

How the Marines Helped Arm

Jeremiah O'Leary, the Star's State Department reporter, is a colonel in the Marine Corps Reserves who served with the Marines in World War II and the Korean War.

By Jeremiah O'Leary
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Marine officers in the U.S. Naval Mission to Haiti assisted rebel leaders in 1963 in their unsuccessful effort to overthrow Francois Duvalier, then the president of the Caribbean nation.

The story of how these officers collaborated with rebel chieftains Clement and Harry Barbot in 1963 has been kept secret until now because

the Marines had my promise of confidentiality in return for an opportunity to interview the insurgent leaders at their secret hideaway outside Port au Prince.

But now these Marines have left the service and stories have been published saying that the Central Intelligence Agency aided rebels trying to overthrow Duvalier. The CIA won't comment on the story, but the Marine efforts I witnessed in 1963 seemed to be completely independent of CIA operations.

I DID NOT know then, and do not know now, whether the small group of Marines in Port au Prince was

working under orders of the Pentagon and the Defense Intelligence Agency or undertook to help the Barbot guerrillas on their own. The Marines who disclosed to me what they were doing never told me whether they were carrying out a policy decision of the U.S. government.

The main thing these officers did was make it possible for Clement Barbot and his small band to arm themselves from the Marine armory, a building located behind the mission headquarters on the Champs de Mars plaza facing the gleaming white Haitian presidential palace. The deed was done, according to the Marines, simply by leaving the armory un-



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Haitian Rebels Against Duvalier

locked and permitting Barbot's men to help themselves to M1 rifles, .45-caliber pistols and fragmentation hand grenades.

THIS WAS totally at odds with the Marine practice of keeping a strict account of their weapons and ammunition and reporting any losses in great detail. But in this case there was no administrative uproar over the loss of scores of rifles and pistols.

The unsuccessful Barbot uprising came as close as any of the many attempts that were made to unseat Duvalier. Six weeks after I interviewed the Barbot brothers, the two rebels were trapped and killed by

Duvalier's forces in a sugar cane field about 12 kilometers from the capital city.

The Marines were pulled out of Haiti at about that time and Duvalier died a natural death a few years later and was succeeded by his son.

THE SITUATION in Haiti was explosive when I visited there in April 1963. The neighboring Dominican Republic was threatening to invade Haiti because of a series of diplomatic incidents and Haitian officials in turn began uttering threats of murder and fire against all whites when the first foreign soldier set foot on Haitian soil. Inside Haiti,

Duvalier's Tonton Macoute gunmen were terrorizing Haitian citizens with arrest, robbery and murder.

Just before my arrival, gunmen had killed two of the bodyguards of Duvalier's only son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, now president of the republic, and the longtime Marine commander, Col. Robert Heintz, of Washington, had been ordered out. The tension was so high that Ambassador Raymond Thurston recommended evacuation of all American dependents and non-essential civilians.

This was the situation when I arrived and encountered Gunner Sheri-

See HAITI, A-8

*Final edit. Our
add "Warrant" office "here"*

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an, an old friend from the 1st Marine Division in World War II. Sheridan told me he had no illusions about Bardot, a one-time associate of Duvalier.

"HE'S A sonovabitch but he's our sonovabitch," Sheridan said. He made it clear that Clement Barbot had been every bit as brutal and acquisitive as Duvalier until the two had fallen out. "Papa Doc" has had him in Fort Dimanche (the infamous prison) and now Barbot is out for blood. And he's maybe the only guy around who's tough and smart enough to knock over Duvalier."

In the ensuing days, times were tough in Haiti. Marines carried airline flight bags everywhere they went. In each bag were swimming trunks, a towel and a .38-caliber pistol. Duvalier's soldiers and

militia were everywhere and they were dangerous.

Meanwhile, Barbot and his men came out at night in fast cars to raid Duvalier's police stations and guard posts. I often mentioned to Sheridan and the other Marines how much I would like to interview Barbot.

AFTER THREE weeks, the Marines took me into their confidence, told me how Barbot had gotten his arms and said they would try to make contact for me. Finally, on May 19, a dark and rainy night, the word came: I was to leave the Sans Souci Hotel and walk to my right until a car stopped and the driver handed me half of a baseball card. I was given the other half of the card.

It was frightening but it worked perfectly. The driver never spoke and tried to lose me by taking a circuitous route but I realized we were on the Rue du Nord — the north-south highway outside Port au Prince.

Curfew or not, we passed two police roadblocks without interference and then turned into a cane field. Soon I was in a small village and Barbot came out to greet me.

HE WAS A handsome, slender man wearing only white underwear and carrying only a pistol. He showed me his Marine-supplied weapons and pledged that his only aim was to rid Haiti of Duvalier.

He told me that he intended to make a big strike the next night. At 8 p.m. sharp, Barbot said, his men would simultaneously attack three militia posts in schools, set fire to cane

fields on either side of the city and then blow up the Haitian-American Sugar Co. oil tanks.

The next night the Marines took me to a house overlooking the city and I showed them on a map where Barbot was going to strike. We used artillery glasses to spot each target while it was still light and then settled back to wait until 8 o'clock.

AT THE STROKE of the hour, one of the marines shouted that he saw one, then two cane fires blazing at opposite ends of the city. Then, one after another came the explosions of grenades and heavy fire from the three militia strongholds. We watched the oil tank farm but saw nothing.

"Barbot is trying to blow up bunker oil with hand grenades," Sheridan muttered. "He has to have thermite or Composition C (plastic explosives). That heavy oil has to be heated to 200 degrees or it won't burn."

At sunrise, I was driven down the hill to the hotel and we put my suitcase in a U.S. mail sack. The Marines had told me I should leave Haiti immediately because I knew the location of the rebel leader. But the first commercial flight didn't leave for two days.

A CARD in my room said the embassy expected me to be at the military airfield where a Navy DC3 had come in from Guantanamo Bay to take me out of Haiti.

When it came time for me to board, 12 Marines and I walked out to the plane carrying mail sacks and only 12 Americans got off. Soon I was airborne and safely away.