercises soon after the arrival of the augmentation units. One objective was to acclimate different elements from the different services to working together. Another was to train for, even rehearse, the kind of joint operations called for in the contingency plans. The joint training program was one of JTF-Panama's most significant successes. The MPs profited from it, although they seemed at times to be low on the JTF-Panama list for distribution of critical information regarding the exercises. It was difficult, for example, to enact preparatory procedures for an exercise when the procedures were designed to take 72 hours and the notice given was 12.

By the fall of 1988, the criminal activity on U.S. installations remained relatively low, while the number of incidents on the ASP and ATF fluctuated. The situation remained tense, but not nearly to the degree experienced in the spring. As the threat of hostilities receded, it became difficult to justify tying up so many MP assets in Panama. Thus, all but one of the augmentation battalions (which had been rotating on a 120-day basis) were pulled out, together with the brigade headquarters. In November, several of the area security missions the MPs had been performing were turned over to other units. The MPs had helped keep the lid on the simmering crisis, which now promised to continue at a low level of intensity into the

indefinite future. Many MPs departed Panama convinced that their presence had not been required in the first place. To those who had entered the country expecting a war, the "business as usual" attitude of the units based in country seemed incomprehensible. Ironically, the ability to maintain a "business as usual" demeanor owed much to the efforts of the MPs so puzzled by it.

The Reaction Phase of the crisis gave way to the Assertive Phase following the Panamanian elections and the beating of the opposition candidates in May 1989. Under Operation Nimrod Dancer, President Bush sent additional combat units to Panama, including a brigade headquarters and an infantry battalion from the 7th Infantry Division (Light), a battalion from the 5th Mechanized Division, and a Marine Light Armored Infantry company. The troops arriving invariably thought they were going to war; they had trained for little else. The MPs, even those who had shared similar thoughts the previous spring, helped disabuse them of that notion and acclimate them to the low intensity and psychological nature of the crisis and the permissible range of U.S. responses. The 7th ID brigade commander acknowledged the value of the MPs when he noted that "the immediate need upon arrival in Panama was not firepower, but rather the right people to ensure the commander can protect his forces from any hostile threat, quickly grasp the political and ROE constraints and ensure appropriate living conditions for arriving soldiers. . . . Frontloading military police provides an immediate security force that is well trained in peacetime ROE, accustomed to being uploaded with UBL, able to provide mounted security, and trained in convoy security operations as well as riot control operations."

By the end of May 1989, two developments affecting the MPs had taken place. First, with the arrival of U.S. combat power under Nimrod Dancer, the harassment of Americans and the intrusions onto U.S. installations virtually came to a halt. At the same time, U.S. forces under JTF-Panama began convoy movements and other exercises to assert U.S. treaty rights and, as a spinoff, put pressure on the PDF, perhaps to the point where disgruntled officers might try again to depose Noriega. MPs at times guided and provided security to the convoys, which in the short-term seemed to have but a limited impact on Noriega and the PDF. MPs also continued joint training exercises, which intelligence indicated were, in fact, keeping the PDF off balance and on edge. Among the more visible exercises involving the MPs was their insertion by vehicle and by helicopter into Fort Amador, an installation containing both Panamanian and American personnel. The first time this operation took place, it backfired. The psychological impact of the insertion was dissipated when Noriega turned up, camera crews in toe, to shake the MPs' hands. Major General Bernard Loeffke, the JTF-Panama commander, tipped his hat to Noriega's "great propaganda ploy" and then took steps to ensure that future insertions into Amador achieved the desired results.

American pressure tactics continued into the fall, but seem to have played little part in the October coup attempt against Noriega. After the instigators of the coup were shot, imprisoned, or in some other way punished, it became obvious to many American officials that only the United States could engineer Noriega's departure from government. The question remained as it had since the spring of 1988: Would the United States risk the ramifications of military

intervention in order to topple the dictator? The answer came shortly after midnight on 20 December.

With the execution of Just Cause, the Assertive Phase of the crisis gave way to the Combat Phase. At this point, the combat support MP units in Panama, with the PMO occasionally dragged in for assistance, assumed their four battlefield missions: battlefield circulation control, area security, enemy prisoner of war control, and law and order. In carrying out their missions, MPs fought alongside infantry in such "hot spots" as Tinijitas, Renacer Prison, and Colon. They also set up and manned roadblocks and other checkpoints along main supply routes and lines of communication, provided static and mobile area security, expedited the movement of troops and convoys, conducted criminal and accident investigations, prepared for riot control, collected and processed EPWs, operated a centralized weapons collection point, served as a source of "deconfliction" between U.S. troops and noncombatants caught up in the fighting, guarded VIPs and key personnel, and provided security for many displaced Panamanians. In general, operational commanders expected MPs to be their eyes and ears "into the furthest reaches of his AO" and to provide mobility, firepower, and reliable communications.

