



# LIGHT FIGHTERS

## THE 7TH INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT) AND THE LATE COLD WAR, 1983–1989

By Donald P. Wright

Early on the morning of 16 March 1988, 1st Lt. Brian M. DeToy was fast asleep in his bedroom when the phone rang. He picked up the receiver and heard a staff duty officer on the other end say, “Blue Bayonet.” DeToy was the executive officer of a light infantry company in the 7th Infantry Division at Fort Ord, California. He knew that the phrase “Blue Bayonet” meant his unit, the 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry, had eighteen hours to assemble, move to Travis Air Force Base near Sacramento, load into transport aircraft, and depart the airfield. Although the division routinely used these alerts to test its units’ ability to meet rigorous deployment timelines, DeToy quickly discovered that his battalion was headed to Honduras. The Marxist Sandinista government in Nicaragua had ordered its army to cross the

*Soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division offload from a C-130 Hercules aircraft in Honduras during Operation GOLDEN PHEASANT, 1 March 1988  
National Archives*

border with Honduras in pursuit of anti-Sandinista insurgents. In response to the Nicaraguan incursion, the U.S. government decided to send DeToy’s battalion to Honduras as part of a larger operation called GOLDEN PHEASANT. The 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry, would join another battalion from the 7th Infantry Division along with two battalions from the 82d Airborne Division in what the U.S. government officially termed a “show of force” designed to both convince Nicaraguan forces to retreat from Honduran territory and to demonstrate U.S. resolve to defend its allies in Latin America. However, once DeToy’s battalion arrived at Travis Air Force Base and saw troops loading live ammunition on their aircraft, he knew immediately that the show of force might turn into a far more dangerous mis-

sion. The smoldering conflict in Honduras threatened to become a major Cold War conflagration, and the U.S. Army's light infantry was heading straight into the blaze.<sup>1</sup>

Army Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham Jr. had announced the need for light infantry divisions in a 1984 White Paper, and he designated the 7th Infantry Division, stationed at Fort Ord, California, as the first unit to convert to the new structure.<sup>2</sup> Within four years, the Army formed three more of these divisions within its active component: the 25th Infantry Division in Hawai'i, the 6th Infantry Division in Alaska, and the 10th Mountain Division in upstate New York. In 1985, the 29th Infantry Division, composed of units from the Virginia and Maryland Army National Guard, reactivated and become the fifth light infantry division. With relatively few vehicles, a very austere logistical footprint, and a troop strength of only 10,000 soldiers, the Army designed these divisions for rapid deployment across the globe.

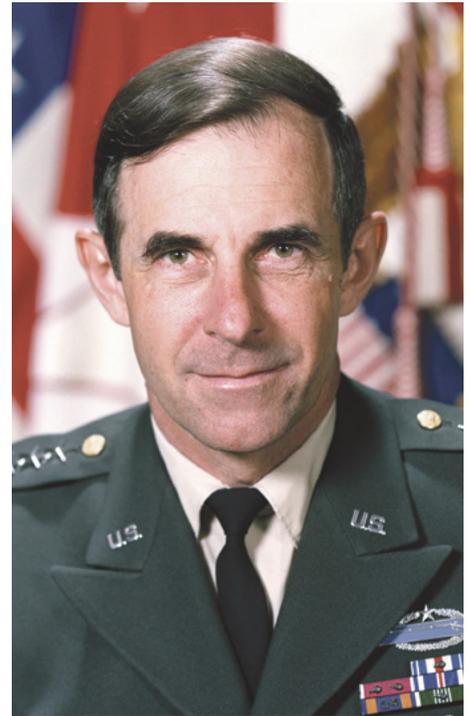
Wickham's decision to build the new light infantry formations signaled a dramatic change in thinking about future conflicts and the forces required to fight them. Since the end of the Vietnam War, and especially after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Army had prioritized the defense of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies in Central Europe. That focus had led to the introduction of new doctrine, new equipment such as the M1 Abrams tank and the M2 Bradley fighting vehicle, and new training approaches focused on enabling U.S. forces to defeat a Warsaw Pact offensive. The two versions of Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, the Army's capstone doctrine published in this period, concentrated on how armor, mechanized infantry, and other units would leverage the firepower from the new weapon systems to fight and win in Europe. As late as 1979, the Army planned to convert most of its remaining standard ("straight") infantry divisions to heavier mechanized formations that could contribute directly to the NATO mission.<sup>3</sup>

The 1984 decision to establish light infantry divisions formally halted the drive toward an Army dominated almost entirely by heavy units. By 1989, when the four new light infantry divisions had been established fully, the Army was a relatively balanced force with six light divisions in

its active duty force, including the 82d Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). This meant that out of the eighteen active combat divisions, one-third was light infantry of one type or another. In putting the Army on a new course, General Wickham was reacting to changes in Cold War dynamics that suggested the next contingency requiring U.S. forces was more likely to be a low-intensity conflict in Central America than a general war in Central Europe.<sup>4</sup> Wickham's response to this perceived shift was to create small, agile, and swiftly deployable units that would depend less on firepower than on what he called "Soldier Power"—a combination of physical and mental toughness, tactical excellence, offensive mindedness, and decisive leadership. The Army began building a new division of "light fighters," soldiers wholly dependent on these attributes to win the battles of the late Cold War.<sup>5</sup>

#### New Forces for a New Era of Conflict

In 1979, three events disrupted how U.S. military and political leaders understood the Cold War. The first, in January, was the fall of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Iranian monarch who had been a key Cold War ally of the United States in the Middle East and had protected U.S. interests in the critical oil-producing region for decades. The revolution that overthrew the shah brought to power a new Islamic republic that quickly became antagonistic to any continued ties with the United States. The second, in July, was the toppling of the Somoza family dictatorship in Nicaragua by Marxist insurgents known as the Sandinista National Liberation Front, or Sandinistas. The Nicaraguan revolution encouraged armed Communist groups in El Salvador and Guatemala to increase their pressure on the ruling regime in each country, generating serious concern inside the U.S. government that Soviet- and Cuban-sponsored movements like the Sandinistas might take control across Central America. Most worrying, however, was the third event: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. That action not only placed Soviet Army units significantly closer to the oil fields of the Middle East, but also served as evidence of the Soviet Union's renewed willingness to use its own military forces for territorial expansion. Soon after the Soviet invasion, President James E. "Jimmy" Carter called



**General Meyer**  
U.S. Army

the invasion "a radical and aggressive new step" that posed a "grave threat" to vital U.S. interests in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> In response he issued what became known as the Carter Doctrine, which promised that the United States would use all measures, including its military forces, to defend its interests in the region.

From the early days of the Cold War, the United States generally had followed a policy of deterrence, which attempted to use various ways and means to prevent the expansion of the Soviet power. The forward positioning of substantial U.S. military forces in Europe and Northeast Asia was perhaps the clearest expression of this policy.<sup>7</sup> After the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan signaled that the Soviets were willing to make aggressive moves that threatened U.S. interests outside these two theaters, U.S. Army leaders began reassessing what type of forces they needed to deter this new danger. Practically and politically, the Army's heavy units in West Germany and South Korea were difficult to deploy to deal with contingencies in the Middle East, Africa, or Latin America. In mid-1979, Army Chief of Staff General Edward C. "Shy" Meyer began advocating for medium-weight divisions that the Army could deploy on contingency missions more quickly than heavy units but

were armed with significant firepower. In the wake of the Soviet entry into Afghanistan, he halted the Army's plan to convert the 9th Infantry Division to a mechanized force, directing it instead to transform into a high-technology light division (HTLD), capable of relatively quick deployment but equipped with new systems that gave it some of the mobility and firepower of a mechanized division.<sup>8</sup>

Developing the HTLD proved difficult. As it slowly evolved through experimentation and exercises, the division became a medium-weight unit dependent on highly mobile vehicles mounting antitank weapons like the TOW (tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided) missile system. As a result, the HTLD was less able to serve as a force that could deploy quickly in a crisis. General Wickham, who took over as the Army's chief of staff in 1982, reviewed the progress made on the HTLD and by 1983 had determined that the division had "turned out to be too heavy." With its 18,000 soldiers and large inventory of vehicles and complex weaponry, the HTLD would require three weeks to deploy on a contingency mission.<sup>9</sup>

