

MILITARY TRIVIA

This week's trivia: Vulcans in Panama

by Maj. James Crabtree

XVIII Abn. Corps PAO

In 1989 the United States was having some serious problems with the Republic of Panama, which was once a strong ally of the United States, was now under the thumb of a ruthless drug-dealing thug by the name of Manuel Noriega.

President Jimmy Carter had just signed an agreement with Panama, which gave control of the Panama Canal back to the republic in exchange for elections. The elections, however, were never held and in the meantime, several military governments came and went until the worst of the Panamanian generals came into power.

Noriega, like a lot of dictators, wasn't very good at actually running things.

Panama's economy was

barely lurching along and of course Noriega began oppressing his own people, who kept asking about those elections. So like a lot of other tyrants, Noriega had to find someone to blame for all of his country's troubles, and the scapegoat was the United States.

Soon the American Soldiers and civilians stationed in the Canal Zone began suffering from state-sanctioned harassments from newly-redesignated Panamanian Defense Forces and the so-called "Dignity Battalions."

U.S. Soldiers were fired on and one officer was killed. But the final straw was when Noriega decided to declare war on the U.S.

Noriega must have been doing drugs himself, because nobody declares war on the U.S. unless they're looking to get their

regime changed.

The XVIII Airborne Corps was in charge of executing Operation Just Cause, which saw elements of the 7th Infantry Division and the 193rd Infantry Brigade already in Panama hooking up with the 82nd Airborne Division and special operations units that dropped in to take charge of the situation.

In Just Cause, the operation saw many small, unconnected actions, which included the reinstallation of the PDF installation of Fort Espinar.

The capture of the fortress would not be because the Air Force's F-117 Stealth fighters or to the 82nd's tanks, but rather because of an anti-aircraft weapon designed to put a lot of shells into the air as quickly as possi-

ble — the M-61 Vulcan, a 20mm gatling gun, which first saw service in Vietnam, but the principal on which it was based on dated back to the Civil War.

The Vulcan replaced the Duster, a 40mm cannon that had a hard time dealing with guerrillas in the grass and jungles of south-east Asia. But the Vulcan and its 3,000 rounds per minute was able to fire, and act like a lawn mower ... much to the chagrin of the communists.

The PDF still had to learn, however.

Prior to Operation Just Cause, a detachment from the 2nd Battalion, 62nd Air Defense Artillery began conducting night drills with the weapon system on a baseball field near the barracks at Fort Espinar.

The PDF quickly got used to seeing the air

defenders working their system and were soon ignoring them. Until one night in December 1989, when air attacks and airborne drops were announced as the U.S. response to Noriega's declaration of war.

The Vulcans then began playing their part in the operation — neutralizing Fort Espinar.

Soon after everything went hot, the Panamanians began expending a lot of ordnance and in response, the Vulcans and U.S. Soldiers came back with thousands and thousands of 20mm rounds, which did some unexpected renovations on the PDF barracks.

Following a very short and one-way exchange of fire, 40 PDF soldiers quickly surrendered and only one U.S. Soldier was wounded in the operation.

The next job was to secure the nearby bay and eliminate the threat posed by Vosper PT-boats.

Although a couple of the boats got away from the docks before they could be captured, none of them were allowed to leave the bay of Coco Solo... one being sunk by a Vulcan when it attempted to engage U.S. troops again.

No enemy aircraft were shot down by the Air Defense Artillery during this short campaign. Although by the time Just Cause was over, the 2-62nd ADA's "score" included one fort and one boat.

Next Week:
What island was awarded a medal?

BUSTER'S BATTERY



LOOKING BACK

Snowblind in Schoppen

by Al Alvarez

Special correspondent

With a French Foreign Legion "Kepi" look, I covered my helmet with a white pillow slip, letting the flap cover my neck and I enclosed myself in a white bed sheet, a snow cape and emerged through the slit for my head.

Finally, I connected the radio and set it on a German wooden sled with a 50-foot on/off switch for the lieutenants to use. We were now ready ... "ready for Freddy!"

Before leaving, we threw some cardboard ammunition cartons filled with coffee, sugar and cans of cream onto the sled and loaded my pockets with goodies after eating everything I could from my rations: crackers, cheese, meat and beans, cocoa, sugar, candy and anything else I could find for energy.

"Now ... I'm warm, full and have dry feet. I can shoot, scoot and communicate!"

On Jan. 14, 1945, heavy snow was falling. Lt. Col. Charles T. Horner co-mingled with portions of Task Force Davison's tank unit while they continued assaulting Faymonville. We (i.e., me pulling the radio sled) accompanied Company I and later Co. L into the northeast portion of Faymonville as we trudged slowly through the snow.

Despite the incoming mortars, the doughs continued their fight in the snow. The mines hidden in the snow took out some of 745th's tanks, and there were reports of two killed in action and 15 Soldiers of 3rd Battalion reported wounded in action. By nightfall we stopped and ran a line to the nearest company to hear the latest reports. Soon reports of 70 casualties for 3rd Battalion were announced. We fired harassing missions and kept everyone awake. By morning Lt. Cangelosi returned from the battalion briefing with new orders.

