

2016

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Walter E. Kretchik

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EYEWITNESS TO CHAOS

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EYEWITNESS TO CHAOS

Personal Accounts of the
Intervention in Haiti, 1994

WALTER E. KRETCHIK

Potomac Books

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kretchik, Walter E. (Walter Edward), 1954-

Title: Eyewitness to chaos: personal accounts of the intervention in Haiti, 1994 / Walter E. Kretchik.

Other titles: Personal accounts of the intervention in Haiti, 1994

Description: Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, an imprint

of the University of Nebraska Press, [2016] | Includes

bibliographical references and index. Identifiers:

LCCN 2016026092 (print)

LCCN 2016040492 (ebook)

ISBN 9781612347240 (cloth: alk. paper)

ISBN 9781612348667 (epub)

ISBN 9781612348674 (mobi)

ISBN 9781612348681 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Haiti—History—American intervention, 1994-1995—Personal narratives. | United States. Army—Officers—

Interviews. Soldiers—United States—Interviews. | United States.

Army—History—20th century. | United Nations Mission in

Haiti. | United Nations—Armed Forces—Haiti. | United States—

Relations—Haiti. | Haiti—Relations—United States.

Classification: LCC F1928.2 .K738 2016 (print) |

LCC F1928.2 (ebook) | DDC 972.9407/3-dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016026092>

Set in Lyon Text by John Kloppig.

To those who served

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank everyone who made this work possible. Special recognitions are in order for the military and civilian men and women who kindly volunteered their oral histories in the 1990s after having lived through what are now historical events. I am indebted to colleagues Dr. Robert F. Baumann, Dr. John T. Fishel, and the many military officers who conducted oral history sessions in the United States and Haiti. Col. Jerry D. Morelock (Ret.), past director, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, provided time and resources in the 1990s to make this book possible decades later. Manuscript reviewer Professor Philippe Girard offered thoughtful observations and suggestions that improved the work. I am indebted to copyeditor Joy Margheim for strengthening the manuscript. The University of Texas–Austin’s Perry-Castañeda Library provided maps. The U.S. Department of Defense furnished photographs. The professional librarians and staff at the Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, archived and catalogued the documents and oral history tapes for public education and historical purposes. Erin Girard of Speedy-Script Transcription Services transcribed hours of video and cassette tapes rife with military acronyms and jargon. Particular thanks go to the Global Special Operations Forces Foundation and retired Special Forces associates for research assistance. I am most grateful to the University Press of Nebraska’s editorial staff. My wife, Pamela J. Kontowicz, afforded support, transcribed tapes, indexed the manuscript, and critically commented on all drafts. Of course, none of these people are responsible for what is written here and all errors are mine alone.

INTRODUCTION

From September 19, 1994, to March 31, 1995, the U.S. government intervened militarily in Haiti. Conducted under UN Security Council Resolution 940 and Chapter VII of the UN Charter, Operation Uphold Democracy was the most convoluted military invasion in American history. Due to former president Jimmy Carter's successful last-minute negotiations with an illegal junta, President William J. Clinton turned around about one hundred aircraft and airborne troops twenty minutes before hostilities were set to commence. Commanders and their units then prepared to enter the country peacefully, scrambling to switch from a war mentality to a peacekeeping mind-set overnight. Operational disorder ensued for weeks even as thousands of multinational forces and numerous agencies entered the country to advise and support Haiti's fledgling democratic government. With mission handover to the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) on March 31, 1995, many U.S. troops departed while others donned blue berets to serve under UN command. For fifteen months, UNMIH troops, 40 percent of them from the United States, assisted Haitians and their government in furthering democracy before mission transfer to yet another UN force, the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti (UNSMIH).

The 1994 U.S.-led military intervention also allowed the U.S. Army major and Haitian American Anthony "Tony" Ladouceur to return to his native country. In 1967 Ladouceur left Haiti to spend his teenage years with relatives in New York City while his businessman father remained in Port-au-Prince. American citizenship and an army enlistment led to a commission through officer candidate school. As a cultural advisor and translator for the

military intervention's commander, Lt. Gen. Henry H. "Hugh" Shelton, the Haiti-born major was able to visit his father's mountainside home overlooking Port-au-Prince. "I will show you a picture of it," he said. "He has a fifty-foot wall around it. He enters through three doors: a wooden door, a reinforced metal door, and then another metal door, both in the front and the back. All the windows have metal bars on them. He has a loaded shotgun and a strategic location in his house where he goes if something starts to happen. One of his neighbors was robbed and they killed his son in the house. He was hiding when they shot his son but then he came at them with a machete. They had Uzi submachine guns and they just wasted him."¹