Although he allowed the HTLD experiment to continue, Wickham looked in a new direction to create a force that could respond to crises quickly before they became larger conflicts. In addition, Wickham wanted that force to have the ability to conduct combat operations with minimal support if the crisis developed into a larger conflict. The Army had long relied on the 82d Airborne Division as its main rapid deployment force. That division could within days send its lead elements anywhere on the globe and forcibly enter a theater using its parachute assault capability. However, in 1983 the 82d had 16,000 soldiers, a light armor battalion, and other heavy equipment. Deploying the entire division would require more than a thousand aircraft and a time line measured in weeks instead of days.<sup>10</sup> The 82d had deployed to the Caribbean island of Grenada in 1983 as part of Operation URGENT FURY, but the Army viewed the 82d primarily as a strategic unit, designed specifically for mid- to high-intensity conflicts rather than smaller-scale contingencies like the invasion of Grenada.<sup>11</sup> The 101st Airborne also had some of the characteristics of a contingency force, but like the 82d, it was equipped and manned for medium- to large-scale combat oper-



**General Wickham**  
*National Archives*

ations. With 18,900 soldiers and a large inventory of helicopters, any deployment of the 101st would also require weeks.<sup>12</sup>

The Army chief of staff hoped to create a new type of infantry division that could deploy almost anywhere on the globe within a few days. In 1983, Wickham directed the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center (CAC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to draw up the design for such a unit. In the fall of that year, the center presented blueprints for a force with 10,000 soldiers and few vehicles of any kind. Although this light infantry division could not conduct the forcible entry mission like the 82nd Airborne Division, CAC designed it to deploy in its entirety in 500 sorties of C-141 aircraft over a 96-hour period. That level of strategic mobility, however, meant making concessions in other aspects of the division's capabilities. Perhaps the most important of these was the limited tactical mobility of the division once it deployed. The Combined Arms Center designed the new unit to be "essentially foot mobile."<sup>13</sup> However, Wickham, a lifelong infantry officer who had commanded both an airmobile battalion in the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam and the 101st Airborne Division in the 1970s, knew how helicopters could enable maneuver. He ensured that the design for the new division included aviation units

that could enhance the division's tactical mobility to some degree.<sup>14</sup>

Other concessions included the relatively limited firepower the unit could wield, especially against an adversary equipped with armored vehicles, and a reduced logistical infrastructure that could only support the division for the first forty-eight hours of a deployment. For the division's designers at Fort Leavenworth, the lack of heavy weapons was a reasonable risk, given the guidance that the division would be "optimized" for defeating lightly armed enemy forces such as insurgents or other light infantry units if contingencies evolved into low- or medium-intensity conflicts.<sup>15</sup> Wickham and others in the Army's leadership did accept that the light infantry division would need to have a role in high-intensity conflicts like the defense of NATO, but planned for it to be augmented with additional weapons and vehicles in those scenarios.<sup>16</sup>

For the new division to meet its missions and overcome some of its key limitations—especially if it became involved in sustained campaigns—General Wickham and the Fort Leavenworth force designers believed that it had to instill a unique ethos in its soldiers. Because the Army required light infantry to maneuver primarily on foot and in a wide variety of difficult terrain, they had to be mentally tough and more physically fit than other soldiers. They also would have to operate independently in small units, each a well-led and highly cohesive formation of disciplined soldiers. Using initiative and audacity, these units would take advantage of every opportunity to attack the enemy. They would train to fight at night and in the most adverse weather conditions. In their operations, shock rather than firepower would be decisive. Leadership would be critical to their success, especially at the squad and platoon levels.<sup>17</sup> Quickly, the force designers adopted the term *elite* to describe light infantry units, a word that the U.S. Army usually reserved for its Ranger battalions and Special Forces. One organization at Fort Leavenworth, for example, defined light infantry divisions as "iron willed elite fighting forces."<sup>18</sup> At the time, use of the term *elite* was aspirational at best, especially because these divisions still existed only on paper. Still, its prevalence in the planning documents was evidence of the high expect-

tations the Army's leadership had for the new light infantry units.<sup>19</sup>

### The Transformation of the 7th Infantry Division

In the summer of 1984, the 7th Infantry Division began the transition to the new light infantry organization. The 7th was a standard infantry division with approximately 18,000 soldiers and equipped with a substantial number of vehicles and heavy weapons.<sup>20</sup> One of its three brigades was the 41st Infantry Brigade, a "round out" unit from the Oregon Army National Guard. The transition timeline began with the turn-in of equipment and vehicles in July 1984 and would end in the summer of 1985 when the new division in its entirety conducted a field training exercise. In those twelve months, the division planned to reduce its overall strength by almost half while also standing up a new active duty brigade to replace the round out brigade. This was an exceedingly ambitious schedule made more difficult by the fact that by mid-1985, the Army expected the restructured division to have at least some of the capabilities of an elite force. To make this goal possible, Army leadership made critical decisions about how the 7th would staff its units and train its soldiers. In the process, the division created a new "Light Fighter" ethos that established the high standards necessary in a formation expected to be elite.

In 1981, the U.S. Army had introduced a new personnel management system called Project Cohesion, Operational Readiness, and Training, known by the acronym COHORT. This new program was an attempt to create greater unit cohesion by moving away from the individual replacement manning system that the Army had relied on for decades. Under the individual manning system, cohesion—the product of the bonds created between soldiers—was difficult to sustain because units constantly lost and gained personnel as they left the service or moved on to new positions. The COHORT program sought to foster cohesion in select company-sized combat arms units (Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Combat Engineers) by keeping groups of junior soldiers together for an entire three-year term.

Soldiers brought in through COHORT went through basic training together. Commissioned and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) traveled to basic training

sites, took command of their new soldiers, and brought them back to their home station where they would start training as a unit. Ideally, that group of officers, NCOs, and enlisted soldiers would stay together for two to three years, becoming a highly cohesive and combat effective organization as a result.<sup>21</sup> The COHORT program gathered momentum in the early 1980s and by 1984, the Army had fielded dozens of COHORT companies and decided to use the system to begin manning entire battalions.

Aware of this success, those involved in designing the new light infantry division saw the program as the ideal means to establish the type of bonding required by an elite unit that was likely to face tough combat conditions in austere settings. General Wickham decided that the three Infantry brigades, three Field Artillery battalions, and single Combat Engineer battalion in the 7th Infantry Division would be manned through the COHORT system.<sup>22</sup> This was an unprecedented use of COHORT and would take twelve months to complete. At the end of that year, the foundation of the new division would form around a core of small units that were tightly bonded and, arguably, better prepared for the decentralized and demanding light infantry missions they would have to conduct.

Creating cohesion among junior enlisted soldiers was just the first step. Next, those soldiers and their new NCO and officer leadership had to gel as teams as they learned the skills required for light infantry operations. To do that, the Army created a wholly new training program for the division. General Wickham's 1984 white paper had contended that the training regimen for the new light infantry divisions had to be "tough, physical, realistic, and mentally demanding." Wickham asserted that these divisions had to have the best small units in the U.S. Army and that training was the "crucial catalyst" in the preparation of those forces.<sup>23</sup> For those charged with creating small units of that caliber, the U.S. Army Ranger School loomed large. The sixty-five-day school had the deserved reputation of offering the most rigorous leadership and small-unit tactics training in the Army. Those soldiers able to complete the course arguably were the Army's best light infantry leaders. Not surprisingly, Ranger School—and the soldiers authorized to wear the Ranger Tab upon graduation—became ideals that shaped the

Army's vision for the light infantry divisions. In 1984, the Combined Arms Center described the new light infantry units as "ranger oriented" and asserted that "Ranger Training remains the single most important leader training required to instill confidence and toughness for the building of elite Light Infantry Units."<sup>24</sup>

With this guidance, the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia (now Fort Moore), began working with the leadership of the 7th Infantry Division to develop an integrated training cycle that was substantially more complex than similar programs in other types of divisions. That cycle began with an expanded version of advanced individual training (AIT) for junior enlisted Infantry soldiers in COHORT companies assigned to the 7th Infantry Division. While these young troops sharpened their basic light infantry skills, the officers and NCOs who would lead them reported to Fort Benning and attended a thirty-day Light Leaders Course. Conducted by Ranger School instructors, this course focused on how to train soldiers upon return to Fort Ord. Brian DeToy, who served as a company-grade officer in the 7th Infantry Division, attended the Light Leaders Course in 1986 and recalled that it was "essentially Ranger School again, but with more time for us as a cadre to sit and talk about how we were going to do things back at home station."<sup>25</sup> After completion of the Light Leaders Course, the COHORT company leadership would meet the new AIT graduates who made up the junior enlisted ranks of their unit and then travel back as a group to their new home station.

