

On Mamba Station

**U.S. Marines in West
Africa, 1990-2003**

U.S. Marines in Humanitarian Operations



COVER: *Marines from the 22d MEU (SOC) help young evacuees put on their life preservers before the flight to Freetown, Sierra Leone, during Operation Assured Response.*

Photo courtesy of *All Hands*

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U.S. Marines in West Africa, 1990 – 2003

U.S. Marines in Humanitarian Operations



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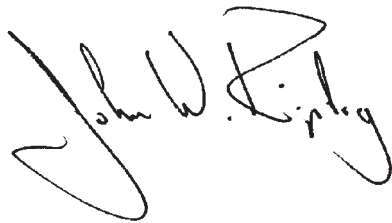
Foreword

This monograph tells the story of thousands of U.S. Marines who supported Operations Sharp Edge, Assured Response, Quick Response, Noble Obelisk, and Joint Task Force Liberia, the noncombatant evacuation operations in 1990, 1991, 1996, and 2003 from Liberia, in 1996 from the Central African Republic, and in 1997 from Sierra Leone.

The traditional concepts of employing Marines predicated their involvement in West Africa on protecting American lives and property that might be in danger. Before its actions in West Africa, the Marine Corps was frequently called on for noncombatant evacuation operations. Classic examples of which include recent evacuation operations in Cyprus in 1974, South Vietnam in 1975, Cambodia in 1975, and Lebanon in 1982 and 1984. Marine involvement in the Liberian evacuations during the country's 14 years of civil war went beyond the permanent presence of the Marine Security Guard detachment at the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, requiring a total of six Marine Air-Ground Task Forces and one Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team platoon to deploy in Liberia. Supporting elements were present in Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Spain. As a testament to operational flexibility, the Marines in Liberia reached as far as the Central African Republic, when a Marine Air-Ground Task Force successfully launched an additional noncombatant evacuation operation from the Liberia area of operations to support the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Bangui. The civil war in Liberia from 1989 to 2003 caused much bloodshed, death, suffering, and destruction. The Marine Corps efforts focused on protecting Americans lives and property and resulted in the evacuation of Americans and foreign nationals from the violence and chaos of civil war.

The authors of this volume, Majors James G. Antal and R. John Vanden Berghe, served as historical writers assigned the History and Museums Division. Major Antal previously served in a variety of infantry and intelligence billets and commanded the Marine Corps Security Force Company in Naples, Italy. He retired from active duty in 1998. Major Vanden Berghe, an infantry officer, served as the assistant operations officer and the operations officer of Battalion Landing Team 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, during that unit's participation in Operation Sharp Edge. He retired from active duty in 2002.

In pursuit of accuracy and objectivity, the History and Museums Division welcomes comments from interested individual.

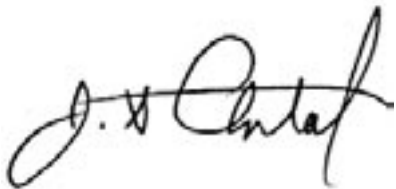


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Preface

This monograph examines the decisions, deployments, and actions of United States Marine Corps forces in Liberia associated with Operations Sharp Edge, Assured Response, and Joint Task Force Liberia, and in the Central African Republic with Operation Quick Response and Noble Obelisk in Sierra Leone. The United States Marine Corps' support of the American Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia, during the country's civil war (1989 to 2003) involved six different Marine Air-Ground Task Forces. The study begins with interactions between the Marine's forward command element and the embassy staff from May through August 1990. Reviewed in detail are significant actions leading up to the embassy's 4 August 1990 decision to evacuate and draw down selected sites. Marines conducted security, support, and noncombatant evacuation operations from 5 August 1990 to 15 February 1991. The concurrent actions of West African peacekeeping forces and Liberian peace efforts are included to provide the context of Marine actions in Monrovia. A short discussion of the interim civil war years follows. With the reintroduction of American forces in April 1996 comes the arrival and deployment of the Marines as a joint task force. Accordingly, the study examines the deployment, command relationships, political-military relationships, the fighting, and Marine's actions at the embassy. Next is an account of the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force, the last Marine unit in Liberia. Included is a narrative of the unit's deployment, turnover, actions ashore, and their final phased withdrawal from the embassy on 3 August 1996. The account of the May 1996 evacuation (Quick Response) from the Central African Republic provides a related example of Marine responsiveness in noncombatant evacuation operations. This monograph illustrates the flexibility and utility of naval expeditionary forces, specifically, Marine expeditionary units, to conduct noncombatant evacuation operations in an uncertain world.

This monograph could not have been published without the professional efforts of the staff of the History and Museums Division. The authors would like to thank Mr. Charles D. Melson, Mr. Charles R. Smith, Dr. David B. Crist, and Mrs. Wanda J. Renfrow for their meticulous review and corrections to both style and content, and Mr. Charles R. Smith, for his contributions to the text. We also would like to thank Ms. Evelyn A. Englander, the research librarian, Mr. Frederick J. Graboske and his staff in the Archives Section, and the Reference Section, headed by Mr. Danny J. Crawford.



James G Antal



R. John Vanden Berghe

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Part I

**Operation Sharp Edge
1990-1991**



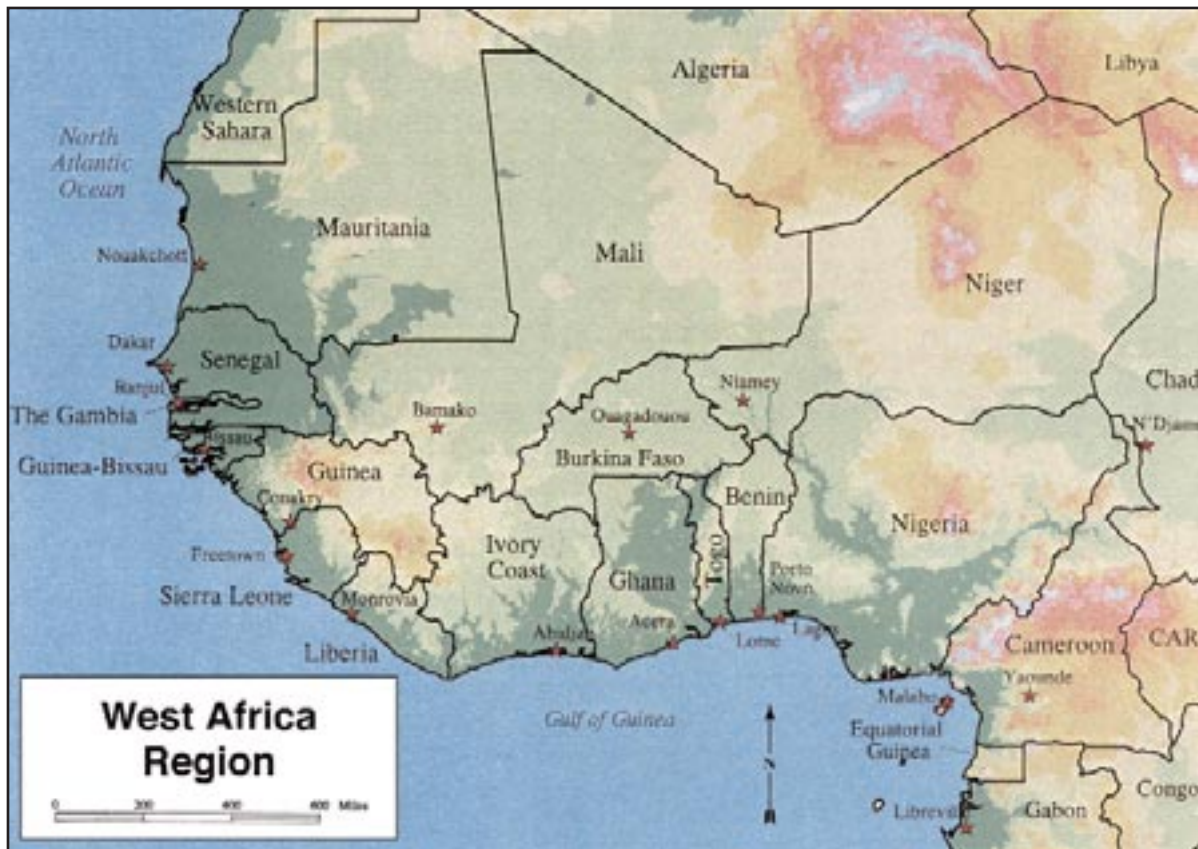
Chapter 1

Liberian Unrest Turns Violent

The Geography of Liberia

Liberia is geographically situated between Sierra Leone, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast on the western bulge of Africa. In total landmass, the country is slightly larger than the state of Pennsylvania. Its narrow coastal strip, from 20 to 50 miles wide, is interlaced with swamps, tidal lagoons, and marshes. The coastal areas lead to rolling hills that range from 400 to 1,200 feet high and are covered with dense broadleaf and evergreen forests. Timber and rubber plantations abound in these areas of abundant natural resources. Along Liberia's northern border, the rugged Guinea highlands divide the Niger River

basin to the northeast from streams flowing across the country. The dominant mountain ranges of the Wologisi and Nimba, with elevations to 5,748 feet, are found along the country's eastern and northeastern borders. Both of these mountain ranges, as well as the lower Bong Hills, are rich with iron ore deposits and littered with gold mines. The country's six major rivers drain northeast to southwest into the Atlantic Ocean. Three of the country's seven significant diamond mines are located near the Lofa River. Major port cities include Buchanan, Harper, Monrovia, and Robertsport. The tropical climate has very distinct wet and dry seasons. During the wet season, which runs between April and November, the





average accumulation of rainfall is between 150 and 170 inches with almost daily torrential thunderstorms in the late afternoon. In the capital city of Monrovia, the mean temperature is 82 degrees Fahrenheit with an average humidity of 90 percent.

Liberia traces its origins back to the 1816 establishment of the American Colonization Society. Intended to sponsor the repatriation of former American slaves to West Africa, this organization established its first successful settlement on Cape Mesurado in 1821. That site grew into the city of



Photo courtesy of the authors
In government since 1935, William Richard Tolbert, Jr., succeeded to the presidency of Liberia upon William S. Tubman's death in 1971. Instituting reforms to close the disparity between Americo-Liberians and indigenous tribesmen, Tolbert raised expectations while the economy failed, stimulating opposition and a military coup.

Monrovia. By 1847, more than 45,000 freed men, as well as Africans rescued from slave ships, had settled there. Most of these settlers died of disease or in conflicts with local tribesmen. The settlers declared independence from the American Colonization Society's jurisdiction in 1847 and established a republic constitutionally modeled after the United States. European nations quickly

recognized the new country, but the United States failed to establish diplomatic ties until 1862.¹

Liberia's seemingly democratic structure was, in fact, a façade. Territory claimed by African-American settlers and their descendents (Americo-Liberians) and those rescued from slave ships (Congos) extended eastward into the interior, which was populated by at least 16 indigenous tribal groups. The ruling Americo-Liberian elite had no interest in assimilating the African population and referred to them as the "Country People." Adopting the attitudes and lifestyle of antebellum southerners, Americo-Liberians regarded the native Afro-Liberians as uncivilized inferiors. Although Liberians considered their state Christian, only about 10 percent of the population belonged to one of the Christian denominations; 20 percent were Muslim, and the remaining 70 percent maintained traditional African beliefs. English is the official language, but there are more than 20 dialects derived from Niger-Congo linguistic groups. A pidgin "Liberian English" is the common tongue.

The True Whig Party, which represented the interests of a small group of interrelated families that dominated the country, monopolized political power for 133 years. This group comprised only 5 percent of the population. This ruling class resided mainly in the coastal urban centers, principally Monrovia, and exploited Liberia's natural resources of rubber, iron ore, and lumber using labor coerced from the rural population. Firestone Tire and Rubber Company established the world's largest rubber plantation at Harbel in 1936, heralding a period of increased American economic involvement in the country. An Open Door Policy, implemented after the election of President William S. Tubman in 1944, led to increasing foreign investment and modest prosperity. During World War II, the United States built Roberts Airport and the Freeport of Monrovia, further developing the county's infrastructure.

Unfortunately, more emphasis was placed on exporting raw materials than on expanding Liberia's industrial capacity. In addition, a National Unification Policy aimed at assimilating rural Afro-Liberians fell short of incorporating the native population into the political power structure. Tubman, in fact, had no tolerance for any form of political opposition. When former President Edwin James Barclay's Independent Whig Party challenged Tubman in the 1955 presidential elections, his supporters were harassed

and Barclay's party was eventually banned. Although Liberia prospered, only the True Whig oligarchy benefited and repression maintained the chasm between them and the majority of the population. This situation continued during the presidency of William K. Tolbert, who assumed office upon Tubman's death in 1971. But discontent led to organized opposition and the Movement for Justice in Africa was formed at the University of Liberia in 1973. Then in 1975, Liberian students in the United States organized the Progressive Alliance of Liberia. An unpopular increase in the cost of rice led to a demonstration on 14 April 1979, which escalated into rioting, looting, and the deaths of nearly 100 people in Monrovia.

Samuel Doe's Rise to Power

A year later, Tolbert died when 17 noncommissioned officers, led by Master Sergeant Samuel Kenyon Doe, stormed the Executive Mansion. They murdered the president in bed and killed 26 members of his security guard. After advising tribal soldiers not to obey Americo-Liberian officers, the enlisted men assumed control of the government and proclaimed themselves the People's Redemption Council. The public initially welcomed the end of 133 years of Americo-Liberian rule with enthusiasm, but the televised execution of 13 Tolbert Administration officials by drunken soldiers foreshadowed the imposition of a military dictatorship. Doe promised a return to civilian rule by 1985; political activity was banned until 1984. Of 14 political parties that were organized, only four were allowed to participate in the presidential and legislative elections held on 15 October 1985. Many of Doe's opponents were detained or otherwise harassed, and when the election still seemed to turn against him, representatives of his own National Democratic Party of Liberia manipulated the vote count and proclaimed him the victor with 50 percent of the votes (80 percent of the legislative seats being claimed by his party). Meanwhile, Doe removed many of his fellow 1980 coup conspirators from the government, increasing the concentration of power to members of his own Krahn tribe. The Krahn, like the Americo-Liberians before them, became a despised minority ruling over a repressed majority. On 12 November 1985, former People's Redemption Council member General Thomas Quiwonkpa led an unsuccessful coup attempt. Quiwonkpa's failure led to his execution



Photo courtesy of the authors
Leaders of the violent 1980 military coup that overthrew President Tolbert were: (left) Sgt Nicholas Podier, who became speaker of the interim National Assembly; Sgt Thomas "Strongman" Quiwonkpa, commander of the Armed Forces of Liberia; MSgt Samuel Kenyon Doe, head of state; and Sgt Thomas Weh Syen, deputy head of state. All died violently. Three were killed on orders of Samuel Doe, and Doe himself was killed in the midst of the 1990 civil war.

and that of 16 of his supporters, followed by widespread persecution of their Gio and Mano tribesmen. Approximately 3,000 were killed, especially in Quiwonkpa's own Nimba County. Many fled the country to await an opportunity for revenge.²

During the early 1980s, Liberia was viewed as a bastion against Soviet expansionism and Libyan influence in Africa and American aid flowed into the country. The end of the Cold War and increasing alarm over Doe's abysmal human rights record led to a reduction of aid by the end of the decade. This decline, coinciding with decreases in the value of Liberia's exported raw materials and the corruption and incompetence of the regime, resulted in economic chaos and widespread unemployment.

Then came Charles Taylor. An Americo-Liberian educated in Massachusetts, Taylor was an expatriate opponent of the Tolbert regime. Present in Liberia during the 1980 coup, his degree in economics and glib personality earned him the leadership of the General Services Administration, which was responsible for centralized government purchasing. He was accused of embezzling about \$1 million U.S. dollars in

1983 and fled to the United States, where he lived as a fugitive until he was arrested by U.S. marshals. In September 1985, Taylor escaped from Massachusetts' Plymouth County Jail, where he was awaiting extradition. He made his way to Libya where Muammar Qadhafi allowed him to train an insurgent force. After additional training in Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast, Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) crossed the border into Nimba County on Christmas Eve, 1989.³

Civil War Begins

Initially, few in the government took the threat seriously. By late December, however, Doe sent the 2d Battalion of his army to suppress the guerrillas. Targeting Gio and Mano tribesmen associated with Quiwonkpa's 1985 attempt, the Krahn-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) alienated the population with indiscriminate murder, rape, and pillage. As civilians began to fear government soldiers more than the NPFL, Taylor's force grew. Many soldiers likewise fled to the rebels, taking their weapons with them. The insurgents lured some AFL units into ambushes by passing false messages on captured radios, gaining more arms in the process. Children as young as 10 years old fought as well, some to avenge slain family members and others simply because they had no option.⁴

As popular support grew, the NPFL expanded its initial focus on killing government troops and officials to persecution of Doe's Krahn and their Mandingo associates. By 6 January 1990, more than 10,000 refugees had fled to the Ivory Coast, spreading word of atrocities committed by both government and rebel forces. Meanwhile, Doe tightened his own security by establishing numerous checkpoints throughout Monrovia and dispatching additional troops into the interior.⁵

The insurgents successfully eluded Doe's forces, moving across mountains and through forests to seize the town of Tapeta, which gave them control of the coastal road and split the country in half. On 7 March, the United States Congress passed House Resolution 354, condemning atrocities committed by both parties in the conflict.⁶ On 24 March, an American missionary was killed in crossfire. In Monrovia, government troops began harassing Liberians employed by the American Embassy. Threats directed against embassy officials over the security guards' radio net culminated in the burning of an

embassy warehouse by two disgruntled employees on 29 March. As Taylor's forces advanced into Grand Gedeh County in early April, the number of Liberians seeking refuge in neighboring counties grew to more than 140,000.⁷ On 23 April, an embassy travel advisory stated the security situation was deteriorating as random acts of violence against foreigners increased. Three days later, the voluntary evacuation of official dependents and nonessential personnel was authorized. Within a week, the official American community shrank from 621 to 143 as embassy families, Peace Corps volunteers, and employees of the Voice of America and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) left the country.⁸

Meanwhile, Doe urged Krahn chiefs to: "get their cutlasses and single barrel guns and get into the bush and pursue the rebels," prompting further atrocities.⁹ Loyalist troops arrested 150 Gio

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soldiers suspected of treason. Many of Monrovia's primarily Mandingo taxi drivers fled to Sierra Leone and Guinea while AFL troops manning a growing number of checkpoints throughout the city detained, harassed, and extracted bribes from motorists. In addition, the number of mutilated corpses multiplied. On 24 May, the U.S. State Department issued another travel advisory ordering all nonessential personnel to leave.

The Need for U.S. Involvement

As the situation continued to deteriorate, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began looking at four possible actions that had been presented by the U.S. European Command. The maritime option included the employment of a Marine amphibious force. The other three involved Army airborne or U.S. Special Operations Command forces seizing

Roberts International Airport. The American Embassy in Monrovia wanted a military option available, but did not favor a direct military presence ashore. Personnel were still being evacuated by commercial charter flights, and although there was no government opposition to their departure, nor any apparent physical threat, numerous roadblocks had to be negotiated on the way to the airport. Evacuees traveled in convoys escorted by the embassy's regional security officer and locally hired guards. While it appeared a noncombatant evacuation operation conducted by U.S. forces was unnecessary, the maritime option provided the most viable contingency force. After review, President George H. Bush, with the advice of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin L. Powell, and the Secretary of Defense, Richard B. Cheney, approved the European Command's plan to station off the Liberian coast 2,500 Marines equipped for an amphibious landing.

On 25 May 1990, the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)), as part of its Landing Force Sixth Fleet deployment 2-90 (the second MEU deployed to the

On the evening of 29 May, government AFL troops broke into the compound firing automatic weapons, wounding two guards and killing a third. Between 30 and 40 men and boys, including Gio and Mano UNDP employees, were forcibly removed. At least eight were tortured, executed, and mutilated on a nearby beach.

Mediterranean that year), was training at Camp de Canjuers near the port of Toulon in southern France. The MEU comprised a command element (the MEU staff); Battalion Landing Team 2d Battalion, 4th Marines (BLT 2/4); Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261 (HMM-261); and MEU Service Support Group 22 (MSSG-22), the MEU's logistical support element. When the deployment order came in from General Powell, the MEU's McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harrier detachment, based ashore at Hyeres Naval Air Station east of Toulon, abruptly shifted its focus from routine training to "mounting out" on board ship. The following day, Admiral Jonathan T. Howe, Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe,

issued the deployment order directing the Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) with the 22d MEU to proceed to the vicinity of Monrovia. Upon arrival off the Liberian coast, the Marines would prepare for evacuations and security operations at U.S. installations ashore to be conducted with or without permission from the Liberian government. Colonel Granville R. "Granny" Amos, commanding officer of 22d MEU, had been monitoring the situation for some time and immediately directed that equipment and personnel be embarked in compliance with a 12-hour standby plan.¹⁰

Government and rebel forces continued fighting at the key towns of Garbande and Buchanan.* The rebel tactics were to first attack checkpoints and convoys outside a town, then encircle it. Once surrounded, government troops usually retreated into the town, haphazardly firing mortars, rockets, and machine guns. The terrorized civilian population suffered most. Doe's troops generally deserted or fled, allowing the rebels to win easy victories.¹¹ Taylor's rebels employed these very tactics on 26 May to seize the city of Kakata, about 30 miles northeast of Monrovia. Arbitrary arrests and detentions in Monrovia continued, as did the indiscriminate killing of Gios and Manos by Krahn soldiers. As fighting drew closer, more refugees flocked into the capital. Seeking protection from the violence, a large group gathered outside the compound of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). U.N. personnel granted entry to about 1,500.

On the evening of 29 May, government AFL troops broke into the compound firing automatic weapons, wounding two guards and killing a third. Between 30 and 40 men and boys, including Gio and Mano UNDP employees, were forcibly removed. At least eight were tortured, executed, and mutilated on a nearby beach. Michael Heyn, the U.N. representative in Liberia, described the attack as "incredible, and a violation of international law."¹² On 30 May, the U.N. evacuated its entire staff. Although Doe visited the compound the following day, promising the survivors he would find the culprits, he either could not, or had no intention of, controlling his army.

Prior to this incident, the commander of the Sixth Fleet, Vice Admiral James D. Williams, USN, authorized the dispatch of the 22d MEU's forward

* Buchanan is a port linked by road and rail to both Monrovia and the interior.



DVIC DN-SC-90-08850

A port view of the amphibious assault ship USS Saipan (LHA 2). In the Mediterranean participating with the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit in NATO southern region exercise Dragon Hammer '90, the Saipan and other ships in the amphibious ready group would be ordered to waters off Liberia.

command element to Liberia. Serving as a liaison between State Department personnel and the MEU, the employment of a forward command element is standard procedure for any evacuation operation.¹³ Unfortunately, the embassy in Monrovia had not requested the forward command element, which made coordination difficult. The team's five original members were reduced to two due to problems with travel arrangements. Encumbered by personal weapons, ammunition, pyrotechnics, satellite communications equipment, cryptology gear, rations, uniforms, and civilian clothes, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen J. Labadie, Jr., the 22d MEU's executive officer, and Major Glen R. Sachtleben, executive officer of BLT 2/4, flew from the USS *Saipan* (LHA 2) by helicopter on 29 May.

After landing at Rota Naval Station in Spain, the pair sought transportation for themselves and their equipment to Liberia. Commercial transportation presented several problems. Not only was it extremely expensive, but their equipment would be difficult to pass through customs. They also had no visas, and the circuitous route (connecting at Madrid, Paris, and Amsterdam) would take 46 hours to complete. A Navy Beech D-12 Super King airplane was available, but it could not carry both them and all their baggage. The officers considered crossing to Morocco, renting a car, and driving to Monrovia. Meanwhile, Colonel Amos decided to send the three remaining forward command element members: Captain David J. Mollahan, officer in charge of the MEU's air naval gunfire liaison company detachment;

Lieutenant Commander Robert Peterman, officer in charge of the Amphibious Squadron 4's (Phibron 4) naval special warfare group detachment; and Sergeant Scott R. Widdifield, from the MEU's radio battalion detachment. While the trio traveled to Rota, Major Sachtleben met Commander Phillip G. Hobbs, the commanding officer of Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 22 (VR-22), a Navy Lockheed C-130 Hercules squadron based at the naval station. That night, the two officers agreed that a VR-22 Hercules would fly the forward command element to Monrovia, provided each got the approval of their respective chains-of-command. While the forward command element spent 30 May getting vaccinations and Malaria pills, VR-22 helped them obtain personal clearances to travel to Liberia and submitted an aircraft clearance request. At 0500 on 31 May, their C-130 left Rota for Monrovia.

First Look at Monrovia

Lieutenant Colonel Labadie, Major Sachtleben, and the remaining members of the forward com-

mand element arrived at 1205 local time. The aircraft spent only 15 minutes on the ground, just long enough to quickly offload its passengers and their equipment. Roberts International Airport, 35 miles from Monrovia, was closed to commercial traffic due to nearby rebel attacks. Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Newman, USA, assistant chief of the military mission at the embassy welcomed the forward command element. The five-man team then drove to the embassy's Greystone compound, where Lieutenant Colonel Labadie directed them to establish communications with the 22d MEU while he met with the embassy staff.¹⁴

The staff briefed the forward command element on the current situation. At the meeting of the Economic Community of West African States on 30 May in Banjul, Gambia, the participants called for an immediate ceasefire and established a standing mediation committee to help resolve the conflict. But the insurgents had already reached Harbel (site of the former Firestone rubber plantation, now Japanese owned), bringing them within 20 miles from the capital. This advance effectively closed all air traffic to Roberts



Photo courtesy of the authors

Armed Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia soldiers drive past the American Embassy on United Nations Drive. The rebel soldiers belonged to one of two factions challenging government forces for control of the capital.



DVIC DN-ST-90-11228

The American Embassy in Monrovia became the focal point for American citizens and other foreign nationals to gather in preparation for evacuation during Liberia's political unrest and civil war.

International Airport. In addition, Taylor's NPFL had split into two factions, which further complicated the situation. Former army captain and ethnic Gio, Prince Yormie Johnson, broke with Taylor in February to form a new faction called the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). This group was challenging both the government forces and their former comrades for control of the capital. Control of more than two-thirds of the country was now split between the two rebel factions, each of which continued to advance in spurts, pausing to reorganize between attacks.

On 26 May, the 22d MEU completed loading its personnel and equipment on the ships of the ARG, which sailed from Toulon the following day. As the group passed Rota, HMM-261 helicopters picked up additional personnel, supplies, and maps of Liberia. The ships then headed south after taking on fuel and supplies. The *Saipan* and USS *Sumter* (LST 1181) proceeded together while the USS *Ponce* (LPD 15), delayed by repairs, followed later.

Recognizing the MEU might be given a contingency mission in Liberia prior to receipt of the deployment order, Colonel Amos directed the MEU staff to refine their plans. Using rapid planning techniques, they were a day ahead when the order was received on 26 May. The following day, the staff briefed General James P. McCarthy, USAF, Deputy Commander in Chief, European Command; Brigadier General Richard Potter, USA, Commander, Special Operations Command, Europe; Admiral Jonathan Howe, USN, Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe; and Vice Admiral James D. Williams, USN, Commander, Sixth Fleet, on board the *Saipan*. The briefing detailed various courses of action open to the MEU, should it be called upon to execute a noncombatant evacuation operation in Monrovia, now designated Operation Sharp Edge.

Reports on the deteriorating situation led to an all-out effort to get the Marines to Liberia quickly. Accompanying the ships of Phibron 4, which formed the ARG, was the destroyer USS *Peterson* (DD 969). The MEU transferred a reinforced pla-

toon of Marines and one helicopter to the destroyer so they could arrive prior to the rest of the task force. These 75 Marines would provide quick reinforcement if called upon, and included an evacuation control center to coordinate an evacuation. A detachment of Navy SEALs (Sea, Air, Land) from Naval Special Warfare Group 2 also boarded the *Peterson*. Traveling at 30 knots, the destroyer arrived off Liberia on 2 June.

The operation order for Sharp Edge directed the task force to be ready to conduct an evacuation within 24 hours of notification. It also assigned Admiral Williams, the commander of the Sixth Fleet, as the commander of the joint task force (JTF).¹⁵ The JTF, now officially formed, comprised approximately 2,300 Marines from the 22d MEU and 1,900 sailors from the ARG. When the *Saipan* and *Sumter* arrived on 3 June, the Marines on the *Peterson* returned to the *Saipan*. With the arrival of the *Ponce* on 4 June, the JTF went into a modified location at sea, designated Mamba Station.*

The embassy compound was located on a peninsula at the western edge of Monrovia with the ocean to the west and south and the Mesurado River to the north. To the east were the business district, central market, Tubman Stadium, and the AFL's Barclay Training Center. The Executive Mansion and Capitol were southeast of the training center. Tubman Boulevard, the city's

During the 1980s, approximately \$500 million in economic, military, and social aid flowed into Liberia, making it West Africa's largest per capita recipient of American assistance.

main thoroughfare, passed eastward through the Sinkor District, Spriggs-Payne Airport, and Congo Town. Tubman Boulevard branched off at Paynesville. Traveling northeast, it was eight miles to the U.S. Omega navigation transmitter site and 22 miles to the Voice of America transmitter. Six miles further east the road forked again, leading either northeast to Kakata or southeast to Herbel.

* Mamba Station was named for Mamba Point, the location of the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia.

The other fork in Tubman Boulevard led eastward along the coast toward the U.S. telecommunications transmitter and Roberts International Airport. Two bridges crossed the Mesurado River north of Monrovia, connecting the capital with Bushrod Island where the Freeport was located. The road continued north across the St. Paul River, passing through Brewersville to the Voice of America receiving station and American telecommunication office receiver site.

The American community was spread out among the city of 400,000 people. An embassy warehouse was on Bushrod Island.¹⁶ The USAID library was located in the central business district. The Graystone compound was located one block east of the Mamba Point embassy compound and housed diplomatic personnel. The embassy's Marine Security Guard detachment lived at Marine House on United Nations Drive. A U.S. Government Services Organization warehouse was within a block of the Barclay Training Center, while the American Cooperative School, USAID Headquarters, Peace Corps Office and training center, and housing for several embassy staff members and other American citizens were located in Sinkor and Congo Town. Americans working in outlying areas such as the Omega and Voice of America transmitter sites lived in either Monrovia or its suburbs.

Both the embassy staff and senior Navy and Marine commanders of the task force were clearly aware of U.S. policy toward the Doe regime. During the 1980s, approximately \$500 million in economic, military, and social aid flowed into Liberia, making it West Africa's largest per capita recipient of American assistance.¹⁷ Because of the country's long-standing ties with the United States, and the Cold War access to Africa it gave the American government, the two nations had strong mutual interests.** Yet the Doe regime's corruption, incompetence, and appalling human rights record could not be ignored.¹⁸ As the rebel factions closed in on Monrovia, Marines and sailors waiting off the coast faced an increasingly complex and volatile situation.

** United States aircraft could land and refuel in Liberia on 24 hours' notice. The Omega navigation station assisted international shipping by providing navigational fixes, while the American telecommunications relay site provided communications for diplomatic traffic between embassies in sub-Saharan Africa. The Voice of America relay station transmitted broadcasts throughout the region.

Chapter 2

Preparing for Operation Sharp Edge

From Predeployment Training to the Mediterranean

In the course of training for its deployment, the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) practiced three noncombatant evacuation operations. For the 22d MEU's "graduation" special operations exercise, Battalion Landing Team 2/4 (BLT 2/4) conducted two different site noncombatant evacuation operations concurrently. One evacuation took place at a mock embassy and the other at an outlying site. Using rapid planning techniques, the MEU executed the multisite noncombatant evacuation operations exercise at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, within six hours of receiving the warning order. Company E performed the outlying site mission and Company H the mock embassy mission.¹⁹ By coincidence, the exercise mirrored closely the subsequent actions of the unit in Liberia.

Before the deployment, the staff studied a number of contingency areas, including Liberia. The MEU's intelligence officer, Major Stephen L. Sayko, explained: "Prior to the deployment we started to take a look at the map, and Africa kind of stood out at us." If a contingency arose that needed a maritime option, "the Med MEU would be the only game in town." The intelligence section took the standard contingency planning materials for West Africa, which included Liberia.²⁰

The 22d MEU's deployment began on 8 March 1990 when it sailed from Morehead City, North Carolina. As the next unit in the normal rotation to the Mediterranean, they steamed across the Atlantic and arrived at Naval Station, Rota, Spain, on 26 March. While at Rota, the staff received its first dispatch on Liberia, which reported an American citizen had died from a gunshot wound to the leg. After this initial message, the MEU staff began receiving other reports from the embassy

in Liberia, including information on the 29 March burning of the U.S. Embassy warehouse in Monrovia.

By 23 April, in Cannes, France, the MEU learned that the State Department had issued a travel advisory on Liberia. The advisory recommended that American citizens leave the country, and noted the start of a reduction of official personnel at the embassy. That same day, the Fleet Marine Officer at the U.S. Navy's European headquarters, Colonel Willis H. "Bill" Hansen, together with U.S. European Command representatives, briefed the MEU staff. Colonel Hansen had led a four-man European Command assessment team to Liberia earlier that month and had acquired an excellent understanding of the embassy's situation as well as possible evacuation sites.²¹ The firsthand assessment gave the MEU commander and his staff helpful planning information and access to recent pictures taken in Liberia. Colonel Hansen reviewed all possible force options available to European Command if an evacuation was required, but the staff focused on the one maritime option that included the MEU. With this new and updated information, Major Sayko's intelligence section began to develop detailed support plans in earnest.²² * Meanwhile, the Marines continued their scheduled training and exercises in the Mediterranean.

In the first week of May, the MEU participated in Dragon Hammer, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization exercise in Sardinia. After the exercise, the MEU sailed to San Rapheal, France, and off-loaded equipment and personnel on 16 May for training at nearby Camp de Canjuers. When the Mediterranean-based Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) anchored in Toulon on 17 May, the MEU split for training and liberty. While one half trained for 10 days at Camp de Canjuers, the other

* The planning included obtaining the embassy's Emergency Action Plan from U.S. European Command.



DVIC DN-ST-90-11531

Stationed off the coast of Liberia, Marines of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit practice body-search techniques on the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS Saipan (LHA 2) in preparation for Operation Sharp Edge.

half enjoyed liberty in Toulon. With messages from the American Embassy in Monrovia indicating a steadily worsening situation, Colonel Granville Amos wanted his Marines prepared to react quickly. He directed his staff and subordinate commanders at Camp de Canjuers to ready plans for a possible 12-hour return to the ships at any point in the training cycle. Realizing the seriousness of the deteriorating situation, Colonel Amos, a veteran of the evacuations of Phnom Penh and Saigon, as well as operations in Grenada and Beirut, wanted to be ready for any eventuality.²³

Early on the morning of 25 May, Colonel Amos officially learned about the possible contingency mission in Liberia. The alert order issued by the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the 22d MEU and Amphibious Squadron 4 (Phibron 4) to get under way for Liberia.²⁴ The ships sailed two days later after a quick loading of equipment and personnel back on board. As they steamed out of the Mediterranean, the ships received fuel and fresh supplies. The Marines received person-

nel augmentation.* On the way to Liberia, the MEU received European Command's Operation Order Sharp Edge while conducting mass casualty drills and evacuation operation reception rehearsals.²⁵ The orders directed the MEU to be prepared to protect and evacuate American citizens and other foreign nationals from Liberia.

Point Men in Monrovia

In preparation for the evacuation, the MEU sent a five-man forward command element to the embassy in Monrovia to assess the situation. Arriving on 31 May, the team's reception indicated that many of the embassy officials considered their presence premature. Gathering at their quarters on the day of their arrival, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen J. Labadie's team met with Colonel David Staley, USA, the chief of military mission in

* Personnel augmenting the joint task force included intelligence specialists, such as a four-man joint intelligence liaison element.

Monrovia. Colonel Staley instructed the team on its conduct, to whom the team could talk, what the members could wear, and where it could go. Essentially, the forward command element could talk to anyone, but if it needed to talk to any Armed Forces of Liberia personnel, the team had to first clear coordination with Colonel Staley. Directed to wear only civilian clothes, the team could travel freely unless going to some unusual place. In those cases, the team needed advance clearance for the visit from the chief of military mission. Speaking frankly, Staley stated he really did not know why the Marines had come, and said the embassy had a good handle on the situation. He further informed the team the embassy expected a coup and anticipated it would take two or three days. That would likely be followed by a great deal of killing and other acts of retribution for the excesses of the Doe government. Once that was over, Staley said the U.S. would recognize the new government and the embassy would go back to business as usual.* Colonel Staley did not anticipate any need for an evacuation because the embassy had already drawn down staff and dependents. He then expressed the hope that Lieutenant Colonel Labadie and his Marines would have a nice stay, however brief, and reaffirmed that he would support the team in any way he could.²⁶

Given the nature of the alarmist message traffic coming out of the embassy, the forward command element reacted with surprise. Major Glen Sachtleben put it plainly:

Of course we were shocked. We expected to land and fight our way to the Embassy and then saw that it wasn't that way. The checkpoints we went through were very quick, no problems at all. The soldiers we saw walking around all had weapons, but they were all lackadaisical looking. There was no feeling that this country was falling apart in our first impression.²⁷

* This line of thinking originated from past Liberian events. Samuel K. Doe's bloody but successful coup in Monrovia, 12 April 1980, ended quickly. The city also rapidly returned to business as usual after a failed coup attempt on 12 November 1985.

Their dismay at the low level of urgency deepened as the team met other embassy officials during the remainder of that first day. Most of the embassy staff, including the deputy in charge of mission, members of the defense attache office, and the chief of station appeared surprised to see them, unconvinced and unsure of why Marines were there. Only Larry Hartnett, the regional security officer, and Colonel Staley appreciated the Marines' presence and fully understood their mission. Major Sachtleben felt the attitude among the embassy staff was that of "this isn't going to happen guys."²⁸ The forward command element team members knew their tasks and wanted to get to work. The tasks included conducting liaison and assessing the overall situation, surveying helicopter landing zones and landing beaches, determining the number of evacuees, and estimating the level of hostilities likely to be encountered during an evacuation. Unfortunately, the prevailing opinion of the staff, that an evacuation was not necessary, led to a reluctance of certain key embassy personnel to support the Marines' effort. Personality conflicts among the embassy staff also led to certain members of the staff obstructing the team's efforts simply because of its association with another staff member.²⁹ All of this made the work of the team more difficult.³⁰

The forward command element met with the Marine security guard detachment, which was headed by Staff Sergeant Timothy Love. Team members noted that Guard Post One was located at the main entrance to the chancery. At the post, the Marine guard on duty monitored local communications and functioned as the net control station for one of the five radio nets at the embassy.^{31**} The posted Marine was the communication link for Lieutenant Colonel Labadie's team when they conducted reconnaissance forays. As the violence escalated, the Marine security guard detachment's quick relaying of messages

** For official Americans and government employees, these radio nets allowed the passing and receiving of messages to warn them of potential problems. In case of emergencies or dangers, most official and nonofficial U.S. citizens received notification or warnings by radio using a tiered contact system. Nonofficial (non-government employed U.S. citizens) Americans in Liberia maintained contact through a warden system with the missionary radio networks, or through commercial companies' communications with their Monrovia offices. Backup for nonofficial Americans was by telephone or short wave radio. "Liberia Emergency Planning Handbook," dtd 1990, Annex B (Sharp Edge HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).



DVIC SN-DT-90-11420

Officers of the 22d Marine Amphibious Unit gather in the Marine Expeditionary Unit commander's office on board the USS Saipan (LHA 2) for a briefing on the situation in and around Monrovia.

and reassuring assistance when called helped embassy staff and forward command element personnel in potentially life threatening situations. In addition to the Marine security guard detachment, the embassy's local guard force stood post outside the gate and inside the embassy compound. The embassy employed a very loyal contract guard force composed of Liberians hired by Wackenhut Corporation. Darrell M. Lowe, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, oversaw the 550 guards, who carried only nightsticks.³² This force manned more than 200 posts throughout the capital to protect official American citizens and property.^{33*} Stationed at all U.S. properties, the guards proved to be a source of local information to the Marines, passing on reports as to who controlled certain areas and what types of activities took place during the fighting.³⁴ As a testimony of their loyalty, throughout the crisis many of the guards

* In addition to the unarmed guards at the embassy, other unarmed guards manned posts at the Graystone compound, U.S. Information Service (USIS) building, USAID Library, USAID compound, Peace Corps compound, DoD military mission, American Cooperative School, official Americans' residences, and the navigation and communication site facilities.

remained on post and reported information even after the rebels had overrun the surrounding areas. Some guards were beaten and others were killed in the violence.

