

Reflections of a Just Cause

LTC (RETIRED) BRIAN D. BARHAM

Author's Note: *These are my personal reflections that I have not previously been shared with anyone. This is what I remember, the way I remember it. At the time I was called on to participate in Operation Just Cause, I was an Infantry captain with about eight years of experience in the Army. I had previously served in the 82nd Airborne Division, 8th Infantry Division (Mechanized), and had been with the 3rd Ranger Battalion a little over a year. I did not feel like an inexperienced Soldier; previous experience with the 82nd Airborne in the Sinai Desert and Operation Urgent Fury stood me in good stead. Experience commanding two companies in Germany provided me with plenty chances to grow. As the S3 Air with the 3rd Ranger Battalion, I understood my responsibilities, and I was not the exception. The battalion was made up of Rangers who had all the right experience, attitude, and confidence in each other.*

The first time my phone rang on 17 December 1989, it was just a routine telephonic practice alert. I passed the message to continue the chain. The next time the phone rang, the alert was not routine. My wife (Christie) and I were just getting ready for bed. The activity of the previous few days though caused me to have some uneasy feelings about this particular alert. I relayed the call and got ready to go into work.

Earlier in the day, my family and I attended the battalion's annual children's Christmas party. While there, I heard the battalion executive officer, MAJ Danny McKnight, say that an officer had been killed in Panama. U.S. Marine Corps 1stLt Robert Paz had been killed by some of General Manuel Noriega's soldiers. I was sad for 1stLt Paz's family. Heartache and holidays are a difficult combination. MAJ McKnight wasn't sure if we were going to "do anything" about Paz's murder or not. I thought that if we were the parents of 1stLt Paz, or if he could somehow make his own thoughts known to us, they would certainly want the U.S. government to "do something." It occurred to me that we were going to do something, and we'd better do a good job.

Christie and I had been dating when I got called out to Grenada for Operation Urgent Fury. As I was getting ready to leave the house, I thought about what I should say to her this time. When I left to go to Grenada, I woke her up with a long-distance phone call. This time, we'd been married over five years, had a 2-year-old daughter, and were expecting news about adopting a son at any time. I told Christie that I thought this alert was for real. She didn't reply at first. I told her to watch the news and that if we were deployed, the unit's rear detachment and the wives' chain of concern would contact her. Before I left, she said, "You guys kick a--!" It helps being married to a woman who understands me.

The drive into work seemed long. When I got there, the commanders and staff were assembling for a quick briefing. The word was that we were going to jump into combat at Rio Hato, Panama. Rio Hato was a large airfield and training area that housed several Panama Defense Force (PDF) units. The chief concerns were the 6th and 7th Infantry companies. These companies possessed mortars, small and heavy machine guns, recoilless rifles, antiarmor weapons, RPG-7 grenade launchers, and small arms. The airfield was defended by three ZPU-4 air defense guns. There was also an NCO academy, an ammunition storage facility, a motor pool with motorcycles and armored vehicles (V300 and V150s), and guards for the airport gates. Noriega maintained a beach house at Rio Hato, and there were also some Panamanian special forces elements that sometimes trained at Rio Hato. It was imperative that we catch them by surprise and overwhelm them before they could organize a coherent defense. We were to jump in the middle of all this at 0100 the morning of 20 December from 13 C-130 aircraft. Rangers would clear the runway for the follow-on equipment and fight in all directions at the same time. I marveled at the calm professionalism with which we dispatched our duties. All the alerts, rehearsals, training, missions, and real-world planning were paying off. We knew what to do and how to act. We were professionals.

I spent two days ensuring my responsibilities were met. As an assistant operations officer, with particular responsibility for air movement, I had a lot of coordinating to accomplish prior to take-off. As an air officer, getting this mission off to a good start was a challenge for several reasons. We had aircraft arriving from numerous locations. Not only was most of our battalion departing from Fort Benning's Lawson Army Airfield, but the entire 2nd Ranger

Battalion and some of the regimental headquarters were leaving at the same time. Fortunately, the Air Force air planners were top notch. Also, the regimental S3 Air, my counterpart, was a solid guy. I had outloaded the 3rd Ranger Battalion from Lawson Airfield several times already. These guys knew their business, but I felt I was listened to and consulted because the others realized that I had some practical experience of doing this type of mission.