At Fort Ord, the soldiers were welcomed into a new division that was establishing a unique identity and culture. By late 1984, the leaders of the 7th Infantry Division had adopted the term "light fighter" to describe all who served in the division and used that term to highlight how the division was different from other units in the Army. To ingrain the light fighter identity, all newly arrived enlisted soldiers, regardless of their military occupational specialty (MOS), attended a weeklong Rites of Passage course at Fort Ord. During this course, they learned fieldcraft, combat survival, basic light infantry skills, and the "spirit" of the light infantry. Completion of the Rites of Passage meant officially becoming a

light fighter, regardless of whether they were an infantryman, an artilleryman, a medic, or a mechanic. The “light fighter” moniker quickly began to appear in the division’s official correspondence and on unofficial division symbols, including patches.<sup>26</sup>

After graduating from the Rites of Passage, soldiers transitioned to training in small units—first as squads and platoons, and eventually in companies and battalions. By design, Ranger School served as the inspiration for much of the training at Fort Ord. The Army had decided to seed the light divisions with a high percentage of Ranger School graduates, especially company commanders, platoon leaders, and squad leaders. This approach would help ensure that the divisions had proven leaders in key positions who would know how to train their own units using techniques they themselves had learned at the school. Of course, most of the positions requiring the Ranger Tab were in the division’s infantry units, where even staff officers from other branches were expected to have completed Ranger School. Brian DeToy noted that that in 1986, Ranger school graduates in his infantry battalion included the signal officer, the military intelligence officer, and the chemical officer.<sup>27</sup> The division’s intelligence, military police, medical, and logistics battalions also planned for their key leaders to attend Ranger School.<sup>28</sup>

To accommodate this increased requirement for Ranger-qualified soldiers, the Army expanded the school’s capacity, a decision that allowed the 7th Infantry Division to send many of its noncommissioned leaders to the course. This policy was unprecedented, as the Army generally offered relatively few enlisted soldiers the opportunity to attend the school, especially after a soldier had reported to a division. Robert J. Avalle, a company commander in the 7th Infantry Division in 1986, recalled, “we started to get . . . course slots in the Army’s Ranger school and started to send platoon sergeants, squad leaders, and in some cases, even [fire]team leaders would go and come back with their Ranger tab.”<sup>29</sup> Between March 1984 and 1986, 544 of the soldiers sent by the division to the course successfully completed it, leading to a significant presence of Ranger-qualified soldiers at the squad and platoon level.<sup>30</sup> Given the centrality of “Ranger-oriented”

skills and training in the emerging light fighter culture, this was no small achievement. Avalle remembered that “people were calling us a ranger division.”<sup>31</sup> The division’s senior leaders certainly focused on the numbers of Ranger Tabs in their units, boasting in 1986 that the 7th Infantry Division had the highest concentration of Ranger-qualified soldiers of any division in the U.S. Army.<sup>32</sup> This was probably an accurate assessment.

The high standards for the new light infantry soldiers led to a rigorous training program. Although they often trained to conduct air assaults or move by truck, the division’s light infantry battalions expected to maneuver primarily on foot. Not surprisingly, infantry leaders at all levels stressed physical conditioning. Small units conducted regular long-distance foot marches with full combat load including rucksacks weighing 40 to 60 pounds. Brian DeToy recalled his company doing 12-mile road marches in full gear twice a month and one 25-mile march per quarter. When units went to train at nearby Fort Hunter Liggett, they often marched on foot, often over extreme distances. In 1984 and 1985, for example, the division’s 2d Battalion, 9th Infantry, conducted a five-day 65-mile march from the Pacific coast near Big Sur to Fort Hunter Liggett, traversing the rugged Santa Lucia mountain range. The march was so demanding that after finishing,

a young soldier in the battalion quipped “we should all become Ranger-qualified for completing this training.”<sup>33</sup> By 1987, the event had become bigger and even more grueling. That year, all three infantry battalions in the 7th Infantry Division’s 1st Brigade, known unofficially as the 9th “Manchu” Regiment, participated in a five-day 100-mile march called the Manchu 100. For the Manchu 100, the battalions walked 20 miles per day in full combat gear, including a 40-pound rucksack.<sup>34</sup> In the late 1980s, foot marches of this length and duration were essentially unknown in other U.S. Army infantry units, including the Ranger Battalions.

While the Army expected the units of the 7th Infantry Division to train for basic offensive and defensive missions, it also charged light infantry units to prepare for specific operations that took advantage of their unique skills and attributes. To leverage their stealth—and mitigate their vulnerability to heavy artillery and air attacks—light infantry units at all echelons would train to conduct all operations at night. This capability was considered a key characteristic of elite units and the Army’s light infantry doctrine stated that night operations were the “forte” of the new divisions.<sup>35</sup> The Army planned to equip the 7th Infantry Division with the newest night-vision technology and broadly distribute the devices, especially across the division’s infantry battalions.



7th Infantry Division soldiers training at Fort Hunter Liggett, 5 December 1986  
*National Archives*

Early on, operating at night became an important norm within light fighter culture. Richard J. Dixon, a company commander in the division in 1988, recalled that his light fighters were very aware of the limited concealment and protection they would have in combat. For that reason, he insisted during field exercises that his rifle company move only in darkness, a practice that led to his soldiers believing they “owned” the night.<sup>36</sup>

With the ability to maneuver at night and operate in small independent units, light infantry units became ideal for what the Army’s doctrine writers described as “special tactics.” Defining these missions became critical to showing the Army at large how light infantry division operations were unique.<sup>37</sup> The doctrine for light infantry battalions published in 1985 used new terminology to identify special tactics such as search and attack, urban storm, urban web (archipelago), and expanding torrent. The last of these was a version of an infiltration operation that featured small groups of light fighters slipping through enemy lines undetected to attack critical sites deep in the rear area. Expanding torrent missions and infiltrations of the more general variety quickly became favored tactics within the 7th Infantry Division. Brian DeToy recalled that infiltrations were “heavily, heavily emphasized” and that his battalion often practiced multi-day infiltration missions.