Three weeks later Capt. Doni Colon, U.S. Army, arrived. His participation in the military intervention began with debarkation at Port-au-Prince International Airport in October 1994. It was also his first exposure to the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. While being transported to his headquarters, Colon witnessed an airport terminal controlled by heavily armed U.S. combat troops, throngs of Haitian pedestrians and street vendors conducting their affairs along dirt streets, and American infantrymen on foot patrol circumventing heaps of human waste and rotting garbage. While nearly vomiting from the stench, Colon observed Haitians "washing themselves by throwing a bucket into the sewer and bringing water out and also cleaning their clothes and stuff in that." A subsequent safety briefing on AIDS increased Colon's growing consternation about Haiti. "I was told that Haitians do not believe that AIDS is really a disease. They believe it is done by someone to you. You can't get it if protected by a particular voodoo [vodun] religious spell. They might make a little charm or do a saying at home to protect them and it is the same with many diseases here. They just do not understand the science, the reality of it. To them, it is magic and superstition." After less than twenty-four hours in country, Colon grimly stated, "This place is in trouble."²

This book is about Ladouceur, Colon, and others like them who served during Operation Uphold Democracy and UNMIH from

1994 to 1996. It is an oral history of the two military interventions, as told by the men and women who personally experienced them. Because it is concerned with military incursions from a personal viewpoint, this study asks a straightforward but important question: What happens to the military men and women who plan and execute military interventions and the civilians who observe them firsthand?

In a contemporary sense, military intervention as a form of preventive diplomacy began on June 17, 1992, six months after the Cold War ended, when UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali submitted his Security Council report entitled *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, and Peacekeeping*.” In it he articulated his vision for the UN in resolving post-Cold War conflicts peacefully. To the secretary-general, the ideological struggle between the West and the East had terminated but various population groups now threatened international peace through “new claims of nationalism and sovereignty.” To “remove sources of danger before violence resulted,” he reiterated that the UN Charter’s Chapter VI allowed for peaceful intervention in international disputes. In the absence of a nonviolent solution, however, Chapter VII and Article 42 permitted a UN armed force to maintain international peace and security. Through preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, or postconflict peacebuilding, the UN members’ judicious application of the charter’s authority and appropriate use of military force would “address the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice, and political oppression.”³

In the early 1990s Haiti certainly met the criteria for a UN military intervention under Chapter VI or Chapter VII. But the use of armed troops to intervene in places such as the island of Hispaniola has generated considerable debate. Historically, intervention to end human suffering is traceable to St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and Christian theories of “just war.” More recently, Andrea Kathryn Talentino’s *Military Intervention after the Cold War: The Evolution of Theory and Practice* (2005) represents those who doubt its usefulness. In the case of Haiti, Talentino concludes that armed



1. The face of military intervention: a wary U.S. soldier canvasses the Port-au-Prince streets. Source: Department of Defense.

intervention accomplished little because the effort was far too limited in scope and reflected a “one and done” attitude of get in and get out. In truth, Maj. Robert B. Geddis, U.S. Army, verified her point by remarking, “I kind of took to Haiti that it is a problem that they got to work out. We are here to help; let’s do our job and then leave.” Richard N. Haass, in *Intervention: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (1999) also questions the value of military interventions to alleviate human suffering. His book offers recommendations for decision makers to consider when determining whether to intervene. Glenn J. Antizzo’s *U.S. Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War Era: How to Win America’s Wars in the Twenty-First Century* (2013) advocates for military interventions as long as objectives are clearly defined, public support is secured, and decision makers have the will to use force when necessary.⁴

These important studies take an argumentative stance to weigh the merits and drawbacks of intervening or offer an advisory perspective intended to sway policy makers. Noticeably absent from

the existing literature is an attentive examination of military interventions from the standpoint of those who actually plan and execute them “on the ground.”

To address that deficiency, this book uses oral histories to disclose the personal experiences of general officers, commanders, staff officers, noncommissioned officers, and others involved in Operation Uphold Democracy and UNMIH. Their insights speak to strategic, operational, and tactical planning considerations, intelligence gathering, multinational force interaction, mission execution conundrums, communications and language concerns, ethnic and cultural factors, and other topics. Collectively, they shed valuable light on what it actually means to intervene militarily in the affairs of others.

The oral histories used here resulted from a chief of staff of the army directive to produce a history of the service’s role in Operation Uphold Democracy. From 1994 until 1999 I led a research team as a regular army lieutenant colonel and faculty member assigned to the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Professors Robert F. Baumann and John T. Fishel, along with U.S. Army reservists and CGSC students, also conducted interviews. We followed guidelines within the U.S. Army’s Center of Military History publication *Oral History: Techniques and Procedures*. Department of the Army regulations for documenting ongoing military operations and distributing public information about them guided our efforts. Military participants released their oral histories as government employees and public servants. Nongovernment civilians also agreed to public release, as concerned citizens. The unclassified interview records are within the public domain and accessible through the Combined Arms Research Library archives at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.⁵