I also had an outstanding NCO as the Air NCO. He was everything a great NCO should be. When the chance for us to be jump-safeties came up, I didn't submit his name right away. I thought he might want to air-land. I wanted to make sure he was in the right frame of mind to jump. He was — the fact that I even had to ask made him angry. I should have known better. In Grenada as a specialist, he had been an M60 machine gunner with the 82nd Airborne. He had been awarded a medal for valor for attacking through enemy fire to save his lieutenant and some buddies who were pinned down. At Rio Hato, he would be instrumental in assisting B Company after they took some horrible casualties.

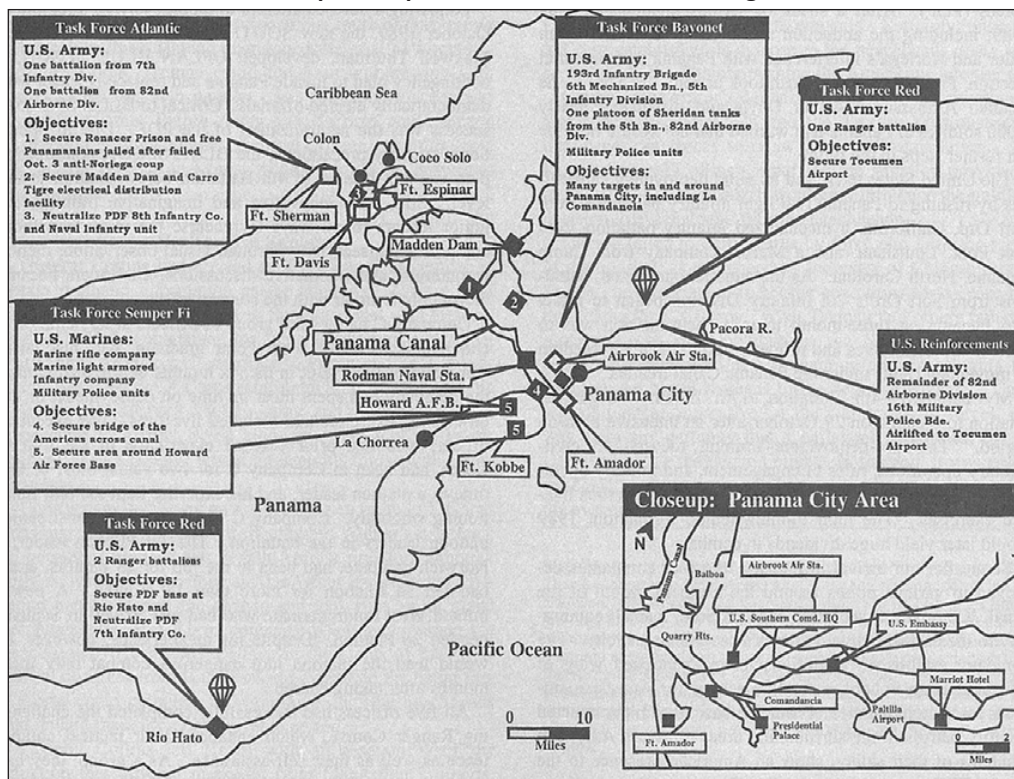
I approached the HHC commander. At Rio Hato, he would be responsible for securing and safeguarding the prisoners at the battalion collection site. Now, I needed him to select my NCO and me as jump safeties. I told him that we wanted to jump and were good choices for this position. He knew how I felt about jumping. He looked up and smiled, "Okay."

The fact that this mission had previously been rehearsed cannot be overlooked. We were redoing the same activities that we had done just a few days prior as part of an exercise designated to simulate this exact mission.

Once the battalion was airborne, most of my responsibilities were accomplished. I did my part to plan this airborne operation. Jumpmasters were selected and briefed, manifests were accurately prepared, and bump plans (in case an aircraft becomes nonoperational on the ground) were developed to ensure we would have the right mix of people on the objective. The Air Force members of the operation were clued in on what the Rangers thought was important.