A March 1986 exercise at Fort Hunter Liggett showcased the types of special tactics and missions the Army expected the light infantry to perform. The three battalions of the division’s 1st Brigade began operations in a low-intensity scenario, conducting platoon-level search-and-attack operations against small guerrilla units. While pursuing these groups, the battalion commanders suddenly received orders to infiltrate through territory defended by a conventional light infantry adversary allied with the guerrillas. The battalions then spent two days stealthily moving on foot deep into the enemy’s rear area before reassembling and mounting a large-scale attack on an armored column.<sup>38</sup>

During these exercises in 1984 and early 1985, the soldiers of the division developed the most visible emblem of light fighter culture: the ragtop helmet. Designed to enhance a light infantry soldier’s ability to hide and stalk the enemy, the strips of burlap and old battle dress uniforms (BDUs) attached to the Kevlar helmet cover broke up the distinctive outline of the helmet. Alternatively called “light fighter hair”—and “Manchu Hair” by soldiers in the 9th Regiment—the ragtop, along with the wearing of camouflage face paint, became mandatory for all soldiers in the division in 1985. The division’s leadership even expected helicopter crews to wear ragtop helmets and camouflage face paint in the field when not in their

aircraft. Although worn primarily during field training, soldiers wore the ragtops and face paint for ceremonies and parades as well. Although initially a minor addition to the uniform, the ragtop emerged first as the most important emblem of the division. Other light infantry divisions adopted it in the late 1980s as a symbol of the broader light fighter culture.<sup>39</sup>

That culture, however, relied on more than prowess in the field. In the original vision for the light infantry divisions, the Army had made it clear that they had to have the ability to deploy almost anywhere within several days. That requirement became formal in 1985 when the 7th Infantry Division became part of the Army’s Rapid Deployment Force (RDF).<sup>40</sup> As a part of this force, the division maintained a rotational-ready brigade, prepared to serve as its lead element upon receiving deployment orders. That brigade would designate one of its infantry battalions as the Division Ready Force (DRF), which had to be in the air and en route to its destination eighteen hours after alert. The remainder of the division would follow over the next six days.

To ensure its units were ready to meet these deployment standards, the 7th initiated an Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise (EDRE) program that closely resembled that conducted by the 82d and 101st Airborne divisions, both of which belonged to the RDF. The EDRE program periodically tested the division’s ability to deploy by conducting approximately six alerts per year, usually at the battalion and company levels.<sup>41</sup> So critical were these exercises that DRF units kept all their equipment palletized and ready for air-loading at Travis Air Force Base, the division’s airport of embarkation. Meanwhile, soldiers in the DRF battalion were on two-hour recall status, required to stay near enough to Fort Ord so that they could report to their units within two hours after notification of the EDRE. After assembling, the alerted unit would travel 180 miles to Travis Air Force Base and load their equipment onto aircraft. In many cases, the exercise went further in simulating an actual contingency by deploying the DRF by air on “fly away” operations to training sites inside the United States or abroad.

Short-term training deployments also became a common experience for the soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division. Given



**A 7th Infantry Division soldier during training at Fort Hunter Liggett,  
5 December 1986**  
*National Archives*



**Leaders from the 7th Infantry Division coordinate attack positions during training at Fort Hunter Liggett, 1 December 1986.**

*National Archives*

its requirement to operate in difficult climates and tough terrain, the division used these deployments to give their units experience with a variety of missions in diverse conditions. Between 1985 and 1989, the division sent units to the Caribbean to take part in counterinsurgency training in a tropical environment as well as to southern California to participate in amphibious operations. One company deployed to Iceland in 1988 to practice defending critical NATO radar installations in the extremely austere environment of that country.<sup>42</sup> Training for combat operations in arid conditions took the division's soldiers to Utah, Arizona, and Texas, as well as to the Army's National Training Center in the Mojave Desert at Fort Irwin, California. In 1987, heavily forested Fort Chaffee in western Arkansas became a common destination for fly away deployments after the Army opened the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at that site. The JRTC would become the Army's main facility for training light infantry units on a range of missions they could conduct in low- and medium-intensity conflicts.

### Honduras and Panama: Light Fighters in Central America

In 1988 and 1989, the 7th Infantry Division graduated from training exercises to con-

tingencies that rigorously tested the light infantry division concept. To the surprise of few in the division at the time, these tests occurred in Central America. The first, Operation GOLDEN PHEASANT, was a show of force mounted in 1988 to support the Honduran government and called on the division to move its units quickly into a situation that had the potential to escalate into armed conflict. Operation JUST CAUSE in 1989 gave the 7th Infantry Division a pivotal role in a low-intensity conflict in Panama, which demanded that the division conduct a broad set of missions—including its first combat operations. Panama is where the Army's first modern light infantry division would display its full potential as well as suffer its first combat casualties. Although the scope of this article does not allow for complete narratives of each operation, the summarized accounts below illustrate how the U.S. Army chose to employ the division in these two distinct crises and the capabilities the light infantry force brought to bear once they were on the ground in Honduras and Panama.

Army leaders had not designed the new light infantry divisions to focus on specific countries or geographic areas. In 1985, however, General Wickham identified Latin America as a region likely to require a military intervention of the

type the light infantry divisions had been designed to conduct.<sup>43</sup> As the 1980s progressed, the 7th Infantry Division began to narrow its attention on Central America. Since the 1979 revolution that brought the Marxist Sandinista government to power in Nicaragua, the U.S. government had sought ways to prevent the expansion of communism to other states in the region. To do that, the U.S. military increased its involvement in the area, expanding its presence in Panama, establishing a military assistance and advisory mission in El Salvador, and gradually ramping up exercises with regional security forces.<sup>44</sup> In 1983, the United States military established a joint task force (JTF) at an air base in Palmerola, Honduras, just north of the capital Tegucigalpa. That task force, eventually called JTF-BRAVO, served as the headquarters for annual joint exercises called BIG PINE in which thousands of U.S. military personnel deployed to train Honduran Army units and build airfields, roads, and other infrastructure in remote areas, especially those near the country's border with Nicaragua.<sup>45</sup> The BIG PINE exercises and the permanent presence of JTF-BRAVO served as ways to assure Honduras and other allies in the region that the U.S. pledge to stand up to the Sandinistas was tangible.

Although leaders in the 7th Infantry Division did not formally identify Nicaragua as a key adversary and Honduras as a likely theater of conflict, many of the division's soldiers were certain that they were training to defend Honduras from Sandinista attack. As a company commander in this period, Robert Avalle recalled thinking that Central America was by far the most likely place where he and his troops would have to fight. Avalle asserted "the enemy was definitely, I think, in Central America." In his estimation, however, it was not only the Marxist threat in the region that made it a likely destination for the 7th Infantry Division, but the terrain as well. He noted that much of Central America was "either very mountainous or very wet, and they are environments [the division] could actually thrive in."<sup>46</sup>

The division's attributes made it well-suited for operations in the region. It could deploy quickly to Central America and was prepared to operate in the austere conditions. Not surprisingly, by 1988 the most prominent destination for the divi-



sion's deployments was Honduras. The 7th Infantry Division's first EDRE outside the United States involved sending the 2d Battalion, 8th Field Artillery, to Honduras in July 1985 to train a Honduran artillery unit.<sup>47</sup> In early 1986, Maj. Gen. William H. Harrison, the 7th Infantry Division's commanding general, traveled to Honduras with the division's staff, an infantry company, and an artillery battery to participate in Operation BIG PINE '86. The next year, the 7th Infantry Division dramatically expanded its role in BIG PINE '87 by deploying its division staff as part of an XVIII Airborne Corps command post exercise. At the same time, the division sent a task force that included the 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry, a field artillery battery, an engineer platoon, and the division's long-range surveillance detach-

ment to participate in another part of BIG PINE.<sup>48</sup> While the 7th Infantry Division staff—along with the staffs of the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions—simulated how U.S. troops would reinforce the Honduran Army in combat against an invading force, the 7th Infantry Division Infantry task force rehearsed air assault missions into rugged terrain with Honduran units.