With the destroyer USS *Peterson* (DD 969) steaming toward Liberia, members of the forward command element were almost certain European Command would select the maritime evacuation option that included the Marines. Once the destroyer arrived, the MEU and ARG constituted the quickest response for the emergency and rendered the three other European Command force options irrelevant. Lieutenant Colonel Labadie believed the Marines on board Navy ships just offshore and over the horizon best suited the embassy's diplomatic intentions. Colonel Staley assured Lieutenant Colonel Labadie that the deputy chief of mission, Dennis C. Jett (in charge of the embassy in the absence of the ambassador), would not allow the U.S. Army to bring in troops and simply leave them at the airport, which could enflame an already delicate situation.³⁵

Lieutenant Colonel Labadie and Major Sachtleben found the State Department's approach extremely frustrating, often putting

them at odds with embassy officials. According to Major Sachtleben: “We think of things in terms of seconds, minutes, hours, and days, and then we roll in on top of the State Department who have a totally different philosophy. They think of things in terms of weeks, months, years, and decades. So here were these two different elements, the Department of Defense and the Department of State, kind of bucking up against each other. So it was extremely frustrating.”^{36*}

Despite the hindrances, members of the forward command element set out to collect information for a possible noncombatant evacuation operation. They began by surveying helicopter landing zones.** Traveling in civilian clothes, Lieutenant Colonel Labadie, Captain Mollahan, and Sergeant Widdifield visited every designated landing zone (LZ) in the area. The site surveys included the American Telecommunications Office, the Voice of America, the Barclay Training Center (AFL compound), and the American Cooperative School. The team gathered updated information on size, slopes, obstacles, directions of flight access and egress, surface materials, and dominant terrain of each landing zone. That information was then relayed to the MEU through messages and phototelesis.³⁷

The results of the survey excluded some landing zones from the list of evacuation sites. The presence of AFL soldiers at the Barclay Training Center and the extensive overhead wires supporting the antennas at Voice of America sites eliminated these landing zones from consideration. The survey also identified some new landing zones, such as the basketball court in the embassy compound. Named LZ Magic after the professional basketball player “Magic” Johnson, the basketball court became the primary helicopter landing zone for Operation Sharp Edge.³⁸

Because the evacuation could employ either helicopters or landing craft, Lieutenant Colonel

Labadie felt it prudent to survey possible landing beaches. Lieutenant Commander Robert Peterman and Major Sachtleben were assigned to this task. The two officers, dressed in civilian clothing and carrying concealed weapons, hiked to seven area beaches. Aware of the delicacy of the situation—traveling the countryside without visas and looking at beach landing sites for what could be construed as an evacuation or an invasion, depending on your point of view—both men acted as circumspect as possible. They looked at every designated landing beach and Peterman conducted a swimming survey in the surf zone at most of them. The two officers discovered hidden rocks, undertows, and plunging surf at every beach. The team especially concentrated on the beach next to the compound, known as Red Beach, conducting surf observations twice each day for several weeks. When the AFL put the beach under surveillance, the surf observations for Red Beach stopped. The team recommended Navy SEALs

“We think of things in terms of seconds, minutes, hours, and days, and then we roll in on top of the State Department who have a totally different philosophy. They think of things in terms of weeks, months, years, and decades. So here were these two different elements, the Department of Defense and the Department of State, kind of bucking up against each other. So it was extremely frustrating.”

— Major Glen Sachtleben

* Deputy Chief of Mission, Dennis C. Jett, expressed an embassy staff viewpoint of the forward command element after about a month ashore. Jett stated that “embassy relations with the military were beginning to fray” by July. Dennis C. Jett, “Evacuations During Civil War, Liberia 1990,” in *Embassies Under Siege: Personal Accounts by Diplomats on the Front Line*, Joseph G. Sullivan ed. (Washington: Brassey’s, 1995), p. 138.

** The forward command element brought with them a copy of Noncombatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) Intelligence Support Handbook (NISH) that contained imagery and data on key landing zones, landing beaches, routes, and locations in Liberia for a NEO.

conduct a comprehensive beach survey before using Red Beach as a landing site.³⁹

The chief of station, Jim McWilliams, opposed the idea of conducting further beach surveys. In their first meeting, McWilliams assured Lieutenant Colonel Labadie that special operations personnel from European Command already had assessed the beaches and approved them for evacuation. Lieutenant Colonel Labadie knew the beaches required a more detailed hydrographic survey, but McWilliams and the military attache did not agree. With Jett’s initial support, Lieutenant Colonel Labadie submitted the proposal up the



DVIC DN-ST-90-11412

LtCol Emerson N. Gardner, Jr., commanding officer of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261, delivers a pre-operation brief to his officers and pilots in the squadron ready room on board the USS Saipan (LHA 2).

chain-of-command.* Higher headquarters disapproved the request and the Marines made due with the results of the forward command element's limited surveys.⁴⁰

Work such as reinforcement of the embassy still required the team's attention. The forward command element planned for the reinforcement of the embassy, which included specific posts to defend and harden. The regional security officer closely cooperated with the team on its plan. To identify specific embassy evacuation responsibilities, the team worked with the consular section. The rush for visas as people tried to leave the country kept the consular office extremely busy. Despite the surge of people, the consular officer, Mrs. Penny McMurtry, coordinated with the for-

ward command element. Incrementally, the Marines gained the required information and completed the basic reinforcement plan by the time the ARG arrived.⁴¹

The team also worked with the embassy staff in planning a more detailed evacuation than what was in the embassy's emergency evacuation plan. This, too, proved difficult because almost all the embassy staff thought an evacuation was unnecessary. The staff believed its draw down arrangements to be sufficient. No one at the embassy actively obstructed the Marines' efforts, but many on the staff simply did not feel an evacuation plan constituted an urgent priority or merited their immediate attention. Despite this indifference, the team completed a detailed evacuation plan.⁴²

Circling at Mamba Station

Once off the coast of Liberia, the ARG waited in the overpowering heat and humidity at a position officially designated Mamba Station. For the

* Deputy Chief of Mission Dennis C. Jett later stated, "since the surveys would have been conducted within site of the Executive Mansion and the army's main base, an armed confrontation was entirely possible." The forward command element eliminated this particular beach early in the planning for the same reason.



DVIC DN-ST-90-11421

Marines of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit gather in the hanger bay of the USS Saipan (LHA 2) for a briefing on the situation in Monrovia. Also outlined were the rules of engagement governing their mission once ashore.

next two months, while the ships steamed slowly in a circular ocean track, the embarked Marines kept busy. Virtually every day they rehearsed various evacuation plans with all units and considered all location options. One particularly sensitive plan concerned the extraction of President Doe if he decided to leave Liberia. The MEU practiced the contingency based on two different options. The first involved a helicopter evacuation from the embassy, while the second was a direct flight from Spriggs-Payne Airport by fixed-wing aircraft. In both options, once evacuated, Doe would fly in one of the MEU's Lockheed KC-130 Hercules aircraft to a country that would provide him sanctuary.⁴³ A maritime special purpose force (MSPF), composed of the MEU's Marine force reconnaissance detachment and the ARG's SEAL

detachment, repeatedly primed for these options, conducting day and night full dress rehearsals. Acting as the covering force for the MSPF, Company H also practiced its role in the preparations. The plan remained on stand-by and in early July the group's alert times shortened temporarily to a one-hour alert to execute.* During June, most of the cabinet officials fled their posts, with the exception of one or two ministers, while President Doe doggedly maintained he could reverse the growing victories of the rebels in Liberia.

In anticipation of the evacuation, the designated commander of the joint task force ordered the

* Although the vacillating President Doe eventually refused a U.S. offer for safe passage, the Marines remained ready.



DVIC DN-ST-90-11540

Marines prepare to fire automatic M249 light machine guns, known as Squad Automatic Weapons or SAWs, during weapons training held on the stern of the USS Saipan (LHA 2). Fielded in the 1980s, the SAW filled the void created by the retirement of the Browning Automatic Rifle.

establishment of a forward logistics site at Lungi airfield in Freetown, Sierra Leone.* The MEU based its KC-130 aircraft detachment from Marine Aerial Refueling Squadron 252 (VMGR-252) at Lungi. Two aircraft arrived on 5 June with the mission of providing aerial refueling and supporting the logistical air bridge between Rota or Dakar and Freetown. Marine and Navy helicopters also

* Among the Commander of Fleet Air Operations Mediterranean's (ComFAirMed) responsibilities was positioning and operating the forward logistics site, supported by a CH-53E helicopter detachment from the Navy helicopter squadron, HC-4. The site periodically received additional logistic help from Navy Lockheed C-130 Hercules and Douglas C-9 Skytrain aircraft. (JO2 William Davis, "HC-4 Continues Operation Sharp Edge Support," *Signature* (Naval Air Station, Sigonella), 26Oct90, p. 1; HMM-261 ComdC 1 Jul-31Dec90, p. 3; HC-4 ComdHist 1990, encl., p. 3).

began conducting short-range logistics flights from the ARG ships to the airfield. Later, the Freetown forward logistics site would serve as a transit point for evacuees arriving by helicopter or ship.⁴⁴

At the beginning of June 1990, the Monrovia embassy staff maintained its daily routine, including shopping in town. The staff appeared to reflect the city's "wait and see" outlook. Since all the fighting between armed factions had taken place in the countryside, Monrovia appeared deceptively calm. Gradually, however, the fighting outside Monrovia started to disrupt the calm facade. Rebels overran the city's satellite earth station and international telephone service ceased.⁴⁵ The voluntary draw down turned mandatory after the Department of State granted the embassy's request for an authorized departure status. (Authorized departure status implied there was imminent danger to State Department employees or their dependents.) Sunday charter flights continued to depart with American citizens from their temporary homes in Monrovia, most leaving with just suitcases. Organized convoys of Americans departed from the embassy to the airport in town, Spriggs-Payne, with the regional security officer and his local guards providing security. Approximately 1,450 Americans remained in Liberia, down from 10,480 five months earlier.⁴⁶

By 7 June, Taylor's NPFL forces controlled Herbel and the international airport areas. The advancing fighters established roadblocks and camps to the east of Monrovia. Denied access to the international airport, many foreigners trying to leave crowded onto the remaining commercial flights at Spriggs-Payne Airport. On 10 June, the U.S. Embassy extricated 360 more Americans using chartered Air Guinea Boeing 737 aircraft.⁴⁷

Colonel Amos decided to send three members of the MEU's radio battalion detachment to Monrovia by boat to augment the forward command element. Embassy officials turned down a helicopter insertion feeling it would frighten Liberians or draw attention to the embassy and send the wrong message about American intentions.⁴⁸ A helicopter-announced arrival might have confused many Liberians involved in the conflict, as word had gotten out to local newspapers that a Marine task force waited offshore. Liberians, especially those who came from the interior where most of the NPFL troops originated, may never have seen or heard a helicopter before. For them, such a sight might incite fear, curiosity, or both. Many Liberians wanted the

Marines to come ashore primarily as a peace-keeping force to stop the fighting and relieve the suffering. Some factions wanted the Marines to support President Doe, and others wanted the Marines to remove President Doe and allow the NPFL to take over the government.⁴⁹

On 12 June, Colonel Staley, Thomas J. White, the embassy's economics officer, and the four members of the forward command element went out to the *Saipan*. They made the trip to the ship, located below the horizon off the coast of Monrovia, in a 21-foot sailboat belonging to the station chief. The group conferred with Colonel Amos and his staff on board the *Saipan* for about two hours. They conveyed Jett's thoughts on why the embassy did not feel a sense of urgency as expressed in earlier and recent messages. Colonel Staley, White, and members of the forward command element explained that rather than conduct an immediate evacuation, as the MEU had anticipated, the Marines needed to wait. The quintessential force, the MEU could hold at Mamba Station until the situation ashore reached a crisis point.⁵⁰ Following the briefings, the forward command element, White, and Colonel Staley, accompanied by three previously selected members of the radio battalion detachment, headed back to Monrovia.

Once at the embassy, the radio battalion detachment, headed by Sergeant Kenneth M. Sharp, set up their intercept equipment. With an abundance of unsecured chatter on Motorola-type handheld radios, the detachment listened to the radio nets of the various fighting factions in and around Monrovia.⁵¹ The Liberian's lack of operational security made the collection effort easy. Most government and rebel forces spoke Liberian English, although they spoke in dialects when they wanted a secure conversation. The rebels incorrectly believed the Americans could not translate these dialects. During the entire MEU operation in Liberia, the detachment provided the *Saipan* useful daily reports for analysis.⁵²

Frantic Negotiations Fizzle

As the rebels gained ground and moved into the Monrovia area, Doe's AFL forces responded to the increased pressure by engaging in random shootings, beheadings, mutilations, and other atrocities. In the Clay-Ashland District of central Monrovia, an AFL squad executed 14 Americo-Liberians. On 14 June, a group of more than 1,000

Liberians conducted a peace march in Monrovia and stopped in front of the embassy. The Marine security guard detachment and extra State Department security personnel deployed throughout the chancery and compound in defensive and observation posts. Fortunately, the demonstration led by church officials did not turn violent. The embassy, meanwhile, on 16 and 17 June, flew out 210 more American citizens by chartered aircraft.⁵³

With the situation in Monrovia worsening rapidly, respected Liberians frantically made an attempt at peace negotiations. The Liberian Council of Churches, encouraged by outside organizations such as the Organization of African Unity and the Economic Community of West African States, organized and chaired the meeting. Negotiations sponsored by the Interfaith Mediation Committee of the Liberian Council of Churches met in Sierra Leone but failed to reach an agreement. Apparently, Taylor's delegation



DVIC DN-ST-90-11402

Marines are led to one of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261's Boeing CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters on board the USS Saipan (LHA 2) during a rehearsal for Operation Sharp Edge.

believed their forces were about to achieve a military victory and saw no need for further discussion and arrogantly walked out of the talks.

The fighting by 23 June had advanced to the outskirts of Monrovia. Johnson's INPFL rebels attacked Taylor's NPFL rebels from positions just 13 miles northeast of the capital city in Bensonville and Careysburg. A large crowd demonstrated for peace on 26 June, calling for a ceasefire and demanding the Liberian president leave the county. About 500 Liberians broke off from the main body demonstrating downtown, marched to the gates of the American Embassy, and chanted for the U.S. to intervene while diplomatic security personnel and the embassy's Marine security guards took up defensive positions. But the demonstration remained nonviolent.⁵⁴ The next day in central Monrovia, AFL soldiers fired on another peace demonstration killing and wounding many in the crowd near the U.S. General Services Organization compound. During the shooting and ensuing panic surrounding the march, stray rounds penetrated the chancery and ricocheted off some of the taller buildings in the compound. One round hit the bulletproof glass in front of Corporal James Landherr's standing post one.⁵⁵

The following afternoon, the NPFL, many in bizarre costumes such as carnival masks, wigs, football helmets, women's dresses, shower caps, and even toilet seats, attacked Liberian army positions at Roberts International Airport.* On 28 June 1990, the new American Ambassador, Peter De Vos, arrived in Monrovia. By this time the Sunday charter flights had reduced the official embassy staff to approximately 40 essential personnel.⁵⁶ As if to welcome him, the INPFL seized the hydroelectric plant at the Mount Coffee Dam the next day and cut off electricity to the city.

Early July found Taylor's rebels firmly in control of most of the Liberian countryside, including the cities of Buchanan and Gbarnga. The offensive temporarily halted to replenish supplies. A few days later, Prince Johnson's INPFL rebels clashed again with Taylor's NPFL fighters outside Monrovia. Formerly allies, now opposing forces, both meant to destroy the other and Doe.⁵⁷

Fighting on 8 July moved to the city's suburbs with heavy fighting occurring at the Spriggs-Payne

Airport and the Sinkor area just west of the U.S. military mission quarters. The city's population feared the rebels and the daily random searches, arson, looting, shooting, executions, and rapes committed by government soldiers. Rebel advances resulted in rice and gasoline shortages and cut off water in the city. Embassy water and fuel tank trucks ran a daily gauntlet of hostile checkpoints and the effort became progressively more difficult as the month continued.⁵⁸ For safety, the Ambassador moved all official U.S. personnel inside the compound or to the Sam and E building across the street from the embassy.

The resumption on 5 July of peace talks, now mediated by the Economic Community of West African States, offered only a glimmer of hope for the citizens of Liberia. During talks in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the NPFL demanded that Doe step down before the fighting could stop. The talks broke off the latter part of July due to the lack of agreement and progress among the warring parties.

Fighting continued among all three factions throughout the month of July with the army attacking the NPFL near Paynesville and Camp Schiefflin. Prince Johnson's and Charles Taylor's fighters fought near Bensonville on 9 July. Another violent clash between the INPFL and NPFL near Careysburg and Paynesville took place as Johnson's INPFL moved south from the Bong Mine area toward Monrovia. As a result, the U.S. Omega station went off the air and the station operators subsequently abandoned the site. With Omega off the air, ships and aircraft could no longer receive navigation fixes from that station.** Thousands of uprooted and homeless Liberians swamped the Omega and Voice of America sites seeking protection. Jett, in a letter to his wife, stated: "There are displaced people anywhere they feel safe: 500 came over the wall of the American Community School: 6000 at the Voice of America: 2000 at Omega."⁵⁹

In Monrovia on 12 July, Taylor's fighters invaded the Nigerian Embassy. To prevent the massacre of their citizens, Ghana and Nigeria sent ships to aid in the evacuation. Guinean soldiers crossed the Guinea border into Nimba county to evacuate and protect that country's citizens. The American Embassy continued to schedule chartered flights

* Many fighters wore these items as symbols of good luck or good "juju." Skulls of victims often decorated checkpoints or vehicles to show the fighter's ruthlessness and to frighten potential enemies.

** Although the Liberian Omega station was off the air, the Amphibious Ready Group's ships and aircraft received accurate Omega fixes from other stations located around the world.

for Americans wanting to leave. Throughout the country, foreigners and Liberians fled from the fighting.

On 14 July, the embassy requested approximately 20 additional Marines from the Marine Security Guard Battalion.⁶⁰ The June convoy escorts, peace marches and groups of refugees at the embassy had taxed the two-dozen diplomatic security personnel brought in to assist the regional security officer.⁶¹ By mid-July, the increased violence prompted Larry Hartnett, the regional security officer, to direct his diplomatic security personnel to man posts along the perimeter and conduct night patrols inside the compound. On the roofs of buildings near Gate One and Gate Two, diplomatic security personnel set up defensive positions and placed American flags over the protective cinder blocks.⁶² Many Liberians and some Americans mistook the armed diplomatic security personnel for Marines.⁶³ The request for additional Marine security guard personnel highlighted the embassy's need for extra security. The forward command element had advised De Vos to bring in a rifle company from off-shore and objected to the request, but the Ambassador believed Marine security guard augmentation under Hartnett offered the best solution.**

Marines Poised for Insertion

Marines offshore were placed on two-hour alert to reinforce the embassy on 20 July after President Doe accused Colonel Staley, the chief of the military mission, of directing rebel attacks against the government. President Doe's accusation sparked a new wave of anti-American sentiment within the disillusioned, disintegrating army. Declaring him *persona non grata*, Doe ordered Colonel Staley to leave the country.⁶⁴ Colonel

* Primarily there to provide personal protection service, the diplomatic security special security team focused its attention on security for ambassadors and key embassy officials. The team performed other security missions such as escorting Americans leaving the country under authorized departure status as well as escorting the water and fuel trucks attempting to make daily runs in town.

** On 24 July, 20 Marines left Quantico, arriving on board JTF shipping on 28 July. By the time they arrived, the 22d MEU could not bring them in by helicopter because of fighting around the embassy. The augmentation remained on board ship the entire time the MEU operated ashore. When analyzing what size force was needed to replace the 22d MEU, European Command staff considered a Marine Security Guard augmentation option.



DVIC DN-ST-90-11544

A plane director signals to the pilot of a McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harrier II aircraft taxiing on the flight deck of the USS Saipan (LHA 2) during Operation Sharp Edge rehearsals. The six-plane Harrier detachment was part of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit's composite helicopter squadron.

Staley departed the next day and flew to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where he provided up-to-date information to an awaiting MEU debriefing team.

Late in the morning on 20 July, Prince Johnson's forces crossed the St. Paul River bridges to Bushrod Island, increasing the pressure on Monrovia. Traveling in a protected convoy, Ambassador De Vos visited President Doe the following day. Approximately 25 AFL soldiers stopped De Vos' vehicle at gunpoint and threatened the Ambassador. After a heated argument that almost escalated into gunfire between De Vos' security and the AFL, the troops allowed the vehicle to proceed to the Executive Mansion.⁶⁵ Two days later, while the MEU rehearsed the Doe extraction and the reinforcement of the embassy, President Doe, holed up in his mansion, accused the United States of again siding with the rebel factions and saying a U.S. submarine had shelled the Executive Mansion. The Ambassador denied

the preposterous submarine attack accusation but Doe had again fueled his soldiers' anti-American sentiment.

Prince Johnson's INPFL took control of Bushrod Island and brought the war into downtown Monrovia. Crossing over the Mesurado River bridges from the north on 23 July, INPFL rebels entered Crown Hill, the central business district and the capital by-pass areas. Fierce firefights took place between INPFL and government soldiers as droves of civilians fled Monrovia by ship, vehicle, and foot. With more than 32,000 displaced and homeless Liberians concentrated in

Roving bands of government soldiers entered an International Red Cross-protected compound and the John F. Kennedy Hospital. They captured, beat, and killed those of Gio and Mano tribal backgrounds who did not escape.

the city, large groups wandered about looking for shelter in local churches, schools, international nongovernmental organization compounds, and abandoned U.S. Embassy properties.⁶⁶ In a humanitarian gesture, the embassy opened Graystone compound to the frightened and homeless Liberians, who quickly filled the area.

Highlighting the deteriorating situation, on 24 July gunfire one block from the embassy caused approximately 30 to 50 people to rush the gates and scale the outside wall.⁶⁷ Some of the panicked crowd gained access to the courtyard in front of the administrative annex. Alerted Marine security guards moved to defensive positions in the interior of the chancery.* The crowd desperately "crawled through every conceivable crack and opening in that embassy wall and were inside within seconds because the embassy simply was not ready to defend itself," Major Sachtleben recalled.⁶⁸ A diplomatic security guard fired five shots into the air to disperse the crowd and to control the situation inside the compound.⁶⁹ The incident ended without bloodshed with diplomatic and contract security guards finally rounding up the intruders.

* The Marine security guard detachment responded to 16 separate internal defense alerts and five emergency recalls for demonstrations between 25 May and 2 October 1990.

While rebel forces infiltrated further into the city, government soldiers looted the central business district supermarkets and the U.S. Information Service building. Roving bands of government soldiers entered an International Red Cross-protected compound and the John F. Kennedy Hospital. They captured, beat, and killed those of Gio and Mano tribal backgrounds who did not escape.** President Doe further inflamed the situation with more absurd assertions, accusing the United States of sending black Marines to assist the rebel forces. These false assertions fueled yet another wave of anti-American sentiment in the AFL, who thought the U.S. favored the rebels. With no celebrating, the AFL spent Liberian Independence Day, 26 July, conducting house-to-house searches for rebels and rebel sympathizers, and black "Marines." A Ghanaian ship from Freetown, Sierra Leone, arrived to evacuate 1,500 of its citizens. Thousands more refugees now crowded into various abandoned American properties in an effort to escape the AFL.

Fighting between the AFL and the INPFL intensified on 27 July as the INPFL moved deeper into downtown Monrovia from its base on Bushrod Island. The fighting included exchanges of rocket barrages as well as small arms fire. On the other side of town, AFL soldiers efficiently looted the Peace Corps compound, bringing in trucks to take the property away.⁷⁰ Government soldiers at the Barclay Training Center conducted beachfront executions of opponents, dumping many bodies into the ocean.*** The *Agence France Presse* reported rebel forces within sight of the presidential palace on 29 July.⁷¹ Just five blocks from the U.S. Agency for International Development headquarters in Monrovia, government soldiers burst into St. Peter's Lutheran Church on 29 July and reportedly killed 200 and wounded 70 or 80 other civilians who sought shelter.^{72****} In one of the worst atrocities of the war, AFL soldiers fired into a crowd until they ran out of ammunition; the troops then killed the survivors with machetes.⁷³

** Government soldiers rounded up some 250 medical students and executed them at the end of Spriggs-Payne Airport runway. Visiting U.S. Coast Guardsmen and British and Nigerian reporters viewed their skeletal remains in February 1991.

*** Many Marine helicopter crews routinely reported seeing bodies floating offshore in August.

**** United Nations officials in October 1990 confirmed the number killed. Returning U.N. officials investigated the massacre and directed the interment of approximately 600 bodies in the church.

In desperation, a large group fleeing from the killings broke through the perimeter fence of the U.S. Agency for International Development compound looking for safety. The embassy could not confirm the exact numbers killed because of the heavy fighting taking place in the city.

The U.S. controlled Graystone compound now housed more than 5,000 refugees. Because of the geography of the city, the compound received a great deal of overhead small arms fire. The street fighting intensified with all three factions exchanging automatic weapons fire and rocket-propelled grenade barrages. Corpses littered the streets. INPFL fighters maneuvered by foot and vehicles down United Nations Drive directly in front of the embassy late in the morning on 30 July.⁷⁴ A short time later, the sound of heavy machine guns and small arms fire echoed in the compound and numerous stray rounds passed overhead. Elements of the Liberian army engaged INPFL forces just below the Marine House down the street from the embassy and killed approximately a dozen men. This type of sporadic but vicious fighting continued intermittently throughout the city during the latter part of July.⁷⁵

By 2 August, the city was indeed a battleground, with violent clashes frequently occurring between the two rebel groups near the American Embassy. On the afternoon of 3 August, De Vos directed all mission personnel temporarily to the chancery's ground floor after several artillery rounds landed near the embassy.⁷⁶ Corporal Phillip L. McClaine, a member of the Marine security guard detachment, recalled the rounds impacting just south of the compound near the British Embassy.⁷⁷ The intensity of the fighting halted all flights out of the city's Spriggs-Payne Airport and many of the AFL units broke apart as the rebels advanced.

The INPLF leader, Prince Johnson, held an interview with the press on 4 August at his field headquarters on Bushrod Island, boasting of his intention to force a U.S. intervention by taking American or British citizens hostage. Located in INPFL controlled territory, the Americans at the American Telecommunications Office receiver site would make excellent potential hostages. Johnson emphatically stated he wanted to "create an international incident so that foreign troops can intervene."⁷⁸ Reinforcing his ruthlessness, a burst from his AK-47 assault rifle resulted in the summary execution of a Liberian International Red Cross worker handcuffed to a French relief worker. Described as an "alcoholic psychopath," Prince

Johnson appeared that day to live up to the description.⁷⁹

Embassy officials had no choice but to react to Johnson's publicized threats against American citizens. At 1400 on 4 August, Ambassador De Vos called Lieutenant Colonel Labadie and Major Sachtleben into his office to discuss an evacuation of the embassy. The ambassador proposed three courses of action: one diplomatic and two military. After discussions with the country team and appropriate officials, the State Department decided not to negotiate directly with Johnson. Instead, they looked to two military options—evacuating and closing down the embassy or drawing down the staff while simultaneously reinforcing security.⁸⁰

The Call to Evacuate

Lieutenant Colonel Labadie notified Colonel Amos at 1820 that Ambassador De Vos had recommended through State Department channels that Marines would assist in an evacuation of American citizens from Monrovia.⁸¹ Colonel Amos then alerted BLT 2/4 of the imminent possibility of an evacuation. All subordinate units of the MEU began preparations, in particular the company commanders of Companies H and E. At approximately 2035, the Ambassador used a forward command element radio to personally call Colonel Amos to notify him of the necessity of an evacuation.^{82*} De Vos specifically informed the MEU commander and the JTF commander that the State Department had approved a draw down and reinforcement of the embassy beginning the morning of 5 August. De Vos and Colonel Amos decided that landing hour would be at 0900.⁸³

After the Ambassador's call, the MEU commander ordered his staff to prepare for a total evacuation option plus a draw down and reinforcement option.** Approval came for the second option that involved the evacuation and closing of

* According to LtCol Emerson N. Gardner, Jr., the Ambassador called directly to the ship using the forward command element satellite communications only two times. The first occurred the day before, when he talked with the MEU's executive officer, LtCol Labadie. LtCol Emerson N. Gardner intvw, 24Oct90 (OralHistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.). 22d MEU Landing Force Operations Center (LFOC) Watch Log, 5Jun-21Aug90, 3Aug90 (Sharp Edge HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

** With President George H. Bush's approval, the national command authority directed the geographic combatant commander, U.S. Commander in Chief, Europe, to implement his execute order.



DVIC DN-ST-90-10898

Alerted by Col Granville R. Amos, 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit's commander, of the imminent possibility of an evacuation, Marines of Battalion Landing Team 2/4 gather on the hanger deck of the USS Saipan (LHA 2) to draw ammunition and load their magazines.

the American Telecommunications Office receiver and transmitter sites, the draw down of the embassy staff, the insertion of a reinforced rifle company into the embassy, and the provisioning of logistic support to the embassy. At 2100, the MEU and ARG staffs convened a crisis action team meeting to review and refine the existing plans. The meeting on board the *Saipan* went into the early morning hours.

As the crisis action team met, the commanding officer of BLT 2/4, Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Pugh, tasked his company commanders to prepare for the two branch plans of the approved reinforcement and draw down option. Later that night, the Marines adjusted their orders when the embassy decided not to use the American Cooperative School as an evacuation site. Embassy officials eliminated the site because they were unsure if any significant numbers would show up due to the short notice. Catching up with MEU actions at 0043 the next morning, European Command issued the execute order. The landing force operations center finally received the message at 0223.⁸⁴ The Navy and Marine staffs

adjourned at 0300 on 5 August and agreed to meet again at 0500 for a final confirmation brief.

The final plan called for securing each evacuation site with a reinforced platoon and the establishment of a hasty defense. Led by its company commander, Captain Gary R. Oles, the force for the receiver site consisted mainly of the 3d Platoon, Company E. Company E's 2d Platoon would secure the transmitter site. Each rifle platoon received reinforcements, including a machine gun squad, two shoulder-launched multipurpose assault weapon teams, and a firepower control team from the MEU's air naval gunfire liaison company detachment.* Each 45-man platoon included a small command element. In addition to the transport helicopters supporting the company at both sites, the plan called for an escort consisting of two Bell AH-1T Cobra attack helicopters. The attack helicopters would remain over the

* The 83mm man-portable, shoulder-launched multipurpose assault weapon is used to destroy bunkers or other fortifications. With the dual mode rocket model, it also can destroy armored vehicles.

ocean in a ready and on-call status. Oles anticipated 18 evacuees at the receiver site and three evacuees at the transmitter site.⁸⁵

The MEU's composite squadron, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Emerson N. Gardner, Jr., would take Company E Marines to the receiver site. The plan required three Boeing CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters filled with Marines and two empty CH-46Es to provide transportation for the evacuees. The Marines would disembark first and about two minutes later two empty helicopters would land and embark the evacuees, if ready. A third helicopter of Marines would land if required. Until called for, all helicopters not used in the initial landing were to remain a few miles away over the water. Surrounded by an encampment of approximately 5,000 to 6,000 displaced Liberians, the Marines and Americans at the site believed it was important to evacuate quickly. No one knew how the refugees, or the INPFL in the area, would respond to the helicopters or the presence of Marines. Fortunately, the excellent communica-

tions with the potential evacuees at the receiver site allowed the Marines to pass on their requirements to expedite the evacuation.

A similar plan for the transmitter site involved three transport helicopters; two loaded with Marines and one empty for evacuees. Two Cobra attack helicopters would escort the transport helicopters and remain over the water within sight of the Marines in the landing zone. In the first wave, two helicopters, a Boeing CH-46E Sea Knight and Sikorsky CH-53E Sea Stallion loaded with Marines, would land, unload passengers, and then take off immediately. Establishing hasty security, the Marines would concurrently conduct a quick screening of the evacuees. If the evacuees were ready, the Marines would quickly call in the third empty helicopter, a CH-46, to pick up the evacuees. Again the plan called for all helicopters not used in the initial landings to remain over the water until called. Although the company executive officer, First Lieutenant Richard E. "Ted" Anders, did not have direct communications with



DVIC DN-ST-90-11339

Standing by on the USS Saipan (LHA 2), Marines make final adjustments prior to boarding Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261 helicopters for the short flight to Monrovia where they would augment security and assist in the evacuation of American and foreign nationals.



DVIC DN-ST-90-10896

Marines board a CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter on the flight deck of the USS Saipan (LHA 2). Two AH-1W Bell Cobra attack helicopters and fully armed AV-8B Harrier jets were on stand-by should the Marines encounter resistance.

the site, the Marines had more time to accomplish the task since there were no nearby refugees and only three evacuees at the site.

As the outlying evacuations occurred, two CH-53 helicopters would fly to the embassy to deliver Company H Marines, who would provide security and assist in the draw down. Two Bell UH-1N Huey helicopters would provide escort. Lieutenant Colonel Pugh intended to establish all positions within the compound since the MEU did not have authority to move outside the embassy.⁸⁶ Colonel Amos wanted the insertions to take place simultaneously so the fighting factions would not have time to react.

Because of limited launch space on board the *Saipan*, the CH-53s were to lift off first and orbit above the ship as other helicopter waves formed. The Sea Stallion helicopters held more fuel and could remain airborne longer than the CH-46s. With the CH-53s off, the flight deck crews planned to launch the CH-46 helicopters, along with the four escort gunships. Upon clearing the *Saipan* of all helicopter assault waves, the launch

plan called for the spotting of fully-armed AV-8B Harrier jets on the flight deck that could be airborne at a moment's notice. The *Saipan's* helicopter direction center staff and squadron staff plan reflected detailed planning and critical timing since it entailed the launching of 22 helicopters from two ships.⁸⁷

At 0500 on 5 August 1990, MEU officers attended a confirmation brief held in the wardroom. By 0600, the companies had staged in the hangar bay of the *Saipan*, ready to draw ammunition and load onto the helicopters. Once the confirmation brief ended, the bands on the ammunition crates were cut and the company gunnery sergeants supervised the issue of ammunition to their Marines. At 0730, the helicopter launch cycle began and the Marines loaded on to the CH-53s in 15 minutes. The heavy lift helicopters carried Company H Marines slated for the embassy and some of the Company E Marines for the transmitter site evacuation. Loaded and ready at 0800, the CH-53 helicopters launched from the deck of the *Saipan*.⁸⁸

Chapter 3

Evacuation Operations

A Rainy D-Day

Although the weathermen on board the USS *Saipan* had predicted clear skies for 5 August, Mother Nature had other ideas and greeted the pilots of HMM-261 with a rainy, cloudy day. Lieutenant Colonel Emerson N. Gardner, Jr., squadron commander of the “Raging Bulls” of HMM-261, planned to have the helicopters rendezvous in the appropriate groupings for the scheduled landings as soon as all the aircraft lifted off the ship, but the low ceiling and rain prevented the squadron helicopters from flying

through the clouds in specific groups. Instead, Gardner directed the helicopters to take radar vectors through the storm system and meet up in landing groups on the other side. As Gardner recalled: “We did that, and it worked out real well.”⁸⁹

During the flight through the clouds, the helicopter direction center vectored the helicopters to prevent mid-air collisions and then helped sort out the helicopters once they arrived on the other side of the rain clouds. Once in the clear, the helicopters grouped together according to landing sites. The direction center’s effort to keep the two



Photo courtesy of BGen Granville R. Amos

At Landing Zone Magic, Marines of Company H quickly exit a Sikorsky CH-53E Sea Stallion and fan out to cover Gate One and Gate Two and establish several blocking positions just outside the American Embassy compound.

CH-53s together caused some initial confusion, but that was quickly sorted out and the helicopters and Marines they carried sped on their way toward the Liberian coast. The passage through the storm caused a six-minute delay, which did not prove to be critical.⁹⁰

Led by Lieutenant Colonel Gardner, the helicopter group of five CH-46s and two AH-1Ts arrived by 0906 at the American Telecommunications Office receiver site north of Monrovia.⁹¹ Three of the CH-46s carried Company E Marines to provide site security for the evacuation while the two empty CH-46s carried 18 sets of life vests and protective helmets for the evac-

uees. The Marines got their first glimpse of the site, a huge cleared area covering about two square miles, as the helicopters carefully navigated the approach around support cables and other antenna field hazards. The extensive receiver site encompassed three different landing zones. Within the site, a small perimeter fence enclosed a cluster of cement communications and support buildings. Outside the fence line surrounding the site were thousands of refugees living in a large makeshift shantytown of plastic sheeting and palm frond lean-tos.⁹² The designated landing zone, named Dove, was located inside the communications site fence line and stood out like an

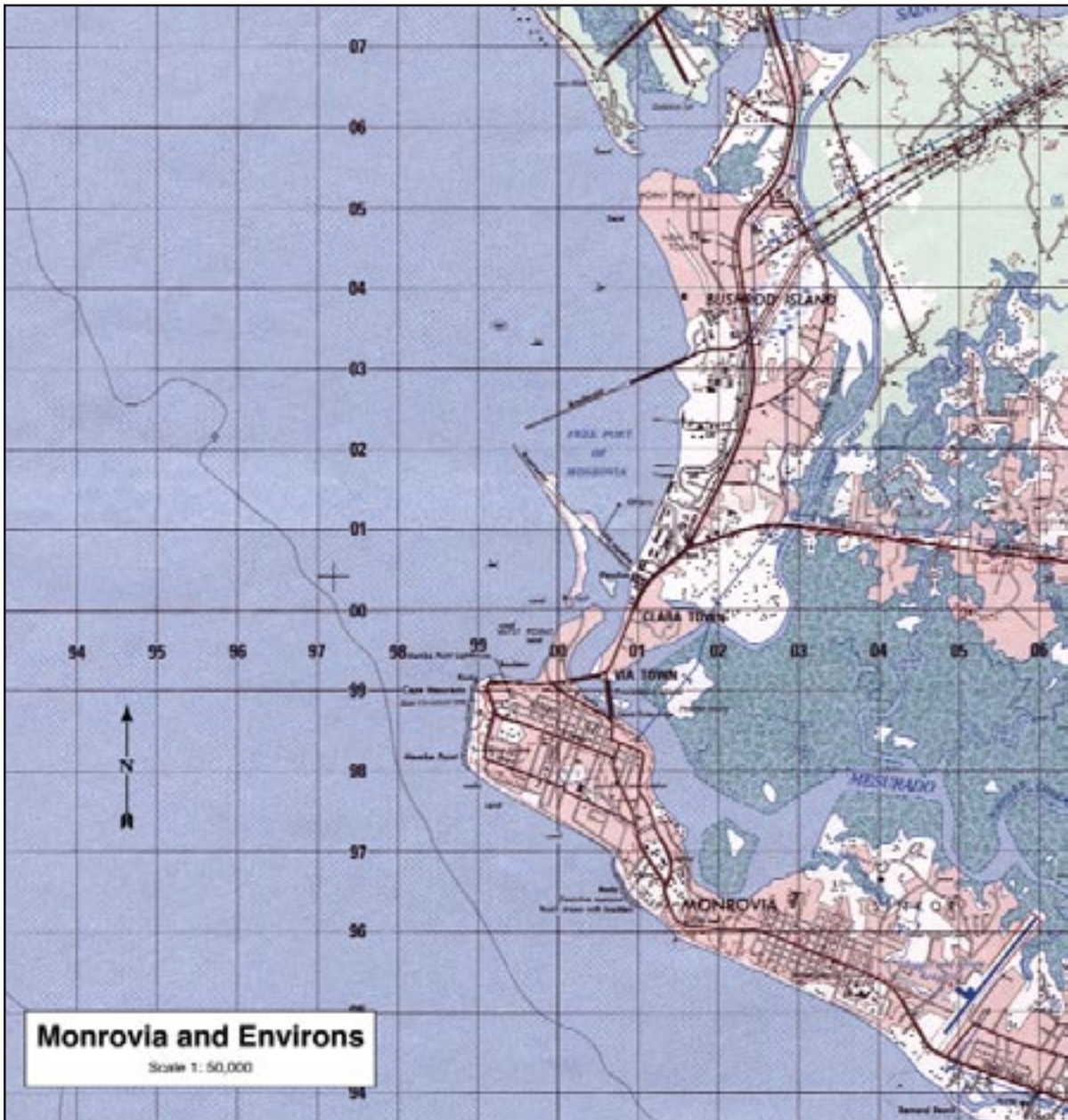




Photo courtesy of BGen Granville R. Amos

A Marine rifle squad positioned atop the American Embassy's Gate Two overlooking United Nations Drive, the main thoroughfare running the full length of the Embassy compound.

island among the sea of refugees. The landing zone provided enough room for two helicopters to land in front of the two-story main building.