At the final air mission brief, the regimental S3 got up to speak. The brief was held in a large classroom in Building 4. There had been some chatter and the usual cutting up as we gathered, but we were all quiet now. Talking to the pilots, he said, "Men, you and your aircraft are going to get shot at over the target area, and you are going to hold

Map 1 — Operation Just Cause H-Hour Targets



it steady. Your aircraft might get hit. The plane in front of you might get blown out of the sky, and you will hold your plane steady and close up the gap. There will be no evasive flying after we are over the target area. You will hold your craft steady, and the Rangers will get out to do their mission on the ground. I congratulate you ahead of time for the outstanding job you are about to do.”

Once again, I marveled at our professionalism. I did not get much sleep prior to take-off, but I felt we were ready as we were going to be. The only thing more time would have allowed for is second guessing... and maybe a nice nap.

Finally, we were loading up. Rangers were breaking down ammunition and adding it to rucksacks that were already overloaded. I carried seven magazines of M16A2 ammunition. Six magazines went into my ammo pouches on my LBE (load-bearing equipment). I taped one magazine to the sling of my rifle. As soon as I landed, I would insert the magazine from the sling into the magazine well. I grabbed some smoke grenades and a pin flare set. (I thought I might have to use these to signal aircraft from the ground.) I taped some fragmentation grenades down on my LBE and put a lightweight anti-armor weapon (LAW) sideways through my rucksack flap. I also carried weapon cleaning equipment, a poncho and poncho liner, extra t-shirt and socks, personal hygiene items (power, toothpaste and toothbrush, shaving cream, and razor), a towel, insect repellent, camouflage sticks, a small sewing kit, one copy of our battalion’s finalized manifest, some paper, carbon paper, casualty collection cards, several plastic handcuffs (flexcuffs), a radio, and a New Testament Bible. Attached to my rucksack was a two-quart canteen and a folding E-tool. On my LBE, I had my ammo pouches, two 1-quart canteens, a compass, a medical bandage, flashlight, signal strobe light, radio, and bayonet. Maps, charts, and other accessories were in my pants’ cargo pockets. I wore my dog tags and carried my ID card in my top right shirt pocket. I could only think of one other thing I wanted to carry — a night-vision device. However, they had all been issued while I was coordinating our departure. I was not that concerned. My night vision was average, but I did not expect to be the guy having to do much shooting. My load was considerably lighter than the average Ranger’s. They carried heavier radios, batteries, more ammunition, and squad equipment.

Just before we went through our pre-jump procedures, we assembled for a mission “speech” from our regimental commander. It was cold; I did not wear any cold weather gear because I knew that I would soon be in more than 90-degree heat. Some Rangers draped blankets that had been provided for us over their shoulders; others just shivered. This was a grand assembly of Soldiers. I cannot describe the feeling I got standing among these men. We were going to war; everyone of us knew it. We had planned and rehearsed our mission. We prepared in earnest; it seemed that all that remained was to do it. Together we felt confident. I remember the regimental commander, COL Buck Kernan, saying that some people study history — others participate in it. The Rangers were about to make history. Only Soldiers who are about to undertake an extraordinary mission can feel like that. It is not a pep rally or an athletic preparation ritual. It is the professional confidence of Soldiers united in anticipation of accomplishing their objective. It is an awesome, almost frightening feeling. But this aspect of America’s fighting force is what sets us apart as the best. We truly fight for freedom. And we know — the way only Soldiers know — freedom isn’t free.

The chaplain got us together for a very short service on the airfield. I was glad I knew him. He was my friend as well as my chaplain. He spoke to us from Ephesians 6. While I was in Grenada, Christie had sent me an excerpt from the same chapter. Most of us were concerned that we had to take care of Soldiers’ lives; the chaplain was concerned for our souls. We looked into each other’s eyes knowing we may never see each other again. He said, “Brian!” Quick seconds passed, “God bless you,” we said at the same time. There was not time for anything else. As I moved back to my aircraft, I struggled to control my emotions.