Less than a year later, the United States found itself facing a situation resembling the scenario its forces had trained for in BIG PINE '87. On 4 March 1988, the Nicaraguan Army launched Operation DANTO, an incursion into the Bocay Salient in southeast Honduras. For years that area had served as a sanctuary for the Contras, the anti-Sandinista insurgent forces that received financial and material support from the U.S. govern-

ment. The Sandinistas had mounted small cross-border strikes against the Contras in 1985 and 1986, actions that JTF-BRAVO helped counter by using U.S. helicopters to move the Honduran military quickly to the border region.<sup>49</sup> Operation DANTO was another matter entirely. Planned for months by the Nicaraguan Army General Staff, the operation featured seven infantry battalions supported by artillery batteries, riverine craft, and aviation units that provided both transport and close air attack.<sup>50</sup> The Sandinista force of approximately 4,500 troops overwhelmed the Contras, forcing them to flee further north into Honduras. In mid-March, after the Nicaraguan government refused Honduran calls to withdraw its forces, the Honduran president formally requested military assistance from the United States.<sup>51</sup>

In response, President Ronald W. Reagan ordered the U.S. military to conduct a show of force mission in Honduras. The operation, dubbed GOLDEN PHEASANT, was designed to persuade the Nicaraguan Army to retreat to its own territory. However, if that failed, senior U.S. military leaders understood that the mission might shift to combat operations.<sup>52</sup> For that reason, Army leadership chose to deploy a combined arms task force that had the combat power to pose a convincing threat to the Sandinistas, but also the ability to deploy quickly to demonstrate the capability to intervene rapidly and deliberately in Latin America. The Army had designed the XVIII Airborne Corps for this type of contingency and normally would have chosen the 82d Airborne Division to conduct the show of force. However, General Carl E. Vuono, the Army chief of staff, insisted that the 7th Infantry Division participate in the mission alongside units from the 82d Airborne.<sup>53</sup>

The U.S. Army quickly formed a brigade-sized task force that included two infantry battalions and a field artillery battalion from the 82d Airborne Division and two infantry battalions from the 7th Infantry Division. To this already formidable task force, the XVIII Airborne Corps commander added several AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters and a section of two M551A1 Sheridan light tanks. He also planned to insert one of the 82d Airborne battalions into Honduras by parachute.<sup>54</sup> Numbering around 3,300



soldiers, the force was the largest deployment of U.S. combat units to Honduras during the Cold War.<sup>55</sup>

The opening phase of GOLDEN PHEASANT went smoothly. The two battalions from the 7th Infantry Division—2d Bat-

talion, 27th Infantry, and 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry—traveled to Travis Air Force Base, loaded onto transport aircraft, and took off for Honduras eighteen hours after they had received the alert. They began arriving at Palmerola Air Base later that day, joining the units from the 82d at the U.S. base. The three airborne battalions from the 82d then moved to areas in central Honduras near the capital. The task force commander directed the two light infantry battalions south toward the Nicaraguan border to take up positions closer to the areas threatened by the Sandinistas. The 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry, conducted an air assault to the town of San Lorenzo near the Choluteca Gap, an area that could serve as a corridor for Sandinista forces intent on invading Honduras. A day later, the 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry, flew into Jamastran, a town approximately 70 miles from the Bocay Salient where the Nicaraguan Army was still conducting operations against the Contras. The site was even closer to the Las Vegas Valley, which had harbored Contra camps for years and where the Nicaraguan Army



A Sheridan light tank at Jamastran, Honduras, 1 March 1988

National Archives

had invaded in 1985 and 1986. Because of the 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry's proximity to the Sandinista incursion, the brigade task force commander reinforced the battalion by sending a battery of 105-mm. howitzers and the two Sheridan light tanks to Jamastran.<sup>56</sup>

Once the light infantry battalions moved to their areas near the Nicaraguan border, concerns about hostilities grew. After arriving in San Lorenzo, the soldiers of the 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry, set up defensive positions and began digging in as ammunition was distributed down to platoon level.<sup>57</sup> Closer to the actual Sandinista incursion, the 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry, marched up into the hills surrounding the Jamastran airstrip where they had landed. Each company quickly established a battle position and issued ammunition to all its soldiers.<sup>58</sup> Brian DeToy, a company executive officer in the 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry, during GOLDEN PHEASANT, was impressed by his battalion's proximity to Nicaraguan border. Years later, he remembered that as they arrived in Jamastran, his company was convinced they might have to fight. DeToy recalled, "We were in a defense ready to go . . . we all thought, man, we got to be ready for something tonight."<sup>59</sup>

No attack came that night. Instead, the next day saw tensions begin to cool as the Sandinistas began removing their forces from Honduran territory. Negotiations between the governments of Nicaragua and Honduras began soon after. The five U.S. battalions shifted to training Honduran Army units, and ten days later they flew back to their home stations. As a show of force, GOLDEN PHEASANT appeared to have been a success. Elliott Abrams, the assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs in 1988, claimed that the Nicaraguan Army "turned on a dime" and retreated when the U.S. Army task force arrived in Honduras.<sup>60</sup> Military officials tended to focus less on the Sandinista reaction than on the rapidity with which the U.S. responded to the Nicaraguan incursion. During GOLDEN PHEASANT, Lt. Col. Richard J. Rinaldo, a spokesperson for U.S. Southern Command, stated, "The message here is that we can deploy quickly with no notice and demonstrate our support to the Honduran government."<sup>61</sup>

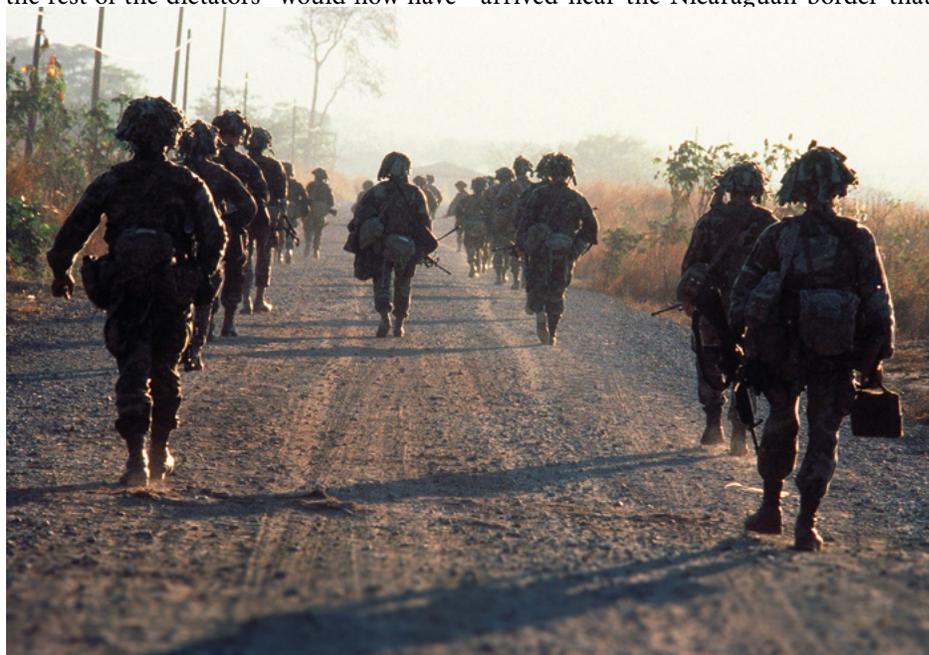
Within the 7th Infantry Division, GOLDEN PHEASANT validated the division's ability to deliver combat power



**Members of the 7th Infantry Division confer with Honduran Army soldiers.**  
*U.S. Army*

quickly, one of the key tenets of the light infantry concept. Maj. Gen. Edwin H. Burba Jr., the 7th Infantry Division commanding general during the operation, remarked that the show of force had demonstrated the division's strategic mobility and that sent "an important message for the entire nation—indeed the entire world." Burba proclaimed that "the Soviet Union, and the Eastern Bloc, and the rest of the dictators" would now have

to account for this new capability before attacking U.S. allies.<sup>62</sup> Looking back, Brian DeToy echoed his division commander's thoughts, stating that GOLDEN PHEASANT was "an exactly 100% successful light infantry mission. We were deployed so fast to a combat zone—a brigade task force, within 18 hours we're on the ground." DeToy maintained that it was the speed with which he and his soldiers arrived near the Nicaraguan border that