Two helicopters landed and Marines quickly unloaded and secured the interior perimeter fence. The helicopters took off again as soon as the last Marine was out. Hundreds of refugees pressed up to the perimeter fence line to see what all the activity was about. Some Liberians attempted to climb the fence and were warned: "Stay back! We are U.S. Marines!"⁹³ While the two empty CH-46s landed, the fifth loaded helicopter remained airborne with the Cobras to keep watch on the situation on the ground. Jack Quin, part of the embassy's communications support unit at the receiver site, already had divided his personnel into two nine-man groups, or "sticks," for loading onto helicopters. The Marine company commander, Captain Gary R. Oles, and Quin quickly verified the identities of every civilian on the evacuation list while the evacuation control team, headed by Staff Sergeant Effard T. Henson, searched and screened the evacuees for weapons using

hand held metal detectors. The evacuees, their equipment, and four escorting Marines lifted off in two helicopters at 0913. With their task completed, the Marines pulled back and boarded the helicopters at 0919.⁹⁴ As the last helicopter left the zone, Captain Oles observed two men with shotguns running toward the gate of the compound. Fortunately, no shots were fired and the Marines departed without incident.⁹⁵ The rapid evacuation of the American Telecommunications Office receiver site completed one task of the MEU's mission.

Seven minutes after the receiver site evacuation, the evacuation of the American Telecommunications Office transmitter site southeast of Monrovia began. As the helicopter-borne force approached Landing Zone Condor, Company E Marines observed about 20 armed men within 400 meters of the landing zone along the main road to the south. A few of the men began moving toward the transmitter site along an entrance road. Once on the ground, the Marines fanned out and established a hasty perimeter.

Second Lieutenant Michael S. Bodkins' platoon spotted seven NPFL rebels moving along the entrance road leading into the site. The site's unarmed local security guard and two Marines waved and yelled at the approaching rebels, ordering them to stop and turn around. The rebels complied and made no further attempt to interfere with the evacuation operation. (The Marines later learned a radio intercept had overheard the rebels being told to "blast" any U.S. helicopters.) While a Cobra gunship orbited nearby, the evacuation control team identified the three evacuees by their passports, scanned them with metal detector wands, and embarked them on the waiting CH-53. About 11 minutes after landing, the 2d Platoon collapsed the landing zone security and extracted at 0936.

The evacuees from the receiver site arrived at 0935 on the *Saipan*. Minutes later, the ship received radio confirmation of the evacuation of the transmitter site. By 0950, all evacuees and Marines from both sites were on board. With their mission complete, the Marines of Company E stood down and turned in their ammunition.⁹⁶

Into the Embassy

While evacuations were underway at the telecommunications sites, the MEU began its main effort at the American Embassy in Monrovia with Marines from Company H, BLT 2/4, setting down at Landing Zone Magic at 0910 to reinforce the security and draw down the embassy staff.⁹⁷ The first wave involved two CH-53 with each succeeding wave consisting of two CH-46 aircraft. When the first wave landed, Lieutenant Commander Robert Peterman of the forward command element notified the 3d Platoon commander, First Lieutenant Gary S. Johnston, about a potential threat outside Gate Three. Johnston ordered one squad to immediately cover Gates One and Two, while he and another squad followed Peterman through Gate Three to establish a blocking position near the corner of United Nations Drive and Sekou Toure Avenue. The sounds of sporadic gunfire echoed in the compound as they moved out. Captain Daniel S. Rogers, commanding officer of Company H, met Major Glen Sachtleben in the landing zone. Rogers received a quick update on the possible threat outside Gate Three. He immediately responded by ordering First Sergeant Luther T. Rymer to inform incoming platoons of the situation upon their arrival in the landing zone.⁹⁸

While establishing security, Marines climbing a ladder to a defensive position on the building at Gate One spotted a cluster of INPLF fighters coming down the road about 50 meters to the north. Someone quickly parked a nearby armored Suburban sideways and the fire team took up positions behind it. A newly arrived squad from 3d Platoon swiftly moved outside Gate One and turned north toward the threat on United Nations Drive. Captain Rogers, his radio operator, and Major Sachtleben followed the squad. The rebels paused when Major Sachtleben warned them by bullhorn to turn around. The Marine squad began to leapfrog toward the fighters with fire teams moving from one covered position to the next. A French journalist that had been walking with the INPFL group joined the Marines as they tactically moved up the street. The rebels, observing the advancing Marines, backed away slowly up United Nations Drive and moved into a house at the junction of Benson Street, a main thoroughfare. Major Sachtleben then gave another bullhorn warning, telling the INPFL troops to leave the building; a few obeyed. To eliminate the threat the fighters posed to the Marines, the squad leader, Sergeant Todd Alverson, ordered his men to clear the building. Fire teams lead by Corporal Dennis Tuzinoski and Corporal Sean Collins methodically cleared each room, forcing the remaining fighters to escape out the rear of the building. With the house clear, the squad moved east down Benson Street and set up positions covering the road. The squad's position looked straight down Benson Street, the left flank anchored at the Masonic Temple grounds and the right anchored by a deep ditch next to the wall of the Graystone compound.⁹⁹

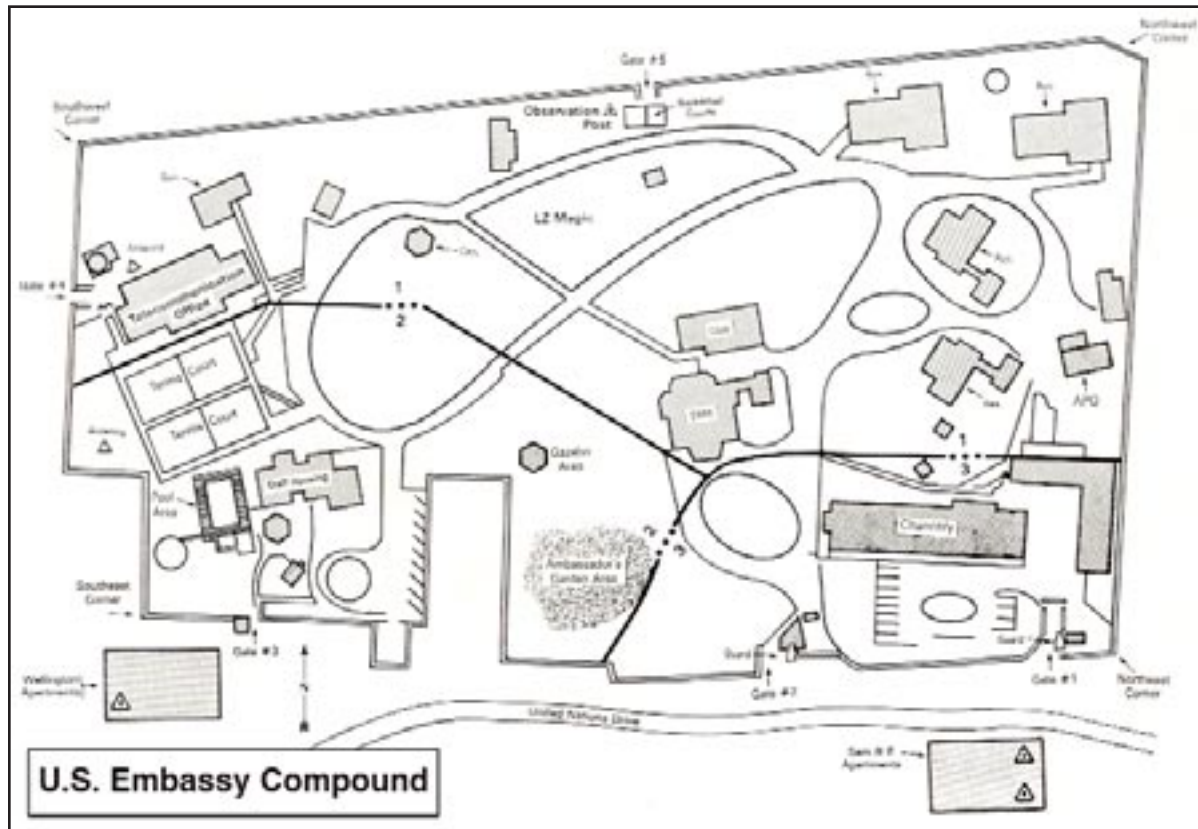
By this time, 2d Platoon had arrived and relieved the 3d Platoon squad at the corner of Sekou Toure Avenue and United Nations Drive and Gate Three.^{100*} The 3d Platoon squad then moved up United Nations Drive to establish a third blocking position just north of the United Nations Drive and Benson Street intersection. This northern-most blocking position had its right flank anchored on the rock quarry and the left flank extended up the slope of Mamba Point Lighthouse Hill, giving the squad a clear view to

* Sekou Toure Avenue was named after the despotic ruler of Guinea who led the fight for independence from France in 1956 and ruled the country from independence to 1984. He claimed to be a descendent of the legendary Malinke chief, Samori Toure, a Guinean guerrilla leader who fought the French in the 19th century.

monitor the movement of vehicles approaching from the north.

In the embassy compound, 1st Platoon set up as the company's reserve, manning observation

The small size of the makeshift landing zone meant helicopters could only come in one at a time. By 1100, 237 Marines equipped with fast attack vehicles occupied defensive positions.



posts on the west side of the embassy at Gates Four and Five. The platoon established a temporary blocking position outside the northwest corner of the compound to cover a secondary landing zone near the quarry north of the embassy. Weapons Platoon set up 60mm mortar positions in an open area just south of the embassy's Landing Zone Magic. Roving patrols initiated by 1st Platoon covered the interior of the compound and 2d Platoon occupied defensive positions at Gate Three. The Marines established observation posts in the compound and across the street in the Wellington apartment building and the Sam and E building. The observation posts outside the embassy gave them better visibility and provided an early warning position if any armed personnel approached the embassy.*

Each of the six fast attack vehicles (modified and reinforced jeeps) had a .50-caliber machine gun or 40mm Mark 19 grenade launcher mounted to them. The Marines positioned one vehicle at each of the northern blocking positions and two more vehicles at the southern blocking position. Constituting the reserve, the remaining two vehicles were directly behind Gate Two. The Marines then strung concertina wire across the road at all three blocking positions. Heavy machine guns, medium machine guns, antitank weapons, and a rifle squad at each roadblock protected the critical approaches to the embassy.¹⁰¹

Marines from Company H established three blocking positions outside the embassy, while inside the compound they began the hasty evacuation of waiting noncombatants. The infantrymen, working with the embassy staff, evacuated 38 employees by helicopter at 1045.¹⁰²

Company H Marines moved to man gate security positions and observation posts, and a reaction force was positioned in the compound. The unit manned additional observation posts across

* According to the monthly status report from the regional security officer, Department of State diplomatic security personnel began manning the observation posts in the apartment buildings outside the embassy on 6 August. (AmEmbassy Monrovia msg to SecState WashDC, 171109ZSep90)



Photo courtesy of BGen Granville R. Amos

Two modified and reinforced jeeps, each mounting a .50-caliber machine gun, were used by the Marines to buttress the blocking positions protecting vital approaches to the American Embassy.

the street in the Sam and E apartments near Gate One and at the Wellington apartments near Gate Three. Upon learning that his Marines manned blocking positions outside the embassy, the BLT commander, Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Pugh, provided reinforcements ashore with the 81mm Mortar Platoon from Weapons Company and the Light Armor Infantry Platoon, constituting an additional reserve.*

The MEU received word later that afternoon it did not have authority to put blocking positions outside the embassy. European Command directed the Marines located at the roadblocks to pull back into the embassy and remain on American-controlled property.¹⁰³ Concerned about exposure and another Beirut-type bombing, Vice Admiral James D. Williams and Colonel Granville Amos came ashore to assess the situation. They walked the ground and supported the employment of blocking positions.

* Capt Daniel S. Rogers and LtCol Robert L. Pugh decided later that additional reinforcements were not needed and withdrew these Marines the next day.

By 1730, the MEU had ordered Company H back into the compound.¹⁰⁴ Abandoning the blocking positions, the Marines assumed security positions within the embassy grounds that afforded less observation, narrower fields of fire, and less reaction time. A couple of nearby buildings dominating the embassy and the Graystone compound caused serious concern for the company commander. Small arms or rocket-propelled grenade fire could easily be directed at the embassy from the buildings near the compound.¹⁰⁵

But evacuations continued in earnest, and by 1535 the control center evacuated 14 more employees.¹⁰⁶ By the end of the day, the 22d MEU had accomplished two goals: the evacuation of 74 noncombatants and the establishment of defensive positions at the embassy.** President George H. Bush's press secretary, Marlin Fitzwater, explained the Marines' actions at a morning press conference: "The purpose of this operation is to

** The MEU flew 51 of the evacuees to Freetown, Sierra Leone.

safeguard lives, to draw down the number of Americans at the embassy staff and to provide security for those who remain....The Marines' presence does not indicate or constitute any intention on the part of the U.S. Government to intervene militarily in the Liberian conflict. We call on all parties in that conflict to ensure the safety of American citizens."¹⁰⁷

in camouflage uniforms and helmets and armed with assault rifles and a few machine guns and started slowly advancing north up United Nations Drive toward the embassy. The Marines warned the AFL troops not to continue and advised them to turn around. Readying their weapons and CS riot control agents (tear gas), the Americans repeated they allowed no armed foot traffic in



Photo courtesy of BGen Granville R. Amos

Col Granville R. Amos (foreground), the Marine expeditionary unit commander, and LtCol Thomas W. Parker, his operations officer, walked the ground visiting each security position inside and outside of the American Embassy compound. Col Amos came away supporting the initial tactical decision establishing blocking positions outside the embassy.

In the days that followed, the MEU continued to provide security and evacuate Americans and foreign nationals and worked on defensive positions within the compound. They also strung telephone lines to ensure redundancy in communications. The company used Motorola or MX-300 hand-held radios, tactical radios, and field telephones to link each position with the company, BLT, and MEU headquarters.

On 7 August, quick action by Company H prevented a potential firefight in front of the embassy. An AFL patrol of 30 to 60 men appeared

front of the embassy. The Liberian soldiers paused and passed the warning to their commander, a Major Tilley, who could be distinguished by a "Rambo-like" headband. Clearly, if his men continued up the road they risked a confrontation with the Marines.¹⁰⁸ Using a bullhorn, the Marines told the fighters they would employ tear gas if the soldiers continued. To his credit, Major Tilley ordered his soldiers to turn around. Less than a minute later on the same United Nations Drive, a small INPFL patrol appeared north of the embassy and started moving south. Immediately after the



Photo courtesy of BGen Granville R. Amos

Marines and American Embassy personnel ready a group of noncombatants for evacuation. From the assembly point near the embassy they would be taken to the landing zone and loaded onto a helicopter for the flight to Freeport, Sierra Leone.

Liberian soldiers had disappeared, the Marines warned the INPFL patrol to turn around. As with the first group, the INPFL patrol left.

Concerned about this incident, the Ambassador conferred with the MEU staff. He made it clear he did not want the Marines to threaten or use tear gas. The published rules of engagement did allow for the escalation of force, except under certain circumstances.* Although the embassy had a copy of European Command's rules of engagement, the Ambassador's initial interpretation was more restrictive. The Marines felt bullhorn warnings were effective only when accompanied with directly threatening action. First Lieutenant James D. Chaney, 2d Platoon commander, was frustrated that riot control agents, while authorized by European Command, were "no longer a viable

option."¹⁰⁹ To the Marines on post it seemed the MEU's nonlethal option consisted only of verbal warnings. The initial word passed to Company H was clarified in a subsequent meeting between the Ambassador and ground commanders, which resolved the misunderstanding.¹¹⁰ Daily meetings between Captain Rogers, the BLT executive officer, the Ambassador, and security officer were held to review the posture and make necessary adjustments.

To prevent similar incidents from happening, the Marines posted signs outside the embassy and distributed written standardized verbal warnings. The MEU's nonlethal inventory consisted of a set of proportional, escalating force; first verbal warnings, then CS gas, and finally warning shots. Ambassador De Vos agreed to allow the use of CS gas or smoke grenades if the new verbal warnings did not work. While fighters from both factions continued to travel by foot on United Nations Drive, the embassy also directed the Marines to allow vehicles to use the road if they showed no hostile intent and did not stop. If the vehicle did stop, the Marines told the vehicle occupants to move on. The Ambassador accepted the risk of a firefight directly outside the embassy by allowing the factions to use the road next to the embassy.

* BLT 2/4 handed out copies of the rules of engagement to its Marines. The handout stated: "In the event that the host nation is unable or unwilling to provide the necessary protection to U.S. forces, the military on-scene commander will employ the following to overcome the threat: 1. Warning to demonstrators. 2. Show of force, including the use of riot control formations. 3. Use of riot control agents. 4. Warning shots fired over the heads of hostile elements. 5. Other reasonable use of force necessary under the circumstances and proportional to the threat." (BLT 2/4 ROE, Aug90 [Sharp Edge HistColl, MCHC])

That evening, Marines watched the trajectories of 122mm rockets launched from the Capitol Hill area and heard the impacts in the Crown Hill, Vaitown, and West Point sectors. The AFL attempted to stop the advance of Johnson's fighters in the

fire.* The committee also established an Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group to deploy to Liberia.** Observers from the Organization of African Unity approved the establishment of a multinational



Photo: DVIC DN-ST-91-00814

Two Marines man a security post on the roof of the American Embassy. The Marine on the right is armed with an M16 rifle, while the other Marine is leaning on an M136 AT4 light anti-armor weapon covered with a poncho.

center of the city. Prince Johnson seized a number of foreign hostages, including an American, 24 hours after the initial Marine helicopter landings. He released 28 foreign hostages by 8 August, unharmed, due to pressure from the U.S. and other embassies and after receiving information about a soon to be deployed peacekeeping force.¹¹¹

West African Peacekeepers Arrive

One day after the Marines came ashore, the Economic Community of West African States met to establish the peacekeeping force. At the summit in Banjul, Gambia, the Economic Community of West African States standing mediation committee held its first ever session and called on all parties in Liberia to observe an immediate cease-

* The standing mediation committee's purpose in case of a dispute or conflict by member states included initiating mediation procedures. Conflicts occurring within states when action was sustained or supported from the outside allowed for the provision of a collective defense to be invoked according to Articles 17 and 18 of the Economic Community of West African States security protocol. The Liberian situation prompted the establishment of the committee.

** The decision to send the peacekeeping force was made by the members of the standing mediation committee, not the full membership of the Economic Community of West African States. Objections by the Bukinaban head of state noted the committee had no "competence to interfere in member states internal conflicts, but only in conflict breaking out between member states," (Weller, *Regional Peacekeeping*, doc. no. 59, p. 89.) Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Togo made up the committee's members. Nigeria led the effort to send the peacekeeping force. The decision played on the existing rivalries between African English speaking and French speaking countries in the region.

West African force, knowing it signified the first real attempt of a regional organization to assume a peacekeeping role. The two-day summit's final communiqué embodied a strong humanitarian rationale.¹¹² It called for a ceasefire, surrendering of all arms and ammunition, the secession of arms imports, release of all prisoners and cooperation with the monitoring group.¹¹³ President Bush's announcement on the same day that the United States would send troops to Saudi Arabia to halt Iraqi aggression in Kuwait overshadowed the historic 7 August decision. The West African coalition consisted of 2,500 troops from Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. The commander stated military force would not be used to contain the situation in Monrovia.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, in Monrovia, the Marines observed 122mm rockets impacting indiscriminately in the Mamba Point and Bushrod Island areas nightly. Foreign embassies urgently requested American assistance to evacuate their citizens and officials

due to the escalating level of chaos. On 8 and 9 August, the Marines evacuated the British and French ambassadors and other foreign diplomatic personnel. By the end of the day on 11 August, 199 persons had been evacuated and flown first to the *Saipan* and then on to Lungi Airport at Freetown.

A large part of the MEU's mission included providing parts and supplies needed for the embassy. To that end, KC-130 detachment flights delivered critical parts and supplies to Freetown. Helicopter sorties from the MEU then picked up the supplies and shuttled them from Freetown to the ship and then to Monrovia. The economic counselor officer, Thomas J. White, acknowledged the importance of the supply runs, commenting, "we were getting real low and might have run out of everything."¹¹⁵ All outside commercial flights had ceased, which left the embassy entirely dependent on the MEU. According to the commanding officer of MEU Service Support Group 22 (MSSG-



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Marines unload boxes of medical supplies and foodstuffs. With the cancellation of all outside commercial aircraft flights, the American Embassy was entirely dependent on 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit for resupply.



Photo courtesy of the authors

Marines of Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group 22 supervise the pumping of diesel fuel from 500-gallon bladders into a truck for distribution. More than 35,000 gallons of fuel was delivered by helicopter to the American Embassy compound during Operation Sharp Edge.

22), Lieutenant Colonel James W. Head: “Colonel Amos wanted to get the embassy to a level of self-sufficiency. Food, fuel, and water were the three big areas they needed support.”¹¹⁶ For more than a week, Marine working parties labored in the heat and humidity to unload 30 pallets of food and medical supplies.¹¹⁷ The MEU Marines amassed more than 30 days of supplies at the embassy.

Lieutenant Colonel Head’s Marines spent much of their time providing fuel for the embassy. When the embassy’s underground fuel tanks dropped to a dangerously low level, the Marines kept the generators running by flying CH-53s in a round robin pick up and fuel delivery service using the 500-gallon bladders of helicopter expeditionary refueling systems. Marines of the MSSG delivered and pumped more than 35,000 gallons of fuel while in Liberia.

The MEU also flew in a reverse osmosis water purification unit to draw water from the nearby ocean. It could produce 600 gallons of potable

water per minute from a raw water source. However, the cliffs below the embassy and the rough surf prevented MSSG-22 engineers from getting the unit to function despite repeated attempts. The MEU solved the problem by flying a 400-gallon water trailer (commonly called a water buffalo or water bull) in daily to support the embassy. The MEU also consolidated all five-gallon water cans onto pallets and flew them in when needed.

The three factions continued to clash throughout the city while Marines provided security and support for the embassy.* Marines heard the disjointed sounds of automatic weapons in Mamba Point, the whomp of mortars, and rocket explosions from the battle raging near the Executive

* No major ground firefights took place at night. Many Liberian fighters believed in “juju,” and that harmful events could happen to them if they fought at night. Juju is magic attributed to or associated with jujus, which are fetishes, charms, or amulets of West African peoples.



Photo courtesy of BGen Granville R. Amos

LtCol Thomas W. Parker (left center), 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit operations officer, meets with one of rebel leader Charles Taylor's officers at the port of Buchanan, south of Monrovia, to facilitate the evacuation of foreign diplomatic staff.

Mansion and Spriggs-Payne Airport. Marine observation posts also sighted black smoke from burning buildings and explosions. Charles Taylor's NPFL fighters sacked many of the embassies, including those of Guinea and Nigeria. The Marines also received reports the NPFL fired on and scattered the occupants of the German and Swedish Embassies. The NPFL took charge of a large number of these European diplomatic personnel, essentially holding them hostage. On 11 August, Taylor announced he would grant safe passage out of Monrovia to the European diplomats. He then took them over land to Buchanan, stopping along the way at the refugee filled, non-functioning Omega site.

Evacuation from Buchanan

Responding to Taylor's movement of foreign diplomatic staff to Buchanan, European Command issued an execute order to the JTF to conduct an evacuation from Buchanan.¹¹⁸ On 12 August, the *Saipan* and USS *Peterson* traveled

down the coast of Liberia to Buchanan. On board, the MEU staff developed a plan for the evacuation that called for both a boat and a helicopter option. The plan, as approved in the confirmation brief, called for Lieutenant Commander Peterman and a Navy SEAL security force to come ashore by landing craft. Once in the port of Buchanan, Peterman's mission included establishing contact with the NPFL and finding a landing zone for the evacuation. Aerial photography revealed a number of potential landing zones, but intelligence reports deemed these unacceptable due to possible mining.¹¹⁹ Once a landing zone had been identified, a helicopter would fly in with the commander of noncombatant evacuation operations, Lieutenant Warren T. Parker, and a team of Marines. The evacuation would begin upon agreement with the NPFL.

At 0630 on 13 August, with the blazing sun already dominating the eastern morning sky, Commodore Stanley D. Gastar, the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) commander, made radio contact with the NPFL in Buchanan. In calm seas,

Lieutenant Commander Peterman and the accompanying SEALs departed from the *Saipan* on board a LCM-8 landing craft (known to Marines as a Mike boat) and moved toward Buchanan's general cargo quay. Docking at 0825, Peterman met with members of the NPFL.¹²⁰ After confirming a suitable landing zone, Peterman called in the helicopter carrying Lieutenant Colonel Thomas W. Parker, the 22d MEU's operations officer. The embassy's consular officer and two other State Department representatives accompanied the Marines to assist in the sensitive negotiations. The helicopter also carried Parker's team, which consisted of a security detachment, a radio operator, the battalion air officer, the air, naval gunfire liaison company detachment assistant officer in charge, two photographers, and the MEU's flight surgeon. The flight surgeon accompanied the team because one of the evacuees, the Spanish Ambassador to Liberia, had a heart condition.¹²¹

The Marines did not arrive with a display of overwhelming force because they did not want the highly sensitive NPFL fighters to get the impression they posed a threat or wanted to

invade. Even so, the NPFL appeared offended by the weapons the Marines carried, which implied the NPFL could not be trusted to protect the citizens that were to be evacuated. The NPFL leaders made it clear they thought Marines posed a danger to NPFL soldiers. Illustrative of the level of suspicion, some of the fighters closely followed Lieutenant Colonel Parker everywhere he went. Parker ignored the intrusive followers.

Lieutenant Colonel Parker and NPFL representatives discussed the precise manner of evacuation in a beach house compound in Buchanan, one of several such compounds owned by the American Mining Company the NPFL had occupied. To reduce tension, Parker gave the NPFL delegation, led by a "General Major," some cigarettes as he talked. According to Lieutenant Colonel Parker: "After some negotiation about who, what, when, and where, we reached a general agreement about how we would conduct the evacuation. They had [the] people. I couldn't see where they were, but they had them staged off. I asked them to bring them to me 15 at a time to the LZ and I would only fly one helicopter into



Photo courtesy of BGen Granville R. Amos

Evacuees from the German Embassy carry their belongings to a waiting helicopter on the beach at Buchanan. After being given protective helmets and life jackets, a group of 15 boarded the CH-46E helicopters for the 10-minute flight to the USS Saipan (LHA 2).

the LZ at a time so as not to present a confusing picture to these people."¹²²

Having reached an agreement, Parker suggested to Colonel Amos that the number of Marines on the ground in Buchanan be reduced despite the presence of several hundred NPFL troops, all armed with Communist bloc weapons. With Amos' approval, Parker sent the security detachment back. With the detachment's departure, the only personnel left were Lieutenant Colonel Parker, Lieutenant Commander Peterman, the battalion air officer, the air, naval gunfire liaison officer, the radio operator, the photographers, and the flight surgeon. Once both sides were satisfied with the situation, NPFL escorts began moving the foreign diplomats and their families toward the evacuation landing zone.

The NPFL brought 96 evacuees, in groups of 15 and surrounded by 30 to 40 armed troops, to the landing zone. Once in the landing zone, the Ma-

rines swept the evacuees with a metal detector wand and searched their baggage for contraband. A few dignitaries, including the Spanish Ambassador, the Swiss Charge' de'Affairs, and the Papal Nuncio received no inspection. After being given protective helmets and life jackets, each group of evacuees boarded a CH-46E helicopter and lifted off for the *Saipan*, a 10-minute flight. The helicopter flights ferried out one at a time, taking all but three of the evacuees, who left by LCM-8 and arrived on board the *Saipan* at about 1400 that afternoon, thus concluding the evacuation.

Scared, tired, and glad to see the Marines, many of the evacuees expressed their relief the ordeal had ended. The diplomats and Americans experienced a harrowing and exhausting time in the hands of the ruthless and highly volatile fighters. They never knew from one moment to the next what the NPFL troops might decide to do. As



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A squad of Marines from Company H, Battalion Landing Team 2/4, boards a CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter on the grounds of the American Embassy, beginning of the process of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit's relief.



Photo courtesy of BGen Granville R. Amos

Wearing a protective helmet and life jacket, a young boy clutches a box of his possessions on the flight to safety. During its stay in Liberia, the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit evacuated more than 3,200 American citizens, foreign nationals, and Liberian citizens.

Lieutenant Colonel Parker put it: "They [the NPFL] would not hesitate to shoot somebody. They would not have hesitated, under the right circumstances, to shoot those diplomats and take a chance on blaming it on somebody else."¹²³

While the Buchanan evacuation was taking place, the Marines at the embassy in Monrovia evacuated 12 people. That same day, the MEU reduced the size of the security force in the embassy compound to a reinforced rifle platoon. When the INPFL learned of the cooperation between the NPFL and the Marines in the Buchanan evacuation, they issued a variety of threats against the United States, although none were carried out.¹²⁴

Rotation of Marine Forces

On 14 August, Company E, which had conducted the evacuations of the two American

Telecommunications Office sites nine days earlier, relieved Company H from security duties at the embassy. Despite the heavy fighting around Monrovia, the size of the security force ashore remained at about 90 to reduce the chance of Marine casualties from frequent stray rounds. Company E assumed security duties by manning three main posts: Gate One, Gate Two, and the roof of the American Telecommunications Office building. The Marines then began a routine of patrolling the compound, manning observation posts and defensive positions, and maintaining a small reaction force. The MEU actually established guard orders for all posts.¹²⁵ While the embassy was still well protected, Company E could call for reinforcements and firepower from the ships if the need arose.

On 15 August, another 12 individuals were evacuated, including the Italian Ambassador to Liberia, and Marines monitored a peaceful

demonstration of 500 Liberians outside the embassy under INPFL guard.¹²⁶ The next day, Marines processed 359 people, mainly Indian nationals, the largest group evacuated to that point.¹²⁷ One woman gave birth to a baby after reaching the safety of the *Saipan*.

While the Marines involved themselves with local security and evacuations, fighting continued in the city. A mortar round hit the Korean Embassy while Taylor's NPFL again attempted to seize the nearby Spriggs-Payne Airport. Fighting closed the German and Italian Embassies and stranded the Ghanaian Ambassador in his embassy. In the midst of the fighting, the government's AFL forces shot an American Baptist missionary in the legs and captured him. He later died and the AFL allowed embassy personnel to recover his body from the Executive Mansion in Monrovia, where the besieged President Doe remained holed up, guarded by AFL troops.¹²⁸

The MEU received assistance on 17 August from an unexpected source when the amphibious readiness group welcomed the USS *Barnstable County* (LST 1197) to Mamba Station. On board were Marines of a two-platoon detachment from Company D, 2d Combat Engineer Battalion, 2d Marine Division, who received orders to divert from their course home to assist the MEU in Liberia. Serving as part of the West Africa Training Cruise 90 and commanded by First Lieutenant Joseph F. Augustine, III, they officially joined the Liberian evacuation effort.¹²⁹

On 17 August, an additional 88 people left from Landing Zone Magic. The evacuees told Marines that AFL members were actively seeking out Americans. The evacuees also related horrific stories of AFL soldiers rampaging in the Sinkor and Congo Town areas.¹³⁰ On 18 August, the evacuation control center and consular personnel processed 754 people, making that day's evacuation the busiest day the MEU had experienced.^{131*} The MEU intelligence section used interrogator translators who spoke Arabic and French to assist evacuation control center Marines in communicating with the Lebanese nationals, who made up the majority of the evacuees. Sadly, the body of the Baptist missionary shot two days earlier by AFL troops went out that day with the evacuees. As the rush to evacuate continued, the MEU flew

109 more third-country nationals to JTF shipping.¹³²

Normally, after some additional processing and a two-hour flight from shipping, the evacuees arrived at Freetown. Later, the larger groups of refugees were transported to Freetown by ship. By mid-August, the Queen Elizabeth quay in the port of Freetown and Lungi Airport bustled with activity. Commercial jets, Marine and Navy helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, and Nigerian Lockheed C-130s delivering West African peacekeepers shared the airport runway. The West African monitoring group picked Freetown as the staging area for its soldiers heading to Liberia. The troops waited in assembly areas, cooked, listened to radios, and lounged at the port as additional forces arrived by plane and ship. Five ships from the West African countries anchored at the Queen Elizabeth quay after passing the ARG on their way to Freetown. These included Nigeria's NNS *Ambe* and Ghana's MV *Tano River* troop transports, jammed full with trucks, supplies, and ammunition destined for Monrovia.¹³³

Turnover and Departure

As the West African ships sailed toward Freetown, Mediterranean-based ARG 3-90 sailed toward the West African coast to relieve ARG 2-90. On 20 August, the 22d MEU welcomed its relief to Mamba Station by evacuating eight civilians to the 26th MEU's ships. The 22d MEU conducted a detailed briefing for the 26th MEU on board the *Saipan*. The next day, the 26th MEU officially relieved the 22d MEU in a blue-water turnover off the shore of Liberia. The 21 August turnover at the embassy went smoothly with Company E, BLT 2/4 relieved of its duties by Captain James K. Shannon's Company K, BLT 3/8. The 22d MEU and ARG 2-90 left Liberian waters after evacuating 1,648 civilians: 132 American citizens and 1,516 foreign nationals.¹³⁴

As Colonel Amos left the embassy, he bid goodbye to Ambassador De Vos. Lieutenant Colonel Pugh, the BLT 2/4 commander, said: "The performance of the troops, especially the small unit leaders, was truly magnificent. It was a good plan and the extraction and reinforcement were executed flawlessly."¹³⁵ One evacuee, before she carried her baby on board a waiting helicopter, summed it up: "Thank God for the United States and the Marines. They're always there to help when people are helpless."¹³⁶

* The 18 August flight manifest, 22d MEU Manifest, August 18 Flights, Drawdown Evacuation 1990 (Sharp Edge HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), however, listed 802 evacuees.

Chapter 4

Operation Sharp Edge

Deployment of the 26th MEU

As Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) 3-90, the third group deployed in 1990, and the 26th MEU sailed toward the West African coast to relieve ARG 2-90 and the 22d MEU, ships loaded with West African peacekeepers also sailed toward Freetown, Sierra Leone. The Marines of the arriving MEU and the soldiers of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group would soon encounter one another in Monrovia, Liberia.

Departing on 7 August, Marines of 26th MEU left Morehead City, North Carolina, to relieve the 22d MEU. A large crowd of journalists and television cameramen met the Marines that morning as they arrived at the port to embark on board their ships. The recent invasion of Kuwait created national interest in any deployment with journalists asking where the Marines and sailors of 26th MEU were going. Many of the Marines did not know themselves if their unit's mission would change or remain focused on Liberia. Adding to the Marines' uncertainty, President George H. Bush had announced that morning he intended to send troops to Saudi Arabia. While America's attention was focused on Saudi Arabia, Colonel William C. Fite III, commanding officer of the 26th MEU, concentrated on his unit's mission to Liberia, which included providing security to the embassy and conducting noncombatant evacuations and limited humanitarian relief operations in benign or hostile conditions.

Dispatching the 26th MEU to Liberia posed operational concerns. Sending it to the West African coast left the Mediterranean without an amphibious ready group. General John R. Galvin, USA, Command in Chief, Europe, Lieutenant General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic, and Admiral Powell F. Carter, Jr., Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, questioned the ability of the ready group and

MEU to respond quickly to other crises while involved in Liberia. The start of American involvement in the Gulf War raised the possibility of unrest spreading to the southern Mediterranean coast. If the ARG and MEU remained floating off Liberia, the U.S. European Command would not have an equivalent force available for contingencies in the Mediterranean. The Sixth Fleet's amphibious force could not redeploy rapidly to the Mediterranean. According to the European Command Joint Historian: "On 14 August 1990, an interagency meeting hosted by the Department of State on the Liberia crisis concluded that the withdrawal of the Marines from Liberia should take place. The participants in the Washington, D.C. meeting could not agree as to when."^{*}

Three things appeared to point to the mission ending soon: the build-up of Operation Desert Shield forces; the economic embargo of Iraq; and the threat of terrorism in the Mediterranean. At the operational level, the continued presence of the Marines in Liberia seemed unlikely given President Doe's refusal to leave, the fact that most of the Americans had been evacuated, and the impending deployment of West Africa peacekeepers. The commander of the Sixth Fleet, Admiral James D. Williams, thought the remaining operations in Liberia would be short-lived. As Colonel Fite recalled: "They just decided that the bulk of the work had been done, and the threat would be so reduced they could afford to get some presence back in the Mediterranean or possibly move forces on to the Persian Gulf and still handle the problem down in Liberia."¹³⁷ Consequently, the Atlantic Fleet and European Command considered splitting the ready group and embarked expeditionary unit to deal with both the Mediterranean and Liberia.

^{*} EuCom JHO, *The Politics of NEO: Sharp Edge*, undated. (Chapter Two, EUCOM JHO NEO manuscript, Sharp Edge files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).



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Marines of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit wait on board the USS Whidbey Island (LSD 41) to be transferred to other ships off the coast of Liberia, during cross-decking operations to reconfigure the amphibious ready group for the upcoming mission ashore.

Colonel Fite expressed reservations in a plan that would break up a well-trained team and employ subcomponents that did not normally conduct independent operations. Considering the serious developments in Southwest Asia, he did not know if the 26th MEU would join the assembling forces in Saudi Arabia. Fite viewed conditions in Liberia as dangerously volatile and was unsure whether the Marines left at the embassy in Monrovia could deal with a worst-case scenario, a deliberate attack. Each of the three warring factions in the Liberian civil war had proved to be erratic and unreliable when it came to keeping agreements. With each faction's strength estimated at approximately 1,000 combatants, no matter how incompetent the factions appeared, Fite considered any sustained attack by the fighters to be very dangerous.¹³⁸

Colonel Fite wanted the remaining Marines not only to be able to defend themselves and the embassy, but to do so while carrying out a non-combatant evacuation against a hostile force. The

embassy guards needed quick reaction forces with firepower. As Colonel Fite commented: "I was reasonably sure that with the whole MEU there, that we could come in there whether they [Liberian factional fighters] liked it or not, either into the compound or on the little beach beside the embassy and conduct an evacuation."¹³⁹

In the end, European Command's security concerns for the Mediterranean littoral and the desires of Admiral Williams, the Sixth Fleet commander, outweighed the reservations expressed by Colonel Fite. European Command decided to split ARG 3-90, which was composed of Amphibious Squadron 2 (Phibron 2) and the 26th MEU. Only about 400 Marines and sailors of the expeditionary unit, Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force (CMAGTF) 3-90, would remain off the coast of Liberia, "to maintain presence on station, continue with the evacuation, and maintain support and security for the embassy."¹⁴⁰ While CMAGTF 3-90 remained, the rest of the MEU would steam to the Mediterranean to satisfy the security and

scheduled exercise requirements of the Sixth Fleet and the European Command.

The decision to split the 26th MEU resulted in Colonel Fite consulting his staff on how best to divide the force based on its mission, capabilities, available shipping, logistics, and personnel. The staff also considered Colonel Fite's guidance important to accomplishing the reconfiguration with the least amount of movement of Marines and equipment between ships at sea. Dividing a Marine expeditionary unit normally not organized to operate in two parts meant risking not having the proper depth in equipment or personnel. The Marine and Navy staffs both worked energetically on the plan to ensure both portions could perform all required missions. Guidance from Admiral Williams included the assumption "that whoever stayed back wouldn't have to stay there very long."¹⁴¹

The right ship mix for both missions also required careful consideration. Early in the mission planning, Colonel Fite conferred with the ready group's commander, Commodore Stanley D. Gastar, USN, about designating a ship for the contingency task force.* The USS *Whidbey Island* (LSD 41) provided the best platform considering the overall needs for aviation, logistics, and personnel support. Forming CMAGTF 3-90 required the designation of command, air, ground, and combat service support elements, the common building blocks to all Marine air-ground task forces. On board the USS *Inchon* (LPH 12), the 26th MEU commander named Major George S. Hartley, the executive officer of Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3/8, to lead CMAGTF 3-90.