My duties on the aircraft were those of the jump safety. I would be busy and was glad. I was on the last C-130 aircraft that would drop jumpers onto Rio Hato drop zone. There were also several aircraft that would air-land as soon as the runway was secure enough to get the planes in. These planes would bring more Rangers with jeeps and motorcycles to provide additional firepower, mobility, communications equipment, and a small resupply. As the battalion’s S3 Air, I wanted to be one of the last aircraft that was to take off to ensure that we were properly loaded. However, I wanted to be sure to be on one of the jump aircraft — instead of the air-land aircraft. I did not think that I would inspire confidence in jumpers if they knew that their battalion S3 Air was not going to jump. At the same time, I had misgivings on being on lucky #13, but not because of its number. Being in the last aircraft over



Map 2 — Rio Hato Airfield, 20 December 1989 (*The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama* by Lawrence A. Yates)

the drop zone would allow time for the enemy's air defense weapons (ZSU-4s) to react and pick our aircraft out as a target. Plus, the gunners could have used the first 12 as target practice before perfecting their skills on #13. As it turned out, every single aircraft was hit while flying over Rio Hato.

While on the aircraft, we had a seven-hour flight. I was already exhausted, and we were packed in like sardines. The Rangers already had their parachutes on, and their rucksacks were stashed close by. After I loaded my side of the aircraft, I tried to get some sleep.

Our pilot was a lieutenant colonel; he was friendly and professional at the same time. He came back to talk to us a couple of times. I had the feeling he really wanted to know us and that he cared. His crew passed out candy bars to the Rangers. I ate one; I wanted the energy it would give me. I felt good about this man at the controls. Two hours out, I woke up all the Rangers; it was time to get rigged to jump.

I prayed. I prayed that the pilots would hold steady while being fired at. I prayed that the Rangers would react with courage and aggressively pursue their missions. Mostly, I prayed for my family...

We erected the seats and I attached the Rangers' rucksacks, weapons containers, and made sure they fit properly in their parachute harness. It was really crowded. I was walking and stepping on some of the jumpers to get the job done, but there were no complaints... no chatter. I did my chore quickly, but I did not want to man-handle the jumpers. They all thanked me, and I heard some say, "See you on the objective." Some of the rucksacks were heavy,

and I was concerned that some of the heavy-laden Rangers may have trouble getting out of the jump door. I need not have worried; these guys rushed out the door like scalded apes.

While I was rigging the jumpers, we got word that the mission had been compromised. Noriega's forces had been tipped off somehow. We didn't know if the units at Rio Hato were alerted or not, but this was not good news. The mission was still a go. I swallowed hard and looked into the eyes of the Ranger I was rigging. Everyone around me looked concerned. I said, "Well Rangers, what did you expect? This party is going to be one with plenty of rock and roll. And we get to choose the music!" Several of the Soldiers gave an enthusiastic "Hooah!" I paused and then continued, "These poor -----s are not going to know what hit them. We are the best in the world. There is no way they could ever get ready for us — no matter how much notice they got." I thought of what Chris said to me: "Hey, kick a--, Rangers!" That got them fired up.

Thirty minutes out, we stood together and recited the Ranger Creed. I listened to the words as I recited the creed from memory — from the heart. It occurred to me that Soldiers in other units did not have a creed to bind them together. We were fortunate. We had the spirit of our unit forged into words, and there was iron in those words. I led the entire aircraft in the forth stanza. I knew that this was a moment I would never forget:

Recognizing that I volunteered as a Ranger, fully knowing the hazards of my chosen profession, I will always endeavor to uphold the prestige, honor, and high esprit de corps of the Rangers.

Acknowledging the fact that a Ranger is a more elite Soldier who arrives at the cutting edge of battle by land, sea, or air, I accept the fact that as a Ranger my country expects me to move further, faster and fight harder than any other Soldier.

Never shall I fail my comrades. I will always keep myself mentally alert, physically strong and morally straight and I will shoulder more than my share of the task whatever it may be, 100 percent and then some.

Gallantly will I show the world that I am a specially selected and well-trained Soldier. My courtesy to superior officers, neatness of dress and care of equipment shall set the example for others to follow.

Energetically will I meet the enemies of my country. I shall defeat them on the field of battle for I am better trained and will fight with all my might. Surrender is not a Ranger word. I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy and under no circumstances will I ever embarrass my country.

Readily will I display the intestinal fortitude required to fight on to the Ranger objective and complete the mission though I be the lone survivor.

Rangers lead the way!

We went through the jump commands. I could hear someone saying the Lord's Prayer. The Rangers prepared themselves to jump. Jump into combat... jump into history... and for some, jump into the hereafter.