**7th Infantry Division troops on a foot march during Operation GOLDEN PHEASANT**  
*National Archives*

proved decisive in Honduras in March 1988.<sup>63</sup>

In the eighteen months that followed GOLDEN PHEASANT, the 7th Infantry Division found itself focusing almost entirely on Latin America. Because the security of Honduras remained a concern, the division deployed its headquarters and one of its infantry battalions to participate in a large joint counterinsurgency exercise with the Honduran military in the summer of 1988. However, the growing political instability in Panama overshadowed this deployment. Security of the Panama Canal remained a vital component in U.S. Cold War strategy, and by 1988 the increasingly erratic behavior of Panamanian president Manuel Noriega suggested that Panama might not remain a staunch ally. In 1988, after Noriega began courting the Cubans and the Nicaraguans for military assistance and ramped up tension between his security forces and U.S. military units stationed in Panama, the U.S. government began planning to remove him from power.<sup>64</sup> As those plans developed over the course of that year, the role of the 7th Infantry Division in a military intervention against Noriega grew. From April 1988 through early 1989, the division deployed elements of its aviation brigade to Panama on ninety-day rotations to augment U.S. forces stationed there with mobility and firepower.<sup>65</sup>

In the spring of 1989, when threats of violence against Americans in Panama spiked, the light fighter commitment to the Panama mission increased dramatically. On 11 May, the 9th Infantry Regiment, the division ready brigade at the time, deployed its headquarters along with one of its infantry battalions to Panama to reinforce security along the Panama Canal. After arriving, the task force moved to the Atlantic side of the canal and began operations to secure U.S. installations and protect U.S. civilians living on that side of the Canal Zone.<sup>66</sup> As the summer began and the instability in Panama continued to grow, the 7th Infantry Division started rotating brigade headquarters every 120 days and infantry battalions every 90 days to ensure that if an armed conflict began, U.S. forces had enough combat power to act immediately. By late November, two brigade headquarters and three infantry battalions had performed this mission while the rest of the division remained at Fort Ord, fully prepared to deploy to



**Soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division wait with their gear on the flight line for airlift to Panama, 12 May 1989.**

*National Archives*

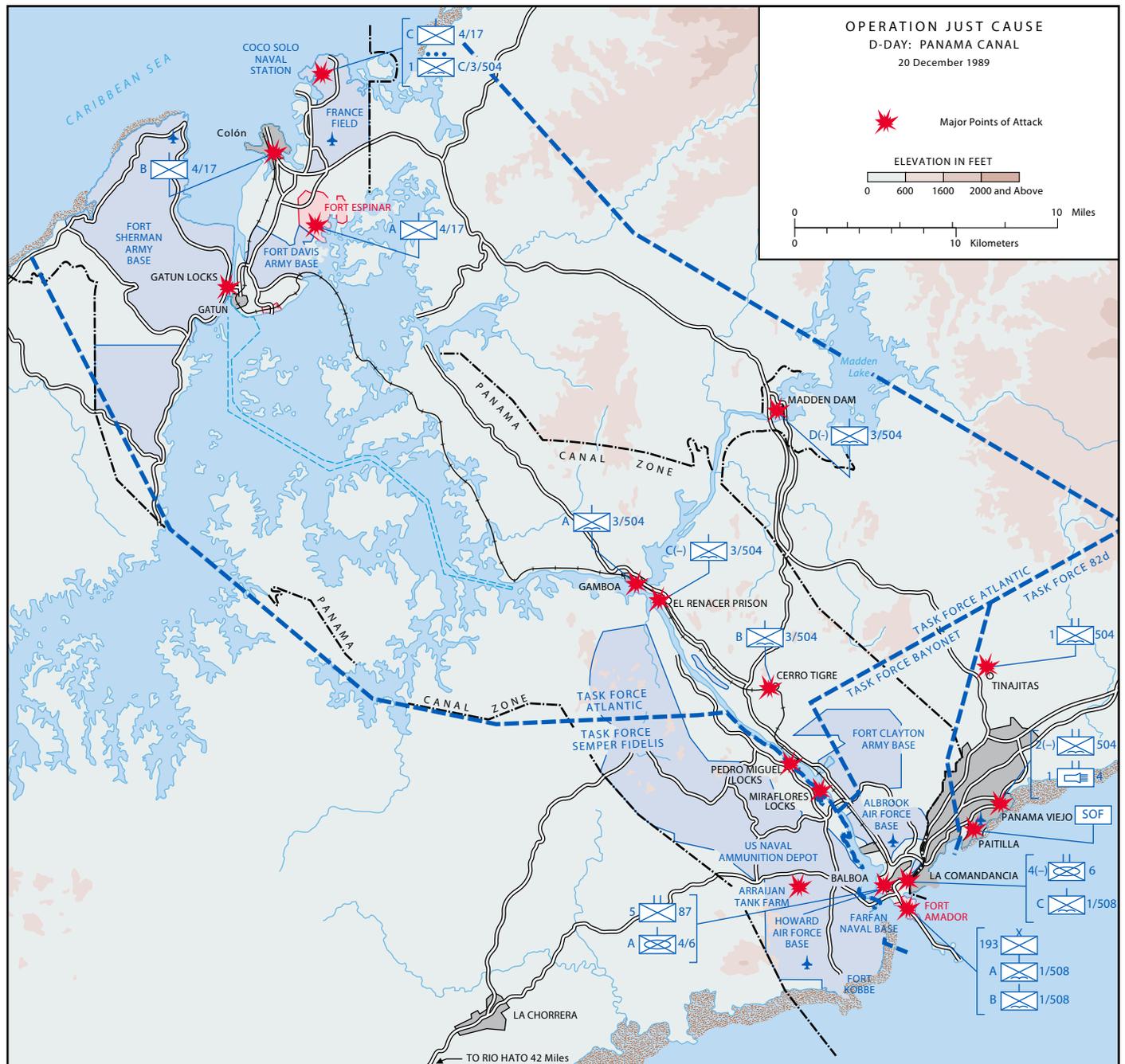
Panama if the long-simmering tensions boiled over into armed conflict.<sup>67</sup>

When the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF) shot and killed a U.S. Marine Corps officer at a roadblock in Panama City on the night of 16 December, President George H. W. Bush ordered the U.S. military to conduct offensive operations to protect U.S. citizens and facilities, neutralize the PDF, and ultimately remove the Noriega regime from power. That decision formally initiated the process to deploy U.S. Army units inside the United States to Panama while forces already in the country prepared for combat operations. On 20 December 1989, the U.S. military operation now known as JUST CAUSE began with the U.S. Army Rangers and paratroopers seizing airfields and other key infrastructure on the Pacific side of the country near the capital of Panama City. Other U.S. Army units secured key government buildings and PDF facilities in the capital, along the canal, and in the city of Colón on the Atlantic side of the isthmus. Although the force focused against the Noriega regime and the PDF was overwhelming in size and combat power, U.S. forces met armed resistance and suffered casualties in many of these actions.

The headquarters of the 3d Brigade, 7th Infantry Division, commanded JTF-ATLANTIC, composed of one of the brigade's

units, the 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry, and an infantry battalion from the 82d Airborne Division. The 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry, had deployed in late November and each of the unit's three line companies had trained in the weeks since to secure three objectives: the PDF naval base at Coco Solo, the PDF garrison at Fort Espinar, and the main highway leading into Colón.<sup>68</sup> When the U.S. offensive began at 0100 on 20 December, each of these companies ran headlong into PDF units willing to stand and fight. The battalion's attack on the naval bases was exceptionally difficult, requiring 4th Battalion's C Company to clear a large building using hand grenades and other small arms. The battalion eventually gained the initiative in these actions and by dawn had taken control of its three objectives. That success came at a price, however. PDF Fire killed Spc. William D. Gibbs outside Colón and wounded several of the battalion's soldiers at Coco Solo and Fort Espinar.<sup>69</sup>

In the first 24 hours of Operation JUST CAUSE, the U.S. military forces neutralized most of the PDF's units in the major cities and the Canal Zone. However, they had not yet apprehended Noriega and they controlled only small portions of Panama City and Colón. PDF units outside the Canal Zone in Panama's interior



also posed a possible threat. To expand the U.S. military presence in Panama and address these concerns, the 7th Infantry Division deployed its 1st and 2d Brigades to Panama on 21 and 22 December 1989, respectively, airlanding both at Tocumen International Airport near the capital. The 1st Brigade took up positions inside Panama City, where they established traffic control points, conducted searches and security patrols, arrested suspected PDF members, and engaged in several firefights with unidentified attackers, all amid rampant looting by the local population in the days just following their arrival.<sup>70</sup> As the

city became more peaceful after the first week, the brigade's mission largely shifted to stability operations for which they had little formal preparation. While this transition challenged the light fighters, they gradually adapted and by early January 1990 began training a new Panamanian police force to replace them in the city.<sup>71</sup>