The aviation personnel and assets came from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162 (HMM-162). The commanding officer of HMM-162 "Golden Eagles," Lieutenant Colonel Darrell A. Browning, assigned Major Daniel P. "Doc" Johnson to lead the aviation detachment. The aviation aircrews consisted of six officers and 22 enlisted men. The detachment also included landing zone control, helicopter maintenance, and helicopter support teams. Three of the squadron's CH-46E helicopters completed the air combat element.

After consultations with his staff and the BLT commander, Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Essink, Colonel Fite determined that a reinforced rifle

company provided enough combat power and depth to allow for the rotation of the Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Essink picked Company K's commanding officer, Captain James K. Shannon, as the ground combat element commander. Although Shannon's Marines formed the bulk of the ground combat element, he received augmentation from the BLT's Headquarters and Service Company, Battery G, Weapons Company, as well as the Amphibious Assault Vehicle and Combat Engineer Platoons on board the USS *Barnstable County* (LST 1197).

A difficult decision involved the mix of combat service support personnel and supplies. Lieutenant Colonel Jonathon W. Stull, the commanding officer of MEU Service Support Group 26 (MSSG-26), was concerned he did not have the necessary depth of manpower and adequate supplies to support both CMAGTF 3-90 and the remainder of the MEU. Stull selected the engineer support platoon to form the bulk of the combat service support detachment (CSSD) since its mission included utility support for the embassy. The engineer support platoon commander, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Edwin E. Deering, was selected as the officer-in-charge, and the detachment reinforced with aviation support, water supply, and bulk fuel personnel.

Embassy support was a large part of the 27-man CSSD's mission in Liberia. Since the embassy's logistical support needs were difficult to anticipate, the Marines did not hold a large supply block afloat. For the Marines ashore, anticipated supplies included food, barbed wire, and sand bags. The MSSG staff picked two large pieces of support equipment to go ashore, a reverse osmosis water purification unit and a generator pump capable of pumping 600 gallons per minute. This left the MEU with one water purification unit to support later Mediterranean exercises. As Lieutenant Colonel Stull explained: "Dividing that up between Mamba Station and the Med made things precarious to sustain support in both locations. It came out okay, but those two areas were probably the trickiest—supply and equipment density."¹⁴²

The 26th MEU reached Mamba Station on 19 August following 12 days in transit. The incoming unit received turnover briefings from 22d MEU on board the USS *Saipan* (LHA 2) the next day. On the morning of 21 August, helicopters flew the 2d Platoon of Captain James Shannon's Company K, BLT 3/8 ashore, where they assumed embassy duties from Captain Gary Oles' Company E, BLT

* Captain Stanley D. Gastar, while in command of the Amphibious Ready Group, held the title of commodore.



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During the shift of personnel and equipment among the ships of the amphibious ready group, Marines from the USS Inchon (LPH 12) disembark from a CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162 on the flight deck of the USS Whidbey Island (LSD 41), their temporary home.

2/4. The relief went smoothly and took a little more than two hours for Company E to turn over all defensive positions and ammunition. Around noon, the last of the 22d MEU left Company K with 90 Marines in defensive positions to guard the embassy and departed Monrovia from Landing Zone Magic.¹⁴³ The 22d MEU completed the blue-water turnover at approximately 1400 on 21 August and left Mamba Station, officially relieved.¹⁴⁴

26th MEU and the Formation of the CMAGTF in Liberia

Colonel Fite went ashore after the turnover and met with his forward command element and Ambassador Peter De Vos. Upon arrival, he received a briefing from his team, who had already been ashore for 12 days. The eight-man

team, headed by the executive officer of the 26th MEU, Lieutenant Colonel Richard H. Kunkel, Jr., had flown to Liberia the day before the MEU sailed from Morehead City and had observed evacuations, transmitted updated information, and familiarized themselves with the personalities at the embassy during their interim stay.

As the turnovers took place, work to reconfigure the amphibious ready group began. Personnel were transferred to and from the designated flagship of the task force, the *Whidbey Island*. The new load plan to accommodate the contingency task force required the concerted effort of all hands. At one point, the combined Marine and Navy effort resulted in the entire deck of the LSD being covered with vehicles, ConEx boxes, 105mm howitzers, and other MEU equipment.* The reconfiguration, undertaken at sea, required

* A ConEx box is a large metal shipping container.

numerous helicopter lifts and night runs with air-cushioned landing craft and well-deck operations to transfer all the equipment, supplies, and personnel. Helicopters with loads slung beneath repeatedly transferred equipment between the *Whidbey Island* and other ready group ships. The *Inchon*, USS *Nashville* (LPD 13), USS *Newport County* (LST 1179), and USS *Fairfax County* (LST 1193) also experienced changes to billeting and load-plan configurations. The MEU's 155mm howitzers below the main deck and deep within the *Whidbey Island* remained on board, impossible to move. During the reconfiguration, the MEU could not pull all other equipment and supplies from in front of the guns to allow for their transfer off the ship. The artillery pieces remained on board even though "there was absolutely no prospect of them being used there [Liberia]."¹⁴⁵ Most of the BLT's vehicles also remained below decks on the *Whidbey Island* for the same reason.¹⁴⁶ The Marines and sailors completed the task after three days of labor-intensive cross-decking, moving equipment, countless tons of supplies, and hundreds of men.

As the reconfiguration started, the MEU's executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kunkel, and members of the forward command element continued to monitor the situation at the embassy. The chancery conference room, filled with radios that allowed communications with each post, the flag ship and U.S. European Command headquarters, served as the command post. The location gave the command element quick access to key embassy personnel. Later that week, Captain Shannon moved in to the conference room as the primary on-scene commander for the ground combat element of CMAGTF 3-90.

Other elements of the forming task force joined Company K ashore. The CSSD arrived at the embassy and found people awaiting evacuation. As Chief Warrant Officer Deering stated: "We landed on the 23d of August and immediately took care of the processing and loading of the awaiting evacuees."¹⁴⁷ In the first lift, an American and 30 foreign evacuees flew on a CH-53 helicopter to Freetown, Sierra Leone.¹⁴⁸

The final transfer separating CMAGTF 3-90 from the 26th MEU ended when three CH-46 helicopters landed on the *Whidbey Island*.¹⁴⁹ With the completion of cross-decking on 24 August and the movement of the Marines, sailors, and equipment ashore, the task force assumed its mission. Most the task force remained on board the *Whidbey Island* and *Barnstable County* in support

or reserve.*¹⁵⁰ Late in the afternoon, the 26th MEU sailed for Rota, Spain, leaving the task force behind in Liberian waters.¹⁵¹

The movement of helicopters to the *Whidbey Island* was significant since the ship normally did not house a permanent aviation detachment. Because of this and the lack of a hangar, the Marines stored some aviation supplies on the flight deck in front of landing spot one.** The crew helped the aviation Marines settle into work spaces not designed for an aviation detachment. As far as anyone on board knew, the arrival of the helicopters constituted the first instance of an aviation detachment embarking on a landing ship dock for extended operations.¹⁵² The ship also presented the newly arrived aviation Marines with some practical challenges. First, the ship did not have an air boss or someone accustomed to running an air control tower. Fortunately, a few of the sailors on board did have flight deck experience, so they operated the tower for a few weeks until the amphibious squadron sent an experienced air traffic controller. Second, with the helicopters positioned on the exposed flight deck, the first few rainy weeks complicated routine maintenance—plastic sheeting and ponchos helped somewhat.

Peacekeepers, Fighters, and Contingency MAGTF

While the MEU completed forming the contingency task force, transport ships loaded with troops and equipment of the five-nation Economic Community of West African States Military Observation Group (ECOMOG) entered the port of Monrovia.*** During the afternoon of 24 August, Nigeria's NNS *Ambe* (LST 1123) and Ghana's MV *Tano River* maneuvered to the mouth

* U.S. European Command limited the number of Marines ashore, gradually reducing that number as the deployment continued into the fall and early winter of 1990.

** The air detachment normally launched one aircraft at a time. In case it needed to launch two helicopters, spot two was shifted further aft. The lower flight decks of the *Whidbey Island* and *Barnstable County* received increased salt spray as aircraft approached or departed. Frequent inspections by the detachment and increased maintenance hours identified potential corrosion problems.

*** An emergency meeting of the Economic Community of West African States Standing Mediation Committee composed of Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Togo, and Gambia took place from 5 July to 20 July in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The committee discussed the concept of deploying a ceasefire monitoring force to Liberia, but reached no agreement.



Photo courtesy of the authors

A Nigerian armored vehicle patrols the streets of Monrovia. While one rebel faction assured unfettered passage to members of the five-nation West African peacekeeping force, other factions attempted to prevent their deployment throughout the capital.

of the jetty area of Freeport.¹⁵³ They temporarily withdrew after receiving some sporadic mortar fire and reentered the port later that evening. After docking, a small mix of troops debarked. Awaiting the peacekeepers on the dock, Prince Johnson, head of the INFPL, attempted to contact the embassy over a Motorola radio, possibly one stolen from the embassy's local guards. Johnson asked for U.S. help in welcoming the African peacekeepers and securing the port.¹⁵⁴ The Marine security guard on duty, monitoring all the radio networks at Post One in the chancellery, did not respond to the request.

Later that night the military observation group commander, Ghanaian Lieutenant General Arnold Quainoo, met with Prince Johnson. The West African soldiers ashore bivouacked haphazardly in abandoned warehouses in the port area.* General Quainoo viewed his force's mission as

* The rapidly formed force lacked supply support. Many newly arrived soldiers did not have personal weapons, uniforms, and boots. Prince Johnson, leader of the INFPL, later provided uniforms and boots as gifts to the Nigerian troops, according to Major General C.Y. Iweze, "Nigeria in Liberia: The Military Operations of ECOMOG," in *Nigeria in International Peacekeeping*, p. 231.

peacekeepers to assist the warring factions in observing a ceasefire.¹⁵⁵

Regardless of the peacekeepers actions, the mission of the Marines encompassed: providing security for the compound; evacuating designated Americans and foreign nationals; providing limited logistic support to the embassy; and supporting limited humanitarian relief operations.¹⁵⁶ Major Hartley, the Marine task force commander responsible for accomplishing the mission, reported to Captain Francis. P. Grause, USN, the commander of Joint Task Force (JTF) Sharp Edge.** Colonel Martin R. Berndt from the U.S. European Command assisted the JTF commander for a few weeks in the embassy as the military liaison to the West African peacekeeping force.

Joining their forces ashore, the remaining West African troops moved off their ships and ventured into greater Monrovia. This 25 August attempt to begin the mission of enforcing a ceasefire involved some collaboration with Prince

** Since the turnover on 21 August, Commander Thomas L. Breitinger, the commanding officer of the *Whidbey Island*, temporarily commanded the JTF until the arrival of Captain Francis P. Grause, who previously commanded Naval Beach Group Two.

Johnson's INPFL, which controlled Bushrod Island. The negotiations allowed the 2,500 peacekeepers to move freely through INPFL areas. Leaving the port area, a Nigerian battalion moved north and secured the St. Paul River bridges while a Ghana and Sierra Leone battalion deployed just short of the north end of the Mesurado River bridges.

The peacekeepers already knew Charles Taylor's NPFL would likely try to prevent their deployment. Taylor opposed the idea of a cease-fire and his delegation at the Banjul, Gambia, talks of 6 and 7 August 1990 flatly stated that until President Doe resigned, no agreement on a cease-fire could be reached. As the peacekeeping troops deployed throughout the day, Marines on post heard sporadic machine gun fire and the explosions of mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. Despite the fighting, Marine CH-46 helicopters flew their first mission into Landing Zone Magic as members of CMAGTF 3-90 delivered fuel for the embassy generators.¹⁵⁷

As the fighting flared on and off, one NPFL gunner's rocket-propelled grenade hit a Nigerian armored car. The attack near the St. Paul bridges wounded two Nigerians.¹⁵⁸ The peacekeepers asked the embassy if the Americans could evacuate the two seriously wounded Nigerian soldiers. A Marine helicopter crew went on stand-by that evening, awaiting the result of the embassy's consultation with Washington. The State Department denied the peacekeeper's evacuation request the following day.¹⁵⁹

On the morning of 26 August, Marine helicopters evacuated an American citizen who arrived at the embassy with a group of refugees. Previously, a detachment of Navy Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters picked up evacuees and flew them directly to Freetown. That evening, the path of the evacuation switched from direct flights to Freetown to a more judicious route. The JTF established the procedure of flying evacuees to the *Barnstable County* and placing a Marine helicopter on board. The ship would then sail to



DVIC DN-SC-91-06093

A Marine shows a group of evacuees how to properly don helmets before boarding a helicopter on the grounds of the American Embassy. From the embassy they would be flown to one of the ships off shore.



DVIC DN-ST-91-05963

Four civilians disembark from a Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162 Sea Knight helicopter at Lungi Airport, just north of Freetown, Sierra Leone. The civilians were processed on board a U.S. Navy ship off the coast of Liberia before being flown to Sierra Leone.

Freetown, Sierra Leone. After arriving in Freetown, the CH-46 would fly the evacuees to Lungi Airfield for further processing and transfer. The Marines and sailors at the Lungi forward logistics site loaded the returning helicopter with critical parts, supplies, and mail for the ship. Once all the evacuees had departed the ship, the *Barnstable County* with its helicopter steamed back to Mamba Station. The combination of LST and helicopter evacuations effectively managed the flow of evacuees for the contingency task force. The Marines repeatedly used this method for about three weeks until the Navy helicopters supporting the operation, which had previously been grounded, could fly again.^{160*}

* Earlier in Sharp Edge operations, evacuees departed the embassy for Freetown, Sierra Leone, on Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters belonging to the Navy's Helicopter Support Squadron 4 (HC-4). The two-aircraft HC-4 detachment routinely flew from Sierra Leone to Liberia laden with supplies, mail, and other cargo. Once helicopters landed at the embassy in Liberia, they off-loaded supplies and returned to Sierra Leone loaded with evacuees. The Navy C-130 or C-9 aircraft flew numerous flights to Freetown bringing supplies originating in the Mediterranean or continental United States. In late August, both HC-4 helicopters were temporarily grounded for parts and maintenance. With the number of refugees wanting to leave increasing, the CMAGTF took over this critical role using the *Barnstable County* and one CH-46.

On 26 August, evacuation control center Marines administratively processed 90 persons. To process the evacuees, embassy staff passed the word by radio and telephone about scheduled helicopter lifts and the available passenger seats. On the appointed day, potential evacuees came to the embassy (with their passports) and filled out an application. Consular personnel screened the applicants, giving priority to citizens of the United States, followed by foreign diplomats, foreign nationals associated with a foreign embassy, and other third-country nationals.

While the evacuees' administrative documents were being processed, the evacuation control center Marines concentrated on security and preparing evacuees for the flight.** Working on a consular computer, Marines recorded the evacuees' names and nationalities for the flight manifests. On the day of the flight, Marines searched the evacuees for contraband, which involved searching each person and their baggage for any drugs or weapons. Despite the anarchy and violence in the city, the Marines found only one weapon, a pistol. However, "suspicious-looking

** The State Department charged third-country nationals a fee for the evacuation, reportedly \$300 for evacuation to Freetown.

powders in bags” were found on several different evacuees.¹⁶¹ Like the pistol, the Marines delivered the confiscated bags to the regional security officer for disposal. The luggage was staged after the search and each person was issued a flight helmet. Once a helicopter landed, Marines led the evacuees, assisting the young and the old, on to the aircraft. The helicopter launched after all evacuees had buckled their seat belts.

Along with processing evacuees, the combat service support detachment attempted to solve the problems experienced earlier in supplying the embassy with fresh water. With the end of the rainy season coming, the CSSD again attempted to draw water from the ocean using the water purification unit left by the 22d MEU. At the top of a cliff directly above the ocean, the engineers wrestled with the water purification unit and pump and concluded the existing pump lacked the necessary power. The engineers were able to draw seawater to the water purification unit at the top of the cliff after having a helicopter place a more powerful pump on shore, but the problem of drawing the water from the ocean still remained.

The purification unit used a suction pipe running from the shore out into the ocean, but severe surf action repeatedly broke the pipe. Consequently, the detachment was only able to pump water from the ocean at high tide when there was less surf action. The pump achieved strong suction at high tide on 26 August, which allowed the unit to produce about 6,000 gallons of potable water. Chief Warrant Officer Deering said: “We processed the water and it turned out to be real excellent water.”¹⁶² The Marines gave samples of the water to the embassy staff, whose concerns about quality were eased by the surprisingly agreeable taste of the water. Unfortunately, the exceptionally heavy surf action at Mamba Point ripped the plumbing out of the pump within the week and washed it away. No longer able to rely on purified ocean water, the Marines looked for other sources to supply the compound. Collecting rainwater was the obvious choice, since in August it rained quite frequently. To that end, engineers set up a couple of 3,000-gallon bladders on low spots in the embassy compound and placed pipes to channel the water into the bladders. It rained



DVIC DN-SC-91-06073

Marines scan United Nations Drive, the main street bordering the American Embassy compound, from a sandbagged guard post on the roof of an embassy building.

hard enough to collect 6,000 gallons of water in two hours. The accumulation, processed by the purification unit, delivered clean drinking water for the Marines.*

Marines continually worked to maintain defensive positions, which rapidly deteriorated in the rainy weather. While CSSD Marines worked on water and power, Captain Shannon's infantry improved its defenses. Marines rotated in a new rifle platoon about every seven days. The platoons, reinforced with machine gunners and 60mm mortar men, set up three rotating guard shifts of eight hours each. Once familiar with the posts, the platoon sergeants and squad leaders of Company K rotated men among the posts to reduce boredom.

To augment these infantrymen, snipers from the Surveillance and Target Acquisition platoon of BLT 3/8 came ashore. After assessing the limited fields of fire from inside the compound, the snipers concluded the Wellington and Sam and E apartments outside the compound afforded better observation of the city. Unfortunately, Marine snipers from the previous command had already been withdrawn from those positions under European Command orders to remain inside the compound. But diplomatic security personnel, although not as well trained in tactical surveillance techniques as the snipers, did not have the same restrictions and were directed to man observation posts in both apartments. The diplomatic security outposts afforded an excellent view of strategic parts of the city and indirectly gave the Marines early warning when fighting broke out.

Evacuees slowly trickled in and Marines evacuated two American citizens and three foreign nationals on 27 August. The next day, Sergeant Brian J. Bonfiglio, a member of the Weapons Company detachment, stopped a group of armed Liberians from summarily executing a fellow citizen. The incident began when a group of fighters started yelling, kicking, and brutally beating their victim. Quickly grabbing a loudspeaker and using a commanding voice, Sergeant Bonfiglio persuaded the group of fighters to stop and let the individual live. Since the action was not directed

at them or other Americans, the Marines could not use force.

The rules of engagement, the same used by the 22d MEU, allowed for an escalation of force if a fighter or a group of fighters initiated hostile action against Americans or the embassy.¹⁶³ Undisciplined Liberian fighters frequently pointed weapons at everyone, not realizing their actions constituted a hostile act. Individual Marines handled the leeway given to them by the rules of engagement with restraint. As Captain Shannon stated:

There were many times where the INPFL or some AFL guys would ride in front of the U.S. embassy on [United Nations] Drive, and not aim in but point their weapons in a very sarcastic manner at the Marine positions. The Marines had the presence of mind to discern who was kidding and who may not be kidding. Though the [rules of engagement] allowed them to fire at any of those vehicles who showed hostile intent such as pointing a loaded weapon, which had a magazine in the weapon, at the positions.¹⁶⁴

Flights evacuating third-country nationals continued, and on 29 August, the *Barnstable County* left Liberian waters for Sierra Leone carrying evacuees and one of the air combat element's three helicopters. As fighting escalated the following day, 76 evacuees transferred to the *Barnstable County* and made the trip to Freetown. At the embassy in a recreation cabana hut located close to Landing Zone Magic, a stray 7.62mm round hit Lance Corporal Davis J. Cassidy. The round came through the open-sided hut's roof and bounced off the floor. Fortunately, it was deflected by Cassidy's flack jacket.

The forces fighting for control of Liberia rang in September with heavy fighting near the AFL's Barclay Training Center and Spriggs-Payne Airport. Stray rounds from small arms fire passed over and through the compound. As Captain Shannon explained: "Where we were positioned in the embassy compound, [which was at the end of a] beaten zone along the gun-target line, which means you are in receipt of many small arms. Regardless of whether they're firing at you or not, you're going to receive a lot of small arms, as well

* The embassy cistern system also collected rainwater. By using a complex system of gutters on the roofs of several embassy buildings, the water flowed by pipes into two underground reservoirs in the embassy compound. Between the two reservoirs, the embassy water storage capacity equaled about 200,000 gallons; a three-week supply at the rate the embassy used water.



Photo courtesy of the authors

The American Embassy's recreation hut housed the Marine command post until a stray round from outside the compound hit one Marine, who was not injured in the incident.

as automatic fire.”¹⁶⁵ During a daytime roving patrol, Marines found a small hole in the fence directly behind the recreation center and two more American citizens and 21 foreign nationals were evacuated.¹⁶⁶

The fighting among opposing sides in the civil war continued on 2 September, with 20 artillery, mortar, and high-angle rocket-propelled grenade rounds impacting close to the embassy. The random shelling increased the number of noncombatants seeking evacuation. U.S. forces evacuated six more American citizens and 57 foreign nationals during a lull in the fighting.¹⁶⁷ That night, the *Barnstable County* again left for Freetown carrying evacuees to safety and bringing back supplies and mail.¹⁶⁸

Monrovia appeared calmer for a few days as the West African peacekeepers renewed efforts to deploy throughout the city. On 3 September, Marines spotted the first observation group foot patrol, who waved as they passed the embassy.¹⁶⁹ The brief calm allowed Marine helicopters to

assist in replenishing the *Whidbey Island's* supplies from the USNS *Henry J. Kaiser* (T-AO-187).¹⁷⁰ On 5 September, a Marine observation post watched a NPFL fighter shoot at a passing civilian vehicle in front of the Wellington apartments. The routine rotation of rifle platoons and combat service support Marines took place on 6 September and the helicopters evacuated six more American citizens and 73 foreign nationals. Filled with refugees, the *Barnstable County* made yet another trip to Freetown that night.¹⁷¹

On 9 September, the Armed Forces of Liberia shelled the Freeport area from the Capitol Hill area. The exposed peacekeeper's ships temporarily withdrew from the port. The following morning, a convoy of INPFL fighters passed the embassy and headed south on United Nations Drive. At Barclay Training Center, meanwhile, 50 to 75 Liberian army troops formed up to escort President Doe to the peacekeeping force's headquarters. Both forces met and exchanged small arms fire just a few blocks east of the embassy.



DVIC DN-ST-91-06094

A Marine buckles the chinstrap on a child's helmet before a group of evacuees board a helicopter for the flight to the initial processing center offshore.

One of the INPFL fighters passing by a Marine post accidentally discharged his weapon, but immediately apologized to the Marines on post.¹⁷²

President Doe ventured out of the Executive Mansion later that morning for the first time since June to visit the peacekeepers' headquarters. After Doe arrived at the headquarters at Freeport, INPFL fighters in a number of trucks pulled up and started arguing with the guards. Gunfire erupted and the fighters of Prince Johnson's INPFL forced their way into the building and began shooting at Doe's bodyguards. In the fray, the soldiers ran for cover while Prince Johnson's men searched from room to room for Doe and his men (members of the Krahn tribal group). Johnson's fighters killed more than 60 men from Doe's escort, wounded and captured Doe and took him to their base at Cadwell.¹⁷³ Word of the capture spread quickly throughout Monrovia and resulted in evacuees flocking to the gates of the embassy. Marines heard sporadic exchanges of small arms fire throughout the day, and by nightfall, Marines had evacuated nine more American citizens and 87 foreign nationals.¹⁷⁴

Returning to Cadwell, Prince Johnson tortured and killed President Doe while his men recorded the grisly event on video. Amidst Doe's screams, Prince Johnson questioned him and narrated the video while drinking a beer. Foreign observers thought President Doe's death would signal the end of the fighting.

That same evening, the peacekeeping force asked for American assistance to evacuate some of their casualties, prompting the aviation Marines to prepare their aircraft for the expected mission. As Major Daniel P. "Doc" Johnson stated: "We were scrambling around at that time trying to get helicopters ready, trying to get them spotted, trying to get crews together to go in, at night, to the embassy and extract these casualties of the ECO-MOG forces." While the Marines got ready, the request for a decision went up the chain-of-command. It took about four hours before the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved. "We all knew that if it was going to be done," Johnson continued, "it was going to be done at night. Well, about 10:00 [PM] they came down and said, 'We're cleared to do it, but do it tomorrow morning.'" The Marines

spotted their aircraft and retired for the night, anticipating a launch before first light the next day. The medical evacuation plan called for the most seriously injured to be treated on the *Whidbey Island* while those who could travel safely were to go to the *Barnstable County* for further passage to Sierra Leone. According to Johnson: "The next morning [10 September] we got up and started briefing and getting aircraft ready. We were all strapped in, ready to go, and [the embassy] called back and said the ECOMOG forces decided to take care of their own wounded and send them back by one of their own ships."¹⁷⁵ During the remainder of the day, the Marines on post watched numerous convoys of armed peacekeepers and INPFL troops drive past the embassy. As night fell, the *Barnstable County* sailed to Sierra Leone with 96 evacuees.¹⁷⁶

On 11 September, the sounds of sporadic fire from artillery, mortars and close heavy machine guns echoed throughout the embassy grounds. A firefight between INPFL and AFL flared up about 200 meters from the embassy gates with a barrage

of stray small arms rounds impacting inside the compound. U.S. Ambassador DeVos, in the interim, met with Charles Taylor to discuss ways to end the conflict.¹⁷⁷

Attempts to control the Barclay Training Center shifted the fight to the east, but the embassy compound took an increasing volume of fire during the next two days. Small arms fire hit both Post Two (Gate Two), and Observation Post One, located on the top floor of the Sam and E apartment building across the street from Gate One. Artillery rounds landed in the water behind the British Embassy. Several Marines had close calls with one round passing through a trouser leg and other rounds impacting the sand bags around defensive positions. Reacting to the increased fighting, Major George S. "Steve" Hartley augmented security inside the compound and brought 60mm mortars ashore. Conducting the weekly rotation, 75 Marines returned to the ship and 92 Marines came ashore. During the rotation, the evacuation control center evacuated 12 more American citizens and eight foreign nationals.



DVIC DN-ST-91-05978

A woman carries her daughter across the flight deck of the USS Barnstable County (LST 1197) after disembarking from a CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter.



DVIC DN-ST-91-05981

A civilian lifts his arms to be searched by a Marine while being processed on board the USS Barnstable County (LST 1197). Marines also conducted a quick search of luggage brought on board and provided the evacuees with refreshments.

While Marines reinforced, Ambassador DeVos again met with NPFL leader Charles Taylor in the embassy.¹⁷⁸

The fighting shifted closer on 14 September and bullets hit Post One and Gate One. Other embassy posts received a peppering of small arms fire, but with no effect. Battered bodies washed up on the beach below the embassy.¹⁷⁹

Later in the morning, INPFL leader Prince Johnson conducted his first embassy visit. As a show of force, Major Hartley mobilized all available Marines and placed them in visible locations where the Marines could be seen cleaning weapons and manning posts. More than 60 of Prince Johnson's armed fighters waited outside the embassy on United Nations Drive while he met with the Ambassador. After Johnson's departure, intermittent firefights in the city increased. The infantrymen on post spent the night listening to the largest volume of rounds passing overhead thus far in the operation.¹⁸⁰

On 15 September, fighting came very close to the embassy. Incoming indirect fire became extremely heavy, especially at Post Two. A gun battle occurred near Gate Two, which continued sporadically throughout the night as INPFL units maneuvered to within a block of the embassy. With fighting so close, even the most junior Marines realized they would be in Liberia for an extended period.¹⁸¹

Firing started early on the morning of 16 September at about 0430 with a small arms exchange just south of the embassy. Prince Johnson arrived later that morning and met again with the Ambassador for continued discussions. He brought a crowd of about 90 INPFL fighters, who waited outside the embassy on United Nations Drive. Meanwhile, the volume of fire landing in the compound and passing overhead held steady. Rounds hit the telecommunications office located in the southwest corner of the compound. In spite of all the stray rounds, Marines

evacuated six more American citizens and 46 foreign nationals. Later, Marines observed sustained heavy machine gun fire aimed at the Barclay Training Center from Mamba Point's Lighthouse Hill.¹⁸²

Late in the morning of 17 September, Prince Johnson, accompanied by his bodyguard of 50

reinforce with the infamous and unpredictable Major Tilley now leading the AFL fighters.*

Major Hartley quickly sent a rifle platoon by helicopter to the embassy and the reaction force deployed inside the compound within 34 minutes. The same helicopters also evacuated three awaiting American citizens and 46 foreign nation-



DVIC DN-ST-91-00663

Two air crewman from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162 carry an elderly woman from their CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter after arriving at Lungi Airport in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

INPFL fighters, returned to the embassy and met with the Ambassador in what had become almost a daily routine. All appeared calm until just before noon.

The Marine task force's intelligence chief ashore received a report that indicated a strong AFL force was moving toward the embassy, possibly to engage Prince Johnson's bodyguard. Responding to the report of 150 AFL soldiers and one armored vehicle (a Romanian armored personnel carrier) moving toward the embassy, Captain Shannon called for a "Sparrow Hawk" reaction force consisting of a reinforced rifle platoon.¹⁸³ Calling to the *Whidbey Island*, he explained to Major Hartley that it made sense to

als during a pouring rain. In addition, Captain Shannon mobilized the combat service support Marines ashore, who stopped their work and quickly manned their assigned positions. Supporting the Marines, Captain Francis P. Grause moved his ships to within sight of the city. Fortunately, the AFL soldiers encountered other fighters as they advanced up United Nations Drive

* Major Tilley of the Armed Forces of Liberia reportedly directed the massacre of more than 600 Liberians in late July 1990 at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Monrovia, a designated Red Cross shelter. Captain James K. Shannon intvw, 15Apr91, p. 10. (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).



Photo courtesy of the authors

West African peacekeepers not only guarded vital facilities throughout Monrovia, they transported the head of the differing factions to the American Embassy compound for discussions with State Department personnel concerning a ceasefire.

and never appeared. The platoon of reinforcements stood down later that day.¹⁸⁴

Prince Johnson received an escort from the West African peacekeeping force during his second meeting at the embassy that day. Marines watched the escort, who waited outside the compound like Johnson's men earlier. The meetings resulted in an appointment for Johnson to meet with Herman Cohen, the Under Secretary of State for West African Affairs.¹⁸⁵

Under Secretary Cohen arrived by Marine helicopter the next day to conduct an assessment of the situation and meet with the factional leaders. The embassy saw the Marine force as an enabler, allowing the State Department to exercise a continuing influence in the negotiations between the factions and the interim government. The Under Secretary's visit underscored the American commitment to finding a solution to the crisis. That same day, the Marines conducted a normal rotation as sporadic small arms fire periodically flew over and through the embassy compound.

By 18 September, the West African states decided to support the reinforcement of its contingent,

which eventually doubled the size of the force. The new field commander of the force, Nigerian Army Major General Joshua Dogonyaro, announced the force's mandate had changed from peacekeeping to peace enforcement. The recent artillery attacks on the force's positions may have influenced his decision. A call for reinforcements resulted in new Nigerian and Ghanaian battalions joining up in Freetown and embarking on ships to Monrovia.¹⁸⁶

On 21 September, Charles Taylor announced his acceptance of an unconditional ceasefire to begin the next day. While Marines listened to the sounds of gunfire, the number of dead buried on the grounds of the nearby refugee-crowded Greystone compound reached 45.¹⁸⁷ More than 300 civilians fleeing the Liberian army gathered in front of the embassy about mid-day. The large crowd pleaded for assistance and refuge. But the crowd quickly became agitated and started to create a disturbance. As Marines readied for a confrontation in the face of the unpredictable situation, the embassy's local guard force commander, Dan Showalter, a retired Marine lieutenant

colonel, quietly walked outside the compound gate and into the hostile crowd. Speaking firmly, he first calmed and then persuaded the Liberians to disperse after explaining how to apply for evacuation.¹⁸⁸ At first light the next morning, a crowd of about 100 Liberians gathered at the embassy gate with their documents in hopes of being evacuated.¹⁸⁹

Arriving to review the Marines' situation on 23 September, Rear Admiral Layton W. "Snuffy" Smith, USN, J-3 of the European Command, went ashore to meet with Ambassador DeVos. Major Hartley noted during the discussions that Admiral Smith strongly encouraged the Ambassador to conserve resources because of Contingency MAGTF 3-90's limited logistical capabilities.¹⁹⁰ Almost as a reminder of the efforts to support the embassy in the face of logistical limitations, the *Barnstable County* departed Liberian waters with evacuees for another trip to Freetown.¹⁹¹

While Charles Taylor had announced he would accept a ceasefire two days earlier, it took until 23 September for the NPFL leader to actually agree to adhere to that ceasefire.¹⁹² But the American-brokered halt in the fighting lasted only until the night of 25 September. That night, several rounds passed through the embassy compound and the Marines on post spotted numerous muzzle flashes in town. Clashes again took place in the Mamba Point area over the next few days. On 27 September, Marines at Post One observed shots fired from a house across the street, and early the next day, artillery and mortars impacted east and northeast of the embassy. The Marines saw sporadic firing arc through the helicopters' approach path later that afternoon. Inside the compound, the intense overhead fire sounded very close.¹⁹³ The new escalation of intense fighting near the compound temporarily halted all evacuations.

The official announcement to end the ceasefire came on 29 September. Despite the danger posed by indirect small arms fire, evacuations resumed. Major Johnson flew a CH-46 that brought Commodore James M. Drager, USN, the temporary commander of the joint task force, and Major Hartley ashore. Rounds started popping in the grassy areas around the landing zone as the helicopter touched down and Major Hartley ran back to the helicopter after clearing the aircraft rotor blades and pointed out to the commodore the rounds impacting into the water. Commodore Drager and Major Hartley could hear the small arms fire even over the sound of the helicopter engines.

Believing the fire came from inside the compound, Major Hartley ordered Captain Shannon to find its source.¹⁹⁴ Captain Shannon alerted and deployed his reserve element, and after a thorough search, the Marines discovered the source of the rounds impacting around the landing zone did not originate from anyone in the compound. The landing zone, the recreation hut (sometimes referred to as Oceanside hut), and the communications building appeared to be at the end of the beaten zone for a nearby firefight.¹⁹⁵

Later rounds struck the sandbags surrounding Post One and Post Two. Marines on post initially thought someone deliberately fired at them, but without being able to pinpoint the source, the Marines held their fire. The firing died down after about three hours, but not before a 12.7mm round shattered the office window of the deputy chief of mission.¹⁹⁶ The small arms fire continued intermittently the next day but moved away from the embassy.¹⁹⁷

The sounds of occasional artillery and gunfire signaled the start of October. The West African force commander, Major General Dogonyaro, initiated a series of actions against NPFL forces to gain control of the city. Although the Marines heard rocket, artillery, and mortar fire, the amount of small arms fire around the embassy dropped off dramatically. During the first week of the month, Marines observed long convoys of INPFL vehicles and West African troops passing by the embassy. Nigerian peacekeepers established roadblocks nearby, one north of the embassy at the intersection of United Nations Drive and Benson Street and the other south of the embassy at the intersection of United Nations Drive and Sekou Toure Avenue.¹⁹⁸ Not surprisingly, they located the roadblocks near locations where the 22d MEU had set up roadblocks on 5 August. Cooperating with the West Africans, the INPFL commenced attacks against the NPFL. Even the AFL, holed up in the Barclay Training Center and Executive Mansion, launched probes against Charles Taylor's NPFL forces.

Fighting around the embassy continued to decrease as October progressed. The Nigerian forces gained loose control over central Monrovia while Charles Taylor's undisciplined NPFL fighters withdrew to the eastern suburbs of the city. The peacekeepers' trucks, loaded with soldiers, and Panhard AML-60 reconnaissance vehicles frequently drove by the compound's posts. After West African aircraft bombed the city of Buchanan, the NPFL retaliated by shelling the

Freeport area. Marines watched Ghanaian Aermacchi MB-339 jets flying ground attack missions. Later in the month they observed Nigerian Dassault/Dornier Alpha Jets fly overhead almost daily.^{199*}

These developments allowed task force Marines to settle into a quieter routine while assisting in the periodic evacuation of noncombatants. Working smoothly with Edward J. Fisher, the consular officer, Marines also helped process the administrative paperwork of those wishing to leave the country. The Marines received additional training on screening, identification, and passports to assist in determining who would be evacuated. The embassy staff efficiently “would get the word out to the people in the street to come in and fill out an application and bring their necessary paperwork, which eliminated a lot of the administrative burden.”²⁰⁰

Among the challenges faced by the Marines was the cancellation of scheduled flights. On several occasions, weather and maintenance problems interfered with the times helicopters were scheduled to arrive. The CSSD Marines would get the evacuees processed and down to the landing zone and the helicopter would never arrive. According to Chief Warrant Officer Deering, when unexpected cancellations of evacuation flights occurred, “You’d have to tell the people, ‘So sorry. Come back in three days,’ which wasn’t a big deal for us, but if you were one of the people trying to get out of Liberia, and you just sold your soul to whomever to get on board this helicopter and get out of the country it was a very depressing sight.”²⁰¹ The Marines knew cancellations frustrated the evacuees, especially after they had been through the entire preparation process. Deering noted that, “we would have to send the people back out. At certain points it was dangerous out in the streets and these people had, obviously, come some distance to get in the embassy and were anxious to get out [of Liberia].”²⁰²

Parts and supplies for the helicopters came from a long, thinly stretched supply line.** A dif-

* The Nigerians deployed four Dassault-Breguet/Dornier Alpha Jets to replace the Ghanaian jets after 20 October. The aircraft is a tandem seat jet designed for reconnaissance, training, and light ground attacks.

** Parts came from worldwide naval aviation supply activities. Normally routed to Rota, Spain, these critical supplies would be flown by Navy aircraft to Freetown, Sierra Leone. To complete the 3,500-mile journey, the helicopters of HC-4 ferried the parts to the Marine aviation maintenance detachment off the coast of Liberia.

ficult maintenance problem for the air combat element occurred at the end of October when the Marine helicopters needed a mandatory rotor head modification. The sleeve on the hubs of the rotor heads of CH-46 helicopters had a tendency to crack and all the helicopters in the Department of the Navy were limited to lifting 22,000 pounds of gross weight instead of the usual 24,300 pounds until they were equipped with the modification. After receiving a Naval Aviation System Command message requiring all CH-46 helicopters to be modified, Major Johnson’s helicopters got top priority.

Unfortunately, the ship was not equipped with a crane capable of lifting the rotor heads, so the modification maintenance crew could not perform the work on board. The forward logistic site on Lungi Airfield secured a crane and the space needed to make the modifications. The helicopters were flown to Freetown one at a time for the modification. However, the modification team at Freetown encountered other problems, including a lack of the necessary spare parts. Only two helicopters remained available while work continued on the third. The project took longer than expected and it was two weeks before all three helicopters were modified and back to Liberian waters.²⁰³

The West African soldiers continued to make headway and attacked the NPFL using the INPFL as allies.²⁰⁴ By 30 October, some signs of a return to normalcy in Monrovia appeared when the power briefly came on.²⁰⁵ The number of Marines ashore providing security gradually declined with the fighting. Based on input from Captain Grause and Major Hartley that the worst appeared to be over, European Command reduced the number of Marines allowed at the embassy. The next question was how long the Marines would have to stay.