The aircraft jump doors came open, and a rush of warm air blew in. I slammed the platform and did a quick door check. I thrust my body outside the aircraft while hanging on with my hands to the inside of the door frame and looked toward the objective. We were approaching over water and were to jump at 500 feet. That is low for a jump, but the fewer seconds in the air the better. I was struck by the contrast; the peacefulness that appeared below would be enveloped in the chaos of a combat assault in three minutes. I could make out the shadows of the coast ahead. We headed toward our objective.

The pilots did an amazing job holding their course steady while taking fire. Their steady nerves allowed the Rangers to jump properly. On aircraft #10, we had a Ranger get shot while still inside the aircraft. A round came right through the belly of the plane and struck one of our NCOs in the chest underneath his flack vest as he was walking to exit the jump door.

I turned the jump door over to the primary jumpmaster. He assumed the first jumper's position in the door, and I gave him the nod. He would be the first jumper to exit our aircraft over the objective. I would be the last to exit from this side of the aircraft. The jump safety of the other door would be the last to exit from his side. It was okay with me if I got out before he did. My rucksack seemed incredibly heavy. Finally, we were over land; I could see the land race past. The jumpmaster in the door jumped.

I grabbed the static lines as the jumpers came toward the door to control their exit and interval. The Rangers were one behind the other pushing toward the door. I could see tracer rounds being fired up at us. I could see the faces of the Rangers as they approached the door. I could see what they were jumping into and I knew they couldn't

not see it. I wanted to tell them something, but there was not time. I heard a loud crack above me in the roof of the plane (perhaps an enemy round?). I shouted, "Ground fire! Keep moving! Ground fire!" Their eyes got bigger. I wasn't sure if they understood me or not, but they seemed to move even faster. Finally, all the jumpers were out, and I leapt out of the door.

My parachute quickly inflated. Tracer rounds were still shooting up at the aircraft. I checked my chute to ensure it was properly inflated. I made sure that I was not going to run into any other jumpers. I lowered my rucksack to dangle beneath me, and I think this is when a round went through my rucksack. I tried to get oriented as to where I was over the objective. I made a mental note of the direction the aircraft were flying, and this gave me my cardinal directions. I'm sure that the ground came up fast, but I would have been happy to land sooner. It was dark.

I hit hard. My weapon jammed into my tricep so hard that at first I thought I'd broken my arm. Before I could get my M16A2 into action using my good arm, a man came running up to me. I jammed a magazine home and chambered a round. As I brought my weapon up to put the main in my sights, he was about 10 steps away. Over his shoulder, I saw a woman, and a small child was standing next to her. The man nearly fell down. I lowered my weapon; I'm sure that he wanted me to protect his family. I could not think of a word of Spanish. I pointed at the trees behind the small huts on this end of the airfield (the direction that would take them away from the fighting). I yelled, "Go! Run!" He spun around, grabbed the child under one arm and the woman with the other. A few days later, it occurred to me that if I had not injured my tricep, I would have killed a man in front of his wife and child.

I got out of my parachute and strapped on the rest of my gear. Several other Rangers quickly seemed to find me. We all repeated our running password — "Bulldog." I must have heard that word a thousand times before the night was over. We teamed up, and I directed our movement south down the edge of the airstrip where I knew that we would eventually reach our various link-up points. Eventually, I had 17 Rangers moving with me. I had a machine-gun team, a medic, and several Rangers with night-vision goggles (NVGs). We moved together for security. I put the Rangers into two wedges and traveled in between the wedges with the M60 machine-gun team and the medic. We heard some shots in the distance. An AC-130 Spectre gunship was flying above ready to use its cannon or miniguns against hostile targets, and the AH-6 attack helicopters were buzzing around. In the distance, I could make out the shape of other Rangers hurrying to their link-up points.

