



MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

Humanitarian Operations

During the 1990s, the United States Marine Corps demonstrated remarkable versatility and responsiveness by conducting a wide range of humanitarian and crisis-response operations around the globe. From evacuating embassies during civil wars to delivering disaster relief after devastating cyclones, Marines deployed as agile Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs) capable of operating in complex and often dangerous environments. These missions—from Somalia and Liberia to Haiti, Bangladesh, and Bosnia—highlighted the Corps’ ability to rapidly project power and provide critical aid while adapting to the unique challenges of each situation. The decade underscored the Marines’ expanding role beyond traditional combat operations, emphasizing their importance as a flexible, expeditionary force ready to respond to political upheaval, humanitarian emergencies, and peacekeeping efforts worldwide.

- For more information, see:
 - [*Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*](#)

Somalia, 1991–1995

In January 1991, a Somali civil war necessitated the evacuation of the U.S. embassy in the capital of Mogadishu, known as Operation Eastern Exit. Displaying the flexibility of the air-ground task force, a 60-man evacuation team from the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (4th MEB), on board USS *Guam* (LPH-9) and USS *Trenton* (LPD-14), rerouted to Somalia. When the helicopters arrived on the morning of 5 January, between 100 and 150 Somalis with ladders were attempting to scale the embassy compound walls. Over several hours, the team secured the embassy while Marine helicopters evacuated all personnel from Mogadishu.

- For more information, see:
 - [*Restoring Hope: In Somalia with the Unified Task Force, 1992–1993*](#)
 - [*Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*](#)

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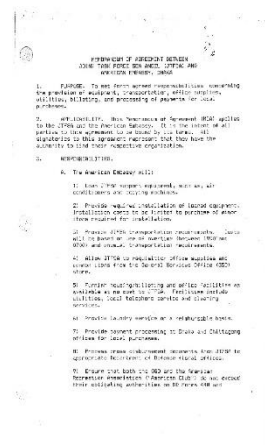
The civil war continued for nearly two more years, causing a massive humanitarian crisis. On 3 December 1992, the UN Security Council authorized using armed force to protect aid deliveries from armed factions. I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) anchored a combined task force called United Task Force Somalia (UNITAF) to carry out Operation Restore

Hope. The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit

(Special Operations Capable) (15th MEU [SOC]) was among the first forces in Somalia, securing the airport and the closed U.S. embassy in Mogadishu, which was repaired to serve as the task force headquarters. Marines assisted UNITAF task forces by establishing relief sectors from which aid could be distributed. The 15th MEU reembarked in January, and elements of the 7th and 9th Marines spent April helping enforce a fragile peace agreement among rebel leaders to freeze the movement of forces, surrender arms, and secure Mogadishu after instances of rioting. The U.S.-led UNITAF turned over responsibilities to a UN force on 4 May, just days after the last Marines left Somalia. Two years later, conditions in Somalia had not improved, and about 1,800 Marines from the 13th MEU (SOC) established a defensive perimeter for three days in March 1995 to protect the withdrawal of the last UN forces.

Operation Sea Angel

In April 1991, a cyclone devastated Bangladesh. The early death toll reached the hundreds of thousands, while damage to infrastructure threatened millions more who were without food, clean water, and basic medical care. To stave off humanitarian disaster, President George H. W. Bush authorized U.S. forces, under the auspices of the State Department, to assist Bangladesh's government. Joint Task Force Productive Effort (later renamed Joint Task Force Sea Angel) was charged with carrying out the operation. 5th MEB responded to the disaster, then Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force 2-91, composed of engineering, logistics,



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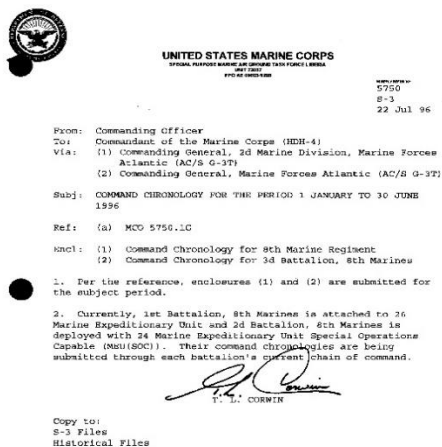


and civil affairs Marines, took over responsibility for the long-term aid distribution until 14 June, when Operation Sea Angel formally ended. The Navy–Marine Corps team proved ideally suited to Operation Sea Angel. Due to Bangladesh's distance from established American bases, the ability to operate from the sea made the operation possible. It allowed Bangladesh's government to be the face of relief efforts, lending it key credibility while establishing democratic rule after ending years of military control.

- For more information, see:
 - [*Angels from the Sea: Relief Operations in Bangladesh, 1991*](#)

Humanitarian Operations in West Africa

In 1989, Liberia had fallen into civil war, necessitating a noncombatant evacuation of Americans in June 1990. The 22d MEU (SOC) arrived off the Liberian coast, where they remained on alert to evacuate the U.S. embassy and other U.S. government sites in the capital of Monrovia. In August, fighting reached Monrovia, and two companies of Marines landed to



evacuate most Americans and secure the embassy.

Through 26 August, the 22d MEU evacuated about 130 American citizens and more than 1,500 foreign nationals, including the staff of several foreign embassies. The 22d MEU turned over responsibility to Contingency MAGTF 3-90 (CM 3-90) on 21 August.