Logistics support grew as the direct threat to the American Embassy shrank. A large part of the Marine task force’s logistic support in Operation Sharp Edge involved diesel fuel, which powered the embassy’s generators. With the power grid in Monrovia shut down, the five generators ran almost around the clock and used 800 to 1,200 gallons of diesel fuel each day. To support this level of consumption, the aviation detachment brought the fuel ashore in 500-gallon bladders, which weighed about 3,000 pounds each when filled.²⁰⁶

Supporting the embassy’s fuel needs required a tremendous amount of work. Before they repaired the rotor heads at the end of October,



DVIC DN-SC-91-06066

A Marine CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter lowers a fuel bladder onto Landing Zone Magic in the continuing effort of the amphibious ready group to supply the embassy.

the CH-46 helicopters were limited to 22,000 pounds gross weight. Because of the fuel's weight and the distance the aircraft had to travel, a helicopter carrying a fuel bladder could not carry a full load of fuel for itself. As such, a helicopter would take on as much internal fuel as it could manage, fly the fuel bladder to the embassy, and then return to the ship. After refueling, the helicopter could then carry another bladder. Since each flight and unloading process took between three and four hours, transferring the fuel made for a long flight day.²⁰⁷

The fuel supply effort kept the onshore support Marines busy. Helicopters brought in 2,000 gallons three times a week to satisfy the embassy's needs. As each 500-gallon bladder arrived in the landing zone, the bulk fuel handlers from the CSSD Marines took over. Using two pumps (one pumped at 125-gallons per minute and the other pumped at 50-gallons per minute), they would transfer the fuel from the bladder into a fuel truck, which held 2,000 gallons. Once the

truck was full, it would be driven to the generator sites where the fuel would be pumped into the generators' tanks.²⁰⁸

Performing both their evacuation and logistics responsibilities, service support Marines helped to bring in tons of foodstuffs and dry goods for the State Department's commissary and exchange. By November, the embassy supply flights routinely brought in luxury items such as 50 pallets of beer and liquor, 500 gallons of ice cream, and pet food.* The Marines occasionally felt like hired hands. But Chief Warrant Officer Deering said his Marines "didn't feel bad about showing them what they could do." Some of the CSSD Marines went beyond the required effort, helping to pour a concrete slab from the landing zone to the road, as well as undertaking wiring and electrical troubleshooting for the embassy.²⁰⁹

* The Marines also delivered pallets of carbonated beverages to the embassy. Initially, the embassy sold a can of soda to the Marines for 50 cents and then raised the price to \$1. As a result, the Marines stopped buying the embassy's stock.

Rotation and Reduction of CMAGTF Marines

A relatively quiet Monrovia resulted in only 62 Marines ashore during November. On 3 November, the USS *Newport County* (LST 1179) arrived at Mamba Station bringing Company L, BLT 3/8 to relieve the Marines of Company K. The platoon commanders and squad leaders went in after receiving a situation orientation for the turnover. Within days of the *Newport's* arrival, the joint task force commander released the *Barnstable County*, which departed Liberian waters with Marine combat engineers onboard. On 14 November, Captain William F. Crenshaw's, Company L assumed security responsibilities ashore. Company K remained in reserve onboard the *Whidbey Island* to support Company L with a standby reaction force.

As the month progressed, the number of weekly evacuees dwindled. The combat service support Marines onboard continued to provide logistics assistance to the embassy and the Marines ashore. Helicopters from the forward logistic site

in Freetown delivered pallets of rice and baby food to the embassy as part of a humanitarian aid package. The stable situation allowed the West African force, along with some Liberian support, to fill the vacuum left by Doe's death as an interim government was appointed. The government's real power, however, extended only to the outskirts of the city. Ambassador DeVos attended the 22 November ceremony together with the peacekeeping force commander and his soldiers. Subsequent negotiations lead by the Economic Community of West African States resulted in all factions agreeing to another ceasefire on 28 November.²¹⁰

On 30 November, the USS *Nashville* (LPD 13) arrived at Mamba Station to rotate the command element of the Contingency MAGTF. Major Hartley, his staff, and subordinate commanders briefed their replacements on the current situation in Liberia. While the briefings took place, the necessary transfers of equipment and personnel occurred. During the transition that day, fighting flared up briefly between the AFL, INPFL, and peacekeepers at the Barclay Training Center. The



DVIC DN-SC-91-06089

Marines at the American Embassy unload a container of hot food. All outside commercial aircraft flights had been cancelled, making the embassy dependent on 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit for resupply.

firefight resulted in stray rounds hitting the U.S.-leased Sam and E apartment building just outside the compound. At Post Two, one of the rounds hit a Marine, knocking him down and creating a three-inch crease in his Kevlar helmet. Unharmed, the round resulted in only a bruised forehead. The lance corporal and his scarred helmet became the object of much attention according to his platoon commander, First Lieutenant Walter E. Lavrinovich, Jr.²¹¹

Command of the Contingency MAGTF changed on 1 December with the executive officer of the 26th MEU, Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Kunkel, assuming command from Major Hartley. The transition was completed early on the morning of 2 December, when the *Whidbey Island* with the Marines of the original Contingency MAGTF 3-90 left Mamba Station.

As the *Nashville* arrived in Liberian waters, a European Command modification to the execute order directed a reduction in Marine presence ashore. Although the total number for the task force remained constant, only about 40 Marines remained onshore. Evacuation criteria changed with the new State Department policy that virtually eliminated most remaining applicants. Lieutenant Colonel Kunkel recalled the Marines evacuated less than 50 people during December.^{212*} The leadership at European Command, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, and the MEU believed the time to pull the Marines out had arrived.

A sense of peace returned in the streets of the city. Many of the markets reopened and people moved about conducting their daily activities. Deployed throughout the city and manning checkpoints, the West African peacekeepers' presence improved the security situation. The INPFL remained at their Cadwell base area and the AFL at the Barclay Training Center. The calm allowed some of the Marine task force staff to venture out and view the wholesale destruction firsthand. As Lieutenant Colonel Kunkel noted: "The first time we went out, it was clearly a city that had been at war. It looked like Berlin: you know, burned out buildings, collapsed buildings, streets blocked, burned out cars."²¹³ The look and mood of the city, however, changed within weeks as the new Marine task force commander noted:

The city was getting back to normal: lots of people out and about, open-air markets.... Vehicles moving: taxicab very, very busy.... Local police started coming out of the woodwork and back on duty. There was a concerted effort to clean the city up, clean the port up, clean the housing areas up. It was a mess, but it was slowly getting back to normal. There was an unofficial ceasefire and there was no fighting between any of the three factions.²¹⁴

Other evidence of a return to normalcy included the reopening of Spriggs-Payne Airport on 8 December, when two of the peacekeeper's Alpha Jets landed. This allowed United Nations charter flights to begin using the airfield. Both the INPFL and NPFL opened rice distribution centers in areas under their control.

Completion of Sharp Edge

Preparing to bring their mission to a close in early January 1991, the task force reduced the number of personnel and support equipment ashore. The 26th MEU by this time had evacuated 831 noncombatants.²¹⁵

A notable achievement of the 26th MEU involved the logistic support provided to the embassy. Marines brought in countless tons of food, supplies, and more than 100,000 gallons of fuel to the compound. Despite the small size of the MEU, which made it incapable of being divided, it also successfully operated two geographically separated MAGTFs. Lastly, in the midst of the turmoil, the accomplishment of a major in-stream reconfiguration of equipment and transfer of forces spoke highly of amphibious ready group and Marine expeditionary unit teamwork, as well as the flexibility it gave to the commander of the European Command.

A total of 2,439 persons were evacuated during Operation Sharp Edge, involving citizens from 59 countries. Less than 10 percent of the evacuees were Americans.²¹⁶ Dennis Jett, the deputy chief of mission, summed up the contribution of the Marines by stating: "We could have not maintained our presence without your efforts. That ability to remain here allowed us to monitor and influence events, to speed relief operations, and

* The Marines also conducted a pet evacuation in which all the embassy's pets were evacuated by helicopter.

to evacuate those U.S. citizens and nationals of other countries who wanted to leave. In doing so, you were responsible for savings hundreds, and probably thousands of lives."²¹⁷

The Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team and the Departure of the Marines

Considering the large buildup in the Persian Gulf and the apparent stability and security in Monrovia, European Command felt the time was right to end the mission. The Ambassador believed, however, that a security presence would still be required. Through additional consultations with the Department of State, an interagency group in Washington, D.C., recommended a Marine presence remain at the embassy. European Command requested U.S. Atlantic Command's support. Consequently, Admiral Carter tasked Marine Corps Security Force Battalion, Atlantic, with the embassy security mission.

Alerted and called off leave on 28 December, the 5th Platoon, Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (FAST) Company, from Marine Corps Security Force Battalion, Atlantic, received the tasking. The 50-man platoon left Norfolk, Virginia, on 6 January 1991 and arrived at Lungi Airfield, Sierra Leone, a day later. They were the first FAST platoon to support an embassy.²¹⁸

At the airfield, the platoon transferred their equipment, supplies, and ammunition from Navy C-130 aircraft to Navy CH-53E helicopters. One of the Navy helicopters belonging to HC-4 was undergoing repairs, leaving only one operational CH-53E to shuttle the FAST platoon and its equipment to Monrovia. The entire platoon arrived by the afternoon of 7 January, completing a long 2,000-mile journey in two days. Once on the ground, the FAST platoon commander, Captain Glen N. Cheatham, together with Company L's commanding officer, Captain Crenshaw, conducted a turnover and toured the defensive positions. After a quick briefing, Captain Cheatham's pla-



DVIC DN-ST-91-05949

A Marine CH-46E helicopter approaches the flight deck of the USS Nashville (LPD 13). With the arrival of a platoon of the Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Company, which assumed security responsibility from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the Nashville departed, officially ending Operation Sharp Edge.

toon officially assumed security responsibilities, manning posts, exchanging frequencies, and signing for ammunition and rations.²¹⁹

Dressed in civilian clothing, Company L's liaison, the defense attache, and FAST Marine representatives went to Spriggs-Payne Airport to meet an arriving Navy C-130 loaded with the FAST platoon's follow-on equipment, ammunition, and supplies. Still along the edges of the airstrip were human remains; skeletons with rotting flesh still on them and piles of skulls.²²⁰ West African peacekeepers now controlled the airfield, but the control tower had been peppered by small arms rounds during fighting and was not functioning. There also was a gaping rocket-propelled grenade hole in the tower. A Marine forward air controller talked the arriving aircraft in from the embassy and the Marines quickly unloaded and moved their cargo to the compound.

Late that day, Company L Marines flew out of the embassy and back to the *Nashville*. The turnover was complete with the delivery of additional ammunition stocks on the morning of 8 January. Operation Sharp Edge officially came to an end on 9 January when Contingency MAGTF 3-90 departed Mamba Station. The *Nashville's* departure concluded the longest running non-combatant evacuation operation to date.

The arrival of the FAST platoon provided the embassy with a highly trained security force with close quarters battle capability and robust crew-served firepower. Manning three day posts and five night posts, they worked on improving selected positions. The Marines ate in the embassy's cafeteria and resided in vacant staff quarters. The FAST command structure also differed from that of the contingency task force. Reports went directly to the team's higher headquarters, the commander of the Sixth Fleet. Daily reports of the platoon covered the routine movement of the peacekeepers' military vehicles and personnel up and down United Nations Drive in front of Post One and Post Two. Armed factional fighters, mostly located outside Monrovia, never came near the Marine's positions. One large, very vocal demonstration occurred in late January directly outside the embassy. The Marines asked the Liberians why they were demonstrating and they responded they wanted "U.S. protection." The crowd of 200 to 300 persons eventually dispersed. Even with the apparent normalcy, 5th Platoon Marines on post heard random shots fired many times throughout their stay.

The embassy no longer depended on the Marines for fuel or water. The administrative officer renegotiated contracts for fuel and water out in town. Opening the airport allowed additional supplies to come by Navy C-130.* The embassy staff frequently ventured out in the city and airport to carry on official business. Even the Marine security guards went out routinely to conduct physical training runs.

The cessation of fighting allowed West African peacekeepers to hold a parade for their rotating battalions on 9 February. The event was attended by the interim President of Liberia, the U.S. Ambassador, the defense attache, and the FAST platoon commander. At the parade, Captain Cheatham noted that Major General Dogonyaro, the peacekeeping force's commander, reminded his audience that his Nigerian troops now played a major part in the control of the city.²²¹

Charles Taylor's NPFL fighters remained on the city's outskirts and Prince Johnson's INFPL at the Cadwell area. Some of the non-governmental relief agencies within the city re-established limited services. The formal signing by all factions of a ceasefire monitoring agreement took place in Lome, Togo, on 13 February 1991.²²²

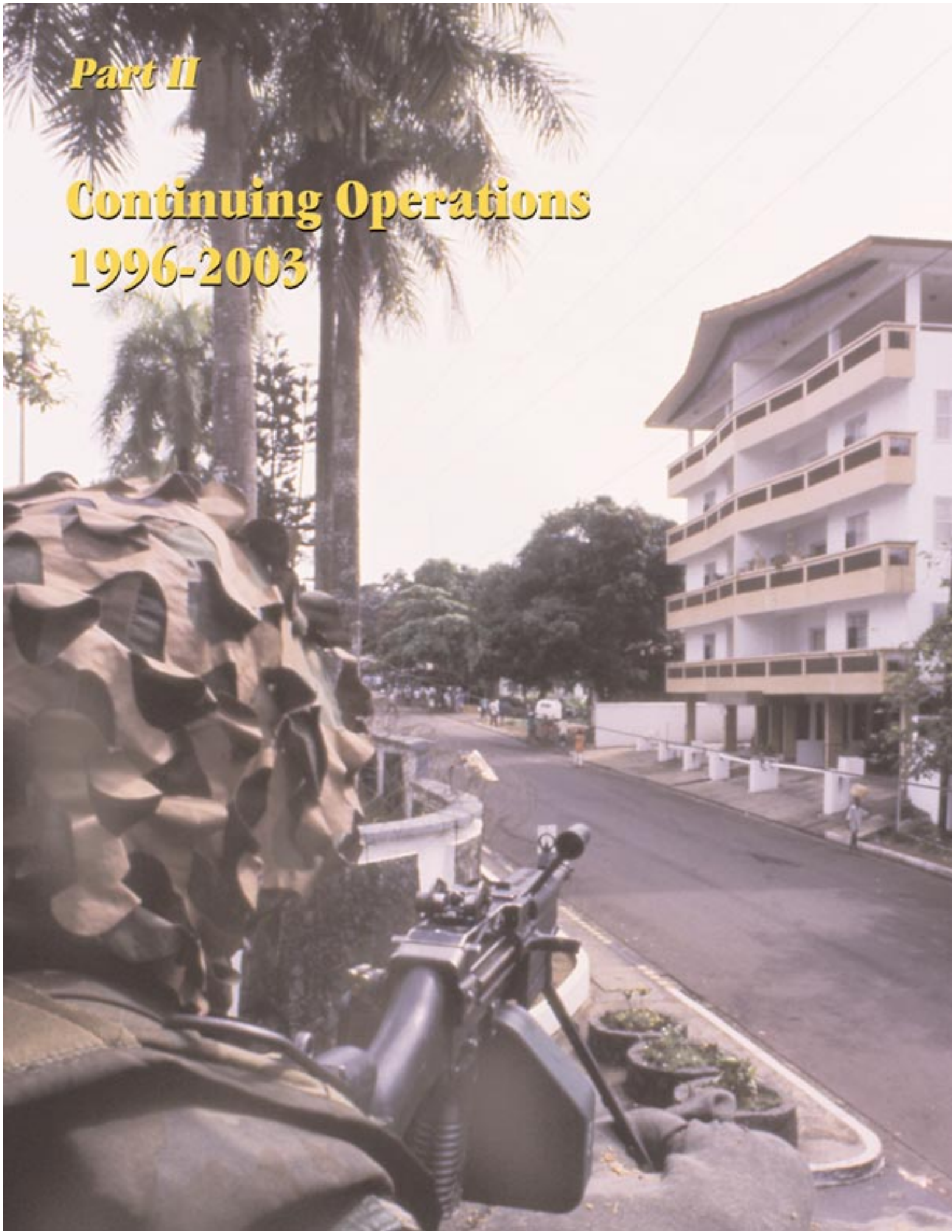
Monrovia and its environs remained overall peaceful during January and February 1991. With the ongoing buildup of forces in Kuwait, both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and European Command wanted the Marines to depart. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directive ordering redeployment of the FAST Marines finally arrived in the second week of February from the Sixth Fleet. The Ambassador's reservations were overcome by developments in the Persian Gulf region, which dictated the mission's end.

In concert with the United Nations' 15 February deadline for the Iraqis to withdraw from Kuwait, the commander of the Sixth Fleet ordered the FAST platoon to depart Liberia the same day by Navy C-130. The morning arrival of the C-130 and C-9 aircraft at Spriggs-Payne Airport signaled the start of regular semi-monthly supply flights for the embassy. For the Marines, the platoon's 15 February departure ended a 194-day presence of Marine combat units ashore in Liberia. Marine combat units would return approximately five years later to the same long-running civil war.

* Navy Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 58 (VR-58) conducted the supply flights into Spriggs-Payne Airport.

Part II

**Continuing Operations
1996-2003**



Chapter 5

22d MEU in Operation Assured Response

Civil War Continues

A tenuous ceasefire remained in effect in Liberia from the time Marines departed in February 1991 until October 1992, but frequent ceasefire violations occurred after the Lome truce. Because of the failure to get all sides involved, peace remained elusive. Fighting quickly spread eastward into neighboring Sierra Leone in March 1991. Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) fighters worked with the fledgling Revolutionary United Front against the government of Sierra Leone and captured several lucrative diamond-mining areas. Within a year, the West African peacekeeping force and the Sierra Leone army had prodded the rebels out of most of the occupied cities and villages and into the Sierra Leone countryside. A new Liberian militia group, the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), attacked NPFL forces from Sierra Leone and moved into western Liberia. Many former Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) soldiers joined ULIMO.

In October 1991, a series of negotiations attended by all factions at Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast, produced an agreement requiring all factions to confine their fighters to camps, disarm under the peacekeepers' supervision, and agree to support elections.²²³ In accordance with the agreement, the NPFL allowed peacekeepers to deploy into the countryside. The NPFL also recognized the authority of the peacekeepers, a primarily English speaking African force, and its parent organization, the Economic Community of West African States. The peacekeepers added 1,200 Senegalese soldiers to balance the force with substantial French speaking African troops.²²⁴

But Taylor's NPFL and other factions did not disarm. Taylor increased his power by creating a

shadow state, issuing money and selling timber, gold, and diamonds in NPFL controlled areas.²²⁵ By 1992, NPFL fighters killed a few Senegalese troops and temporarily took more than 400 peacekeepers hostage. Clashes continued and the peacekeepers withdrew to the greater Monrovia area. On 15 October, major hostilities resumed as the NPFL launched an offensive to take the capital. Heavy fighting took place when the fighters entered the suburbs of the city, which resulted in the displacement of an estimated 200,000 Liberians.²²⁶ On 20 October, the U.S. Embassy conducted an ordered departure of American citizens. In four days, charter and military aircraft evacuated 170 Americans.²²⁷ Twenty embassy personnel stayed behind, including the Marine security guard detachment.*

Deployed in the U.S. European Command's area of responsibility, the 26th MEU (Special Operations Capable) closely tracked the developments in Liberia. Alerted for possible evacuation contingencies during the fighting in October 1992, the Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), composed of the 26th MEU (SOC) and Amphibious Squadron (Phibron) 8, at the time supported both Operation Provide Comfort and scheduled Sixth Fleet exercises. No attempt was made to assist in contingency operations in Liberia while the Mediterranean ARG conducted split operations.²²⁸ Fortunately, Taylor's troops never entered the city. The West African peacekeepers blunted Taylor's offensive on the outskirts of the city using tanks, artillery, naval gun-

* Initially, the regional security officer directed part of the Marine security guard to evacuate due to a mandated number of personnel that were to remain behind. But those numbers conflicted with the embassy's existing emergency action plan, which mandated the number of personnel to be evacuated.



Photo courtesy of the authors

Armed National Patriotic Liberation Front fighters skirt the southern edge of the American Embassy compound in search of United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy militia members. Escalating conflict between the two groups again forced many American citizens into the embassy.

fire, and air support. Eventually, the peacekeepers regained control of greater Monrovia.

As the bloodletting continued into 1993, ULIMO stepped up its attacks on the NPFL, but the peacekeepers eventually disarmed them. A massacre of 600 civilians on 6 June by the AFL occurred in the West African-controlled city of Harbel.²²⁹ The incident seriously weakened confidence in the peacekeepers as protectors, as they appeared to favor certain factions. In another round of negotiations by the Economic Community of West African States at Cotonou, Benin, the factions again agreed to a ceasefire and a timetable for disarmament and elections. Signatures from representatives of the Organization of African Unity and United Nations added support to the accords in July. As a result, the United Nations established a 368-man observer force, called the United Nations Observer Mission Liberia.²³⁰ The accord replaced the inter-

im government of Amos Sawyer with a Liberian national transitional government. After considerable delay, the transitional government took control in March 1994, but the plans for elections in September collapsed. During September, former AFL elements staged an unsuccessful coup.

Significant disarmament and demobilization of the factions did not take place due to differences over political and economic power. While negotiations continued, the fragile peace quickly disintegrated as outbreaks of fighting occurred in the countryside. In 1994, the ULIMO group split into two ethnic factions, the ULIMO-K (predominately Mandingo and Muslim) under Alhiji Kromah and ULIMO-J (predominately Krahn) led by Roosevelt Johnson. Another Krahn faction, the Liberia Peace Council (LPC) headed by George Boley, also appeared and began fighting the NPFL. Competing factions eventually mushroomed into seven separate militia groups.

Areas outside the Monrovia-Buchanan-Gbarnga peacekeeping zone remained inaccessible due to deteriorating security. Fighting between the factions resumed with Taylor losing, then regaining his headquarters at Gbarnga. The lack of security in the countryside forced the U.N. military observers to reduce the size of this mission and its activities. The continuing flow of arms and the unwillingness to uphold a ceasefire fueled more violence.

At Abuja, Nigeria, negotiations ended with the factions signing the 13th peace accord in August 1995. The plan formed a new Liberian transitional national government composed at first of a five-person, then later a six-person, Counsel of State. Sworn in on 1 September, faction leaders Charles Taylor (NPFL), Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K), and George Boley (LPC) received cabinet posts together with three civilians.

By December, the ceasefire again broke down and fighting occurred between ULIMO-J and West African peacekeepers at Tubmanburg, which began initially over control of diamond mines. With all the factional leaders living in Monrovia, clashes between other cabinet ministers' factions took place and only token disarmament occurred. Council calls for the arrest of Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J) on 12 March 1996 sparked a brief outburst of violence in the city. At the beginning of April, another attempt to arrest Johnson spurred an outbreak of widespread fighting in Monrovia.

Introduction of American Forces

The NPFL, ULIMO-J, and other Krahn smuggled arms and fighters into the city, creating a potential powder keg. In early April, the situation came to a head when Council member Taylor (NPFL) issued a 72-hour ultimatum to Johnson (ULIMO-J) to turn himself in. Similar to the March incident, a combined NPFL and ULIMO-K force went to arrest Johnson. The ensuing fighting started at approximately 0300 on 6 April and created chaos inside the city, which previously had been a safe haven from the conflict in the countryside.²³¹ By mid-morning, Americans fleeing from the violence began arriving at the embassy. The fighters who had infiltrated the city drew on hidden caches of arms and ammunition and the violence quickly escalated. The Emergency Action Committee met that evening at the U.S. Embassy with Sergeant Luiz E. Sanchez, the acting Marine security guard detachment commander, in atten-

dance.* The staff expressed concern for the safety and accountability of Americans and the meeting ended with a request for security assistance and for permission to draw down the staff.

On directions from the embassy's regional security officer, Sergeant Sanchez put an additional Marine security guard at Post One, doubling the number of guards at that post. Inundated with calls on seven different radio nets, Post One Marines remained extremely busy controlling access, monitoring nets, talking on radios, and passing messages. The Marines frequently heard sounds of gunfire or rocket-propelled grenades exploding in the city. One mortar round exploded in the U.N. observer compound just across the street from the embassy. Sergeant Sanchez frequently observed fighters moving within the view of the embassy's closed-circuit television camera security system. The fighters brandished weapons as they drove by the embassy in stolen vehicles. Refugees, looters, and groups of drunk or marijuana-high fighters roamed the streets. The Marines also received reports of fighting at the airport, Barclay Training Center, and in the Mamba Point area. The violence increased as additional NPFL and ULIMO-K troops poured in from the countryside.²³²

The escalation forced humanitarian aid organizations to depart as combatants pillaged aid organizations' buildings and warehouses. By Easter Sunday, 7 April, more than 400 people waited in the compound for evacuation. The embassy opened the gates of Graystone compound to provide refuge for the Liberian population and 15,000 displaced Liberians quickly filled the American-controlled compound while others roamed the streets looking for safe haven.²³³

American citizens in town were taken off guard by the violence and were quickly caught in the middle of the fighting. Many telephoned the embassy for help. Marine security guards relayed calls to the regional security officer who repeatedly left the compound to intervene, accompanied at times by a faction liaison officer. To get to the embassy, Americans had to run a gauntlet of roadblocks where they were shaken down or seized. Chaos and terror reigned throughout the

* Staff Sergeant Jerry A. Blandford, the commander of the Marine security guard detachment at the time of the outbreak of fighting, was on leave in the United States. He and one replacement, after a number of flights, flew into the embassy about a week later on helicopters from Special Operations Command, Europe. (Sergeant Luiz E. Sanchez interview, 27Oct97 [Oral History Collection])

city as armed fighters robbed, looted, broke into homes, and threatened citizens. Mobs invaded the facilities of the U.N. relief agencies and stole more than 300 vehicles, pillaging warehouses and destroying property as they went. At the airport, two aircraft were hit by rocket fire and exploded into flames.

Acting similar to the warring factions, many peacekeepers abandoned their posts as the fighting spread or did nothing to intervene to stop the fighting or looting. Groups of soldiers from the West African force actually participated in the looting. Many of the Nigerian soldiers had not been paid in four months and some sold ammunition or handed over their weapons to the Krahn. Most peacekeepers hastily retreated to their bases, although some remained guarding selected facilities and businesses while allowing the looting to go on around them.²³⁴

The embassy's request for military support prompted a presidential announcement on 9 April to send in U.S. forces to assist in the evacuation of Americans and other foreigners.²³⁵ Responding to the tasking from the national command author-

ities, European Command established a joint task force headed by U.S. Army Brigadier General Michael A. Canavan, the commanding general of European Special Operations Command.²³⁶ The special operations forces received alert orders on 6 and 7 April to move to Dakar, Senegal, and Freetown, Sierra Leone, to assemble in support of evacuation operations in Liberia. The 10-day operation was the first time the command element of the European Special Operations Command formed as a joint task force.²³⁷ Named Assured Response, the operation's deployment order directed the pre-positioning of equipment and aircraft at an intermediate support base in Dakar, Senegal, and at a forward support base in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The mission of the joint task force was to conduct a noncombatant evacuation and protect the lives of American citizens and designated third- and host-country nationals in Monrovia.²³⁸

A succession of firefights took place in front of the embassy before the joint task force arrived. Johnson's ULIMO-J fighters gathered in an area near Gate One, later nicknamed "Crack Alley" by



DVIC DF-SD-01-09185

This view down United Nations Drive, which borders the full length of the American Embassy's landward wall, shows where much of the looting of other nations' embassy and consular buildings took place.



DoD (USAF) 960411-F-0954H-005

American citizens evacuated from Monrovia exit the tail of a U.S. Air Force MH-53 Pave Low helicopter in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The helicopter and its crew deployed from the 352d Special Operations Group, Mildenhall, United Kingdom.

the Marines. Near the Wellington apartments, a number of armed fighters in vehicles and on foot roamed around looking for places to loot. The fighters on the street, within view of the embassy's Mezbau Gate, repeatedly fired random shots. In a risky move aimed at dissuading the fighters from breaking in and stealing the visible U.S. government vehicles, Lance Corporal Edward A. Davis, III, dashed from cover, unarmed and under full observation of the armed fighters, and placed an American flag on a chain-link fence gate. This action helped deter the fighters, who later invaded and looted other buildings near the embassy.²³⁹

With a Special Operations Command, Europe, assessment and Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) teams on the way, Marine security guards and the local guard force prepared the embassy's landing zone by taking down the basketball court backboards, hoops, and poles, cutting trees, and placing light markers on the fence line. A six-person survey and assessment team landed first, followed by an 18-man SEAL team. Both elements disembarked

on 9 April from Sikorsky MH-53J Pave Low helicopters in the embassy landing zone. The team established security positions in conjunction with the regional security officer and the five Marine security guards.* The two helicopters left fully loaded with evacuees who were waiting in the compound.²⁴⁰

Fighting continued outside the embassy and on 11 April, after beating two local unarmed guards, fighters with weapons entered the embassy grounds and attempted to break into the diplomatic quarters. The SEALs reacted by rounding up the fighters with no casualties and then releasing them. Additional special operations personnel soon arrived. Rounds from small arms posed a constant threat to the helicopters landing in the embassy landing zone. One rocket-propelled grenade exploded near an incoming helicopter, prompting the joint task force to switch to night helicopter landings. During the day, fire was

* Marine Security Guard Detachment, Monrovia, normally consisted of seven Marines.

heaviest in the afternoon and most U.S. personnel remained inside to avoid stray rounds regularly impacting within the compound. By 16 April, the South European Army Task Force's initial ready company, Company C, 325th Airborne Combat Team, manned defensive positions and ran security patrols in the compound.²⁴¹

Sporadic fighting continued throughout the city with heavy fighting taking place between the NPFL, ULIMO-J, and Krahs. Smoke from fires set by looters or started by shelling billowed from the city. Evacuees gave firsthand accounts of Guinean peacekeeping troops joining in the looting and selling weapons to the fighters. Although West African tanks rolled through parts of the city, the troops remained ineffective in restoring order. At the Barclay Training Center, Krahn and Johnson's ULIMO-J men defended the compound while holding peacekeepers hostage against NPFL attacks.²⁴² The Barclay Training Center repeatedly received barrages of machine gun fire and volleys of rocket-propelled grenades. In the central business district and on Bushrod Island, gangs of

armed youth roamed the area pillaging and burning businesses.

The bitter fighting resulted in special operations forces and diplomatic security personnel conducting a number of rescues to save American citizens outside the compound. After nine days, more than 2,200 noncombatants representing 73 countries, including approximately 540 Americans, had been evacuated. Most evacuees left the embassy landing zone by helicopters and flew to the forward support base at Lungi Airfield in Sierra Leone. By 18 April, Lungi had become home to the special operations forces command element, which comprised nine helicopters, two aircraft, and approximately 650 personnel. From the airfield, aircraft delivered the evacuees to a safe haven at Dakar, Senegal. Once at the Dakar airport terminal, embassy and joint task force personnel assisted in processing the evacuees to their final destinations. At the height of the deployment, the special operation forces positioned 11 aircraft and close to 600 support personnel in Dakar.²⁴³ On arrival, the Marines inherited only a



DVIC DF-SD-01-09184

Civilian evacuees waiting on board a Lockheed MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft from the 352d Special Operations Group for their next flight to Dakar, Senegal, where they would be turned over to U.S. State Department representatives for the last segment of the evacuation from Liberia.

small portion of General Canavan's special operations forces, assets, and support bases.

Marines Take the Reins

As early as 10 April, U.S. Army General George A. Joulwan, Commander in Chief, European Command, wanted to ensure the return of his special operations forces. After issuing the execute order for Assured Response, his staff followed with a modification of the plan, which called for replacing the special operations joint task force with a Marine joint task force if the situation did not stabilize quickly. The modification would provide the right force for any lengthy operation. Since the inception of Assured Response, General Joulwan recognized the utility of the Mediterranean ARG for any long-term situation.

Alerted by telephone the day before, the 22d MEU (SOC) commander, Colonel M. Wayne Forbush, received the first modification to the European Command Assured Response execute order on 11 April. The order directed the Mediterranean ARG with the embarked Landing Force Sixth Fleet to sail at best speed to Monrovia, Liberia. With no relief from Sixth Fleet's ongoing exercise requirements, Colonel Forbush understood the situation required split-MEU operations. The additional mission now assigned to 22d MEU was to conduct noncombatant evacuation operations and to provide security for the American Embassy in Liberia. Three of the ships, USS *Guam* (LPH 9), USS *Trenton* (LPD 14), and USS *Portland* (LSD 37), located in the Adriatic Sea, got underway immediately. The last ship, the USS *Tortuga* (LSD 46), was undergoing repairs at the port of Haifa, Israel. The majority of the MEU staff also was in Israel planning for exercise Noble Shirley. MEU elements on the *Tortuga*, the artillery, Battery B, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, and the light armored reconnaissance company, Company D (-), 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, went ashore in Israel to conduct a scheduled exercise. No cross-decking or reconfiguration was necessary other than transporting six weapons carrier high mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles (humvees) to Sierra Leone from Israel.²⁴⁴

A forward liaison cell departed the *Guam* on 14 April 1996 with a mission focused on liaison and preparation for the turnover of the forces at the embassy. Lieutenant Colonel James F. Barnes, the 22d MEU executive officer, led the four-man team. Flying by C-130 to Freetown, Sierra Leone,



USS *Guam* (LPH 9) MARG 1-96 Deployment Cruise Book
In mid-April, Col Melvin W. Forbush was appointed Joint Task Force Assured Response commander when the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit assumed the evacuation and security mission from the Army.

the team went to the joint task force rear headquarters located at the airport's lounge building. Inside the building, Lieutenant Colonel Barnes recalled: "There must have been 25 colonels and 50 lieutenant colonels."²⁴⁵ Seeing the large number of officers, soldiers, and airmen present at the joint task force headquarters, Barnes realized the expeditionary unit needed to bring in additional MEU staff to coordinate operations.

At the embassy, Ambassador William B. Milam learned of the deployment of the Marines during one of his live interagency secure teleconferences after the special operations force's arrival. On 15 April, the Marines of the forward liaison cell arrived at the embassy in Monrovia and coordinated with the European Special Operations Command's forward headquarters, the U.S. Army infantry battalion commander, and the Ambassador and his staff. Ambassador Milam previously had worked with Marines and met Lieutenant Colonel Barnes during Operation Sea Angel.²⁴⁶

The forward liaison cell relayed an initial assessment to the MEU recommending the introduction of the same size force the special operations joint task force had at the embassy, as well as staff visits before the ship arrived in Liberian waters. Agreeing to the suggestion of staff liaison visits, the 22d MEU commander sent 11 members of his staff and subordinate elements to visit Lungi Airfield headquarters and the embassy in Monrovia from 17 to 19 April. By 18 April, special operations elements at Freetown and Dakar were ordered to redeploy because of the arrival of the Army's initial ready company. The special opera-

tions forces immediately began breaking down tents and packing equipment for departure.

By 18 April, the special operations joint task force had completed evacuation of all Americans in an "authorized departure status," those wanting to leave voluntarily. Only 18 official American and State Department personnel remained at the embassy.* On 19 April, emergency talks sponsored by the Economic Community of West African States brought a temporary halt to the fighting in Monrovia, but the situation remained tense.

That same day, ships carrying Marines arrived at Mamba Station located off the coast of Liberia. The 22d MEU commander, Colonel Forbush, received another modification to the European Command order, which directed the Marines to assume the European Special Operations Command evacuation and security mission. He quickly recalled his visiting staff on 19 April to help the MEU command element assume the additional responsibilities as a joint task force headquarters. Upon completion of the turnover, Colonel Forbush relieved Brigadier General Canavan and assumed command of Joint Task Force Assured Response. The joint task force initially included: the 22d MEU; Amphibious Squadron 2 (the *Guam* ARG) led by Captain William D. Young, USN; the Air Force's 4050th Operations Squadron led by Colonel Wayne Mudge, USAF; and a detachment from the Navy's Fleet Air Mediterranean at the forward support base in Freetown, commanded by Captain Charles White, USN.

The 22d MEU staff members assumed new responsibilities as the joint task force staff and adjusted to meet the requirements of both the MEU commander and the commander in chief. With the staff already split, planning sustained operations required long hours from the staff's remaining junior officers and staff noncommissioned officers. The MEU requested and received from the II Marine Expeditionary Force minimal

individual staff augmentation for the joint task force.

Actions Ashore

At 0600 on 20 April, the first helicopter sorties carrying Marines arrived to replace the soldiers at the embassy in Monrovia. The well briefed platoon guides from Company F and Weapons Company BLT 2/2 came ashore first. The main body of Marines began arriving at the basketball court landing zone one hour later. Company F arrived first, quickly followed by the small 22d MEU forward command element and some MEU Service Support Group 22 (MSSG-22) personnel. Fast attack vehicles debarked carrying .50-caliber machine guns, Mk19 grenade launchers, and tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided missiles, commonly called TOW missiles. These vehicles combined with the mortars, machine guns, and sniper weapons already on station at the embassy significantly enhanced the Marines' firepower. The MEU completed the entire lift by 1015.

Company F, commanded by Captain Eric M. Mellinger, assumed security of the compound. The smooth transition left Marine squad leaders and platoon commanders with fire plans and field sketches drawn by the departing airborne troops. Starting at about 1230, soldiers from Company C, 3d Battalion, 325th Infantry, left in six sorties of three Boeing MH-47D Chinook helicopters. The last flight out of the embassy at 2015 included the outgoing commander of the European Special Operations Command's Joint Task Force Assured Response. That evening, more than 275 Marines protected the compound. Captain Mellinger noted the embassy staff seemed overjoyed the Marines had arrived.²⁴⁷

The 22d MEU staff formed a joint operations center forward at the embassy. Colonel Forbush's main headquarters remained on board the *Guam* to minimize the footprint ashore. The evacuation control center, a detachment of nine Marines from MSSG-22, set up in the embassy's dining facility and went to work processing evacuees. At 1415, with his forward deployed headquarters ashore, Colonel Forbush officially assumed command of Joint Task Force Assured Response. Most of the approximately 1,970 personnel of the 22d MEU (SOC), which was composed of BLT 2/2, MSSG-22, and HMM-162, remained afloat.²⁴⁸

The next day the joint task force established a forward support base at Freetown, Sierra Leone.

* The 22d MEU called on its Marine KC-130 detachment to transport essential staff members. Detachment "A," Marine Aerial Refueling Squadron 252 (VMGR-252) performed the mission. The two aircraft detachments, normally on stand-by in the continental U.S., had already deployed to support the planned Noble Shirley exercise in Israel. Although the aircraft were normally under the operational control of Sixth Fleet, European Command's modification to the Assured Response execute order placed the aircraft under control of the commander of the joint task force on 24 April 1996. (Major James K. Kazin interview, 12 Sep96 [Oral History Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.]

The forward support base, coordinated by Captain White, was the nexus of all traffic in and out of Liberia. Using the same evacuation routing established by the previous joint task force, the Navy-run forward support base transferred evacuees from helicopters to awaiting aircraft that flew to the safe haven in Dakar, Senegal.

On 22 April, Marine helicopters flew Ambassador William H. Twadell (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs) and his inter-agency support team to the embassy. The team, which included Major General Michael J. Byron, Vice Director for Strategic Plans and Policy, Joint Staff, conducted discussions with West African field commander General John M. Inenger at his headquarters, and later with factional leaders. During their two-day visit, meetings with the peacekeepers centered on the West African force's efforts to restore order and a proposed U.S. aid package of \$30 million to assist peacekeeping operations. Colonel Forbush and Captain Paul A. Shelton, the MEU's assistant intelligence officer, accompanied the team when it visited the

peacekeeping force's headquarters. Frank comments by the Nigerian commander gave Colonel Forbush an excellent understanding of the peacekeepers' disposition and desires. The Nigerian general requested a long list of military equipment support, including McDonnell Douglas AH-64 Apache helicopter gunships.²⁴⁹ Given the peacekeeper's historically poor maintenance and limited logistical capabilities, the request for Apache helicopters did not receive serious consideration.

Colonel Forbush flew to Freetown the next day and held a component commander's conference at the forward support base. At the 24 April meeting, he passed on General Joulwan's intent to reduce the overall force and presence ashore and to redeploy all remaining special operations troops. The reduced Air Force component of the special operations force briefed their ongoing redeployment plans. The joint task force would retain two Air Force AC-130 gunships for on-call support, but by 28 April the Air Force component's AC-130s had left Freetown. The Navy com-



Photo courtesy of the authors

Replacing U.S. Army soldiers, Marines of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit set up a sniper position on the grounds of the American Embassy. The M40A1 sniper rifle pictured here was based on the Remington model 700 and was manufactured by specially trained Marine Corps armorers.



Photo courtesy of the authors

The joint task force commander, Col Melvin W. Forbush, briefs key task force personnel at the forward support base in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Decisions made at the meeting reduced the force's footprint ashore.

ponent would keep one Lockheed EP-3 for reconnaissance and a two-helicopter detachment for support on station.