To execute their missions effectively, MP units have to accompany the "warriors" into the field; they have to be involved in the combat phase of operations from the outset. Just Cause offered no exception to this rule. For what would essentially be a series of small-unit independent combat operations in which U.S. forces hit well over twenty targets within a matter of hours, MP platoons, companies, and

occasionally battalions already in Panama were parceled out to the several combat task forces taking part in Just Cause. When the leading elements of the 82d Airborne Division arrived in country, the division's MP company, minus one platoon, accompanied it in what became "the first combat jump in U.S. Army history by a military police company." The 82d's commanding general later commented that "one of the wisest things we did in this operation was bring the . . . MP company."

Despite this foresight, there were still not enough MPs in Panama to perform all the constabulary duties required during the early phases of Just Cause. The misuse of MP units in certain areas of operations exacerbated the problem. For example, MPs not only picked up and processed EPWs, they also found themselves building the EPW compound, a task better performed by an engineer or EPW battalion. Also, MPs were often given combat missions, such as flank protection, for which they lacked adequate firepower and protection.

Circumstances inherent in this kind of contingency operation further aggravated the manpower problem. Rarely is there a clear demarcation between the Combat Phase of an intervention and the follow-on Stability Phase, in which reestablishing law and order and providing nation assistance become the overriding objectives. In Panama, as in the Dominican Republic and Grenada before it, the Stability Phase did not begin after the Combat Phase, but during it. Even as fighting continued, a new government took power, a new Panamanian security force came into being, and clearing operations and law and order patrols began in Panama City. The simultaneous

demand placed on MPs to conduct combat, combat support, and stability operations further drained the pool of available resources.

Given the shortage, misuse, and overextension of MPs during Just Cause, combat units ended up performing constabulary missions, as they had in virtually every other post-World War II intervention conducted by the United States (Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, Grenada). Many combat units had anticipated having to perform such missions, at least on a temporary basis, but few had prepared to do so. As one "warrior" commented, "This is a new experience for us, and we're learning as we go. We've trained for fighting, not for civil patrols." One platoon leader echoed this sentiment. "The role of police officer or constable is a difficult one for an unbridled warrior still fresh from the fight to assume. High-strung and chomping at the bit, we would soon be forced to suppress our aggression and adopt a more civil approach to dealing with our surroundings. . . . Deadly force could only be used in self-defense and to protect American and Panamanian lives. Minimum force would be used in establishing law and order. Warning shots had to be fired in all cases, and it was mandatory to shoot only to wound. Chambering a round while not in imminent danger and clearing buildings by fire were forbidden." This abrupt transition from warrior to policeman rarely came easily, the consequence being a number of unfortunate incidents in which infantry troops taught to close and destroy needlessly opened fire on noncombatants. In short, combat and constabulary requirements coexisted through the first several days of Just Cause, although the units best prepared and disciplined to fulfill the latter were not always available to do so.

In the wake of Just Cause, commanders of the various operational task forces gave the MPs mixed reviews. The highest praise emanated from task force headquarters on the Pacific side, the area of the most intense fighting. The harshest comments came from Task Force Atlantic, whose commander complained that "distinguishing between operational issues and law and order issues seemed to be a constant challenge for the in-country military police." He praised those MPs who were tactically well trained, but grumbled that "MP's trained only in law enforcement operations lack the training to perform adequately in tactical operations." Another Task Force Atlantic critique charged that the soldiers and officers of one MP company "were untrained in the areas of fire control and maneuver. While possessing an impressive HMMWV with M60 machine gun, the average MP team was inexperienced with its use and woefully lacked live-fire training. Our tendency became to employ the MPs well away from the infantry soldiers." (In passing, it should be noted that the MP company in question was relatively new and perhaps not up to standards in all aspects of its combat support training.)

MP commanders voiced their own complaints, the gist of which criticized operational commanders for misusing MP units and misunderstanding the combat and law enforcement capabilities of the MPs. In addition, the MP commander in Panama discovered that, once area-oriented missions began to take precedence over decentralized and largely independent combat activities, he could not readily regain control of MP units placed opcon to individual combat units. Since MPs continued to be dispersed well after the bulk of the fighting had ceased, they could not protect and police the rear area

(a difficult term to define on a nonlinear battlefield) and respond in a timely way to other missions for which they possessed specialized training.