Evacuations continued as fighting in and around Monrovia continued for months. On 9 January 1991, CM 3-90 departed, and the 5th Platoon, Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (FAST) Company, Marine Corps Security Force Battalion, Atlantic, assumed the embassy security mission until 15 February 1991, when

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a West African peacekeeping force restored order in Monrovia.

Marines returned to Liberia in 1996 after rebel leader Charles Taylor sent fighters into the capital to capture one of his rivals, resulting in widespread unrest. Marines from the 22d MEU (SOC) were detached to support Joint Task Force Assured Response with the mission of protecting the U.S. embassy and evacuating Americans and other foreign nationals. While most



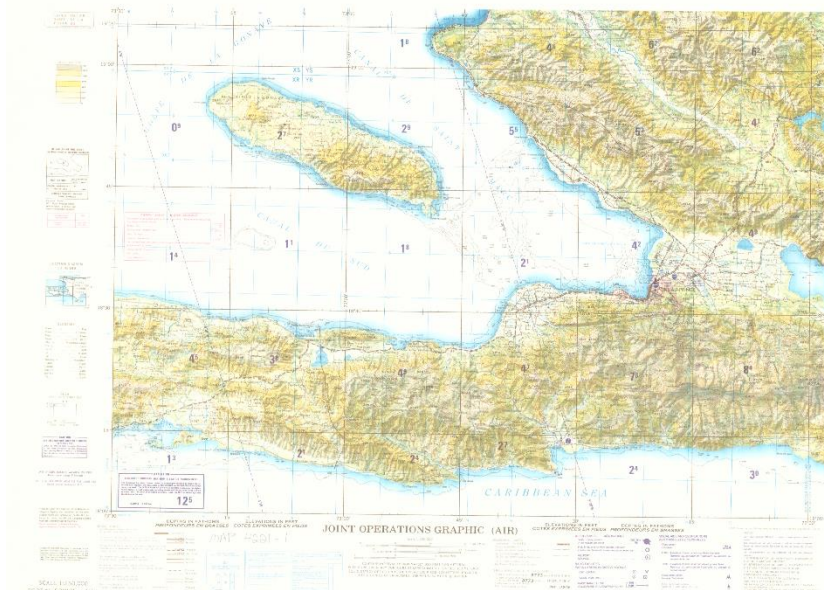
fighters avoided engaging the Marines, there were occasional firefights. One group of fighters fired at a Marine position, wounding a Marine. In response, the Marines engaged the fighters from their positions, killing about three and injuring several more. From June until August 1996, a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force, composed of personnel from the 8th Marines, took over responsibility for embassy security until African peacekeeping forces secured Monrovia after Taylor withdrew his troops from the city.

- For more information, see:

- [*On Mamba Station: U.S. Marines in West Africa, 1990–2003*](#)

Haiti, 1990s

In September 1991, the Haitian military ousted its democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who fled to the United States in exile. The coup triggered a refugee crisis, as Haitians attempted to flee to the United States by sea. From 1991 until 1993, the Marine Corps established Joint Task Force Guantanamo to house Haitian refugees in camps at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The task force was led by Brigadier George H. Walls Jr., commanding general of the 2d Force Support Group. As the camps' populations swelled into the thousands, unrest grew, including attempted breakouts. At one point, II MEF's alert battalion, the 2d Battalion, and the 8th Marines were sent to reassert control in one of the camps. By July 1993, only a few hundred refugees remained, and they were permitted entry to the United States until their cases were resolved. That month, the Marine Corps deactivated the reduced joint task force and terminated the operation. In response to a military coup in Haiti in July 1994, a Marine task force landed at Cap-Haitien, a port city on Haiti's north coast, while the Army occupied Port-au-Prince to maintain order and ensure the



Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division



handover occurred. Marines occasionally clashed with Haitian troops and police, resulting in several casualties amid a breakdown in command among the Haitian forces. On 25 September, the Marines turned over responsibilities in Cap-Haitien to the Army's 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division.

- For more information, see:
 - [*A Skillful Show of Strength: U.S. Marines in the Caribbean, 1991–1996*](#)

Bosnia, 1990s

Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of several nations that declared independence from Yugoslavia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. In April 1992, Bosnian Serbs (ethnic Serbs living in Bosnia and not Serbia) surrounded the capital of Sarajevo. They undertook a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign, expelling Bosnian Muslims and Croats from the territory they controlled.

Marine F/A-18 squadrons assigned to Navy aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean and F/A-18 and EA-6B squadrons deployed to Aviano Air Base, Italy, formed the bulk of the Marine



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Corps contribution to an air campaign against the Bosnian Serbs. The 24th MEU (SOC), however, played a key role in the rescue of Captain Scott F. O'Grady, a U.S. Air Force pilot whose F-16C Fighting Falcon aircraft was shot down over Bosnia on 2 June 1995. At 0200 on 8 June, a 42-member TRAP (Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel) team, composed of Marines and sailors, lifted off from USS *Kearsarge* (LHD-3) in two

CH-53E Sea Stallion helicopters at about 0500, reaching O'Grady less than two hours later. As both helicopters flew back to *Kearsarge*, hostile forces fired at least three surface-to-air missiles, all of which missed. Small arms fire did strike both aircraft but caused no casualties or significant damage.



- For more information, see:

- *[Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment](#)*

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