Expanded from what the Marines defended in 1990, the embassy grounds in 1996 included the former British Embassy within its boundaries. The Marines at the embassy quartered themselves in available rooms throughout the compound. The joint task force forward, housed in the chancellery, occupied a majority of the ground floor. Company F set up most of its defensive positions away from the boundary of the embassy, primarily located on top of buildings with views of United Nations Drive.

The Marines worked on improving and adding positions during the first week. One position was established on the second floor of the Ambassador's quarters, which was formerly the British Embassy. The expanded U.S. Embassy boundary faced the end of a natural avenue of approach from the east up Sekou Toure Drive and United Nations Drive.²⁵⁰ Any American property, however, drew displaced Liberians like a magnet. By now more than 20,000 Liberians had gathered in

the nearby U.S.-controlled Greystone compound looking for a safe haven from the violence. Ghanaian mediators for the Economic Community of West African States negotiated a truce on 20 April, and the Krahn released 78 foreigners held at the Barclay Training Center. The Liberians began a limited clean up of the city, although marauding fighters continued moving about. During the next few days the MEU's intelligence section received reports of more NPFL fighters and heavy weapons, including mortars, entering the city, while Krahn factions remained at the Barclay Training Center.²⁵¹

Marines Return Fire

On 27 April, Company G relieved Company F and improved the new defensive positions, including building dummy positions. The company commander, Captain Jeffrey J. Kenney, knew the terrain quite well after deploying to Liberia as a company executive officer in 1990 during Operation Sharp Edge.

Serious fighting started up again on 28 and 29

April.²⁵² Stray rounds constantly passed over the heads of the Marines and fighters in stolen vehicles or on foot frequently passed in front of the Marine positions brandishing and pointing their weapons at the Marines, who often responded with stern warnings. Although the fighters congregated close to the embassy and attempted to provoke the Marines, the Marines clearly understood the rules of engagement, which allowed the Marines to return fire if fired upon, or if the fighters showed hostile intent. While the pointing of weapons was common in Liberian culture, the Marines could easily have interpreted the action as a hostile intent. But the Marines on post exhibited considerable restraint.

A pattern of fighting soon developed near the embassy. The NPFL normally received ammunition the night before a fight. Then the next day, late in the morning, the NPFL would attack to the east. Later in the day, the Krahns would push them back west toward the embassy. When it was over, both sides would return to their assembly areas only to start the performance again the next day.²⁵³

On 30 April, earlier than normal, the Marines heard automatic weapons fire and explosions in the city. The Krahns were attempting to break out of the Barclay Training Center. Marines reported heavy fire, concentrated outside the southern half of the embassy opposite Post Seven at the facility maintenance building, and Post Eight at the Ambassador's residence. At about 0845, 25 to 30 NPFL fighters armed with AK-47s and several rocket launchers assembled in the open field to the east of the embassy and moved east toward the Barclay Training Center. A short time later, about 15 to 20 more NPFL fighters followed. The Marines watching knew something was about to happen.

At 1030, several heavy bursts of fire hit a cluster of shanties outside the fence line near the Ambassador's residence. Civilians living there ran for cover or fled in terror. Marines from the 2d Platoon watched as a group of NPFL fighters congregating on United Nations Drive about 400 meters from the southern part of the embassy and started moving toward the beach. The fighters' target appeared about 300 to 500 meters out in the water. Six to 10 persons rowing frantically in a canoe were apparently trying to paddle around Mamba Point. The NPFL fighters moved along the beach, chasing and shooting at the canoe. Marines of the 2d Platoon warned the first group of about a dozen fighters to turn around when

they reached an area below the embassy fence line, but the NPFL fighters continued to fire. Captain Kenney at Post Eight yelled: "You guys can't go there!" The fighters paused and their leader demanded passage to shoot the men in the canoe. Kenney, now near the chain link fence, told the NPFL leader to leave and the Marines would take care of the men if the canoes landed. The Marines knew if the men in the canoe returned fire, the embassy and their positions would be in the line of fire. A Marine ordered the squad accompanying the company commander to chamber their rounds and train their weapons on the fighters. The audible sound of chambering rounds convinced the NPFL leader to back down. Apparently satisfied, he thanked the company commander and ordered his men to withdraw to a building behind the old national public health



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine
Battalion Landing Team 2/2 Marines not only improved existing defensive positions such as the one atop the main building of the American Embassy, but also built new ones, including dummy positions.



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine

Marines manning the American Embassy's front gate had a bulletproof-window view of the constant chaos along United Nations Drive.

services building, which the Marines called the "I-Hop." After the incident, the 2d Platoon's area in the southern half of the embassy settled down for about an hour.²⁵⁴ Around 1200, Marines again heard the sound of gunfire to the north of the I-Hop building. By about 1245, fire echoed throughout the embassy compound as skirmishing started outside while refugees streamed past.

By 1310, a number of firefights broke out near the embassy. With all Marines on post alerted and many observing the fire and rocket explosions, reports from the Marines flooded the command post. Post Eight, a sandbagged balcony on the second floor of the Ambassador's residence, offered a good view of the southern sector of United Nations Drive. A surveillance and target acquisition team headed by Corporal Jason S. Farrand, a trained scout sniper, manned the post. Corporal Farrand's Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifle lay positioned between himself and First Lieutenant Aaron E. Bennett, the surveillance and target acquisition platoon commander.* Lieutenant

Bennett had gone to the post to relieve one of the team members. Both watched as a firefight erupted about 150 meters to their front. While behind his rifle and observing the firefight through the rifle's scope, Corporal Farrand moved his eyes off the scope to observe the origins of a shot just fired to his left. The ricocheting round grazed Corporal Farrand's collarbone, continued into the inside collar of his flak jacket, and dropped to the ground. The impact caused him to drop his weapon, fall backward and break the leg of the chair on which he sat. "It felt like a huge steel ball hit my shoulder," Farrand commented. Farrand got up and ripped off his flak jacket to check his wound. Nearby Marines pushed the corporal back down for his own protection and after a quick assessment by a corpsman, Farrand left for the battalion aid station. Post Eight Marines believed a stray round caused the incident, so they did not return fire.

Corporal Farrand returned to the post after a corpsman cleaned the wound. Farrand came back because he thought "they were going to try and evacuate me to the ship," and he wanted to be with his team because he "knew something was going to happen." After the incident, Captain

* The Barrett M82A1A Special Application Scoped Rifle (SASR) is a semi-automatic sniper rifle chambered for the .50-caliber, Browning machine gun cartridge.

Kenney told all posts over the radio to exercise caution and watch out for “flagging.”*

Adding to the Marines concern, 100 or so refugees had gathered along the western fence line to avoid the shooting. At around 1400, Marines spotted a group of about 10 NPFL fighters moving up Sekou Toure Drive. Corporal William A. Gardner, 2d Platoon’s 3d Squad leader, was checking his men’s positions at Post Seven and Seven Bravo and he watched from Seven Bravo as the fighters advanced in quasi-tactical formation toward the embassy. Marine combat engineers had built post Seven Bravo, a sand-bagged position on top of the roof of the facility maintenance building, just the day before. When the NPFL squad reached the area around Gibson Street, about a block from the embassy, one fighter aimed and fired at the position. The round hit the plywood support for the sand bagged walls about six inches from Corporal Gardner and Lance Corporal Wade M. Ward, a squad M249 automatic weapon gunner. Plywood splinters from the round hit Lance Corporal Ward in the cheek. After dropping for cover, Gardner immediately ordered the Marines on post to return fire. Popping back up, the Marines returned fire using M16s, an M60 machine gun, and an M249, killing at least three of the NPFL. Gardner yelled cease-fire and the Marines immediately reloaded. One fighter lying in a prone position in the street fired a round at the Marines. Gardner ordered his machine gunner to fire again and the impact of the rounds flipped the militiaman onto his back. After calling a second ceasefire, the squad leader and his Marines watched two fighters, with arms raised high, cautiously move toward the bodies in the street and drag off two of the wounded. Other fighters stripped the dead of their weapons and boots and the survivors fled the scene.²⁵⁵

Indiscriminate fire continued to strike the area around Post Seven from an unknown location. At 1500, a group of fighters again fired on Post Seven, but the Marines were unable to locate the source and did not return fire. Interspersed with civilian refugees, a different group of NPFL fighters, who had not engaged the Marines, retreated from the area of the I-Hop building toward the embassy. Wanting no trouble, they flashed peace signs and pointed their weapons away from the

* Flagging was a slang term used by the Marines of 22d MEU to describe a factional fighter’s action of pointing his weapon at Marines.



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine
A battalion landing team Marine patrols the fence line of the American Embassy compound, which had been extended to incorporate the British Embassy.

compound as they ran past along United Nations Drive.²⁵⁶

At 1515, a group of 40 to 50 Krahn fighters fired from the hip as they moved west by squads on United Nations Drive. The Krahns pursued a ragged group of NPFL fighters who started running north along United Nations Drive and then through the open field in front of Post Eight to escape the fire. After dispersing the group, the lead element of the Krahn force hesitated, regrouped, and moved north. Captain Kenney, on Post Eight, yelled at the lead fighter to stop. Just 35 meters from the post on the other side of the wall, the lead fighter, who was wearing white shorts, grinned at Kenney and fired his weapon at the Marines. After taking a burst of machine gun fire, Captain Kenney gave the command to fire. Marines on Post Eight and other nearby positions opened fire on the lead fighter, who immediately dropped for cover.

Using a Barrett sniper rifle, a Marine engaged a fighter popping up and shooting from the ruins across the street. After a few shots, the fighter



USS *Guam* (LPH 9) MARG 1-96 Deployment Cruise Book

A Marine sniper fires from a fortified position in the upper floors of the American Embassy's main building. To minimize civilian casualties, fire was restricted to ferreting out opposing snipers in the buildings across United Nations Drive.

staggered out and the Marines followed up with a burst of M60 machine gun fire. One fighter attempted to engage the Marines with a rocket-propelled grenade, but was hit by a Marine sniper's round. After exchanging fire with the Marines for some time, the Krahn's withdrew. Some of the fighters used civilians as shields as they moved back to the east behind the I-Hop building, while others dragged their wounded away. Krahn casualties numbered at least one killed and four wounded.

Six of the withdrawing Krahn marksmen positioned themselves in the I-Hop building and engaged Post Seven and Post Eight with small arms fire. Not wanting to cause civilian casualties, Captain Kenney restricted fire to well aimed shots to ferret out the snipers. Marines, including Corporal Farrand, returned fire. Employing a Barrett sniper rifle, an M40A1 sniper rifle, and M16A2 rifles, they left at least two dead on an outside staircase and second story balcony of the I-

Hop building. The disciplined fire drove the last few fighters away around 1545.²⁵⁷

After Company G's effective response, Mamba Point became unusually calm. The embassy's local guard project manager, Hershel Hernandez, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, went out and physically verified at least six dead and numerous blood trails from skirmishes. The bodies of the dead remained untouched in the street for the rest of the day. That evening, in deference to the Marines, NPFL fighters needing resupply called the embassy to request permission to drive by in two vehicles. Fighters gathered at the I-Hop building but did not come near the Marines. From then on, the fighters avoided pointing weapons at the Marines and many times would raise them over their heads to signify peaceful intentions as they approached the embassy. The NPFL later called the embassy to claim its leaders did not launch the attack against the Marines and recommended roadblocks at both ends of the streets approach-

ing the embassy to prevent any misunderstandings. At the direction of the regional security officer, the embassy's local guards erected unmanned roadblocks to reroute the fighters away from the embassy.²⁵⁸

However, automatic weapon fire still echoed throughout the city, especially near Barclay Training Center where machine gun and rocket-propelled grenades slammed into the training center's grounds as doctors treated wounded fighters. As a result of the violence, Mr. George Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs working at the embassy, called off negotiations. After consulting with the Ambassador and Mr. Moose, Colonel Forbush received permission from European Command to move the *Guam*, *Trenton*, and *Portland* within sight of the city. Both Colonel Forbush and Ambassador Milam thought the movement would allow a quick turnaround if an evacuation became necessary. After the firefights the day before, the demonstration of

the naval presence gave a visible reminder of the strength of Joint Task Force Assured Response. Charles Taylor called the Ambassador to express his concern about the proximity of the ships. Sensitive to the political implications, European Command on 2 May ordered the joint task force to move the ships back over the horizon.²⁵⁹

Marines from Company G rotated out on 3 May as Company E Marines moved into defensive positions around the embassy. The same day, Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J), with a West African escort, left the Barclay Training Center in an armored car and headed for the U.S. Embassy. The Economic Community of West African States delegation had made the offer to evacuate him earlier, but the economic community-sponsored peace talks scheduled for 7 and 8 May in Accra, Ghana, afforded him a plausible reason to leave. While awaiting evacuation by Marine helicopter to Sierra Leone, Johnson actually apologized to the MEU commander for his fighters engaging the



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine

Manning Post Five, a .50-caliber heavy machine gun position on the balcony of one of the American Embassy's residences, Marines cover a likely avenue of approach combatants might use to storm the compound.

Americans. The Marine helicopter then flew Johnson to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where a Ghanaian aircraft delivered him to Accra, Ghana.²⁶⁰

The tempo of fighting ashore slowed as the NPFL considered the latest ceasefire offer. But the NPFL soon rejected that offer and attacked the Krahns. Fighters loyal to Roosevelt Johnson continued the battle at the Barclay Training Center. By Sunday, 5 May, Johnson's Krahns broke out of the besieged Barclay Training Center. Burning, looting, and fighting went on throughout the city during the weekend.

Around noon on 6 May, a group of retreating NPFL engaged a group of Krahns advancing westward along Sekou Toure Drive on Mamba Point. During this advance, the Krahns repeatedly engaged Marine positions with fire, especially Post Seven. Manning the sector were Marines from Company E's 3d Platoon, who returned fire with automatic weapons. The Krahns changed their route of advance and moved north on Gibson Street. Neither side took casualties.²⁶¹

Since the beginning of Assured Response, the amphibious ready group and the MEU had conducted split operations in consideration of the Sixth Fleet's exercise schedule. The exercises, combined with the orders to reduce the forces ashore and overall Assured Response presence, resulted in Marines from BLT 2/2 cross-decking. Specifically, on 8 May, Company D (-), 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, Company E, 2/2, and Battery B, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, left the *Guam* and the *Portland* and transferred to the *Trenton*. The *Trenton* left for the coast of Spain to join with the repaired *Tortuga*, and there participate in Exercise Matador 96. The *Guam* and the *Portland* remained on station off the Liberian coast. The Nigerian registered freighter *Bulk Challenge* also remained in West African waters. After leaving Liberia overloaded with refugees, other West African countries had refused to grant the ship safe harbor in their ports.²⁶²

Thousands fled as thick clouds of smoke hung over the city. With all aid and relief agencies gone, the situation in the city approached disaster



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine

During lulls in the fighting, Marines check evacuees waiting for an inbound helicopter, which flew them to safety in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

level with an estimated 60,000 people displaced by the fighting and the Liberians reporting cases of cholera. The calls for a ceasefire at the Economic Community of West African States summit on 7 and 8 May in Accra, Ghana, went unheeded. Sporadic firing continued throughout the Mamba Point area. At the embassy, Company F took over from Company E on 9 May, but the situation remained tense. On 11 May, numerous stray rounds again flew overhead with one round grazing a sergeant's biceps as he walked between posts.

Colonel Forbush called the fighting on 15 May the heaviest he had seen up to that time. Evacuee numbers increased proportionally. During the next several days, fighters from the NPFL launched attacks against the Barclay Training Center in another attempt to dislodge the ULIMO-J and Krahns. Ironically, Charles Taylor had announced earlier he had ordered his NPFL fighters to withdraw from the city. Fighters commanded by "General Butt Naked," a *nom de guerre* of one of the NPFL leaders, conducted frenzied assaults against the Krahns in the Mamba Point district. Taking and holding no ground, they would withdraw by mid-day and leave the dead where they lay.²⁶³

On 18 May, the Mamba Point fighting moved close to Gate One of the embassy in the area the Marines called Crack Alley. Fighting erupted next to the Greystone compound late in the morning. The skirmish resulted in more than 30 rocket-propelled grenade explosions that sent the Marines ducking for cover. The Marines watched fighters shoot at each other at point blank range as the fighting took place up and down the alley. Krahn fighters attempted to seize the house of Charles Taylor's mother, while others requested permission to use United Nations Drive to outflank their NPFL enemy. Marines on post refused, and the fighters turned around and went back into the alley. One rocket-propelled grenade exploded inside the embassy compound near Gate One, wounding a civilian embassy employee. Marines then observed executions of prisoners by the NPFL who dumped the bodies on the beach near the embassy.

Reduction of Marine Forces

Although the West African peacekeepers set up checkpoints in the city, their troops repeatedly retreated when fighting flared up. The peace-

keepers' commander, not satisfied with the support he was receiving, stated on 20 May that his force, which numbered around 7,500, required twice the number of peacekeepers than it currently had.²⁶⁴ With promises of American funds and logistical support, the peacekeeping force deployed throughout the city in mid-May to regain control. They manned checkpoints north and south of the embassy. In a radio broadcast, the force's field commander stated that from then on his troops would allow no guns on the streets and insisted that all fighters leave the city. Responding by radio broadcast, Charles Taylor's NPFL and Alhaji Kromah's ULIMO-K said they would observe the order and withdrew some forces from the city. The fighting died down and the peacekeeping force exerted its authority by seizing weapons caches. The Marines continued to observe fighters, but they carried no weapons. Many of the displaced began returning home and the number of persons at the embassy's Greystone compound dropped. Incidental fire by 24 May ceased around the embassy. Two days later, the peacekeeping force completed its redeployment throughout the city.²⁶⁵ When Colonel Forbush reconnoitered the city by embassy vehicle on 31 May, he believed the fighting had essentially stopped.

The beginning of June saw Liberians clearing debris and sweeping streets. Volunteers and health worker also started digging up the hundreds of hastily buried corpses. Starvation, disease, and wounds from the fighting accounted for most of the dead. The standoff at the Barclay Training Center was settled when the fighters of Roosevelt Johnson's ULIMO-J left unarmed. The ethnic Krahns, one of the seven factions in Liberia's six-year-old civil war, agreed to disarm. As a result of the Ghanaian-led economic community negotiations, 500 Krahn fighters safely withdrew from the Barclay Training Center and turned over a token number of weapons.²⁶⁶ Marines at the embassy remained vigilant with Company G rotating in and Company F leaving the compound. Evacuation flights slowed, and by 7 June, the last evacuees left from the embassy. The Marines enjoyed the city's calm. The quiet allowed the Ambassador to take leave and the II Marine Expeditionary Force commander was able to visit the Marines ashore. About this time, a maintenance problem arose involving the swash plates on CH-53E helicopters. The problem grounded all of the MEU's CH-53Es. Colonel Forbush, as the joint task force commander,



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine

While fighting and chaos reigned, Marines of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162 continued to evacuate civilians and foreign nationals by CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters.

ordered the *Guam* to remain at Mamba Station so the pilots could test the helicopters once mechanics made the repairs. Because the Sixth Fleet had previously scheduled the *Guam*'s departure, Forbush's decision created a furor at Sixth Fleet headquarters, which communicated its displeasure to the highest command levels. Since Sixth Fleet was not in the operational chain-of-command, the issue of whether the joint task force commander could control the deployment of his ships constituted a sore point with Colonel Forbush. The question of who was the supporting command (Sixth Fleet), and who was the supported command (22d MEU) came up on at least three occasions. All three times when Colonel Forbush mentioned ship movements, calls came from the Sixth Fleet, and it seemed as though the relationship was reversed. Fortunately, by 22

June, Marines of HMM-162 received the parts to fix the problem, which allowed the testing of the aircraft before the planned departure.²⁶⁷

On 14 June, the joint task force-sponsored Air Force assessment team confirmed that Spriggs-Payne Airport was capable of landing C-130 aircraft. Commercial air traffic subsequently resumed on 17 June in Monrovia, thus ending the need for Marine evacuation flights. The next day during the turnover of rifle companies, HMM-162 extracted six fast attack vehicles from the embassy in anticipation of the turnover. By this time, the 22d MEU had evacuated 49 Americans and 260 third-country nationals from the embassy. With a special purpose air-ground task force steaming to Liberia, the *Portland* departed on 20 June. The ship's departure left only the *Guam* to represent the ARG in Liberian waters.²⁶⁸

Chapter 6

Operation Quick Response

Violence to the East

While the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit conducted operations in Liberia, another threat to Americans developed in the Central African Republic, which is situated on the eastern boundary of the U.S. European Command's area of responsibility. Spanning an area slightly smaller than the state of Texas, the country borders Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and Zaire. With a population of a little more than 3 million, this landlocked country joins the Sudanese savanna zone to the Congo River basin. Nearly half of the Central African Republic's population is ethnically Banda and Baya, but most political leaders have come from the smaller Obangui-region tribes. Sangho constitutes the national language, with only a small portion of the population speaking French, the official language.²⁶⁹ The Central African Republic's transportation system is poor—it is in fact one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world. External trade relies on the Obangui River, which forms the country's southern boundary. Major exports include diamonds, cotton, and timber. Agricultural goods account for half of the gross domestic product and the majority of the populace works in agricultural production. In May of 1996, approximately 2,500 French and 254 Americans lived in the Central African Republic.²⁷⁰

Once the Oubangui-chari territory of French Equatorial Africa, the Central African Republic achieved independence in 1960. The first non-colonial ruler of the Central African Republic was the democratically elected David Dako. In 1966, Colonel Jean-Bedel Bokassa displaced his cousin Dako by coup d'etat. A former French colonial soldier, Bokassa became President in 1967, President for life in 1972, and crowned himself Emperor Bokassa I in 1976, renaming the country the Central African Empire. Bokassa's complete

disregard for any democratic sentiments spurred a successful counter-coup in 1979 by Dacko. French military units assisted in the coup, Operation Barracuda, after learning of Bokassa's orders that resulted in the massacre of hundreds of school children.*

In 1981, General Andre-Dieudonne Kolingba led the country's military in another coup. Kolingba became the leader of the Central African Republic and his policies led the country into economic stagnation. Strong internal opposition and French pressure resulted in legislative elections in 1987 and a presidential election in 1993.²⁷¹ Elected president in 1993, Ange-Felix Patasse replaced Kolingba's regime with a coalition government. The new president's plans for restructuring and decentralizing the government provoked opposition, especially from the unions, which demanded back salaries. The currency devaluation of other French-speaking African nations in 1994 further aggravating the situation by causing a 45 percent inflation of the country's currency. When Patasse's government found it impossible to pay salaries, civil servants, health workers, and teachers responded with protests, riots, and work stoppages.²⁷²

A security agreement between France and the Central African Republic, which was made when the republic proclaimed its independence, allowed for the stationing of French troops in the country. The military contingent numbered approximately 1,300 men spread out between numerous garrisons. Camp Bealle and M'Poko military bases constituted the major facilities in the city of Bangui. The aviation detachment at M'Poko Airfield included four Areospace SA-330

* Jean-Bedel Bokassa's brutality included the torturing, killing, and even eating of slain political opponents. Julian Nundy, "Cannibal Emperor Buried With Honors in Central African Republic, (Electronic Telegraph, 5Nov96, issue 531.)



Puma helicopters, five Mirage fighters, and two Transall C-160 cargo aircraft.²⁷³ Although the French presence was a source of frequent nationalist agitation, the Patasse government depended heavily on security assistance from the French troops.²⁷⁴

* The French signed the 1960 defense agreement with four countries in the region. After the 1966 coup d'etat, the new president, Andre Kolingba, demanded a revision to the accord. In October 1966, the military cooperation accord signed in Paris allowed for two bases, one at Bangui and the other at Bour, and the stationing of 1,400 French military personnel in the country. The French called the force the French Operational Assistance Elements (EFAO).

On 18 April 1996, armed rebellion broke out. The incident started with a protest by 80 soldiers who had not received pay. The group of mutineers, soldiers mainly from Kolingba's Yakoma tribe and Bokassa's Gbaka tribe, fortified their barracks at Camp Du Kassai in the capital, Bangui.²⁷⁵ The number of mutineers quickly grew to 400 as they seized a number of key installations in the city. In the ensuing fight a number of civilians caught in the crossfire were killed or wounded. President Patasse deployed the presidential guard battalion in hopes of disarming the soldiers, but the move resulted in more bloodshed. Because of the presidential guard's failure, Patasse fled to the French garrison. French Foreign

Legionnaires deployed from Camp Bealle, and after some minor skirmishing, restored order on 20 April. After escorting the mutineers back to their base, negotiations between the soldiers and the government occurred and France provided financial aid to help pay the soldier's salaries.²⁷⁶

On 18 May, a unit of the presidential guard battalion attempted to take control of an armory from the former mutineers. The soldiers reacted violently, breaking into the armory, seizing weapons, and forcing the presidential guard unit to withdraw. Fighting broke out in the city the following day, some of it taking place in front of the U.S. Embassy. French units deployed to protect French property and the Presidential Palace. Civil control broke down as rebelling soldiers and rioters looted commercial districts and private residences. Rebel soldiers established roadblocks and robbed travelers at gunpoint. This effectively closed the route to the airport, where commercial air traffic ceased.²⁷⁷ The revolt gained momentum as the rebels seized the city's main fuel depot and the national radio station, which was close to the U.S. Embassy. Public transportation ground to a halt; shops, schools, and markets closed, and most of the people remained indoors. Stray bullets struck the U.S. Embassy and the staff received numerous reports of fighting and looting near American residences.

French troops retook the radio station killing nine rebels. French armored personnel vehicles patrolled the streets on Monday, 20 May, to rescue and round up roughly 1,000 foreigners caught up in the violence. While negotiations started between President Patasse and the mutineers, clashes occurred between presidential units and the rebels. The mutineers, mainly from the combined arms regiment, numbered approximately 500. In response to the increased violence some French units withdrew to Camp Bealle and M'Poko Airfield.²⁷⁸

The French decided to send military reinforcements to the Central African Republic, initially from the surrounding sub-Saharan states hosting French units, Gabon and Chad. Christened Operation Almandin II, the French commander, General Bernard Thorette, headed for the Central African Republic with other reinforcements from France.²⁷⁹ Troops already in Bangui deployed to support the Patasse government and prevent the mutiny from escalating into a coup before Thorette's reinforcements could arrive.

After seeing gun battles in front of the U.S. Embassy and receiving reports of Americans

being accosted in their homes and on the street, Ambassador Mosina H. Jordan requested the State Department authorize an ordered departure of numerous U.S. Government personnel and American citizens. The request included asking for security support and military transportation to assist in the evacuation. As the violence spread throughout the city, the embassy advised Americans unable to leave their homes to remain indoors.

When the revolt broke out on 18 June, the European Command's theater command center, a 24-hour operations center, monitored the crisis. After receiving authorization from national command authority, European Command began contingency discussions with the French military concerning the safety of U.S. citizens. Marine Brigadier General David M. Mize, the deputy operations officer for European Command, flew to Paris to coordinate the military action.²⁸⁰ The French agreed to cooperate and assist in the evac-



uation. As the fighting escalated, Secretary of State Warren Christopher commented: "It's a violent situation; we're concerned about American personnel and we're trying to do everything we can to ensure their safety and to evacuate those who can leave."²⁸¹

The French agreed to transport American evacuees to collection points from which they would proceed to the main evacuation point at M'Poko Airfield. From there, U.S. aircraft would fly the evacuees to the designated safe haven, Yaounde, Cameroon. The French further agreed to evacuate Americans from remote sites using their helicopters or cargo transport aircraft and to assist a small American force designated to provide security for the embassy in Bangui.²⁸² The U.S. Embassy in the capital city of Bangui had not had a Marine security guard detachment since 1993. Only unarmed local contract guards provided security. The nearest diplomatic security support, a regional security officer, resided in another country.²⁸³

Call in the Marines

At 0700, 20 May, the commander of Joint Task Force Assured Response, Colonel Forbush, received a call from Brigadier General Mize at European Command. As commanding officer of the 22d MEU, Colonel Forbush had already split his forces between Liberia and the Mediterranean to provide security, sustainability, and evacuation assistance to the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, while simultaneously conducting exercises and training in support of U.S. Sixth Fleet commitments. General Mize was familiar with these dispositions, having just returned from a visit to the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia.²⁸⁴ The two officers focused their discussion on the crisis in the Central African Republic. In a verbal warning order, General Mize told Colonel Forbush to prepare Marines for deployment to the capital city, Bangui, to assist in the possible evacuation of U.S. citizens. The Marines would protect the embassy until an ordered departure took place or until other forces relieved them. In addition, the Marine force would offer military advice to the Ambassador, maintain liaison with the French forces, and provide for the logistical sustaining of the embassy.²⁸⁵

Already ashore at the embassy in Monrovia, Colonel Forbush talked with Captain Richard E. Luehrs, II, telling him that he would deploy to the Central African Republic. Captain Luehrs, the officer-in-charge of the air, naval gunfire liaison company detachment, flew back to the USS

Guam (LPH 9) with Colonel Forbush.²⁸⁶ That evening, as General Mize released the European Command's warning and execute orders, the joint task force's operation was well underway.²⁸⁷

On board the *Guam* off the coast of Liberia, Colonel Forbush called his key staff together and they immediately began planning and alerting units. The agreement with the French allowed for a small Marine security and liaison group. Initially, 35 Marines and sailors would make up the Marine security and liaison team. The 81mm mortar platoon of Weapons Company, Battalion Landing Team 2/2 (BLT 2/2), received word it would provide security and evacuation control. Colonel Forbush picked Major Norman J. Robison to command the mission, now designated Operation Quick Response. Major Robison, originally from Marine Forces Atlantic, Standing Joint Task Force, had joined Joint Task Force Assured Response to assist.²⁸⁸

To get the Marines to Bangui, located almost 200 miles from the task force's location, required using the 22d MEU's KC-130 detachment. The two-plane detachment arrived in theater in April to support a scheduled training exercise and remained there to support Operation Assured Response in Liberia. A little after 0700 on 20 May, one of the detachment's aircraft started its engines to conduct a routine resupply flight on the airfield tarmac at Rota, Spain. While the engines were running and the crew worked on a small maintenance problem, the pilot, Captain David A. Krebs, received an order to shut down the aircraft. Over the radio, the 22d MEU contact stated Krebs would fly to a capital that began with the letter "B." Returning to the detachment's office, Captain Krebs and Major John T. Collins, the detachment commander, determined their destination was Bangui.²⁸⁹ The joint task force's air combat element operations officer then provided additional information and tasking. Although the task force staff was still developing the plan, the operations officer told Krebs the mission called for him to fly 3,000 miles from Rota, Spain, to Dakar, Senegal, and then to Freetown, Sierra Leone. The aircraft was expected to remain overnight at Dakar before picking up Marines in Sierra Leone. Once at Lungi Airfield in Sierra Leone, it would pick up awaiting Marines who would provide liaison, evacuation control, and security for the U.S. Embassy, and fly them to Bangui, Central African Republic.²⁹⁰ Major Collins, needing detailed information on Bangui, requested charts of the Bangui airfield from his parent squadron, Marine Aerial Refuelling



Photo courtesy of Maj David A. Krebs

Capt David A. Krebs (left) and Capt Homer W. Nesmith stand with the crew of the first Marine Refueler Transport Squadron 252 Lockheed KC-130 Hercules aircraft to land at M'Poko Airport in Bangui, Central African Republic, following a long flight from Rota, Spain, by way of Dakar, Senegal, and Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Squadron 252 (VMGR-252), located at Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina. The detachment's intelligence chief also visited the Navy's Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron 2 (VQ-2), at Rota, to gather information about the fighting.²⁹¹

Launching at 1100, the KC-130's crew did not have all the information on the mission, as the task force staff was still in the process of developing it. Once in the air, Major Collins received word that after refueling in Dakar and loading in Freetown, his aircraft would continue on to Bangui. Colonel Forbush decided to extend the crew day, normally 12 hours, to accomplish the task.* The stop in Dakar, Senegal, allowed only enough time to refuel and pick up a fax from Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, which contained airfield approach and information for Bangui.²⁹²

Back on the *Guam*, the Marine security and liaison team received a briefing by Major Robison

* If an aircraft with autopilot takes off before 0500, the flight time for a crew can be extended to 18 hours. With an augmented crew, maximum flight time per day is 24 hours. (VMGR-252 Det A, "KC-130 Gouge," 20Jun96 [Assured Response Collection, MCHC, Washington D.C.]

around noon and then drew weapons and ammunition.²⁹³ The security and evacuation control center Marines left the ship by CH-53E helicopters and arrived at Lungi Airfield at 1700 to wait for the KC-130. While at Lungi, the Marines formulated a detailed security plan for the embassy with the help of Staff Sergeant Scott T. Livengood, a former member of the Marine detachment in Bangui.²⁹⁴ The KC-130 arrived at 2000. Marines installed a satellite communication system (AN/PSC-3 radio) in the KC-130 using a hatch-mounted antenna. A communicator had joined the crew in Dakar to operate the system. The aircraft loaded the personnel, pallets of bottled water, and meals ready-to-eat for the evacuees and the Marines. After refueling, the flight departed at 2200 with no assurance of clearances to fly over Cameroon or to land in Bangui. As the plane headed for Bangui, the State Department worked on obtaining flight clearances, a process that normally took 36 to 72 hours. To avoid flying over countries for which clearances had not been obtained, the aircraft skirted the coast of West Africa in international airspace. To accomplish the mission, the pilots needed clearances from both Cameroon and Central African Republic.²⁹⁵ Thirty

minutes before crossing into Cameroon airspace, the aircraft's pilots learned they had received clearance to fly over Cameroon and land in the Central African Republic.²⁹⁶ As the KC-130 approached M'Poko Airfield from the south, the aircraft broke through the clouds and Major Collins observed the city for the first time, noting green tracer rounds crisscrossing the area.²⁹⁷

Marine Operations in Bangui

At 0600, The KC-130 landed at M'Poko Airfield. As it taxied to the French military compound, the pilot, Captain Krebs, noted numerous French fighting positions on the eastern side of the runway, which indicated the seriousness of the situation.²⁹⁸ As the plane taxied up the ramp, Captain Krebs and Major Collins saw crowds of people. The fenced-in compound located on the east side of the airfield, which normally contained 300 French military personnel, was crowded with more than 1,000 civilians awaiting evacuation. The majority were French nationals, but citizens of other nations, including Canada and Cameroon, had made their way to the compound. The French had evacuated several Americans, including Peace Corps volunteers from outlying sites, while others made it to the airport on their own. One American family told the Marines of rebel soldiers invading their home and stealing food and money. Other refugees described harassment by rampaging gangs of soldiers.²⁹⁹

Major Robison coordinated with waiting U.S. Embassy personnel and spoke with the French operational assistance element's command at M'Poko to arrange transportation. Several French military trucks arrived and the Marines embarked. Five Marines from MEU Service Support Group 22 and one corpsman, which comprised the evacuation control center, remained at the airfield under the leadership of First Sergeant Allan M. Slater. The other Marines, including a seven-man liaison element and an 18-man security element, moved by truck to Camp Bealle, escorted by French wheeled armored personnel carriers. Marines coordinated with the French at the camp and met their liaison officer, Captain Thierry Paquereau. Leaving for the embassy, the Marines made their way through the city but saw no rebels, nor did they hear any shooting. The temporary ceasefire in effect that morning contributed to a false sense of calm.³⁰⁰

Arriving at the embassy, Ambassador Jordan greeted the Marines, who immediately deployed



Photo courtesy of Maj David A. Krebs
American Peace Corps volunteers and Cameroonian refugees crowd on board the first Marine KC-130 evacuation flight from Bangui to Yaounde, the capital of the Republic of Cameroon.

throughout the compound. Major Robison and his second in command, Captain Luehrs, received a brief on the current situation. After assessing its layout, the Marines initiated security patrols within the embassy compound. They also established two defensive positions, one on the chancery roof facing southward toward David Dacko Road, and the other atop the General Service Office maintenance building facing the opposite direction toward Avenue du 18 Victoire. As the Marines constructed positions with the help of local embassy workers, a lone rifleman in a building nearby took aim at the Marines. Six to eight Marines immediately reinforced the position and zeroed in on the rebel, who quickly placed his weapon down on the rooftop, waived a white flag, and retreated from the position. The Marines held their fire.³⁰¹

Back at the M'Poko Airfield, the aircrew realized no additional Americans would arrive any-

time soon. Calling back to the joint task force by established satellite communications, they asked for permission to depart. Captain Krebs wanted to get the evacuees and crew to Nsimalen Airfield in Yaounde, Cameroon, recognizing that remaining longer in Bangui would increase fatigue. After receiving permission, the KC-130 departed at 1130 with 13 evacuees, mainly Peace Corps volunteers and missionaries. When they landed at Nsimalen the crew-day had reached 36 hours with 18.3 hours of actual flying time. The American Ambassador in Cameroon and his staff greeted them. The embassy staff, expecting approximately 80 evacuees, quickly processed the 13 civilians while the crew and pilots contacted the joint task force and received tasking for the next day.³⁰²

In Bangui, a firefight broke out around the embassy at 1300. The rebels and the French employed automatic weapons and small arms fire. Multiple rocket-propelled grenade explosions, as well as the sound of .50-caliber machine gun fire from French armored personnel carriers, reverberated throughout the compound. Neither side

directed any fire toward the embassy. Later that afternoon, a number of extended firefights occurred at an intersection southeast of the embassy. Stray rounds flew overhead until midnight.³⁰³

At the airfield, First Sergeant Slater's evacuation control center processed arriving Americans throughout the first night. Early on the morning of 22 May, the KC-130 returned from Cameroon, taxiing to the civilian aircraft ramp in an area secured by French Foreign Legionnaires. When a firefight erupted between the rebels and loyalist troops at the end of the runway, the Legionnaires responded with machine gun fire and the shooting ceased.³⁰⁴

At 1400, the Marines moved a group of 77 Americans and third-country nationals to the awaiting KC-130. After all were on board, the aircraft, which was cleared for takeoff, experienced a "flame out" in its number two engine. The evacuees were offloaded and waited in the shade of the wings to protect them from temperatures of more than 110 degrees Fahrenheit. After deter-

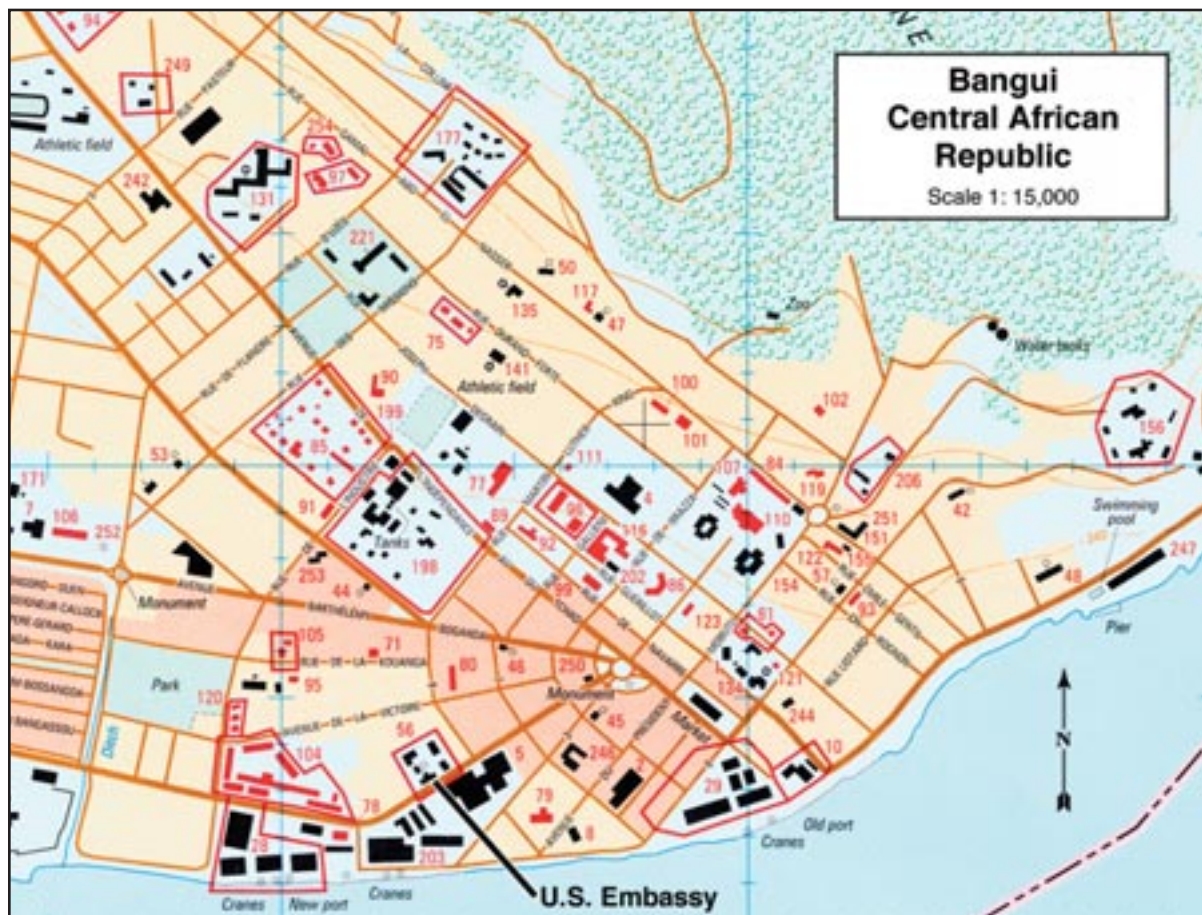




Photo courtesy of Maj David A. Krebs

American evacuees seek shelter from the heat under the wing of a KC-130 at M'Poko Airport shortly after the aircraft's number two engine flamed out during the power up in preparation for take off.

mining repairs were required, the pilots parked the plane at the terminal's civilian ramp.³⁰⁵

The evacuees and aircrew moved to a new evacuation control center located in a maintenance building where they remained until 2300 when a second KC-130 arrived from Rota, Spain.* A Cable News Network camera crew arrived and filmed the Marines as they offloaded supplies by hand.³⁰⁶ The French, meanwhile, evacuated civilians from the military camp with their own C-130 and C-160 cargo aircraft. At 0100 on 23 May, the new KC-130 departed for Nsimalen Airfield with 59 evacuees and most of the crew from the disabled aircraft.** A handful of Americans, anticipat-

ing the restoration of order, elected to remain at the evacuation control center.³⁰⁷

During the early morning of 22 May, shots again rang out near the U.S. Embassy. Marines later spotted 30 rebel troops operating in the vicinity. Fighting between the rebels, the presidential guard, and French troops broke out later that afternoon. The poorly trained rebels rarely shouldered their weapons, preferring to fire from the hip or raising the weapon overhead to fire. French Puma helicopter gunships flew overhead and engaged the rebel forces near the radio station. Stray rounds impacted the chancery's roof and outside walls. Nearby rocket-propelled grenade explosions kept the Marines on post vigilant. One government armored personnel carrier positioned itself near the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) facility next to the chancery. Marines soon heard its 20mm cannon fire at rebels, who responded with machine guns. The Marine reaction force quickly escorted embassy employees to safe locations within the compound. French Mirage jets, conducting reconnaissance flights, flew overhead. The day's fighting started a large fire in a building

* That same day, the 22d MEU received a U.S. European Command modification to the execute order that directed Joint Task Force Assured Response to conduct a noncombatant evacuation operation and assume control of one additional KC-130.