The 2d Brigade received the mission to move into the open areas west of the Canal Zone to neutralize PDF units, secure key infrastructure, and begin stability operations. Over the next two weeks, the brigade conducted multiple battalion- and company-level missions across this region. These

missions combined nighttime air assaults, dismounted marches through jungle, and cordon-and-search operations to induce the surrender of PDF garrisons. This approach was remarkably successful as the light fighters' appearance outside these towns, along with negotiations led by U.S. Special Forces, led to the quick and peaceful capitulation of these PDF forces in almost all cases.<sup>72</sup> For Richard Dixon, a company commander in the 2d Brigade, it was his unit's ability to operate independently and move quickly from site to site in western Panama that was critical to this success. He noted, "we showed pretty good flexibility



Three members of the 7th Infantry Division walk past a restaurant during Operation JUST CAUSE, 1 January 1990.  
*National Archives*

CAUSE further appeared to confirm the light fighters' ability to operate effectively in a low-intensity conflict against an irregular adversary. Over the course of little more than a month, 7th Infantry Division units conducted a variety of actions, from close combat to stability operations. In adjusting to this environment, they benefited greatly from the light fighter culture that had emerged in the division, which emphasized highly trained small units operating in a decentralized manner. Although they may not have all been elite soldiers of the kind originally envisioned by General Wickham, the troops of the division proved in Panama that they were disciplined, prepared for combat, and adaptive in the rapidly changing conditions of a low-intensity conflict.

Despite its success in Panama, the 7th Infantry Division faced new challenges almost as soon as its forces returned to California. In February 1990, the Army announced that Fort Ord would be close as part of the Base Realignment and Closure process—part of the federal government's effort to reap a "peace dividend" as the Cold War ended. Army leaders then directed the 7th Infantry Division to begin planning to move to Fort Lewis, Washington.<sup>75</sup> Six months later, after Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait, the Army chose not to include any of the light infantry divisions in the large expeditionary force deployed to the Persian Gulf to defend Saudi Arabia and force the Iraqi Army out of Kuwait (Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM). Most observers understood this decision as driven by the nature of the open desert terrain and the need for highly mobile mechanized units.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the place of the light forces within the post-Cold War Army seemed secure, given the consensus at the time was that the new global security landscape would more likely be characterized by low-intensity conflict than conventional wars like the one fought against Iraq. In 1992, the growing conflict in Somalia, which involved U.S. forces including elements of the 10th Mountain Division, seemed to validate this assumption. The lack of a clear threat to U.S. military dominance, however, encouraged the U.S. government to look for deeper reductions in the Department of Defense's budget. Senior Army leaders reacted to this push for fiscal savings by cutting the overall active force by a third, a reduction that included two of the light infantry divisions established



A 7th Infantry Division soldier stands guard outside the residence of the Peruvian ambassador in Panama City, 9 January 1990.  
*U.S. Army*

and adaptability by responding to the missions . . . it was very decentralized, focused on company level missions and initiative and developing the situation."<sup>73</sup>

On 3 January 1990, fifteen days after JUST CAUSE began, Manuel Noriega surrendered to U.S. authorities. That same day, the Army Ranger battalions began redeploying to the United States and a week later, units from the 82d did likewise. The 7th Infantry Division remained to conduct postconflict operations. While the division's 1st Brigade left Panama City to redeploy to Fort Ord on 17 January 1990, the 2d and 3d Brigades would remain until the first week of February to maintain security in Panama City and conduct stability operations in Eastern Panama.

#### The Legacy of the First Modern Light Infantry Division

When the light fighters returned to Fort Ord, they were feted as heroes. Their commander, Maj. Gen. Carmen J. Cavezza, declared that they had performed brilliantly and that JUST CAUSE had "validated our training program" and highlighted the division's strategic capabilities.<sup>74</sup> There was much to this statement. The 7th Infantry Division's performance in JUST CAUSE—and GOLDEN PHEASANT—confirmed the division's ability to rapidly deploy its combat power into crisis situations. JUST



**Members of the 7th Infantry Division move to set up a defensive perimeter during Exercise CABANAS '88, 8 August 1988.**

*National Archives*

in the 1980s. In 1994, both the 6th and the 7th Infantry Divisions inactivated, leaving the 10th Mountain and 25th Infantry Divisions on active status.

The legacy of the original light fighters, however, remained intact. Within the span of a decade, the 7th Infantry Division had established the organization, doctrine, and culture of the U.S. Army's new light infantry units. The soldiers of that division had tested the effectiveness of the light infantry concept in rigorous training as well as in combat. The experiences and ethos of the first light fighters passed to the other light divisions as the United States confronted a series of low-intensity conflicts in the 1990s. The two remaining light divisions would become workhorses as a result. In addition to the mission in Somalia in 1992, the Army sent the 10th Mountain Division to Haiti in 1994 to conduct stability operations. The 25th Infantry Division relieved the 10th from that mission in 1995. Large elements of both divisions also served as peacekeepers in the Balkans. The 10th Mountain Division was the Army's first conventional force in Afghanistan after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. The light infantry divisions may not have had many opportunities to play main roles in the last decade of the Cold War. However, the crises of the post-Cold War world required a force of disciplined and well-trained soldiers that could deploy quickly and conduct a

broad set of operations in austere conditions. With little fanfare, the Army's light fighters had moved from the peripheries of the Cold War to the foreground of a new uncertain era.

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## Notes

1. I thank Bob Avalle, Joe Bongiovi, Brian DeToy, Rich Dixon, and Barry Maxwell for the interviews they graciously provided to me. Their recollections of the 7th Infantry Division in its first decade as a light division greatly informed this work. Thanks also to Rick Herrera, Tom Hanson, Eric Burke, Rob Williams, and the readers at *Army History* for their careful review and comments on an earlier version of this article.

2. White Paper, "Light Infantry Divisions," John A. Wickham Jr., 1984, 1. General Military History Files, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library Digital Library. <https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4013coll11/id/1446/>.

3. John L. Romjue, an Army historian who worked for many years in the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) History Office, authored two key works on the Army's transition in this period: *From Active Defense to AirLand Battle: The Development of Army Doctrine, 1973–1982* (Fort Monroe, VA: Historical Office, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1984); and *The Army of Excellence: The Development of the 1980s Army* (Fort Monroe, VA: Office of the Command Historian, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1993).

4. The changing dynamics of the Cold War after 1979 generated great concern within the U.S. military about Low-Intensity Conflicts (LICs). That interest led to the U.S. Army publishing two field manuals on operations in LICs between 1981 and 1986. For a contemporaneous summary of thought within the U.S. military about LICs in this period, see John S. Fulton, "The Debate About Low-Intensity Conflict," *Military Review* 66, no. 2 (Feb 1986): 60–67.

5. For an elaboration on the concept of a Second or Late Cold War, see Odd Arne Westad, ed., *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997); and David S. Painter, *The Cold War: An International History* (London: Routledge, 1999), chap. 6.

6. Jimmy Carter, "State of the Union Address 1980," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, 23 Jan 1980, <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml>.

7. For a comprehensive analysis of the U.S. Army's role in deterring Soviet expansion in Europe, see Ingo Trauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army: Building Deterrence for Limited War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008). Donald A. Carter, *Forging the Shield: The U.S. Army in Europe, 1951–1962*, United States Army in the Cold War (Washington DC: U.S. Army

Center of Military History, 2015) provides a more detailed account of the establishment of the U.S. Army's conventional deterrent in Europe in the early Cold War.