The reasons why the UN and the U.S. government would intervene militarily in Haiti are complex and understanding them requires revisiting Haiti’s position within international circles and in relation to the United States. The island of Hispaniola is strategically important, for it is but 1,530 miles from UN head-

quarters in New York to Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, equivalent to the distance from Los Angeles, California, to Topeka, Kansas. Haiti is also 690 miles off the U.S. coast, equal to the driving distance from Chicago, Illinois, to Washington D.C. Soon after Jean-Bertrand Aristide's ouster in 1991, the UN secretary-general encouraged the formation of the UN Group of Friends of Haiti, a political, economic, and diplomatic assistance body including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Guatemala, Peru, the United States, and Uruguay. U.S. membership has much to do with national security because of unlawful immigration and Haiti's role as an illegal drug conduit through which tons of cocaine enters America annually. Stopping illegal immigrants and countering Haitian drug smuggling composes a significant portion of U.S. counterdrug operations and expenditures.⁶

Once considered the "pearl of the Antilles," Haiti is the poorest Western Hemisphere country, with a 10 percent adult literacy rate. Only 50 percent of Haitian children attend school. The country ranks among the ten least-educated nations globally, with the other nine located in Africa. The relatively few educated Haitians are typically wealthy and attended foreign universities. They often become expats, leaving their country for the United States and other locales, such as Canada.

Haiti's loss of educated citizens creates a national "brain drain" as well as a substantial diaspora in many countries. The 2010 U.S. Census reported 975,000 Haitian Americans, concentrated in Florida, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Louisiana, Delaware, and Wisconsin. There are prominent Haitian American judges, lawyers, politicians, military officers, entertainers, businessmen and businesswomen, artists, musicians, and models in the United States, as well as the 1991 Miss America and numerous professional athletes. Haitian Americans send millions of dollars to their relatives in Haiti each year.

Although the relationship between Haiti and North America is well established, surprisingly little has been published about Operation Uphold Democracy and UNMIH. John R. Ballard's *Upholding Democracy: The United States Military Campaign in Haiti, 1994-*

1997 (1998) conveys his personal views as a member of U.S. Atlantic Command's Joint Analysis and Assessment Team in Haiti and Norfolk, Virginia. His work is chronological and sophisticated and includes some participant interview material. A book I coauthored with Baumann and Fishel, *Invasion, Intervention, "Intervention": A Concise History of the U.S. Army in Operation Uphold Democracy* (1998), was published by the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College Press and focused on army operations in Haiti. Additional works include Bob Shacochis's *The Immaculate Invasion* (1999), an excellent personal story of an imbedded journalist with U.S. Special Forces units in Haiti. Stan Goff's *Hid-eous Dream: A Soldier's Memoir of the U.S. Invasion of Haiti* (2000) is another personal account. Lawrence E. Casper's *Falcon Brigade: Combat and Command in Somalia and Haiti* (2001) offers insights into military intervention operational and tactical decision making. Ralph Pezzullo's *Plunging into Haiti: Clinton, Aristide, and the Defeat of Diplomacy* (2006) and Philippe Girard's *Clinton in Haiti: The 1994 U.S. Invasion of Haiti* (2004) offer superb general histories of Haiti and cover specific events leading up to the military intervention and afterward. How the local populace engages UN peacekeepers is covered in Béatrice Pouligny's *Peace Operations Seen from Below: UN Missions and Local People* (2006). Several complementary works highlight the two interventions through the lenses of U.S. and Haitian economic, government, humanitarian, political, military, or social issues. They include Amnesty International's *On the Horns of a Dilemma: Military Repression or Foreign Invasion?* (1994); Charles Arthur's, *After the Dance: Haiti: One Year after the Invasion* (1995); and Karen von Hippel's, *Democracy by Force: U.S. Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World* (2000). *The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century*, edited by David M. Malone (2004), includes a comprehensive chapter on the Security Council's role in the Haitian intervention. *Capacity Building for Peacekeeping: The Case of Haiti*, edited by John T. Fishel and Andrés Sáenz (2007); Ronald H. Cole, *Mission to Haiti: Direction and Support of Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Operations, 1994-2000* (2008); and

Aaron L. Wilkins, *The Civil Military Operations Center in Operation Uphold Democracy* (2012) are valuable for deducing practical “lessons learned.” All of these studies assist in understanding the military intervention in Haiti.

This book adds to the body of work on military interventions in several ways. It illustrates how oral history assists in explaining past events. Those interested in foreign relations and military history should find it useful for what it says about executive policy becoming operational reality. The work further illuminates what happens to men and women in uniform when ordered into harm’s way. Maj. Gen. Joseph W. Kinzer, U.S. Army, the commanding general of UNMIH, explained in his interview why the Haiti military intervention is a worthwhile study: “You should look at this and think about having to do something like it.” Before taking Kinzer’s advice, however, it is necessary to give some thought to military intervention in light of how Haiti’s people have historically viewed the use of military power.⁷