** Parts for the aircraft arrived the next day. The detachment swapped aircraft when two KC-130s from Detachment A, VMGR-252 arrived in Freetown shortly thereafter. The aircraft needed phase maintenance every 250 hours, which took about five days to accomplish. The 2d Marine Aircraft Wing normally planned the aircraft rotations for more in-depth routine maintenance.

close by, but the flames eventually subsided without damaging the compound.³⁰⁸

The embassy advised all American citizens to stay at home, but had neither an accurate roster for, nor the locations of, Peace Corps and USAID workers in the countryside.* The directors of both organizations, trapped in town, possessed this information and needed to bring it to the embassy. Major Robison coordinated their transportation with the French liaison officer, Captain Paquereau, and French soldiers escorted the Peace Corps and USAID directors to the embassy.³⁰⁹ Once at the embassy, the directors notified the remaining workers of the evacuation plan through an emergency recall system of radios and telephones.

At 0820 on 23 May, approximately 2,000 demonstrators arrived in front of the U.S. Embassy. Marines watched as the crowd shouted anti-French slogans and demanded President Patasse's departure. The demonstrators chanted pro-American slogans such as, "U.S. yes," and "United with you!" As the crowd conducted a sit-in, someone fired at the demonstrators and wounded two. The crowd attempted to move toward the French Embassy and Marines on Post One (the chancery) heard bursts of machine gun fire and a rocket-propelled grenade explosion. The crowd dispersed when French troops arrived. French patrols soon passed by the embassy and a firefight ensued in an area northeast of the embassy, dubbed "Hooterville" by the Marines. Despite all the fighting that day, the embassy received only stray rounds and bits of shrapnel. The rebels did not target the embassy.³¹⁰

At the M'Poko Airfield, the evacuation control center processed arriving Americans flown in from remote sites by French military aircraft. The compound became a beehive of activity as French military and commercial aircraft transported French evacuees, while Mirage jets and Puma helicopters took off for missions above the city. The Marines at the airfield heard small arms fire during the day and watched tracer fire at night in the city.³¹¹ The Marines at the embassy improved their positions throughout the next two days, stringing concertina wire while protests and fire-fights continued nearby. Hundreds of civilians looted the MoCaf Brewery, located just down the

street from the chancery, but were dispersed by the presidential guards. At the airfield, the evacuation control center processed 160 evacuees while French vehicles carried supplies from the airport to the embassy.³¹²

Planning for Reinforcements

Colonel Forbush expressed considerable concern over the 22d MEU's ability to reinforce the Marine security and liaison team. At the joint task force headquarters at the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, the situation was being monitored and contingency plans were developed for a large-scale reinforcement. Major Robison requested additional assistance from Lieutenant Colonel Michael E. Dick, the joint task force operations officer. Based on the seemingly deteriorating security situation, Marine planners considered flying in 13 light armored vehicles and 10 high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (humvees) using a Lockheed C-5A Galaxy aircraft. Elements of the 22d MEU conducting Operation Matador, a combined training exercise in Spain, could provide this force. After assessing the requirements, European Command decided if a larger force were needed in the Central African Republic, Special Operations Command, Europe, not the 22d MEU, would provide the bulk of the forces. 22d MEU assets designated in the final concept of operations for the reinforcement of Bangui were limited to 27 Marines and two humvees.³¹³

European Command issued a third modification to the execute order on 25 May, directing reinforcement by designated Marines, who began arriving in Bangui that day. The remaining elements arrived by KC-130 at 1700 on 26 May. Additional Marines augmented the evacuation control center at the airfield, moved to the embassy by convoy, and joined the French operational assistance element at its headquarters at Camp Bealle. A total of 61 Marines now provided security and evacuation support.³¹⁴ Two KC-130 flights evacuated 122 people on 25 May. On 26, 27, and 28 May, the daily number of evacuees taken out by KC-130 flights from M'Poko Airfield ranged from 184 to 190. The French maintained assistance with helicopters and armored vehicles, transporting 12 additional Americans from outlying areas to the airfield. With French Legionnaires providing ground security, a French Transall C-160 transport aircraft rescued the remaining Peace

* The embassy had the annual State Department report showing how many Americans were currently residing in its jurisdiction, but the report did not provide locations or contact information on individuals.



Photo courtesy of Maj David A. Krebs

A Marine KC-130 departs Bangui for Yaounde, Cameroon. More than 400 American citizens and foreign nationals were evacuated during Marine Refueler Transport Squadron 252's stay in the Central African Republic.

Corps volunteers and delivered them to the evacuation control center at M'Poko Airfield.

Negotiations between the rebels and the government allowed the rebels to return to their camps under French military escort and President Patasse agreed to pass a law granting them amnesty. On 27 May, the French liaison officer, Captain Paquasse, informed the Marine commander, Major Robison, that the majority of the rebels had returned to their base at Camp Du Kassai.³¹⁵ On the evening of 28 May, the last American citizens requesting evacuation were flown to Cameroon. The total number of evacuees processed by the Marines included 190 Americans and 258 foreign nationals. More than 43 people died and 248 received wounds during the mutiny. Although looting in the city continued, French patrols dispersed most of the remaining looters while negotiations between the government and rebel leaders took place.³¹⁶

Reduction of Presence and Withdrawal

On 30 May, Colonel Forbush received verbal approval to begin a draw down from the Central African Republic. The Joint Task Force Assured Response staff on board the *Guam* initiated plans to conduct this evolution in phases. The next day, 30 Marines and one vehicle left Bangui, and seven additional Marines departed on 1 June. On 13 June, Captain Luehrs assumed command from Major Robison and 11 more Marines departed,

which left 13 at the embassy. Bangui had suffered considerable damage during the mutiny with many businesses looted or burned. The population, however, returned to their normal routines and the security situation relaxed with no threat to either the embassy or Americans.³¹⁷ On 27 June, First Lieutenant John Himes and 11 Marines and sailors from the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) arrived to assume security duties from the 22d MEU. The KC-130 that brought in their relief flew Captain Luehrs and his detachment to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where they boarded helicopters for a flight to the *Guam*. The Marines of 22d MEU evacuated 448 citizens from 21 countries in eight days from a location 2,200 miles from their nearest support. Their professionalism, and that of the KC-130 aircrews working with them, made this achievement possible.³¹⁸ As one Peace Corps worker enthusiastically stated: "The Marines were great!" First Sergeant Slater, in charge of the evacuation control center at M'Poko Airfield, likewise praised the French for their cooperation. Bangui remained essentially peaceful while the squad of Marines from the Special Purpose MAGTF guarded the embassy. The Marines settled into a guard post routine and received periodic resupply by KC-130. On 1 August, the last KC-130 flight landed in Bangui and picked up the waiting Marines. Operation Quick Response ended when they rejoined the Special Purpose MAGTF on board the USS *Ponce* (LPD 15).

Chapter 7

Planning, Deployment, and Action

Special Purpose MAGTF Deploys

During April and May, Generals George A. Joulwan and John M. Shalikashvili discussed the replacement of the 22d MEU. As early as 15 April, Marine Forces, Atlantic, staff met to discuss the alternatives. One of the options called for a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) and a two-ship amphibious ready group. Any force deployed by ship would come from 2d Marine Division's designated amphibious ready force, which at that time was the 8th Marines, commanded by Colonel Tony L. Corwin.*

By 18 April, II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) identified the 8th Marines regimental staff as the command element for any special purpose task force. From mid-April through May operational planners at II MEF and subordinate commands considered what forces the mission would require. During the planning, the 8th Marines' staff and subordinate units were heavily involved in Exercise Purple Star, a combined joint task force training exercise at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The units forming the combat service support element that were not involved in Purple Star began planning in mid-April.³¹⁹ When the exercise ended in late May, the commander of Marine Forces, Atlantic, designated the 8th Marines staff as the Special Purpose MAGTF headquarters for planning purposes. Working up plans for two options, the 8th Marines' staff assumed that one large-deck amphibious ship or one small-deck amphibious ship would be available. By the end of May, Naval Surface Forces, Atlantic, made it clear the only available ship was a small-deck amphibious ship, specifically, a landing platform

dock (LPD).³²⁰ The U.S. Atlantic Command issued a planning directive on 28 May and Major General Michael D. Ryan, the commanding general of II MEF, followed up with an alert order to the 8th Marines on 31 May. Following additional guidance from the commanding general, the 8th Marines regimental staff and subordinate units that would form the special purpose task force launched into mission planning analysis efforts.³²¹

Planners first looked at the task force flagship, the USS *Ponce* (LPD 15), commanded by Captain Leon F. Mahoney. The small-deck ship was not configured to function as a flagship and lacked the appropriate communications assets to control a joint task force. The designated task force commander, Colonel Corwin, requested quadruple satellite communication terminals and two deck-mounted tactical satellite radios to enhance command and control communications and intelligence support for the joint task force. Even with these add-ons, the lack of command configuration ultimately resulted in a less than optimum command and control communications capability.^{322**} Further, Marine planners learned the ship was poorly equipped for the control of aircraft in bad weather and could not assist aircraft in performing precision instrument approaches. The LPD's lack of weather radar forced the Marines to rely on satellite photos for weather forecasting. The lack of an embarked navy tactical air control squadron likewise required much more detailed aircraft control coordination. Adding to the challenge was the small size of the *Ponce's* flight deck

* The 2d Marine Division rotated the amphibious ready force, air contingency force, and maritime preposition force contingency duties between the three infantry regiments every eight months.

** The Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force requested the Commander Navy Surface Fleet, Atlantic, install four Magnavox MX 2400 Inmarsats—international maritime satellite communication network systems. The Marines used two AN/PSC-3 man-packed satellite communication terminals. The dial-in data rates were generally limited to between 2.4K and 4.8K and often could not be established at all during daylight hours. (S-6, SPMAGTF "Article Input," undated [Assured Response Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.]

and hangar, which limited the number of helicopters on board as well as the amount of maintenance space. Because of the ship's insufficient aviation maintenance facilities, the task force staff, in coordination with the air combat element, planned to embark three maintenance vans. Unfortunately, the vans further limited space and the squadron could realistically launch only one aircraft at a time.³²³

The planners considered two helicopter options—using either CH-53s or CH-46s. The 8th Marines staff thought the CH-53E best fit the aviation needs of the task force on the LPD. Because of their longer range and availability under guidance from II MEF, the task force joined two CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461 (HMH-461) and two Bell UH-1N Huey helicopters from Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 (HMLA-167).³²⁴

The task force did not have the luxury of a long work up. The regimental staff formed a command element that more than doubled its size. What also differed from the 22d MEU was the addition of 26 Marines from II MEF headquarters assigned specifically to assist the joint task force commander. The regimental staff had little experience working at a joint level and less time to train with the new augmentation. Responsibilities of the regimental staff also grew as the personnel

officer, in a period of three weeks, joined all of the task force Marines and sailors.

Joining the special purpose task force was Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3d Battalion, 8th Marines (-), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Paul E. Lefebvre. The BLT consisted of two rifle companies rather than three, the normal number of rifle companies, as well as augmenting reinforcements. Approximately 100 Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Lance R. McBride, formed Combat Service Support Detachment 28 (CSSD 28).³²⁵

By 7 June, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a warning order for a Special Purpose MAGTF to replace the 22d MEU in Liberia and assume responsibilities as the joint task force headquarters. Tasked by European Command, the special purpose task force mission focused on providing the necessary protection and sustainability of personnel at the embassy. The order directed the task force to stay on station until the ordered departure of official American citizens or until the reinforcement of the Marine security guard detachment was no longer required. With approximately 60 days of logistics support plus a heavy reliance on limited aviation assets, Colonel Corwin assumed the threat level would remain unchanged or decrease. He also assumed the





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CWO Michael Dominguez instructs Marines of Company L, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, in the use of the M16A2 service rifle from the sling arms position on the flight deck of the USS Ponce (LPD 15) during its transatlantic voyage.

embassy desired to return to pre-crisis operations as soon as possible.³²⁶

On 12 June, the *Ponce* embarked the Marines at Morehead City, North Carolina. At the last minute, the two CH-53E helicopters were replaced with six CH-46 helicopters due to a worldwide grounding of all CH-53E helicopters. With only 66 hours of preparation, 105 Marines from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (HMM-264) replaced the HMH-461 detachment.³²⁷

On 14 June, the *Ponce* departed with the Special Purpose MAGTF composed of approximately 732 Marines and sailors, five light armored vehicles, and nine amphibious assault vehicles. During the trip, Marines of the BLT watched detailed videotapes of the embassy's positions and rehearsed for the coming mission. The ship itself was crowded and living and workspaces were cramped. The Marines endured long lines for chow and just about any other services the ship offered.³²⁸

For long-haul aviation support, the task force employed Detachment A, Marine Aerial Refueling Squadron 252 (VMGR-252). The detachment,

already in theater, was to provide critical KC-130 logistical support, conducting operations from Rota, Dakar, Bangui, and the forward logistics site in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Members of the squadron remained in Rota, Spain, to help move supplies and parts. One replacement aircraft joined the detachment on 13 June, picking up the task force's advance party at Marines Corp Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina.³²⁹

On 15 June, the advance party of the special purpose task force flew to Freetown, Sierra Leone, by Marine KC-130. The advance party transferred to the USS *Guam* (LPH 9) by helicopter for briefings and then continued on to the embassy. Composed of 32 Marines, the party was led by the MEU's executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Christopher J. Gunther, and included Lieutenant Colonel Lefebvre and the commanding officer of Company L, Captain Jeffrey E. Lister. The group concentrated its efforts on becoming familiar with the operating climate at the embassy and the responsibilities of the joint task force. With the city relatively calm, the advance party, dressed in civilian clothes and transported in



DVIC DM-SD-98-02801

Col Tony L. Corwin, commanding officer of Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Liberia, addresses his Marines two days prior to landing in Liberia.

embassy vehicles, reconnoitered the area and visited the headquarters of the West African peacekeepers. Lieutenant Colonel Gunther recalled his impressions of the city, stating that fighters had “looted, burned, or pillaged almost every building we saw.” Viewing the peacekeepers while conducting a reconnaissance of the city, Gunther noted the peacekeepers’ checkpoint or roadblocks consisted of any junk they could place in the road. He further observed West African soldiers shaking down Liberians at the checkpoints and extracting a “road tax,” as West African soldiers were not routinely paid.³³⁰

The Special Purpose MAGTF as the Assured Response Joint Task Force

Colonel Corwin spoke with the Marines on board the *Ponce* on 25 June, and reminded them that he did not know when the mission would end and that it could go on anywhere from two to six months.³³¹ A European Command order arrived that day directing the special purpose task force to relieve the 22d MEU and assume the MEU’s mission.³³²

Arriving off the coast of Sierra Leone the next day, the special purpose task force sent detachments to Rota, Spain; Dakar, Senegal; and Freetown, Sierra Leone, to support the movement of logistics for the joint task force. The detachment sent to Lungi Airfield, near Freetown, came from CSSD 28, and provided security at the forward support base for cargo waiting to be picked up. As the *Ponce* steamed toward Mamba Station off the coast of Liberia, a helicopter from the 22d MEU also picked up Lieutenants David M. Fallon, Seth I. Lapine, Johnny J. Cooper, II, and James A. Tenaglia of Company L, Farrell J. Sullivan, the BLT’s heavy machine gun platoon commander, and Robert S. Peterson, the BLT’s surveillance and target acquisition platoon commander, and delivered them to the embassy to prepare for the turnover.³³³

At sunrise on 27 April, Marines of the special purpose task force came ashore on board the 22d MEU helicopters. Company L, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, led by the executive officer, First Lieutenant Charles N. Black, landed at the embassy’s Landing Zone Bravo and relieved Captain Eric M. Mellinger’s Company F, BLT 2/2. The Marines of Company L conducted a thorough

post and ammunition turnover as they had come ashore with no ammunition. The special purpose task force commander, in coordination with the 22d MEU commander, placed the same size force ashore to minimize any appearance of change. At 1400, Colonel Corwin assumed command of Joint Task Force Assured Response. The new joint task force arrived at the start of the monsoon season and would enjoy only three days of sunny weather the entire time ashore.³³⁴

Similar to the 22d MEU, the special purpose task force's mission called for the Marines to provide protection for embassy personnel and support the logistical needs of the embassy. Organized to accomplish several contingency missions, the assigned tasks included the tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel, hydrographic surveys, and noncombatant evacuation operations. The operation order noted the Marines would remain until all official Americans departed or until a security detachment was no longer required.³³⁵

From the inception of the special purpose task force, a phased draw down, envisioned by the

Commander in Chief, European Command, constituted a major factor in Marine planning. Colonel Corwin and Ambassador William Milam worked together on developing a series of conditions to define when the Marines would end their security mission. They listed eight conditions that helped define the criteria for withdrawal of the Marines for European Command.³³⁶

Ashore, the Marines operated the main joint operations center from the embassy. This was different from the 22d MEU, which operated a forward joint operations center there while keeping its main joint operations center on board ship. Since space was at a premium on the *Ponce*, placing the main joint operations center ashore made sense.³³⁷ The commander of the reinforced rifle company ashore, Captain Jeffrey E. Lister, directed his Company L Marines to enhance their defensive positions. Captain Lister, a veteran of Sharp Edge, had a variety of non-lethal weapons available if needed. These included beanbag shotgun rounds, pepper spray, stinger grenades, and tear gas. The company also had its normal complement of ammunition and weapons. Later,



DVIC DM-SD-98-02804

Marines of the special purpose task force arrive at the American Embassy by CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters. The Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Marines assumed the embassy security mission from the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit.



DVIC DM-ST-02-00484

Marine rooftop defensive positions dot the south side of the Ambassador's residence at the American Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia.

when Captain Eric L. Geissler's Company K rotated into the compound, the detachment from Company C, 2d Combat Engineers, put up chicken wire and black screening to mask the positions of Marines manning the compound.* The rifle companies rotated out every six to nine days in the humid, rainy weather.³³⁸

The only armed troops the Marines saw were the West African peacekeepers. Periodically, peacekeeper vehicles and foot patrols traveled in front of the embassy. In more than a few instances, the peacekeepers pointed weapons at the Marines. Familiar with the rules of engagement, Marines dealt with these incidents by first reacting defensively and then directing the soldiers to point their weapons away from the embassy. Several false alarms occurred each night during the first week, which kept the sentries on alert. Unarmed factional fighters gathered occasionally within sight of the embassy at the house of Charles Taylor's mother, but they never appeared with weapons. The Marines observed

numerous persons missing limbs pass by the embassy, a visual reminder of the human cost of the fighting.³³⁹

Company K replaced Company L on 4 July and both units enjoyed a 4th of July celebration. Around noon, in the middle of the company's turnover, some 80 to 100 Liberians arrived in front of Gate One. The crowd demonstrated their support for the Americans for about an hour and then departed. That afternoon the Ambassador gave a speech in which he thanked the Marines and stressed his hope for a return to normalcy. To celebrate the occasion, the Ambassador, the Marines of the joint task force, and the Marine security guard detachment held a ceremony and cookout at the Marine House.³⁴⁰

Marines Draw Down and Depart

On 9 July, Lieutenant Colonel Gunther flew to European Command headquarters and briefed the command's staff on the task force draw down options.³⁴¹ He recommended 15 August as the departure date to Marine Brigadier General David M. Mize, the deputy joint operations officer for

* The concern for extra force protection measures came in the wake of the bombing of the U.S. Air Force's Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, on 25 June 1996.

European Command. General Mize asked if the joint task force could withdraw sooner. After a number of discussions and assessments at different levels, European Command agreed that all forces could withdraw by 3 August. The plan acted as a catalyst for a decision by the national command authority to begin a phased withdrawal.³⁴²

On 10 July, the Marines and sailors on the *Ponce* celebrated the ship's 25th birthday while planning for the accelerated withdrawal began.³⁴³ By 15 July, with the plan approved, a phased draw down began with one third of the force ashore moving to the ship. The battalion landing team reduced the number of Marines manning Posts Four, Six, and Eight Alpha. Assets focused on intelligence collection remained ashore at full strength until the end, but CSSD 28 started taking down positions as the infantry company no longer manned them.³⁴⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Lefebvre, BLT 3/8 commanding officer, stated: "The methodology, if you will, for the draw down was to: First, reduce posts that were redundant; second, reduce those with the least risk and to

offset those [closed posts] with increased patrolling." The landing team initially kept crew-served weapons in place and reduced the manning of posts by ones and twos. The Marines incrementally closed the non-essential posts, but the posts that were absolutely essential remained manned until the final withdrawal.³⁴⁵

Monrovia remained calm. As Marine forces withdrew, the West African peacekeeping force grew with the arrival of 1,500 Nigerian reinforcements.³⁴⁶ The larger force increased its activity and became more visible on the streets.³⁴⁷ Regular commercial flights at the Spriggs-Payne Airport resumed by mid-month and the embassy's logistical needs were met through commercial channels. A reflection of the return to normalcy was the gradual reduction of the number of refugees in July at the embassy's near-by Greystone compound. By 19 July, the security situation was back to normal, with Monrovia completely secured by the West African force.³⁴⁸ On 23 July, in an effort to reinforce the peace and head off any further fighting, the Economic Community of West African States met in Accra, Ghana, to discuss the



DVIC DM-SD-98-02807

A Marine stands guard at Post Two. The only other armed troops the Marines observed were West African peacekeepers.



DVIC DM-SD-98-02810

Local Liberians dance in the street outside the American Embassy during a peaceful demonstration on the 4th of July. They hold signs asking for American assistance and wishing the United States a happy Independence Day.

Liberia situation. The summit resolved to implement fully the Abuja Accords and impose sanctions against the heads of the factions if the truce, disarmament, and scheduled elections did not occur.³⁴⁹ Both the visible reinforcements and the talks reaffirmed that Monrovia would remain stable.

On 25 July, 45 personnel from the special purpose task force's advance party departed for the U.S. by Navy C-9 and C-130 flights from Freetown, Sierra Leone. Marines closed Posts Three, Two Alpha, and the .50-caliber positions. The next day, European Command issued the redeployment order for the Special Purpose MAGTF.³⁵⁰

On 1 August, in a message to the State Department recommending the termination of evacuation status for Monrovia, Ambassador Milam stated: "the main faction leaders declared, in Abuja, Nigeria, a nationwide cessation of hostilities and their intentions to disarm their fighters by the end of September. I have recommended that the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force depart on 3 August."³⁵¹

On 2 August, Joint Task Force Assured Response closed down the small liaison detachment in Dakar, Senegal, followed the next day by the closing of the forward logistics site in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Early that morning, before light, Marines of Company L left their remaining defensive positions and gathered near the embassy's landing zone. As the sun rose, they began their departure. The movement of forces from the embassy took a total of six hours. Seven Marines, assigned as security guards, were left behind.³⁵²

After departing Mamba Station, the task force steamed to the Canary Islands for some well-deserved liberty before heading home. The special purpose task force, formed for a contingency, moved more than 620,000 pounds of cargo and 2,400 passengers in 300 sorties during the monsoon season. More importantly, it accomplished the goal of providing security for the embassy, which allowed the State Department to continue working for a peaceful solution to the long and bloody Liberian civil war.

Epilogue

A Stabilizing Presence

“Throughout all of West Africa you can wake up on any given morning and find one or more of the governments overthrown,” noted Lieutenant Colonel Barry M. Ford following the 1997 noncombatant evacuation in Sierra Leone. “The entire continent is really in desperate trouble. Over the next few years we’re going to be spending a lot of time in Africa.”

The comments of Lieutenant Colonel Ford, a Headquarters Marine Corps analyst specializing in Africa and the Middle East, would prove to be prophetic.³⁵³ Marines would be deployed to Eritrea, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Congo in 1998, Mozambique in 2000, and again to Liberia in 2003.

In 1996, while attempts were being made to find a peaceful solution to the Liberian civil war, factional fighting in Rwanda and the successful gains by Tutsi forces prompted many Hutus to flee in mass to neighboring Republic of Zaire. This exodus resulted in the establishment of a number of large refugee camps in eastern Zaire, creating areas of instability and tensions. In October, Rwandan troops entered Zaire to halt Hutu incursions. At about the same time, an armed Tutsi coalition, led by Laurent-Desire Kabila and known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL), was formed when local officials in Zaire attempted to expel them at the behest of Hutu groups. With the goal of forcibly ousting Zaire’s President Mobutu Sese Seko, the ADFL, supported by Rwanda and Uganda, began a military campaign to capture the capital, Kinshasa.

As conditions in Zaire deteriorated, the United States prepared for the possible evacuation of about 500 American citizens, 320 of whom were in Kinshasa along with an estimated 7,000 Europeans. In response, a three-part plan was

launched. A 350-member U.S. Army enabling force from U.S. European Command was deployed to Brazzaville, Congo, across the river from Kinshasa, and Libreville, Gabon. In addition, a small group of communicators was sent to Zaire to establish a communications facility in the capital, and a 325-man permissive force, complete with helicopters and transport aircraft based in Libreville and Brazzaville, prepared to evacuate people if necessary. The third leg of the tripartite plan was the deployment of an amphibious assault ship with a scaled down Marine expeditionary unit, or “mini-MEU.”³⁵⁴

In November, the amphibious assault ship *Nassau* (LHA 4), the amphibious transport dock *Nashville* (LPD 13), and the dock landing ship *Pensacola* (LSD 38), with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)) on board, departed the East Coast on Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 97-1 deployment. In March 1997, Colonel Emerson N. Gardner, Jr.’s Marine unit took part in Operation Silver Wake, the noncombatant evacuation of Albania. While stationed off Albania, the *Nassau*, with elements of the MEU, was dispatched more than 5,100 nautical miles from the Adriatic Sea to the eastern Atlantic Ocean near the Congo, just north of Zaire, and ordered to prepare for the possible evacuation of American citizens should the civil war spread to the capital. The remainder of the 26th MEU (SOC) on board the *Nashville* and *Pensacola* stayed behind in the Mediterranean to provide strategic reserve for the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia. Prior to leaving the Adriatic, a detachment of the MEU’s CH-46 and UH-1 helicopters was exchanged for AH-1W Super Cobras from the other ships and ANGLICO, the unit’s air, naval gunfire support team.



DoD (USAF) 970403-F-7910D-502

Marines of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) prepare to move out after arriving in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. Command and support elements were deployed as part of contingency planning for a possible evacuation of American citizens and others from Zaire.

On 5 April 1997, the 26th MEU assumed the main effort for the planned noncombatant evacuation from the Joint Special Operations Task Force, in Brazzaville, allowing the number of U.S. Army forces on the ground to be cut. "Our concept is to maintain a light footprint at the MEU forward headquarters...in Brazzaville," Colonel Gardner explained. "We're going to keep the bulk of our Marines aboard USS *Nassau* poised and ready to respond to orders."³⁵⁵ The *Nassau* remained on station for approximately one month while the Marines ashore conducted several rehearsal evacuation drills, waiting to be called to rescue Americans in Zaire in case that country's civil war spilled into Kinshasa. As the *Nassau* stood sentinel duty off Zaire, the amphibious assault ship *Kearsarge* (LHD 3), with elements of Colonel Samuel T. Helland's 22d MEU (SOC) on board, departed Norfolk, Virginia, on 15 April, two weeks ahead of schedule, and headed for the west coast of Africa to relieve the *Nassau* on 2 May, ensuring the *Nassau* got home within her scheduled rotation date. The other two ships of

the *Kearsarge's* amphibious ready group—the amphibious transport dock *Ponce* (LPD 15) and the dock landing ship *Carter Hall* (LSD 50)—remained behind and later deployed to the Mediterranean with the rest of 22d MEU's Marines for exercises in Spain.³⁵⁶

Colonel Helland forward-based 123 Marines, 2 CH-53 Sea Stallions, 2 CH-46 Sea Knights, and 2 AH-1W Super Cobras more than 350 miles inland at an airfield near Brazzaville, across the Congo River from Kinshasa. Back-up forces, if needed, remained on board the *Kearsarge*.³⁵⁷ Following failed peace talks between Kabila and Mobutu in early May, Mobutu left the country and Kabila's forces peacefully marched into Kinshasa on the 17th. Kabila declared himself president, consolidated power around himself and the ADFL, and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Marines had evacuated no one.

On 25 May, soldiers led by Major Johnny Paul Koromah of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council seized power in Sierra Leone. Koromah formed a new military government consisting of

both soldiers loyal to him and Revolutionary United Front rebels who had fought the ruling governments for the past five years. The coup ousted President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, a 20-year United Nations diplomat and the first democratically elected government, after only one year in office and after five years of civil war that left more than 10,000 dead and forced an estimated million to flee.

A former British colony about the size of South Carolina sandwiched between Guinea and Liberia, Sierra Leone boasted beautiful beaches and bountiful resources. But after decades of civil strife, the country's infrastructure remained poorly developed and the gap between the few wealthy elite and the rest of the country's population had grown immense.

Chaos reigned following the coup. Work stopped, stores closed, and looters ruled the streets of the Freetown, pillaging homes and businesses. The situation in the capital had deteriorated to near anarchy. "It has become a very dangerous place with a bunch of 13-year-olds running around and out of control," the American charge d'affaires reported. "These are a bunch of thugs and lunatics having a free reign of terror with the army joining in."³⁵⁸ At the request of the Department of State, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen directed U.S. European Command to prepare for yet another noncombatant evacuation operation. Ironically, Sierra Leone had been used the year before as a safe haven for evacuees fleeing neighboring Liberia.

In standby status off the coast of the Congo, the 22d MEU (SOC) was selected to spearhead the effort, codenamed Noble Obelisk. Within hours of being alerted, Marines were rushed back on board the *Kearsarge* from the base camp in Brazzaville, Congo, and the ship sailed north at full speed on 25 May. Four days later, the *Kearsarge* was 20 miles off the coast of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Once the deputy chief of mission in Freetown gave the word to begin the evacuation, the plan called for a Marine security force to land, assess the situation, and then begin processing and loading evacuees on helicopters for the flight to the ship. After a few days, the evacuees would be taken to Conakry, Guinea, for transportation arranged by the State Department to their final destination.³⁵⁹

Before dawn on the 30th, a company of Marines from the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, boarded CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters for the flight to Freetown despite a coup-imposed flight ban.



DoD (USAF) 970409-F-7910D-503

Marine Cpl Joseph Calebro uses an AN/PSC-3 satellite communications radio to establish a link from the tarmac at Point Noire, Republic of Congo. Cpl Calebro was attached to Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252 to provide KC-130 Hercules aircraft with secure communications.

Backed by heavy weapons, fast attack vehicles, AH-1W Super Cobra gunships, and AV-8B Harrier attack jets, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. Greenwood's Marines established an evacuation site near the Mammy Yoko Hotel where hundreds of evacuees had gathered. From a control center established inside the hotel, members of MEU Service Support Group 22 began processing the waiting evacuees. The frightened men, women, and about 200 children then streamed on board Marine helicopters as fast as the aircraft could move in and out of the landing zone. Ten hours and 85 sorties later, more than 900 evacuees had been moved to the *Kearsarge*. Once on board ship, the evacuees underwent further processing and screening and were provided food, clothing, medical treatment, and entertainment. The fol-



DoD (USN) 970530-N-8506C-002

Evacuees from Freetown, Sierra Leone, are directed from a Marine CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter across the flight deck of the USS Kearsarge (LHD 3). On 30 May, more than 900 persons from 40 countries were evacuated.

lowing day, pilots and crewmen of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261 transported the evacuees to the designated safe haven up the coast in neighboring Guinea.³⁶⁰

While Marines were busy evacuating Americans and other foreign nationals, U.S. Army Special Forces rescued two other Marines, members of the security guard tasked with closing the embassy and safeguarding classified documents, who had become trapped in the chancellery. Passing unopposed through several rebel checkpoints, the small team of soldiers got the Marines out without incident.

Two days after the first evacuation, Marines again boarded helicopters following reports of further unrest in the city. Working from the same landing zone near the Mammy Yoko Hotel, Marines encountered no hostile gunfire while evacuating more than 400 Americans and third-country nationals in less than five hours. Following the routine established during the first evacuation, the second wave of evacuees were screened, processed, and quickly transferred to Conakry, Guinea. Among them were 18 orphans

and Pinkie McCann-Willis, who headed the Freetown office of the Indianapolis, Indiana-based Americans for African Adoption agency. McCann-Willis said she and the children had spent two days pinned down by gunfire before she was able to pile the children into the back of her pickup truck and make a dash for the Mammy Yoko Hotel.

Fighting and chaos again increased ashore, this time exacerbated by Nigerian warships (whose government opposed the coup) that were bombarding positions held by Koromah's forces. A third and final evacuation was planned, but Koromah's forces were now targeting the beachfront Mammy Yoko Hotel where a contingent of Nigerian soldiers that had deployed ashore had set up their command post. With the Mammy Yoko Hotel untenable for the evacuees, the evacuation site was moved to the Cape Sierra Hotel-Restaurant, less than two miles south along the beach. The MEU still planned to use helicopters to transport a majority of the evacuees.

Prepared for possible heavy fighting, Lieutenant Colonel Greenwood's Marines came

ashore at first light on 3 June with heavy weapons, including six light armored vehicles equipped with 25mm and 7.62mm machine guns. The weapons were not needed, and more than 1,200 persons, including 10 carried out on stretchers, were evacuated in five hours in the absence of any resistance. On board the *Kearsarge*, the ship's medical facilities were swamped with casualties and individuals traumatized by the past days' events. Despite the operational tempo of the evacuation, Marine and Navy helicopters began transferring individuals to Conakry the same day.³⁶¹ In three safe, fast, and efficient waves, the Navy-Marine Corps team had rescued more than 2,500 persons.

While Marines of the 22d MEU (SOC) completed their evacuation efforts in Sierra Leone and prepared to sail to the Canary Islands for a well-deserved liberty call, Brazzaville, Congo, was plunged into chaos when government troops were sent in to disarm the private militia of a rival

party. Dozens of Americans were held up at the U.S. Embassy and other pockets throughout the city. Although the 22d MEU was put on standby, European Command officials instead decided to rely on the French to evacuate the bulk of American citizens and sent a 12-man U.S. Army Special Forces team to the embassy to provide security and extra communications.

The *Kearsarge* continued on to the Canary Islands and later to the Mediterranean where she linked up with the other two ships of the amphibious ready group. In Sierra Leone, Nigerian-led Economic Community Ceasefire Monitoring Group forces ousted the Koromah government after 10 months in office, and the democratically elected government of President Kabbach was reinstated in March 1998.

Following the close down of Joint Task Force Assured Response and the departure of the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force in August 1996, the United States, the United



DoD (USN) 970530-N-8506C-001

A child clings to a crewman on the flight deck of the USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) after a frightening first ride in a helicopter. She was among the first evacuees to arrive on board the Norfolk, Virginia-based amphibious assault ship.

Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) embarked on negotiations to disarm and demobilize the warring factions in Liberia. After considerable progress, special elections were held in July 1997 with Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Party emerging victorious, primarily due to the fear of a return to war had Taylor lost. For the next six years, the Taylor government made little investment in the country's infrastructure. Nor did it attempt to improve the lives of Liberians. Instead, Taylor supported the rebel factions in neighboring states and fomented unrest and brutal excesses in the region, which led Taylor's former adversaries to resume their armed rebellion.

On 4 June 2003 in Accra, Ghana, the ECOWAS facilitated the beginning of peace talks between the Government of Liberia and rebel groups—the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).³⁶² LURD, the larger of the rebel groups, was based in neighboring Guinea and claimed 3,000 to 4,000 troops, while Cote d'Ivoire-based MODEL, also known as Lima Force, claimed 800 to 1,000. They largely represented elements of the former ULIMO-K and ULIMO-J factions that had fought Taylor during Liberia's civil war. That same day, the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone issued a press statement announcing the opening of a sealed indictment accusing Taylor of "bearing the greatest responsibility" for atrocities in Sierra Leone since November 1996.