A couple of PDF soldiers opened fire to our right; they were not shooting at us but at a couple of other Rangers. I hollered for a Ranger with NVGs to give them to me. They couldn't even rise to return fire. The muzzle blasts gave the PDF soldiers' positions away. I knew I had to do something, but I knew that it had to be the right thing. These men were Rangers, but we were all from different parts of the battalion and had not trained together. I had the Rangers get on line. The PDF soldiers were about 150 meters away. This was close enough; I did not want to waste time getting into a better position to shoot at the PDF. I also didn't want to shoot our own men; I wasn't sure how many of the Rangers had NVGs. I stood to a crouch and yelled loudly to the Rangers that there were other Rangers pinned down to our front. I would open fire on the enemy position, and then the M60 would open fire. All Rangers would be sure to keep their fire to the left of the M60 tracer rounds. I had loaded my magazines with



Rangers stand at the entryway to Rio Hato airfield after capturing a machine gun.
(Photo from *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama*, CMH Pub 55-3-1)

a mix of rounds. The first round was a tracer, then three ball rounds followed by another tracer round. I repeated this process until I got to the last four rounds, which would all be tracer. I wanted this to remind me to prepare to load a fresh magazine. I opened fire, and then the M60 opened up right next to me. Then all of us were firing. I finished the magazine and jammed another one home. By this time, the PDF soldiers were no longer returning fire. I yelled for the Rangers to cease fire. I shouted to the Rangers that had been pinned down, "Rangers, are you okay?" I heard, "Yeah... thanks!" A few weeks later I learned that one of the Rangers that had been pinned down was a friend, the battalion communications officer.

The PDF soldiers were probably assigned to guard the ammunition storage area. They had deserted their post and tried to escape, but they didn't get far. A couple of days later, I found the bodies of two PDF soldiers in the tall kunna grass. I helped put their remains into body bags, and then we sent the bodies to the collection site. I do not know if there were any more than these two, but I only recall seeing two muzzle flashes.

We continued to move to our link-up points. As we moved closer to the road that bisected the north/south runway, I could see a convoy of vehicles approaching. I remembered from our intelligence briefing that PDF units could be returning from field training along this route. It was possible that these vehicles were bringing a reaction force. I had us break into a run and quickly put the Rangers down in a linear ambush position. I told them that I would fire a LAW, and then the M60 would hit the lead vehicle. Everyone else would shoot at the trail vehicle until it stops, then rake the kill zone. I told them, "Do not assault through the kill zone!" I threw my ruck down on the ground and grabbed the LAW. This was when I first saw that my rucksack had been hit by a bullet; it was a good thing the round didn't hit the LAW. I was just about to extend the LAW to put it into action when the entire other side of the jungle opened up. I hugged the ground and screamed, "Hold your fire, Rangers! Hold your fire!" I figured that B Company was in position and did not need our help. I was afraid that if we started shooting that the Rangers from B Company would think that we were PDF soldiers that had dismounted the vehicles. The last thing I wanted was to be responsible for starting a confused, two-way firefight between Rangers. To their credit, not a single Ranger on my side of the road returned fire. That's discipline; that's amazing.

Two PDF soldiers jumped out of one of the trucks and ran right at me. I knew that I did not want to open fire at these men. I did not want to risk B Company returning my fire, and I was also afraid that one of the Rangers close to me might decide to shoot. I came up off the ground and smashed the butt of my M16A2 into one of the men's shoulder. He crumbled to the ground. The other man just fell; I think he fainted. The other Rangers quickly pounced on the men and handcuffed them with the plastic handcuffs each of us carried.

We made contact with the Rangers on the other side of the road. This was as far as I needed to take the little band of Rangers that were traveling with me. I made sure each of them knew where they were and sent them on their way. They all had missions to perform; this was just the beginning. Before I sent them on their way, I told them they had already done a great job and to keep up the good work. The Ranger who carried the M60 gave me the highest compliment that I'll ever receive as a Soldier. He said, "Sir, I'll jump into combat with you anytime. You're hooah!" The others echoed, "Hooah!" Then we parted, and they hurried away in small groups to do what they had come to do.

The officer in charge of the ambush on the other side of the road was the B Company executive officer (XO). He had known this was an important road block and moved here as quickly as he could. The blocking position had not been set when he got there so he took charge and rushed Rangers into an ambush position. As we linked up, he had his men searching the vehicles. One of the vehicles was a fuel truck, which was leaking. He told me that he was going to move the blocking position further up the road. I asked him where B Company prisoner of war collection point was. I told him I would take the prisoners there for him because I could see he was short-handed, but I would need at least one other Ranger to travel with me. He told me to take the prisoners to the third cluster of trees between the runway and the taxi way. About this time, the support platoon leader (PL) showed up. He said that he had seen the ambush and chased a one-armed man into the jungle but could not find him. He was enormously frustrated. The Rangers that searched the vehicles reported that there were no other survivors. (Later, several showed up and just gave themselves up to the Rangers at the roadblock.) The B Company XO told one Ranger to travel with me to make sure there was someone with B Company to turn the prisoners over to. The support PL and I had to get to the same link-up point so he said he'd travel with me. We were just about to leave the area when a vehicle ran the roadblock on the opposite side of the runway. The Rangers on that side opened fire. Once again, I