8. Stephen L. Bowman, John M. Kendall, and James L. Saunders, *Motorized Experience of the 9th Infantry Division, 1980–1989* (Fort Lewis, WA: U.S. Army, 1989), 13; Interv, Keith Nightingale with Edward C. Meyer, 1988, Senior Officer Oral History Program, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 410.

9. Interv, Bud Andrews with John A. Wickham, *Washington Times*, 27 Dec 1984, 18, Box 35, John A. Wickham Jr. Papers, U.S. Army History and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

10. U.S. Army Combined Arms Combat Development Activity, "LID [Light Infantry Division] Info," 8 Sep 1983, slide 4, Combined Arms and Fort Leavenworth Archive (hereinafter CAFLA), Kansas.

11. U.S. Army Combined Arms Combat Development Activity, "Light Infantry Division Umbrella Concept," 23 Aug 1983, 1, CAFLA; *Army's Light Division: Hearing Before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate*, 99th Cong., 1st sess. (20 Jun 1985), 49, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31210016385492&seq=1>.

12. Romjue, *Army of Excellence*, 77.

13. Combined Arms Combat Development Activity-Capability Development Directorate (CACDA-CDD), "Concept Statement: Light Infantry Division" 27 Jul 1983, 2, CAFLA.

14. CACDA-CDD, "Operational Concept for the Combat Aviation Brigade of the Light Infantry Division," 22 Sep 1983, 6, CAFLA.

15. CACDA-CDD, "Light Infantry Division Umbrella Concept," 23 Aug 1983, 2–3, CAFLA.

16. The establishment of the light infantry divisions generated significant debate and criticism within the U.S. Army's officer corps, much of which focused on the wisdom of the Army leadership's decision to divert manpower and other resources from the NATO mission to establish the LIDs. For a comprehensive summary of this debate, see Romjue, *Army of Excellence*, 113–21.

17. CACDA, "LID Brief, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army (VCSA)," 7 Dec 1983, 11, CAFLA.

18. Command and General Staff College-Combined Arms Training Integration Directorate (CGSC-CTI), "TRADOC LID Training Strategy Report," 1 May 1984, III-10, CAFLA.

19. For uses of the term *elite*, see CGSC-CTI, "TRADOC LID Training Strategy Report," III-10; and Dept. of the Army, *The U.S. Army Light Infantry Division: Improving Strategic and Tactical Flexibility*, Feb 1984, 12, Archives, Div

86 Collection, TRADOC Military History and Heritage Office, Fort Eustis, VA.

20. Romjue, *Army of Excellence*, 62.

21. Michael R. Kearnes, *Lessons in Unit Cohesion: From the United States Army's COHORT (Cohesion, Operational Readiness, and Training) Experiment of 1981 to 1995* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2022), 55–59.

22. *Ibid.*, 66.

23. White Paper, "Light Infantry Divisions," 2–3.

24. Rpt, CGSC-CTI, "TRADOC LID Training Strategy Report," III-10–III-12, CAFLA.

25. Interv, Donald P. Wright with Brian M. DeToy, 16 Dec 2021, 3, Historian Files.

26. Msg, Cdr, 7th Inf Div, to Cdr, I Corps, and Cdr, Forces Cmd (FORSCOM), sub: 7th Infantry Division Situation Report Number Two, 29 Sep 1984, CGSC DTAC LID Update, CAFLA; See also Historical supp., 7th Inf Div (Light), Fiscal Year 1985, Fort Ord, CA, found at various places throughout the text, Annual History Collection, Library and Archives, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter, Library and Archives, CMH). The cover page for the division's official historical summary for fiscal year 1986 features an image of a tarantula in a web. Above the spider is the phrase "Light-Silent-Deadly" and below is the term "Light Fighter."

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28. CGSC-CTI, "TRADOC LID Training Strategy Report," III-46, III-110, III-157, and III-171.

29. Interv, Donald P. Wright with Robert J. Avalle, 17 Mar 2022, 5, Historians Files.

30. Historical supp., 7th Inf Div (Light), Fiscal Year 1986, Fort Ord, CA, 7, Annual History Collection, Library and Archives, CMH.

31. Interview, Wright with Avalle, 17 Mar 2022, 4.

32. Historical supp., 7th Inf Div (Light), Fiscal Year 1986, 2.

33. Tim Wright, "2-9 Tests Skills, Endurance in Long March" *Fort Ord Panorama*, 5 Jul 1984, 1; *Ibid.*, H-4.

34. Casey Fuller, "Soldiers Go the Distance, Complete the Manchu 100," *Fort Ord Panorama*, 12 Oct 1987, 5.

35. CGSC-CTI, "TRADOC LID Training Strategy Report," May 1984, III-10, CAFLA; U.S. Army Infantry School, Field Circular (FC) 7-13, *Light Infantry Battalion and Brigade Operations and Battalion ARTEP [Army Training and Evaluation Program] Mission Training Plan*, Nov 1985, 5.

36. Interv, Donald P. Wright with Richard J. Dixon, 1 Mar 2022, 3, Historians Files.

37. MFR, M. G. Foss, Review of ID(L) IPR [Inf Div (Light) In Progress Review] for CSA [Chief of Staff of the Army], 20 Jan 1985, 1, CAFLA.

38. Phil Tegtmeier, "Dragon Summit Proves Light's Power," *Fort Ord Panorama*, 10 Apr 1986, 1.

39. 7th Inf Div, "Throwback Thursday shot: Fort Ord Infantry. Notice the headgear? Basically, they took old BDUs, hacked them up and tied them to their helmets," Facebook, 6 Feb 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/7thInfantryDivision/photos/a.193879120744882/420786191387506/?type=3>.

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41. Historical supp., 7th Inf Div (Light), Fiscal Year 1985, 1, 10–11; Historical supp., 7th Inf Div (Light), Fiscal Year 1986, 9; Historical supp., 7th Inf Div (Light), Fiscal Year 1988, Fort Ord, CA, 12–13, Annual History Collection, Library and Archives, CMH.

42. Interv, Wright with Dixon, 1 Mar 2022, 12.

43. *Army's Light Division* (20 Jun 1985), 38.

44. For a summary of the Reagan administration's policy in Latin America, see Edward C. Keefer, *Caspar Weinberger and the U.S. Military Buildup, 1981–1985* (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2023), chap. 15, 473–510.

45. Keefer, *Caspar Weinberger*, 487–93; see also Capt. Beau Downey, *A History of Joint Task Force-Bravo* (Soto Cano Airbase, Honduras: Joint Task Force-Bravo, 2020).

46. Interv, Wright with Avalle, 17 Mar 2022, 6.

47. Historical supp., 7th Inf Div (Light), Fiscal Year 1988, 11.

48. Martin Shupe, "Honduran Heat Greets 7 IDL Task Force," *Fort Ord Panorama*, 26 Mar 1987, 1; Phil Tegtmeier, "Division Staff Returns from Honduras," *Fort Ord Panorama*, 9 Apr 1987, 1.

49. Maj. Jonathan House, "Golden Pheasant: The U.S. Army in a Show of Force, March 1988," unpublished study, 8–9, Golden Pheasant Collection, Library and Archives, CMH.

50. *Ibid.*, 12.

51. *Ibid.*, 32; General Accounting Office, Honduran Deployment: Controls Over U.S. Military Equipment and Supplies (Washington, DC: General Accounting Office, 1988), 6, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/nsiad-88-220.pdf>.

52. House, "Golden Pheasant," 54.

53. *Ibid.*, 45.

54. Interv, Maj. Jonathan M. House with Lt. Gen. John W. Foss, 10 Apr 1989, 2-1, Golden Pheasant Collection, Library and Archives, CMH; House, "Golden Pheasant," 104, 141.

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75. Only the 1st Brigade, 9th Infantry Regiment, completed the transfer to Fort Lewis in 1993. When the Army decided to inactivate the entire division, the 2d and 3d Brigades and the other divisional units remained at Fort Ord and were inactivated on that post in 1993.
76. The 10th Mountain Division did deploy its 548th Support Battalion for Operation DESERT SHIELD, but that unit was not involved in combat operations.

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