As the intense fighting in the western suburbs threatened to spread into Monrovia, the only part of the West African nation Taylor controlled, the international staffs of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations were forced to evacuate the capital. On 7 June, French helicopters swooped in to rescue more than 500 fleeing Americans, Europeans, and other foreign nationals from the American and European Union compounds. The evacuees were transported to a French warship offshore and then to Abidjan, Ivory Coast. American Ambassador John W. Blaney stayed behind with a heavy security presence.³⁶³

With the violence escalating, Ambassador Blaney requested military aid should additional embassy personnel and American citizens have to be evacuated. At the direction of the Secretary of Defense, the European Command sent a small military support team to augment the security



Photo courtesy of the authors
Liberian President Charles Ghakay Taylor, known as "Pappy" to his supporters, was accused of masterminding regional conflicts while the plight of his country's 3.3 million people worsened.

forces at the embassy in Monrovia, support State Department personnel with the orderly departure of United States citizens wishing to leave the country, and to be pre-positioned to aid in any evacuation. The deployment was given the name *Shining Express*. The *Kearsarge*, then returning home with elements of the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade after combat service in Operation Iraqi Freedom and providing support to President George W. Bush during his summits with Arab leaders in Egypt and Jordan, was directed down the west coast of Africa to provide security and lift support for the operation. The increased American presence was enough to influence the Taylor government and two rebel groups to agree to a ceasefire on 17 June that envisioned a comprehensive peace agreement within 30 days. With stability somewhat reestablished, the State Department decided that an evacuation and the *Kearsarge's* presence were no longer necessary, and on 19 June she turned her bow to the west and set out for a 28 June return to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

The three Liberian factions repeatedly broke the ceasefire, resulting in the resumption of bitter fighting and increasing pressure on the United States to take a more active role in the Liberia conflict. On 30 June, at the request of United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, the

Security Council met to discuss the possible deployment of a multinational force to Liberia. Secretary Annan raised the prospect of American involvement, which later was echoed by West African mediators. The Bush administration was reported to be weighing its options, among them the deployment of 2,000 troops. "We're exploring all options as to how to keep the situation peaceful and stable," President Bush said. "One thing has to happen: Taylor needs to leave the country. In order for there to be peace and stability in Liberia, Charles Taylor needs to leave now."³⁶⁴

While the United States determined what form its assistance would take, the West African States took action. Meeting in Accra, Ghana, ECOWAS military chiefs pledged on 4 July to raise 3,000 troops from member countries for an intervention force to restore peace in Liberia. But the ability of West African countries to send enough troops was plagued by financial and logistical constraints, said Ghana's Lieutenant-General Seth Obeng, chairman of the economic community's Defense and Security Commission. "ECOWAS and the

African Union should intensify their initiatives to get an advanced country, possibly the United States, to spearhead peace efforts in Liberia, just as Britain and France did for Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire," he suggested. The recommendations of the commission were forwarded to the community's Mediation and Security Council for ratification.³⁶⁵

Bowing to American demands, President Taylor said on 4 July he would step down from power, but only after a U.S.-led peacekeeping force arrived in the war-torn country. Demonstrators took to the streets of the capital insisting that Taylor quit immediately. Government soldiers opened fire on the group of more than 500 protestors, wounding one. But the group continued their march on the U.S. Embassy, chanting 'Taylor kingdom must come down. Satan Taylor must go.' Two days later, Taylor agreed to leave the country and take up asylum in Nigeria, but only after an orderly exit from power supported by an international peacekeeping force to "prevent chaos and disruption in Liberia."³⁶⁶



Photo courtesy of the authors

Widespread looting, rape, and lawlessness characterized the campaign carried out by Liberian rebel fighters, many of which were children. Drunk or often under the influence of drugs, they meted out instant retaliation to any civilian who talked back or denied them a favor.



DoD (USAF) 200417125553

Marines with the Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team based out of Rota, Spain, prepare to depart Freeport, Sierra Leone, for Monrovia. The team was assigned to provide security for the American Embassy in Liberia.

With the warring factions again honoring a truce, some shops and supermarkets reopened and a United Nations chartered vessel began to evacuate some of the thousands of trapped Sierra Leonean refugees. During the lull in the fighting, a 32-member American humanitarian assistance survey team arrived from Europe at Roberts International Airport, about 12 miles south of the capital, and then flew to the embassy's Mamba Point diplomatic enclave. Composed of medical personnel, civil engineers, logistics specialists, water purification experts, and a public affairs officer, the group was to assess the security environment and determine what type of humanitarian support the United States could offer. Supporting the group were 15 Marines from the Rota, Spain-based Marine Corps Security Force Company, Europe. They were to act as a smaller version of the company's Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team (FAST). Initially termed Operation Sheltering Sky, the codename for the United States effort in Liberia would later be changed to Joint Task Force Liberia.

Apart from reviewing the security situation, the assessment team was to visit various refugee camps and meet with ECOWAS officials to discuss American support for the West African peacekeeping force. The team's recommendations would be forwarded to General James L. Jones, commander of U.S. Forces in Europe, who would then relay them through Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to the President. "The decision on a larger deployment of a peacekeeping force will be made by President Bush," said Ambassador Blaney when asked if the arrival of the team marked the beginning of a U.S. peacekeeping operation in Liberia.³⁶⁷

The Liberian capital braced for a fresh attack by the LURD rebel group in mid-July. Troops loyal to President Taylor reported that rebel forces were massing near the strategic town of Key Junction, 23 miles northwest of Monrovia. The fragile ceasefire agreed to on 17 June was in danger of breaking down again due to the standoff between Taylor, who refused to step down and go into exile until international peacekeepers

arrived, and LURD, which threatened to attack any peacekeepers who landed in Liberia before Taylor left. On 17 July, LURD forces overran Key Junction and moved west, raising fears they could mount a third assault on Monrovia. During the first two assaults in June, several hundred were killed and more than 100,000 were made homeless. MODEL forces also attacked government positions at the port town of Greenville, southeast of the capital, and at Belliewaley to the northeast.

By 19 July, thousands of terrified civilians with their meager belongings headed for the center of Monrovia, fleeing the city's western suburbs as fighting between Liberian government soldiers and LURD rebels escalated around Virginia and Saint Paul Bridge, about 6 miles away. In the Ghanaian capital, where peace talks were being held, the various factions began reviewing a comprehensive peace plan drafted by West African mediators. In addition, ECOWAS began initial moves to deploy the 1,000-man vanguard force of peacekeepers, which would enable President Taylor to go into exile and allow American troops to join the West African economic community in ending Liberia's civil war.

Despite West African community leaders and MODEL calls for LURD forces to halt their assault on Monrovia, the capital city continued to be pounded with mortar fire and fierce street fighting persisted as reinforcements moved to cut off roads to the interior. In a fresh wave of looting, many government fighters took advantage of the anarchy to break into closed shops. Venting their anger and frustration, a group of Liberians dumped mangled and bloodied bodies outside

the gates of the embassy, some saying, "If you had intervened this would not be happening." To defend the embassy in the midst of the fighting, 41 Marines of Yorktown, Virginia-based 2d FAST Company, who were training in Rota, Spain, were flown in on three U.S. Air Force HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters from 56th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron from Naval Air Station Keflavik, Iceland. The unit arrived as mortar fire rained on residential areas and struck the commissary and adjacent Graystone compound across from the embassy. The helicopters had been sent to Sierra Leone on 13 July to support the survey team along with a Royal Air Force MC-130P Combat Shadow deployed to Senegal from its base in Mildenhall, England. On their return trip, the helicopters evacuated members of the humanitarian survey team.

In addition to approving the Ambassador's request that his Marine security guard be reinforced, Secretary Rumsfeld also signed an order moving the *Iwo Jima* amphibious ready group and its embarked 26th MEU (SOC) from the Red Sea near Djibouti, where it was supporting Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, into the Mediterranean. Once there, the ready group could reach the coast of Liberia in seven to 10 days if needed.

During the last week of July, the beleaguered government of President Taylor came under attack on a second front as rebels battling to capture the capital launched a simultaneous attack on the port city of Buchanan, 75 miles to the southeast. Meanwhile, rebel forces advanced their positions within Monrovia, gaining access to Somalia Drive, the ring road encircling the northern out-



DoD (USAF) 200417104632

Marines with the Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team provide security for a U.S. Air Force HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter from the 56th Rescue Squadron as it lands at the American Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia.



DoD (USN) 030718-N-8933S-0011

The amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) and the landing ship dock USS Carter Hall (LSD 50) pause for an underway replenishment to take on supplies while enroute to the west coast of Africa.

skirts of the city. The rebel forces ignored a plea by Ambassador Blaney to cease fire, withdraw from Monrovia, give up their attempts to seize Buchanan, and allow breathing space for the peacekeepers to arrive. It looked to many observers that both rebel movements had now decided to disregard the 17 June agreement and launch an all-out offensive to finish off Taylor's regime before the international force arrived.

With the embassy locked down, Monrovia under siege, and most of the city's million inhabitants now living in squalid conditions on the brink of starvation, the Bush administration, although pressured by military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan and leery of another open-ended mission, ordered the deployment of the *Iwo Jima* amphibious ready group and 26th MEU (SOC) to the west coast of Africa. Within 24 hours, the joint task force's forward coordination element was deployed to the embassy where it served as the task force's liaison to the embassy and provided the staff with early noncombatant and medical evacuation plans. The forward coordination element would remain at the embassy for next 65 days. The administration also offered to pay more than \$10 million toward the cost of deploying West African peacekeepers to Liberia.³⁶⁸ The West African economic community

estimated it would need \$104 million to keep the force in country for six months.

On 2 August, President Taylor announced he would resign as head of state on 11 August and leave the country on an unspecified date. His commitment fell short of the economic community's demand that he step down and leave Liberia within three days of the arrival of Nigerian peacekeeping troops. Taylor's attempt to delay his departure did not impress the United States, which now had 2,300 Marines sitting 31 miles off the coast waiting to intervene if necessary. Commanded by Colonel Andrew P. Frick, the 26th MEU (SOC) comprised the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, with attached artillery and vehicle transport; Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264, a composite squadron of helicopters and Harrier jets; and MEU Service Support Group 26. The MEU was divided between the three ships of the amphibious ready group: the amphibious assault ship *Iwo Jima* (LHD 7); the amphibious transport dock *Nashville* (LPD 13); and the amphibious dock landing ship *Carter Hall* (LSD 50). All were veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Two days later, the first contingent of Nigerian troops arrived in a heavy rain at Roberts International Airport on board two white United Nations helicopters from neighboring Sierra

Leone. The mission of the 60-man vanguard was to secure the airport for the eventual deployment of more than 3,200 troops, made up of contingents from Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Togo, Benin, and Gambia. Once on the ground, the Nigerian peacekeepers, whose strength would quickly grow to two battalions, moved cautiously toward the capital where an informal truce between government and rebel troops was in effect. The same day, the U.S. Army's South European Task Force (Airborne) (SETAF) deployed a 45-member forward headquarters to the *Iwo Jima*. The headquarters, headed by Major General Thomas Turner, the SETAF and Joint Task Force Liberia commander, was composed of a majority of SETAF personnel and was designed to make maximum use of the Army task force's capability to reach back to Southern European task force's main headquarters near Vicenza, Italy. In addition to command and control of the forces operating in Liberia, the forward headquarters coordinated with officials from the embassy, Department of State, United Nations, and humanitarian organizations operating ashore.

On 6 August, the first of 20 Marine contingents authorized to go ashore arrived by helicopter at the embassy where it linked-up with the forward coordination element. The seven-man liaison team was to coordinate the efforts of civilian contractors who were providing humanitarian services and logistical help to the Nigerian troops and to assist in reopening the port and coordinating needed repairs and maintenance to Roberts International Airport. In addition, a casualty evacuation and quick reaction force was established on board ship to support U.S. and multinational personnel ashore.

The following day, the West African peacekeepers formally moved into the city of Monrovia and received a rapturous welcome from thousands of Liberians waving palm branches and white flags and chanting, "We Want Peace! No More War!" But the Nigerian troops were not ready to cross over to the port area on Bushrod Island, which was held by LURD forces. Meanwhile, President Taylor confirmed to the Liberian parliament that he would resign on the 11th and hand over power to Vice President



DoD (USMC) 03814-M-9750-B-502

Peacekeepers control a peaceful yet peace-hungry crowd as they move into the capital. Under the leadership of Nigerian Gen Festus Okonkwo, Nigeria's contribution would swell to more than 1,500 soldiers.



DoD (USN) 030814-N-6204K-028

Marines from 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit wait on the deck of USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) prior to boarding helicopters bound for Monrovia, Liberia.

Moses Blah in view of what he called “a broad-based international conspiracy against my government.”

As he pledged, Charles Taylor ended his six-year rule of Liberia on 11 August by handing over the green presidential sash of office to Vice President Blah and flying into exile in Nigeria. Dressed in his trademark white safari suit, he was somber, but still defiant. “I want to be the sacrificial lamb, I will be the whipping boy,” but, he said, “God willing, I will be back.”³⁶⁹ Blah, a friend and ally of Taylor during the civil war in the 1990s, would rule until October when he would hand over the reigns of power to an interim president chosen by the Liberian peace conference under way in Accra, Ghana. Timed to coincide with the resignation and departure of Taylor, the amphibious ready group appeared over the horizon as fixed and rotary aircraft conducted air patrols in the skies over Monrovia. The show of force not only prevented serious incidents from occurring during the transition of power, but also provided a psychological boost to both the citizens of Monrovia and the West

African peacekeepers on the ground. On 13 August, President Bush informed Congress of his actions as required by the War Powers Resolution, noting, “it is anticipated that U.S. forces will re-deploy when ECOMIL [ECOWAS Mission in Liberia] forces have transitioned to the follow-on U.N. stabilization operations.”³⁷⁰

Shortly after dawn on 14 August, nine CH-46 Sea Knight and CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters carrying 150 combat-equipped Marines of Battery L, 10th Marines, touched down at Roberts International Airport. The Marines would operate as a quick reaction force (QRF) should peacekeepers come under significant attack. “The QRF is not there in a security role,” a Department of Defense spokesman stressed. “They’re merely standing by to provide a reaction capability if something unexpected occurs with regard to an ECOMIL unit, and only to stabilize the tactical situation so [ECOMIL forces] can restart their mission.”³⁷¹ The shipboard QRF remained on 60-minute alert, while the casualty evacuation team remained at 180-minute alert. Another 60 Marines landed in four amphibious assault vehicles in the



Photo courtesy of 26th MEU

A CH-53E Super Stallion with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 drops off supplies to the Marines at Robert International Airport.

port area. Task force representatives, along with Ambassador Blaney, were then able to successfully negotiate the withdrawal of LURD forces from the port.

As helicopters and two Harrier jets flew overhead, Nigerian armored personnel carriers moved across two bridges spanning the Mesurado River onto Bushrod Island and formally secured the strategic port area. As they did, LURD fighters were still in the process of withdrawing their pickup trucks with looted items to the Po River on the northern edge of the city. Under the protection of a Marine security platoon and Nigerian troops, American combat engineers, explosive ordnance disposal personnel, and U.S. Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) teams began a survey of the heavily looted port to permit much needed humanitarian supplies to be put ashore. The survey also noted



Photo courtesy of 26th MEU

Maj James E. Donnellan (right), executive officer of 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, goes over plans at the international airfield for an immediate action drill with Maj Lojah, the commanding officer of Delta Company, 1st Nigerian Battalion.



Photo courtesy of 26th MEU
1stLt Matthew A. Markham (left), with Battery L, discusses tactics with his Nigerian counterpart during a quick reaction drill at Roberts International Airport.

depths and obstacles for any possible amphibious landing by the Marines afloat.³⁷²

On 18 August, as more peacekeeping forces arrived, two force reconnaissance teams and a headquarters element were inserted into Bushrod Island and Roberts International Airport to act as liaison with the two Nigerian battalions. The teams were tasked with providing communications and coordination between Joint Task Force Liberia and the multinational force. Additional logistics personnel also were put ashore. Later that day, the Liberian government and two rebel movements signed a peace agreement in Accra, Ghana, that paved the way for an interim government headed by an independent civilian to take power in October, thus ending 14 years of near constant civil war. The chairman of the West African regional body, Ghana's President John Kufuor, "reminded the former warring factions that genuine political power comes from the ballot box and democracy rather than from the barrel of the gun."³⁷³ Despite the peace agreement and relative calm in the capital, government and rebel forces continued to clash throughout the interior, which created new waves of refugees.

A week after the signing of the peace accord the 150-member Marine force withdrew from the airport to ships of the amphibious group off shore. The decision "reflects the situation on the ground," said Lieutenant Colonel Thomas N. Collins, the Southern European Task Force spokesman. "We're here to support [the West Africans], but we can do it better from the ship." About 100 Marines remained on the ground, 70 guarding the embassy and 30 acting as liaisons

with West African peacekeepers. "They're forsaking us," said a young Liberian. "We wish they'd stay until peace would come. Their presence here puts fear in our fighters. It makes them think if they carry on hostilities, they'll be handled by the Americans."³⁷⁴

During the next month as additional West African peacekeepers arrived, boosting their numbers to more than 3,000, Marines of the 26th MEU waited off shore conducting daily reconnaissance flights and remaining ready to respond if needed. On 5 September problems arose. Two Marines suffering from low blood pressure, fever, diarrhea, vomiting, and liver and kidney dysfunction were evacuated to Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center in Germany. An additional 15 Marines developing similar symptoms were cross-decked to the *Iwo Jima's* intensive care unit with follow-on evacuation to Bethesda Naval Medical Center in Maryland. Additional cases were evacuated several days later. At Bethesda they were diagnosed with malaria. "We know everybody took their medication," said Captain Gregory Martin, USN, a physician specializing in infectious diseases. "We don't know if somebody missed a dose here or there. Probably so."³⁷⁵ By the end of the month, all the evacuated personnel had been released from the Naval Medical Center and were placed on convalescent leave.

With the West African troops due to become part of the United Nations peacekeeping force in early October, the 26th MEU began the retrograde of its liaison teams. By the end of September, all were on board ship except 55 Marines who would remain in Monrovia to beef up security at the embassy. The *Carter Hall* and *Nashville* left the West African coast on the 28th followed by the *Iwo Jima* three days later. The ships of the amphibious ready group would rendezvous at Rota, Spain, where they would conduct a wash-down and the personnel given some needed liberty before getting underway for the United States.

"When you see the *Iwo Jima*, the *Nashville* and *Carter Hall* off the coastline, it shows that the American public cares and that there is a definite military presence," said Colonel Frick. "We provided a stabilizing presence which allowed the multinational forces from other Western African countries to come in and handle the problem regionally." Marine helicopters and jets flying overhead and U.S. Navy ships looming on the horizon "reassured the humanitarian relief organizations and African peacekeeping forces that it was safe to go back to work."³⁷⁶

Notes

Source material used in the preparation of this publication was derived from the Sharp Edge and Assured Response files, Archives Section, Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC), Washington, D.C. The command chronologies of the Marine units involved are located in the Archives Section, MCHC, Washington, D.C. All oral history tapes referenced are located in the Center's oral history collection in the Archives Section. All Department of State messages and related materials are located in the authors' backup file on Liberia.

Chapter 1

Liberian Unrest Turns Violent

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Chapter 2

Preparing for Operation Sharp Edge

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Chapter 7

Planning, Deployment, and Action

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A Stabilizing Presence

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Appendix A

Chronology

Operation Sharp Edge 1990 to 1991

- 8 Mar 1990 22d MEU (SOC) deploys from Morehead City, North Carolina.
- 23 Apr 1990 State Department issues travel advisory on Liberia and advises Americans to leave the country. Withdrawal of government employees begins.
22d MEU intelligence section begins to plan for Liberia contingency.
- 12 May 1990 22d MEU arrives at Camp de Canjuers, France.
Col Granville R. Amos directs that all units have a 12-hour plan to retrograde to the ships.
- 24 May 1990 22d MEU notified of possible mission in Liberia.
- 26 May 1990 22d MEU completes emergency backload.
USS *Peterson* is designated Mediterranean-based Amphibious Ready Group escort.
- 27 May 1990 22d MEU participates in joint French/American Memorial Day Ceremony, Draguignan, France.
22d MEU units on board USS *Saipan* and USS *Sumter* sail from Toulon, France.
22d MEU presents Operation Sharp Edge Courses of Action Brief to Deputy CinCEur, Gen James P. McCarthy, USAF, and CinCUSNavEur, Adm Jonathan Howe, USN, on board the *Saipan*.
ComSixthFleet and ComSOCEur embarked on *Saipan* for initial briefing and ship orientation.
- 28 May 1990 22d MEU forward command element given tentative permission to go to Liberia.
USS *Ponce* departs Toulon upon completion of boiler repairs.
Gen James P. McCarthy, USAF, Deputy CinCEur, and Adm Jonathan Howe, USN, CinCUSNavEur embarked on board *Saipan* to review NEO draft Operation Order.
- 29 May 1990 Forward command element departs *Saipan* and flies to Rota, Spain.
Peterson rendezvous with *Saipan* and *Sumter*.
- 31 May 1990 Forward command element flies from Rota to Liberia and is initially housed in the Greystone compound.
EuCom establishes Joint Task Force with Sixth Fleet as ComJTF.
A 75-man advance security force and one CH-46 helicopter moved to *Peterson*, which is sent ahead of the rest of the MEU/ARG at 30 knots.
- 1 Jun 1990 22d MEU receives CinCEur Sharp Edge Operation Order.
- 2 Jun 1990 *Peterson* arrives off the coast of Liberia.

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- 3 Jun 1990 *Saipan* and *Sumter* arrive off the coast of Liberia and begin 66 days in ModLoc before evacuation.
- 4 Jun 1990 *Ponce* arrives in ModLoc.
22d MEU force on board *Peterson* returns to *Saipan*.
- 5 Jun 1990 Two KC-130s from VMGR-252 arrive in Freetown, Sierra Leone.
22d MEU receives alert order for extraction of President Samuel Doe: one hour alert set.
- 6 Jun 1990 22d MEU briefs NEO plan to British Task Group 325.1 on board *Saipan*.
ModLoc named Mamba Station.
- 8-22 Jun 1990 22d MEU rehearses possible courses of action for Operation Sharp Edge. These include rehearsals for extracting President Doe and for multiple site NEOs.
- 10 Jun 1990 22d MEU augments forward command element with three-man radio battalion detachment.
349 Americans are evacuated on American Embassy charter flight from Spriggs-Payne Airport.
- Jun-Jul 1990 Forward command element prepares for possible NEO, which includes preparing a landing zone at the embassy and checking possible beach landing sites.
- 17 Jun 1990 American embassy evacuates 168 American citizens on charter aircraft from Spriggs-Payne Airport.
- 26 Jun 1990 250 Liberians march to American embassy gate calling on U.S. to intervene.
- 28 Jun 1990 New U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Peter De Vos, arrives at Spriggs-Payne Airport.
- 2 Jul 1990 22d MEU is given a one-hour Doe extraction and two-hour embassy reinforcement alert order.
- 10 Jul 1990 Commander Sixth Fleet calls on American Embassy and government of Sierra Leone officials.
- 11 Jul 1990 *Sumter* departs Mamba Station for equator crossing.
- 14 Jul 1990 *Sumter* returns to Mamba Station.
- 18 Jul 1990 *Peterson* in port at Abidjan, Ivory Coast.
- 19 Jul 1990 American embassy charter flight carries 15 American citizens out of country.
- 20 Jul 1990 22d MEU attains two-hour alert posture to reinforce embassy.
- 26 Jul 1990 Refugees fill U.S. compounds, formerly occupied by U.S. citizens now evacuated.
- 27 Jul 1990 Embassy on alert following small arms fire over Greystone compound.
- 28 Jul 1990 21-man Marine security guard team embarks onboard *Saipan*.
- 30 Jul 1990 22d MEU placed on one-hour alert status to reinforce embassy.
- 4 Aug 1990 Ambassador De Vos calls forward command element members to his office to discuss evacuation. The ambassador then seeks approval for military action through his chain-of-command.
Ambassador DeVos notifies Col Amos via the forward command element's radio that the evacuation will be necessary. Landing Hour is set for 0900 on 5 Aug.
State Department approves the military evacuation.

- 5 Aug 1990 Company E conducts evacuations of Voice of America and American telecommunications office sites.
Company H (Rein) reinforces and begins evacuation of embassy.
Security force at the embassy totals 237 Marines and sailors.
26th MEU forward command element flies from Norfolk, Virginia, to Monrovia via Rota, Spain, and Freetown, Sierra Leone.
22d MEU evacuates a total of 74 evacuees.
- 6 Aug 1990 26th MEU sails from Morehead City, North Carolina.
22d MEU strength in embassy compound reduced to 192.
19 evacuees moved from Monrovia to Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- 7 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 24 people to Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- 8 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 8 people, including British Ambassador, to Freetown.
26th MEU forward command element arrives in Monrovia.
- 9 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 25, including French Ambassador and his staff. The French evacuees are transported to the French ship *Orage* and the remaining evacuees are taken to Freetown.
- 10 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 14.
- 11 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 35.
- 12 Aug 1990 22d MEU receives execute order from Joint Chiefs of Staff to evacuate foreign diplomats from Buchanan. *Saipan* and *Peterson* sail to Buchanan.
- 13 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 96 people from Buchanan including the Spanish Ambassador, the Swiss *Charge de Affairs*, and the Papal Nuncio.
The *Peterson* is detached from Operation Sharp Edge.
The number of Marines in the embassy compound is reduced to a reinforced platoon of 90.
- 15 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 12 people, including the Italian Ambassador.
- 16 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 359 people, including a woman who gives birth on board the *Saipan*.
- 17 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 88 people.
USS *Barnstable County* is attached to Amphibious Squadron Four for possible contingency operations.
- 18 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 745 people.
- 19 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 109 people.
- 20 Aug 1990 Mediterranean-based ARG 3-90/26th MEU arrives on Mamba Station.
22d MEU evacuates eight people to Mediterranean-based ARG 3-90 ships.
- 20-24 Aug 1990 Mediterranean-based ARG/26th MEU are reconfigured with a great deal of cross-decking to create Contingency MAGTF 3-90 (CM 3-90).
- 21 Aug 1990 Elements of CM 3-90 conduct turnover with 22d MEU in embassy compound.
26th MEU relieves 22d MEU in a blue-water turnover.
22d MEU departs Mamba Station after evacuating a total of 1,648 persons (132 American citizens and 1,516 foreign nationals).
- 22 Aug 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates 30 people.
- 26-28 Aug 1990 *Barnstable County* sails to Freetown and back with CH-46 helicopter on board to transfer evacuees.

- 29 Aug-1 Sep 90 *Barnstable County* sails to Freetown and back to transfer evacuees.
- 30 Aug 1990 LCpl D.J. Cassady is hit by a stray 7.62mm round, but is uninjured as the round is deflected by his flak jacket.
- 1-30 Sep 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates 57 Americans and 398 foreign nationals with *Barnstable County* transporting the evacuees to Freetown and returning to Mamba Station.
- 17 Sep 1990 Armored vehicle and more than 200 of the government's Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers approach embassy. Marine reinforcements are inserted into the embassy compound via helicopter. AFL soldiers withdraw.
- 29 Sep 1990 Marines on Post Two report seeing muzzle flashes within 100 meters of the post. Rounds strike the main embassy building.
CM 3-90 evacuates 2 Americans and 28 foreign nationals.
- 1 Oct 1990 Five or six rounds hit Post Three (located on the embassy roof).
- 1-29 Oct 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates 27 Americans and 146 foreign nationals.
- 2 Oct 1990 One round strikes Post Two (embassy Gate Two).
- 11 Oct 1990 U.S. Navy Seabee team arrives from Norfolk, Virginia.
- 3 Nov 1990 USS *Newport* with Company L, BLT 3/8 embarked arrives on Mamba Station. Key personnel go to USS *Whidbey Island* for briefs.
- 4 Nov 1990 *Barnstable County* departs Mamba Station.
- 8 Nov 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates one American and six foreign nationals.
- 10 Nov 1990 Marine Corps Birthday. A ceremony was held on the flight deck of *Whidbey Island* and cake is taken ashore to the Marines at the embassy.
- 12 Nov 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates two Americans and four foreign nationals.
- 14 Nov 1990 Company L, BLT 3/8 conducts turnover with Company K and assumes security force duties at the embassy. Company K remains responsible for reinforcement mission. *Whidbey Island* Marines continue to provide communications, combat service support, and aviation support ashore.
- 24 Nov 1990 HMM-162 detachment completes three months on board the *Whidbey Island* even though the ship is not designed for sustained aviation operations.
USS *Nashville* departs Rota, Spain, for Mamba Station.
- 30 Nov 1990 *Nashville* arrives on Mamba Station and turnover briefs are conducted. Personnel and equipment are then transferred from *Whidbey Island* to *Nashville*.
- 1 Dec 1990 CM 3-90 change of command. LtCol Robert H. Kunkle relieves Maj George S. Hartley.
The number of Marines ashore is reduced to 40.
- 2 Dec 1990 The *Whidbey Island* detaches, departs Mamba Station, sails south for equator crossing, and then proceeds to the Canary Islands for liberty.
- Dec 1990 CM 3-90 continues embassy security mission. Calm prevails in Monrovia
- 28 Dec 1990 5th Platoon, Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (FAST) Company, Marine Corps Security Force Battalion, Atlantic, is tasked with assuming the embassy security mission. Platoon members are recalled from Christmas leave.
- 6 Jan 1991 The 50 members of 5th Platoon, FAST Company depart Norfolk, Virginia.
- 7 Jun 1991 5th Platoon, FAST Company arrives at the embassy compound and conducts turnover with CM 3-90 forces.

- 9 Jan 1991 Operation Sharp Edge is officially terminated as CM 3-90 departs Mamba Station. FAST platoon remains to provide additional security for the embassy.
- 15 Feb 1991 FAST platoon departs Liberia via Navy C-130 aircraft.

Operations Assured Response and Quick Response 1996

- 27 Jan 1996 22d MEU embarks and sails from Morehead City, North Carolina.
- 11 Apr 1996 22d MEU receives EuCom Assured Response execute order to deploy to Monrovia, Liberia, to conduct NEO. USS *Guam*, USS *Trenton*, and USS *Portland* steam west and staffs begin planning. USS *Tortuga* (with artillery and light armored vehicles) remains in port in Haifa, Israel, for repairs.
- 14 Apr 1996 Forward Liaison Cell (FLC) departs *Guam* for Joint Task Force (JTF) Assured Response headquarters in Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- 15 Apr 1996 22d MEU executive officer, LtCol Barnes, proceeds to the U.S. Embassy, Monrovia, Liberia, to conduct turnover with BrigGen Michael A. Canavan, USA, commander of JTF Assured Response.
- 17-19 Apr 1996 22d MEU staff members conduct liaison visit to Freetown.
- 20 Apr 1996 Company F, BLT 2/2 inserted into embassy compound and assumed responsibility for compound security from the U.S. Army's Company C, 3d Battalion, 325th Airborne Combat Team. Col M. Wayne Forbush assumes command of JTF Assured Response.
- 21 Apr 1996 Forward Support Base (FSB) Freetown established by a detachment from Fleet Air Mediterranean to facilitate the flow of logistics into and evacuees out of Monrovia.
- 30 Apr 1996 Marines in the embassy compound return fire for the first time. Marines engaged Liberian fighters during multiple incidents when Marine posts came under direct fire. Approximately six Liberians were killed in the exchanges. No Marines were seriously injured.
- 6 May 1996 Post Seven received and returned fire without effect.
- 9 May 1996 The *Tortuga* and a detachment from 22d MEU detached from JTF Assured Response to conduct Exercise Matador 96 in Spain.
- 20 May 1996 JTF Assured Response receives warning order to be prepared to conduct reinforcement operations in the Central African Republic. Execute order for Operation Quick Response immediately follows.
- 21 May 1996 32-man detachment from 22d MEU flies to Bangui, Central African Republic, and immediately processes 13 Americans who were awaiting evacuation. The evacuees are flown to a safe haven at Yaounde, Cameroon, by the Marine KC-130 that delivered the force.
- 22 May 1996 Marines process and evacuate 59 Americans from M'Poko Airfield in Bangui.
- 24 May 1996 French forces provided armored transport for logistical supplies from M'Poko Airfield to the U.S. Embassy. Marines process and evacuate 38 Americans and foreign nationals.
- 25 May 1996 Quick Response execute order is modified directing the insertion of a security augmentation and evacuation control center (ECC) force. Marines process and evacuate 122 Americans and foreign nationals.

- 26 May 1996 A 25-man augmentation force arrives in Bangui. Marines process and evacuate 100 Americans and foreign nationals.
- 27 May 1996 The last Americans requiring evacuation are processed and evacuated.
- 31 May 1996 The augmentation force begins redeploying to JTF Assured Response. During Operation Quick Response, 190 Americans and 258 foreign nationals were evacuated from the Central African Republic. Security element remains at U.S. Embassy.
- 2 Jun 1996 Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) Liberia received verbal execution order to prepare to deploy.
- 14 Jun 1996 SPMAGTF Liberia embarks and sails from Morehead City, North Carolina.
- 14 Jun 1996 Advance Party from SPMAGTF Liberia arrives in Monrovia and begins turnover with 22d MEU.
- 27 Jun 1996 SPMAGTF Liberia relieves 22d MEU as JTF Assured Response. Company L, 3/8 assumes security mission in embassy compound. 22d MEU has evacuated a total of 49 Americans and 260 foreign nationals from Liberia.
- 15 July 1996 Phase II draw down of Marines begins.
- 22 July 1996 Phase III draw down of Marines begins.
- 1 Aug 1996 Turnover of security in Bangui to American Embassy. Marines redeploy to USS *Ponce*. The FSB in Freetown is closed.
- 3 Aug 1996 Phase IV draw down of Marines begins. Security in Monrovia is turned over to Marine Security Guard personnel. The *Ponce* leaves Liberian waters.
- 5 Aug 1996 JTF Assured Response is disengaged. SPMAGTF Liberia and the *Ponce* revert to control of U.S. Atlantic Command and return to U.S. on 21 August 1996.

Appendix B

Command and Staff List

Operation Sharp Edge

22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)
CO Col Granville R. Amos
XO LtCol Stephen J. Labadie, Jr.
S-1 Capt George A. Kelling
S-2 Maj Stephen L. Sayko
S-3 LtCol Thomas W. Parker
S-4 Maj Donald P. Edwards
Battalion Landing Team 2/4
CO LtCol Robert L. Pugh
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261
CO LtCol Emerson N. Gardner
MEU Service Support Group 22
CO LtCol James W. Head
26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)
CO Col William C. Fite
XO LtCol Richard H. Kunkle
S-1 Capt Kenny J. Mathis
S-2 Capt Steven R. Kaczmar
S-3 LtCol Brett D. Rayman
S-4 Maj Steven W. Forney
Battalion Landing Team 3/8
CO LtCol Robert G. Essink
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162
CO LtCol Darrel D. Browning
MEU Service Support Group 26
CO LtCol John W. Stull
Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force 3-90 (24 Aug to 30 Nov 1990)
CO Maj George S. Hartley
Company K, BLT 3/8
CO Capt James K. Shannon
Detachment HMM-162
OiCMaj Daniel P. Johnson
Detachment MSSG-26
OiCCWO3 Edwin E. Deering
Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force 3-90 (1 Dec 1990 to 8 Jan 1991)
CO LtCol Richard H. Kunkle
Company L, BLT 3/8
CO Capt William F. Crenshaw
Detachment HMM-162
OiCLtCol Tommy L. Patton

Detachment MSSG-26

OiC CWO3 Edwin E. Deering

5th Platoon, Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team (FAST) Company

Platoon Commander Capt Glen N. Chetham

Operations Assured Response and Quick Response

22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)

CO Col Melvin W. Forbush

XO LtCol James F. Barnes

S-1 Capt Joseph P. Spataro

S-2 Maj Gregory D. Seroka

S-3 LtCol Michael E. Dick

S-4 Maj Gary A. Lambertsen

Battalion Landing Team 2/2

CO LtCol Walter E. Gaskin

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162

CO LtCol Kenneth D. Bonner

MEU Service Support Group 22

CO LtCol John L. Grimmitt

Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force

CO Col Tony L. Corwin

XO LtCol Christopher J. Gunther

Battalion Landing Team 3/8 (-)

CO LtCol Paul E. Lefebvre

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (-)

CO LtCol Eugene K. Conti

MEU Service Support Group Detachment 28

OiCLtCol Lance R. McBride

Appendix C

Citations

NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION MEDITERRANEAN AMPHIBIOUS READY GROUP 2-90

CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service during Operation SHARP EDGE from 29 May to 21 August 1990. The Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group (MARG) 2-90 was dispatched to the vicinity of Monrovia, Liberia to aid in the possible evacuation of U.S. citizens from the country and to reinforce the United States Embassy in Monrovia. Due to an unstable, violent situation existing in the country because of an on-going civil war, the MARG was assigned to help ensure the safety of U.S. citizens, diplomats, and other noncombatants still in the country. Responding to a constantly changing political and military climate, MARG 2-90 formulated sufficient contingency plans to cope with a variety of possible missions that might be assigned. Maintaining a high state of readiness throughout the contingency, the MARG was called upon, beginning on 5 August, to conduct noncombatant evacuation operations in Monrovia, Liberia as well as the city of Buchanan. During Operation SHARP EDGE, over 1,600 noncombatants from 34 different countries were safely evacuated from the country. In addition, the United States Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia was reinforced and resupply operations began, delivering badly needed water, food, and medical supplies, thus enabling the Embassy to continue to operate during the civil war. By their uncanny resourcefulness, superior professionalism, and total devotion to duty, the officers and enlisted personnel of Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 2-90 reflected great credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Henry L. Garrett III
Secretary of the Navy

**JOINT MERITORIOUS UNIT AWARD
JOINT TASK FORCE OPERATION ASSURED RESPONSE**

CITATION:

The Joint Task Force Operation ASSURED RESPONSE distinguished itself by exceptionally meritorious achievement from 8 April 1996 to 12 August 1996. During this period, the Joint Task Force was responsible for the planning, coordination, and execution of the emergency evacuation of thousands of civilians from the chaos of civil war in Liberia and the Central African Republic. Within 24 hours of the initial alert order, the first elements of the Joint Task Force were enroute to the Intermediate Staging Base to establish a headquarters and to make final preparations for evacuation. Over the course of the next 4 months, men, women, and children of all ages, nationalities, and language were carried to safety in a courteous and efficient manner despite line hours, stressful work conditions, and 90 plus degree temperatures. When fighting among mutinous troops in the Central African Republic's capital city of Bangui threatened US citizens, Joint Task Force Operation ASSURED RESPONSE dispatched a forward liaison cell capable of providing security and evacuating threatened Americans. Their diligent efforts were responsible for the safe evacuation of hundreds of US citizens and third country nationals. Without hesitation, the men and women of Joint Task Operation ASSURED RESPONSE met this and all other challenges with success and dispatch in fulfilling the mission. By their exemplary performance of duty, the members of Joint Task Force Operation ASSURED RESPONSE have brought great credit upon themselves, their Service, and the Department of Defense.

Given under my hand this 8th day of October 1996

John M. Shalikashvili
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Appendix D

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

ACE	Air Combat Element. The ACE of a Marine Expeditionary Unit is normally a reinforced Marine medium helicopter squadron comprised of 12 CH-46E Sea Knights, 4 CH-53E Super Stallions, 4 AH-1W Sea Cobras, and 4 UH-1N Hueys. A detachment of AV-8B Harrier aircraft also is routinely attached to the squadron and a detachment of KC-130 Hercules aircraft is placed on stand-by in the continental United States.
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia. The government's armed forces under President Samuel Kenyon Doe.
ARG	Amphibious Ready Group. Three to five amphibious ships on which a Marine Expeditionary Unit is embarked.
BLT	Battalion Landing Team. An infantry battalion usually reinforced with an artillery battery, light armored reconnaissance platoon, assault amphibian platoon, combat engineer platoon, and reconnaissance platoon.
CSSE	Combat Service Support Element. The CSSE of a Marine Expeditionary Unit is an MEU Service Support Group.
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Military Observation Group. Established initially on an ad hoc basis as a multinational peacekeeping/peace enforcement force, ECOMOG and was the first such group to be established by a regional body.
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States. A regional group of 15 countries founded by treaty in May 1975 and conceived as a means toward economic integration and development of an economic union in West Africa.
FAST	Fleet Anti-terrorist Security Team. Marines from FAST companies deploy to provide additional security to U.S. facilities around the world in response to increased threats.
FCE	Forward Command Element. A Marine Expeditionary Unit's advance party that is deployed to an embassy in preparation for a noncombatant evacuation operation.
GCE	Ground Combat Element. The GCE of a Marine Expeditionary Unit is a battalion landing team.
INPFL	Independent Patriotic Front of Liberia. The rebel faction led by Prince Yormie Johnson.
MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force. A MAGTF is made up of command, ground combat, aviation combat, and combat service support elements.
MARG	Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group.

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- MEU (SOC) Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable). A Marine Air-Ground Task Force made up of a command element, battalion landing team, composite helicopter squadron, and Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group. The Special Operations Capable (SOC) designation signifies the Marine Expeditionary Unit has completed a rigorous six-month training program and has been certified to accomplish a variety of missions including noncombatant evacuation operations.
- MSG Marine Security Guard. Marine security guard detachments are assigned to provide internal security to U.S. embassies.
- MSSG Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group. The combat service support element of a Marine Expeditionary Unit. MSSGs comprise supply, maintenance, engineer, and health service units.
- NEO Noncombatant Evacuation Operation.
- NPFL National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The rebel faction led by Charles Taylor.
- RPG Rocket-propelled grenade. The RPG weapons generally used by West African combatants is the RPG-7, a Soviet antitank weapon.

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The device reproduced on the back cover is the oldest military insignia in continuous use in the United States. It first appeared, as shown here, on Marine Corps buttons adopted in 1804. With the stars changed to five points, this device has been used continuously on Marine Corps buttons to the present day.