found myself hugging the earth. I yelled for the PL to get down. The prisoners fell into each other as they tried to get down. One of them screamed a couple of times in a high shrill voice. As soon as the shooting ended, the PL jumped up and said, "Let's go!" As he began to race off toward the vehicle, I told him to stop. The Rangers on the other side of the runway would come over to check out the vehicle. The last thing we needed to do was spook them by running at them in the darkness with our weapons at the ready.

We moved out with the prisoners, and one of them suddenly began to speak English. He told us that he was not really a soldier. He said he was from Puerto Rico and just there visiting friends. He'd like us to let him go so that he could go tell them the wonderful news that the Americans had come. I told him that I could not let him go and that he would not be harmed as long as he did exactly what we told him to do. I had him tell the other prisoner in Spanish that I was going to take them to a holding area where they would be safe.

I then checked in with the B Company commander. I told him that his blocking position had moved further up the road, that the fuel truck was leaking diesel, and that I had two prisoners for him and one of them spoke English. He had his medics guard the prisoners until the prisoner of war area was operational. I did not want to get in the way, and I could not see a way for me to help him so I left and sent the Ranger that traveled with us back to the roadblock. The support PL and I then headed to our link-up point. As we neared the site, we ran into CSM Mariano R.C. Leon-Guerrero, the regimental sergeant major, and COL Kernan. The CSM was making sure that his commander was protected. It was good to know that they were on the ground, controlling the battle. I was even more confident than before.

When we finally reached our link-up site. We made contact with a captain from the S4 section and moved into the kunna grass to set up radios. The support PL put his gear down and immediately went back to help B Company. He ended up assisting in the round up of more EPWs. The S4 captain and I worked with the Air Force tactical control party to make sure the aircraft that landed ended up in the right place. We wanted the Rangers that were about to off load to know where they were and what the situation was like. While trying to taxi prior to take-off, one C-130 hit a tree limb and lost an engine. It was still able to take off; I guess the crew didn't want to stick around.

I monitored the radios until most of the fighting was finished. All my commitments for the initial mission were complete. As the Air Force tactical control party had the last C-130 take off, I headed back to the radio site. The sun was about to rise and I was exhausted. I decided to get some sleep; I knew there would be plenty to do when I woke up. As I settled down on the ground at the logistical site, it occurred to me that I should take some time to gather my thoughts. I knew that we had taken some casualties (four dead, 18 wounded, 26 serious jump injuries), but that we had done well. We also captured an incredible number of small arms weapons, armored cars, V300s and V150s, three ZSU-4 anti-aircraft guns, mortars, machine guns, and ammunition.

But, I knew that I was alive! I knew that the Rangers had "kicked a--!" I knew that I should be careful to remember what this moment felt like. There was nothing romantic about this moment, but there was a certain satisfaction. There was concern for the Rangers, our families, and the families of our enemies. Rangers are a special breed, but we still are just men. I knew that we were all a combination of past personal histories, aspirations, fears, hopes, dreads, and ambitions. And yet, we put personal concerns aside. We were a team. We were the best America had to offer, and we were good enough to get the job done right.

LTC (Retired) Brian D. Barham served as the S3 Air for the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment during Operation Just Cause. He also participated in Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada with the 82nd Airborne Division. His other assignments include serving as a company executive officer in the 82nd Airborne Division; company commander in the 1st Battalion, 13th Infantry in Germany and 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment; small group instructor at the U.S. Army Infantry School's captains course; S3 for 1st Brigade, 8th Infantry Division; G3 at 4th Infantry Division; and chief of plans for both Kuwait and Kosovo joint task forces. He also served on the staff for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. LTC Barham retired in 2001. He is a 1981 ROTC graduate of the University of South Alabama.