Once the combat died down, stability and nation-building operations moved to the forefront of U.S. efforts in Panama. At first, coordination was poor among the four or five ad hoc U.S. civil-military activities and civil affairs groups established to help the Endara government gain legitimacy, stand up a new Panamanian security force, and revive the country politically and economically. In mid-January, however, a Military Support Group (MSG) was activated under JTF-Panama for the purpose of overseeing the U.S. military's role in nation assistance. The MPs became opcon to the MSG when performing constabulary duties related to the Stability Phase of the intervention.

The most important role played by the MPs once the shooting died down was in helping to make the new Panamanian security forces a credible and functioning organization. Even while the PDF and Dignity Battalions battled U.S. troops in the first days of Just Cause, President Endara and his two vice-presidents, Guillermo Ford and Arias Calderon, made the decision to use what was left of the PDF as a cadre for the new Panamanian Public Forces (PPF). To build a new force from scratch would take several years, they postulated, thereby prolonging the intervention in the sense that the United States would have to provide law and order during this period. Also, because many of the PDF had not surrendered their weapons, a decision to release them from service would create a large group of unemployed men whose most finely honed skills involved using firearms and

abusing people. Having decided to use the PDF as a cadre, Endara, Ford, and Arias determined that the PPF would not be a military force but a police force, armed primarily with shotguns and revolvers. By Friday, 22 December, only two days after Just Cause kicked off and while fighting continued in many areas, recruitment began for the PPF. The goal of the new government was to get the PPF into the streets where it learn firsthand its law and order duties and where it could begin establishing the basis of a new rapport with the Panamanian people.

PPF patrols began in relatively secure areas of Panama City on 23 December. U.S. troops, usually combat infantry, accompanied the "born-again" policemen, a forced union that did not set well with many American infantrymen who only days before had been shooting at, and had themselves been shot at, by many of the men they were now rearming and walking alongside, shoulder to shoulder (except in those instances when the more cautious Americans insisted upon the former PDF walking a few steps ahead). As soon as practicable, Panama City was divided into alphabetical zones assigned to different PPF units, and MPs, with their sense of professional detachment, began to replace infantry in the combined patrols. The MPs helped in efforts to provide equipment and firearms to the PPF, and provided advice. By U.S. law, they could not train the police forces of another nation, but they could advise groups brought in from the United States for that purpose, and more important, they could lead by example. As of the summer of 1990, the combined patrols continued, despite the redeployment of the 7th ID, 82d Airborne Division, Marines, and XVIII Airborne Corps units and personnel who had taken

part in Just Cause and despite the drawdown of MPs in Panama. As the MPs go about protecting American lives and property in Panama, they continued to demonstrate firsthand the law and order skills the Panamanian police (now called the Panamanian National Police, or PNF) so desperately needed. The success of this venture, however, is still in question.

In summarizing the performance of constabulary duties during the Panama crisis of 1987-1990, it should be noted for almost two years prior to Just Cause and soon after the combat phase of that operation ended, U.S. officials made a conscious decision to place Military Police in the forefront of the effort to protect American lives and interests and to bring democracy to the strife-torn country. MPs, in effect, became the linchpin to U.S. military strategy in the first and last phases of the crisis. Their ability to work with people and to defuse dangerous situations, their restraint in the use of weapons, the sense of security they imparted, their experience in law and order functions, and their value as a symbol of U.S. resolve in a "defensive" mode made this decision wise if not inevitable. As one light infantry brigade commander admitted to his own astonishment in the summer of 1989, he would have gladly traded one of his rifle companies for a company of MPs, given the nature of the Panama crisis.

Time and space do not permit a comprehensive list of lessons learned regarding constabulary functions in the Panama crisis. By and large, the MPs performed with a high degree of professionalism and distinction. Problems did surface, however, that need to be addressed, not just at the MP school, but throughout the Army. A partial list of these issues would include the following.

- (1) The need to establish command and control relationships well in advance of deploying MPs into a crisis situation.
- (2) The need to provide deploying MP headquarters and combat support units with clear mission statements.
- (3) The need to integrate and coordinate the activities of MP units with those of the combat, combat support, and combat service support units involved in a crisis.
- (4) The need for bring in MPs during the first phases of an intervention.
- (5) The need for planners to anticipate the large number of constabulary forces that most contingency operations like Just Cause will require.
- (6) The need for combat units to train for constabulary missions.
- (7) The need for operational commanders to understand thoroughly what MPs are and are not capable of doing for them.

The crisis in Panama, besides revealing the enormous potential of the Military Police in Low-Intensity Conflict and Contingency Operations, provided the real-time experience necessary for resolving these issues and others. The next step is to be sure that the lessons are applied and not left to collect dust while the U.S. military establishment moves on to the next crisis.

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