"We are going to take Schoppen, the next town to the southeast. Let's move it!" Cangelosi said as we began trudging through the snow until we reached some woods where machine gun fire erupted. Cangelosi soon quieted the woods with a high explosive concentration and we found ourselves held up in the woods with no fire and no hot chow as we stomped our feet all night to stay warm. Luckily, I had a can of sliced peaches that I warmed up in my armpit for breakfast.

The following day, possibly Jan. 15, we accompanied 3rd

Battalion's Co. L who seemed to be in reserve since we stepped in the footprints of the lead company. The snow was now knee deep and snowing fiercely with drifts quickly piling up.

Finally, someone passed the word on down the line that we were in a blizzard. Observation was impossible, and though we couldn't see anything, the good news was that the Germans couldn't see us either.

Our day consisted of struggling through the snow, laying a line back on the road and meeting up with our artillery liaison wire crew. Splicing the line with frozen fingers and listening to the two parties conversing, after which, we tried bumming rides on the only vehicles able to move — the "weasels" a type of lightweight covered track vehicle being used as ambulances carrying those wounded in action waving their Red Cross flags.

As a tank dozer approached, everyone on the road piled onto the dozer for a slippery, dangerous ride back. I followed my line back into a house, in which, thank God the troops had fired up a stove. Although the house was crowded, it was cozy.

While Lt. Cangelosi and Sgt. Vacher observed for any enemy activity upstairs, I was downstairs drying out and trying to heat my radio batteries on the stove to restore their strength — it worked.

As I continued to warm up my batteries and myself, the artillery liaisons told me the bad news about Jonsey, the Battery A radioman who was killed in action while we were hitting Faymonville. The word was that he was hit by a sniper. Jonsey was an artillery buddy who was doing my same job. I had just returned a quarter-mile reel of commo wire I'd borrowed from him ... we were losing a lot of doughs.

The following day we continued through the snow at the proverbial "snail's pace," along with the doughs plodding through snowdrifts watching the tanks as they slid and slipped off the roads when we noticed someone had wrapped barbed wire around their boots for traction. They claimed it worked, so my new salvation was my wrapped boots and the sled I was dragging behind me.

(Editor's note: This is a series of memoirs by Lt. Col. Al Alvarez, who retired from XVIII Airborne Corps and now volunteers at the Airborne Special Operations Museum.)

RANGE SCHEDULE

From Monday through Oct. 29 units on Fort Bragg will be conducting small arms and high explosives firing in the Fort Bragg range area. All personnel are warned against entering any danger or impact area without specific approval from the installation range officer. The Fort Bragg range area is not considered an open range. Entry into or use of fixed ranges, observation posts, training facilities, or areas other than designated recreational areas on Manchester, Plank or King roads, must be approved by the installation range officer. The schedule below is subject to change without notice to the public. Additions and/or deletions occur frequently. Commanders with a few individuals who need to fire may coordinate with the using unit to add firers to that unit's range. The following is the weekly range schedule that indicates the units that will be using the ranges.

PISTOL	Monday	Range 50: 2/504	Range 33: 2BCT	Friday
38/45/9MM	Range 41: 2/321FA	Range 52: 2/504	Range 56: 2/504	Range 53: 1/508
Monday	Range 59: MUIC	Range 59: 1/508	Thursday	Saturday
Range 66C/1: 2DSTB	Tuesday	Friday	Range 56: 2/504	Range 66B: 1/252AR
Range 29: 2BCT	Range 28: 2/504	Range 41: 2/321FA	Friday	Sunday
Range 66C/1: 3/73CAV	Range 31: 2BCT	Range 59: 1/508	Range 56: 3/82AV	Range 66B: 1/252AR
Range 66C/3: 3/73CAV	Range 41: 2/321FA	Saturday	Saturday	
Wednesday	Range 50: 1/504	Range 41: 1/252AR	Range 43: 1/252AR	M60 SAW/
Range 29: 2BCT	Range 52: 2/504	Range 52: MUIC	Range 56: MUIC	TRANSITION
Range 66C/3: 2/82AV	Range 59: 1/508	Range 58: MUIC	Sunday	Wednesday
Thursday	Wednesday	Sunday	Range 43: 1/252AR	Range 54: 1/504
Range 66C/2: 2/504	Range 28: 3/82AV	Range 41: 1/252AR		Range 66A: 2/504
Range 66C/3: DISCOM	Range 31: 2BCT			Thursday
Saturday	Range 41: 2/321FA	M16 QUAL	Tuesday	Range 54: 1/504
Range 29: 1/252AR	Range 50: 2/504	Monday	Range 53: 2/321FA	Range 66A: 2BSTD
Sunday	Range 52: 2/504	Range 43: 1/7SFG	Range 66B: 2BCT	Friday
Range 29: 1/252AR	Range 58: 2/319FA	Tuesday	Range 53: 1/508	Range 54: 1/504
Range 66C/1: MUIC	Range 59: 1/508	Range 33: 2BCT	Range 66B: 2BCT	Saturday
	Thursday	Range 43: 2/504	Thursday	Range 66A: 1/252AR
	Range 28: 3/82AV	Range 56: 2/504	Range 53: 1/508	Sunday
M16 ZERO/QUAL	Range 41: 2/321FA	Wednesday		Range 66A: 1/252AR